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Amir condemns 'tragic escalation' in Al-Aqsa

28 Palestinians killed as occupation forces unleash terror in Gaza



KUWAIT: People hold up placards during a protest in solidarity with the Palestinian people at the Iradah Square in Kuwait City yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KUWAIT/JERUSALEM: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday condemned the occupation army's "tragic escalation" against worshippers in Al-Aqsa Mosque, describing it "inhumane." HH the Amir reaffirmed Kuwait's firm position against these "inhumane actions." He called on the occupation authorities to cease these actions immediately and respect rights of the Palestinian people to exercise their rituals in Al-Quds. The State of Kuwait, reiterated HH the Amir, stands by the Palestinian people and supports all efforts aimed at reaching a just and comprehensive solution for the Palestinian cause, in order to enable the Palestinian people establish their independent state with UN resolutions and Arab peace initiative.

Meanwhile, hundreds of people turned out yesterday afternoon for a demonstration in Iradah Square in protest against the Zionist violence against Palestinians.

Separately, 10 Kuwaiti MPs yesterday submitted a motion calling to hold a special Assembly session to condemn the crimes committed by the Zionist forces on Jerusalem and in the Sheikh Jarrah suburb.

See Pages 3 and 6

In Palestine, occupation forces unleashed terror in Gaza yesterday, firing at civilians and killing at least 28 Palestinians in a dramatic escalation sparked by the earlier unrest at Jerusalem's flashpoint Al-Aqsa Mosque compound. Nine Palestinian children were

among those killed by Zionist forces in the blockaded Gaza Strip and 125 people were wounded, local health authorities said. Occupation forces carried out 130 strikes by fighter jets and attack helicopters on military targets in the enclave, killing 15 commanders from Hamas, according to reports.

Rockets were launched from the coastal enclave yesterday as Hamas' armed wing the Qassam Brigades vowed to turn the southern Jewish community of Ashkelon into "a hell". Loud booms again rocked the town yesterday where a rocket had ripped a gaping hole into the side of an apartment block, a reporter said.

Nightly unrest at the Al-Aqsa compound in annexed east Jerusalem since Friday has left more than 700 Palestinians

Continued on Page 2

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Local

Kuwait Amir congratulates public on advent of Eid Al-Fitr



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



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



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah congratulated Kuwait's nationals and expatriates on the advent of the festive celebration of Eid Al-Fitr, according to the Amiri Diwan yesterday. Separately, the Amiri Diwan sent its best wishes on the occasion to His Highness the Amir, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah along with the Arab and Islamic nations. The Amiri Diwan prayed that the nation remain safe under its wise leadership.

In other news, His Highness the Amir received His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister at Bayan Palace yesterday. His Highness the Crown Prince meanwhile received His

Highness the Prime Minister in a separate meeting at Bayan Palace.

Amir greets Saudi King

On Monday, His Highness the Amir congratulated via phone Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud on the advent of Eid Al-Fitr. His Highness the Amir prayed to Allah Almighty to bestow His blessings upon King Salman. His Highness the Amir also wished many happy returns of the dear occasion for both Arabian Gulf nations as well as the Arab and Muslim worlds. King Salman extended his gratitude to His Highness the Amir for the phone call, wishing him everlasting wellbeing and Kuwait more progress and prosperity under his wise leadership.

Similarly, His Highness the Amir con-

veyed his warmest greetings to Bahrain's King Hamad bin Issa Al-Khalifa via telephone, ahead of the Muslim Eid Al-Fitr holiday that marks the end of Ramadan. His Highness the Amir wished the two Gulf neighbors, as well as the wider Arab region, continued prosperity and development, while in return, the Bahraini king was appreciative of the kind gesture which encapsulates the camaraderie shared by Kuwait and Manama.

Furthermore, His Highness the Amir phoned Abu Dhabi Crown Prince and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed Al-Nahyan to congratulate him on the advent of the Eid Al-Fitr. His Highness the Amir also wished many happy returns of the dear occasion for both Arabian Gulf nations. He wished

Sheikh Mohammad everlasting wellbeing and for the UAE greater security and stability under the wise leadership of President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al-Nahyan. He wished everlasting wellness for the UAE President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed. Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed thanked His Highness the Amir on the good gesture which mirrors the depth of relations between the two nations. He wished His Highness the Amir everlasting wellbeing and for Kuwait more progress and welfare under his wise leadership.

His Highness the Crown Prince also received a phone call from Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed, who congratulated him on advent of Eid Al-Fitr. Sheikh Mohammad prayed to Allah the Almighty to bestow good health on His Highness

the Crown Prince, and that both countries and their people enjoy further progress and prosperity. His Highness the Crown Prince thanked Sheikh Mohammad and wished him good health and for the people of the United Arab Emirates further progress and prosperity under the leadership of President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al-Nahyan.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir received a phone call from Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who wished him well ahead of the Muslim Eid Al-Fitr holiday. The Turkish leader expressed his heartiest wishes to both countries over the joyous occasion, while His Highness the Amir thanked him for the warm sentiments and wished the friendly country the utmost of success and prosperity. — KUNA

Kuwait PM receives letter from Bahrain's Crown Prince, PM



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah reads a letter from Bahrain's Crown Prince and Prime Minister Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa. — KUNA

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received yesterday a letter from Bahrain's Crown Prince and Prime Minister Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa on ways of boosting bilateral ties. The letter was handed over by Bahrain's Minister of Finance and National Economy Sheikh Salman bin Khalifa Al-Khalifa during a meeting with His Highness the Prime Minister at Bayan Palace. The meeting was attended by Minister of Finance and Minister of State for Economic Affairs and Investment Khalifa Hamada. — KUNA

Indian Ambassador extends Eid greetings

KUWAIT: Ambassador of India to Kuwait Sibi George released the following message on the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr:

"Eid Mubarak to All. On this auspicious day, I pray for peace and harmony, for friendship and love and good health for all. On the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr, on behalf of the Indian community in Kuwait, I extend my greetings to His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amir of the State of Kuwait, His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Crown Prince of the State of Kuwait, and His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Prime Minister of the State of Kuwait. Eid Mubarak also to the Government and the friendly people of the State of Kuwait.

"I also extend my warm greetings to all my Indian brothers and sisters in Kuwait. Eid Al-Fitr is a special festival in India, a land with abundant diversity of religions and beliefs, with people from different socio-cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds living in complete harmony.

"This year all across the world, we observe Eid Al-Fitr in the most difficult of times for humanity due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the last few weeks our brothers and sisters in India have been facing many challenges. I am confident that in com-

ing weeks, through our whole of society and whole of government approach, we will be able to overcome these difficult times and defeat this pandemic comprehensively. I thank the government and the people of the State of Kuwait and the vibrant Indian community in Kuwait for extending their helping hand to save lives in India. Let's also remember and thank our medical professionals, our doctors and our nurses for their many sacrifices.

"At this moment when we celebrate Eid Al-Fitr, let our thoughts be with those in isolation and suffering, let our prayers be for the world to heal quickly and for a compassionate and healthy future. I pray that this festival strengthens our belief in charity, our faith in fraternity and our commitment in compassion. Once again, Eid Mubarak to all Indian nationals and friends of India in Kuwait. May you all be safe and stay blessed."

of Ramadan. Following the session, Minister of Health, Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs and State Minister for Cabinet Affairs, Sheikh Dr Basel Humoud Hamad Al-Sabah, stated that His Highness the prime minister, at start of the session, expressed congratulations to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Kuwaiti people and residents of the country, on approaching onset of Eid Al-Fitr.

The ministers examined His Highness the Amir's address on the last 10 days of Ramadan, where he called for more understanding and patience in coping

with the coronavirus pandemic, affirming the necessity to adhere to the health precautions and lauding efforts of the frontline workers and the volunteers who shouldered the responsibility of confronting the pandemic. The ministers noted that His Highness had warned that the state would not allow anyone to undermine Kuwait's security, stability, national unity, re-affirming that cooperation among the authorities is the basis for successful national tasks. He further underscored that the state attaches particular concern for the new generation. They applauded His Highness' statement that called for bolstering the national unity, the country's security, stability and prosperity. — KUNA

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said "all sides need to de-escalate, reduce tensions, take practical steps to calm things down". Diplomatic sources said that Egypt and Qatar, who have mediated past conflicts, were attempting to calm tensions. Arab League Secretary General Ahmed Aboul Gheit condemned the Gaza strikes as "indiscriminate and irresponsible ... and a miserable display of force at the expense of children's blood".

The Kuwaiti Cabinet during its weekly meeting on Monday denounced Zionist entity's continued construction of settlements and the forced displacement of Palestinians from East Jerusalem and Sheikh Jarrah's area. It stressed seriousness of continued building settlements which run counter to international law principles and endanger international efforts aiming to reach a final solution to the Middle East conflict as well as destabilize the region.

In this regard, the Cabinet welcomed the joint statement issued by Britain, Germany, France, Italy and Spain in which they called on the Zionist entity to suspend its decision on building further settlements and end settlement expansion in the occupied West Bank as well as halt the evacuation process in East Jerusalem mainly in Sheikh Jarrah district. — Agencies



Indian Ambassador Sibi George

Amir, Crown Prince send letters to Spain's King on bilateral ties



MADRID: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets with his Spanish counterpart Arancha Gonzalez Laya. — KUNA

MADRID: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a written message to Spain's King Philip VI on the deep-rooted and historical ties between the two countries, and means of developing them in all fields and on all levels. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a similar letter to the Spanish King. The two letters were delivered by Kuwait's Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah to Spain's King during a meeting held on Monday at the royal palace in Madrid.

The foreign ministers of Kuwait and Spain held talks on Monday over bilateral relations, marking the 60th anniversary of diplomatic ties with a common push to bolster cooperation. Sheikh Dr Ahmad's talks with his Spanish counterpart Arancha Gonzalez Laya underscored the mutual desire to improve bilateral ties, bringing to fruition the ambitions of the two countries' respective leaders, which serve the best interests of their people, according to a statement by the Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry. The talks come as the Kuwaiti top diplomat started an official visit to Madrid, sealing a number of major deals, chief among them a memorandum of understanding for bilateral political talks, an agreement for diplomatic cooperation and mutual visa exemption treatment for diplomatic passport holders. — KUNA

Baghdad had sent its national security adviser Qassim Al-Araji to the Balad base last week to try to reassure the American firm, days after the latest salvo. Tahsin Al-Khafaji, spokesman for Iraq's Joint Operations Command, said Lockheed Martin would "continue to advise the Iraqi air force, even remotely", citing contractual obligations.

The United States has provided Iraq with 34 F-16s, all stationed at Balad. It has also trained Iraqi pilots, while American contractors have been in charge of the fleet's upkeep. Arbil was long considered safer than the rest of Iraq, but the situation has changed recently and Washington has deployed a C-RAM rocket defense system as well as Patriot missiles there, as it has done in Baghdad to protect its troops and diplomats. In mid-April, pro-Iran fighters sent an explosives-packed drone crashing into Arbil airport in the first reported use of such a weapon against a base housing US troops in Iraq.

The Pentagon has warned that attacks against the US-led coalition rose in the first three months of this year. "In Iraq, Iran-aligned militias increased their attacks targeting coalition positions and assets this quarter, prompting a temporary departure of US contractors supporting Iraq's F-16 program," it said in a report to Congress released earlier this month. — AFP

Kuwaiti Cabinet applauds Amir's Ramadan address

KUWAIT: The Cabinet held its weekly session at Seif Palace on Monday under the chairmanship of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, acclaiming His Highness the Amir's speech marking the last ten days of the fasting month

Amir condemns 'tragic escalation'...

Continued from Page 1

wounded, drawing international calls for de-escalation and sharp rebukes from across the Muslim world.

The United Nations rights office said yesterday it was "deeply concerned" by the escalation of violence in the occupied Palestinian territories. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights appealed for calm after several days of unrest.

Tensions in Jerusalem have flared into the city's worst disturbances since 2017 after Zionist riot police attacked large crowds of Palestinian worshippers on the last Friday of the holy fasting month of Ramadan.

"We are deeply concerned at the escalation of violence in the occupied Palestinian territory, including east Jerusalem," Rupert Colville, spokesman for UN rights chief Michelle Bachelet's office, told reporters in Geneva. "We condemn all violence and all incitement to violence and ethnic division and provocations."

Kuwait stands with Palestine



KUWAIT: People in Kuwait took part in a protest at the Iradah Square in Kuwait City yesterday, holding up signs and chanting slogans in solidarity with the Palestinian people against the Zionist aggression. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

MPs request pardon for opposition activists

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: A group of opposition MPs yesterday launched a different path to secure the return of a group of opposition former MPs and activists who have been living in self-exile in Turkey by publicly seeking a pardon from His Highness the Amir.

Until now, the opposition has been pressing to pass legislation in the national assembly to pardon those activists who fled the country to Turkey about three years ago to avoid a harsh jail sentence passed on them for taking part in storming the national assembly building in 2011.

Those activists include leading former MPs Mussallam Al-Barrak, Jamaan Al-Harbash, Faisal Al-Muslim, Mubarak Al-Waalan, Salem Al-Namlan and others, who for years dominated the local political scene.

Opposition MP Farz Al-Mutairi yesterday host-

ed a meeting for 15 MPs who contacted the exiled former lawmakers and discussed ways to bring them back home. Mutairi said after the meeting that the meeting agreed to seek a special pardon from His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to "bring those heroes back to Kuwait".

He said that a number of MPs from the meeting will travel to Turkey after the next assembly meeting scheduled on May 25 to negotiate with the exiles a mechanism for their return. He said that a number of the former MPs who spoke with the meeting over the phone "blessed the steps" being taken by the lawmakers, a reference that they agree for the Amiri pardon.

Until recently, all opposition MPs had insisted that the return of the exiles must be done through legislation to be passed through the national assembly. But on March 30, the assembly rejected the comprehensive pardon draft law because all the opposition MPs had boycotted that session. Now, a new law must wait until the next assembly term.

A number of leading opposition lawmakers like Mohammad Al-Mutair, Shuaib Al-Muwaizri, Thamer Al-Suwait and others did not attend yesterday's meeting of the opposition and no reason was given for their absence.

public calls to abide by health precautions to curb the spread of the virus.

Meanwhile, Dr Sanad said on Monday that 6,500 vaccination doses for COVID-19 have been administered to employees at 360 and Al-Kout shopping malls as part of the second phase of the roving inoculation campaign that kicked off on Sunday. Dr Sanad added that the ministry aims at immunizing all staff at the central commercial malls to ensure a safe environment for visitors of these markets.

Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah had informed the ministers during the Cabinet's weekly meeting Monday about the latest developments related to the pandemic where casualties dropped and recovery rate was estimated at 94.6 percent. The ministers were also briefed about the inoculation campaign as part of the precautions aimed at achieving community safety and stem spread of the pandemic.

The ministers discussed recommendations set by the coronavirus emergency committee and decided to end the partial curfew as of first day of Eid Al-Fitr, close all commercial business from 8 pm to 5 am except for pharmacies, food and pharmaceutical businesses, eateries and maintenance companies and agencies, indefinitely. The government decided to allow the reopening of cinemas and theaters only for those who have been immunized. Eateries are allowed to pursue work with deliveries only. Establishments and institutions are allowed to call in maximum 60 percent of their staff. — KUNA

Kuwait's COVID daily count drops below 1,000 for second day

KUWAIT: Kuwait has registered less than 1,000 new COVID-19 cases for the second straight day Monday after the daily count remained over that threshold since Feb 28. The Ministry of Health has announced recording 978 new coronavirus infections on Monday and 992 the day before, giving a sign of hope that the situation of the pandemic in the country could be improving. The new figures take the total cases in the country up to 286,064, while total deaths reached 1,652 after the ministry announced seven related deaths Monday and 10 the previous day.

The ministry's spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad pointed out Monday that some 1,250 more people had been cured of the virus over the previous 24 hours, raising the total of those who have overcome the disease to 270,883. He added that the number of people hospitalized with the virus stood at 13,511 as of Monday, with 210 of them in intensive care units. Dr Sanad revealed that some 8,212 swab tests were conducted over the same period, bringing the total to 2,411,948. He renewed

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News in brief

Amnesty for prisoners

KUWAIT: An Amiri decree issued on Monday has offered amnesty and commuted the prison terms of some convicts, the Kuwaiti government said. The public prosecution and interior ministry will collectively implement this measure shortly, the government's communication center tweeted. — KUNA

Kuwait condemns blast

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Cabinet condemned the "terrorist" Afghan school blast that left dozens of people dead and wounded. During its weekly meeting Monday, the Cabinet affirmed Kuwait's firm stance rejecting all these terrorist acts, violence and terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. The Cabinet expressed their sincere condolences to the Afghan government and people, and the families of victims. — KUNA

Six hurt in fire

KUWAIT: Six people were injured, including two critically, in a fire reported in the Waha district of Jahra Monday night. The victims were rushed to hospital to be treated from smoke inhalation. Investigations are underway to find out the cause of the fire.

Oil gains 82 cents

KUWAIT: Kuwait oil edged 82 cents higher during Monday's trading sessions to close at \$68.13 per barrel (pb) against \$67.31 pb the last Friday, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. Benchmark Brent crude gained four cents to \$68.32 pb and West Texas Intermediate rose two cents to \$64.92 pb. — KUNA

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A vendor displays prayer beads inside his shop at Mubarakia Market in Kuwait City. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Ramadan Diwaniya

Weather smartphone apps helpful, but background necessary: Meteorologist

My curiosity about astronomy began at a young age: Saadoun

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti professionals are interviewed by Kuwait Times to learn more about the nature of their jobs, and changes and challenges they have faced during the pandemic. The following are excerpts from Kuwait Times' interview with astronomer and meteorologist Adel Saadoun.

Kuwait Times: Tell us about your journey as an astronomer and weather forecaster.

Adel Saadoun: My curiosity about heavenly bodies, galaxies and planets began when I was a teenage boy. I started reading books about the sun, moon and stars. My curiosity took me to our national library, where I was able to feed my hungry mind. Until now I

read books, because I find answers to all questions in my mind. In my house I have the most advanced telescope that I use to observe the solar system.

Kuwait: How often do you use your telescope?

Saadoun: When I was young, I had a smaller telescope that I used almost every day. But the telescope I have now is huge and needs at least two people to set up before you can use it. I use it to observe heavenly phenomena, eclipses, planet conjunctions and sometimes to enjoy the galaxies and nebulae. I am 70 years old and my activities are drastically reduced. Most of the time I prefer to stay at home, especially during this pandemic.

Kuwait Times: How did you become a weather forecaster?

Saadoun: When I was young, I had a habit of writing about weather conditions in Kuwait that I used to record in a small notebook daily. I got the proper his-



Adel Saadoun

torializing in atmospheric sciences related to weather forecasting. If we are talking about the weather, we must know the main factors affecting the weather. Today, a lot of people predict the weather just by looking at mobile applications. Certainly you can use them as they are based on science, but it is dangerous if you have no background of weather patterns.

Kuwait Times: Tell us something about your famous Aladdin House in Fintas?

Saadoun: I built this house to be my sanctuary. It is colorful and cozy with a wide and spacious living room and a lofty ceiling. I want to go home after a long day of work and have a good feeling about the place where I stay. I feel rested when I go home and see the decor. I have plants and colorful frescos and friezes - it's a warm and happy house.

This house has a mix of architecture from Central Asia, Europe and a bit of Arabic touch as well. If you look at the dome of my house, the design was borrowed by Arabs from Central Asia, particularly Mongolia, from where it spread to Russia, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and other countries in the region. I completed the house in 1995, two years before I retired from my Shuaiba Port job. My conviction is if you cannot make a house better, make no house at all.



I built my house to be my sanctuary

tory of our weather, which helped me with my predictions, although now you can easily predict the weather through modern technology. That small notebook is still with me today and it's quite accurate. It launched my addiction to studying weather conditions in Kuwait.

I also got interested in studying geography, and got a degree in geography from Kuwait University, spe-

'Ramadan Basket' helps feed 3,000 families in Kuwait

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) and ReFood concluded their food rescue initiative titled 'Ramadan basket'. This initiative was launched as part of NBK's Annual Ramadan Program 'Do Good Deeds in Ramadan' to support 3,000 families with food and goods.

The "Ramadan Basket" Packages were delivered by NBK and ReFood volunteers via refrigerated trucks to maintain the quality and safety of products. ReFood and NBK volunteers collected sorted and stored surplus food and goods to share with low-income families.

Through this initiative, rescuing food and saving the environment went hand-in-hand. This initiative is considered as one of the leading Rescuing food initiatives which strives to collect excess food that would've gone to waste, and instead, give it to those in need across Kuwait.

Talal Al-Turki, NBK Public Relations Senior Manager said, "NBK in partnership with ReFood was delighted to create an initiative that encourages sustainable solutions and reduces food waste. This partnership aims to educate the Kuwaiti public about the dangers of food waste and create a solution by divert-

ing excess good food from going to waste to the plates of people in need."

"At NBK, we are proud of this pioneering Kuwaiti youth in ReFood. Hand in hand, we look forward to further enhance and promote the culture of reducing food waste and helping those in need, while at the same time conserving economic resources from waste," he added.

NBK is committed to supporting promising Kuwaiti initiatives that aim to give back to Kuwait. NBK has maintained its leadership as a pioneer in adopting initiatives for the benefit of our community. NBK is constantly seeking to further enhance its support promoting a sustainable future.

It is worth mentioning that ReFood is a non-profit company that aims to reduce waste from the food and consumer goods sector by collecting excess products from local suppliers and manufacturers. ReFood collaborates with the industry's largest food suppliers in Kuwait to save the largest possible quantity of products from ending up in landfills. ReFood provides a beneficiary registration service. Families that meet the eligibility requirements can register and subscribe to available ReFood programs to benefit from the packages on a regular basis.



Talal Al-Turki



RAMADAN QUIZ 2021

Kuwait Times annual Ramadan competition will publish every day throughout the holy month of Ramadan. All thirty coupons containing the correct answer must be sent to the newspaper to become eligible for the raffle draw. All coupons must be received on or before Monday 17 of May 2021. Winners will be announced in Kuwait Times.

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Kuwait Times Ramadan Quiz

30- What is the name of the celebration observed to mark the end of Ramadan?

- A. Eid al-Fitr
 B. Eid al-Adha
 C. Eid Al-Ghadir

Kuwait Times Ramadan Quiz

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East Jerusalem hospital fills up after Al-Aqsa aggression

Pfizer shot gets US nod for 12-15 year olds as India outbreak rages

Nine dead in Russia school shooting

Lone teenage gunman opens fire at a school in Kazan

KAZAN, Russia: At least nine people, most of them children, were killed yesterday when a lone teenage gunman opened fire at a school in the central Russian city of Kazan, officials said. President Vladimir Putin ordered a review of gun control laws after the shooting—one of the worst in recent Russian history—which occurred on the first day back to school following annual May holidays.

The spree started around 9.30 local time (630 GMT), sparking panic among students and teachers at the School No. 175 in Kazan, the capital of the Russian predominantly Muslim republic of Tatarstan.

Amateur footage on social media, apparently filmed from a nearby building, showed people escaping from the school by jumping from second- and third-floor windows, with sounds of gunshots echoing in the schoolyard. Police said they detained the gunman approximately one hour after initial reports of shooting.

Seven of the dead were children in the eighth grade, Tatarstan regional leader Rustam Minnikhanov told reporters. He said two adults, including a teacher, also died. Another 20 were hospitalized, including 18 children. Six of them were in intensive care, Lazzat Khaidarov, a spokesman for the regional authorities, told AFP. The ages of the injured people varied from between seven and 62.

In the aftermath of the killings, authorities declared a day of mourning for Wednesday while Putin expressed his "deep condolences" to the victims and called for new gun laws.

"The president gave an order to urgently work out a new provision concerning the types of weapons that can be in civilian hands, taking into account the weapon" used in the attack, his spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

'Neat and calm'

Images broadcast on state television showed dozens of people outside the school with fire

services and police vehicles lining nearby streets and law enforcement carrying automatic weapons patrolling the area. The number of dead reported varied, with the city's mayor saying eight people had been killed. Russian news agencies, citing official sources, said earlier in the day that 11 people had died.

The Interfax news agency, citing a nearby business college, identified the shooter as Ilnaz Galyaviev, who was enrolled at the Tatarstan University of Management but was expelled one month ago for poor academic performance. "He was always neat and calm, he was respectful of fellow students and teachers," a representative of the university was quoted as saying.

There were initial reports of two shooters, with one reportedly barricaded on the fourth floor of the building and killed, but officials later said a lone attacker was responsible.

'Deeply saddened'

Tatarstan leader Minnikhanov described the shooting as "a major tragedy for our republic" shortly after the building was secured. "We are deeply saddened that this has happened," he told reporters.

He described the detained assailant as a "terrorist" and said the 19-year-old shooter had a license to carry a firearm. A source told Interfax that Galyaviev had been armed with a Turkish-made Hatsan escort shotgun, the same weapon used in a mass shooting at a college in Kerch in Russian-annexed Crimea in 2018.

Officials ordered a minute of silence at football matches later yesterday and both cabinet and parliament meetings honored those dead in the attacks.

Witnesses offered chilling accounts of the tragedy. "I was in class, I first heard an explosion, then gunshots," state news agency TASS quoted a student as saying in the wake of the attacks.

Elena, a Kazan resident who said she was outside



KAZAN, Russia: A woman cries as she is taken to an ambulance at the scene of a shooting at School No 175 in Kazan, the capital of Russia's republic of Tatarstan, yesterday. — AFP

the school, told the Echo of Moscow radio station earlier in the day that law enforcement was clearing people from outside the premises.

"Parents are crying," she told the radio station. "People are hysterical."

Columbine copycat

Russia has relatively few school shootings due to normally tight security in education facilities and the difficulty of buying firearms legally, although it is possible to register hunting rifles. In November 2019, a 19-year-old student in the far eastern town of Blagoveshchensk opened fire in his college, killing one classmate and injuring three other people before shooting himself dead.

ple before shooting himself dead.

In October 2018, a teenage gunman killed 20 people at the Kerch technical college in Crimea, the peninsula Russia annexed from Ukraine in 2014. The 18-year-old attacker shot himself dead at the site. He was shown in camera footage wearing a similar T-shirt to Eric Harris, one of the killers in the 1999 Columbine High School shooting in the US, which left 13 people dead. The Crimea shooter, Vladislav Roslyakov, was able to legally obtain a gun license after undergoing marksmanship training and being examined by a psychiatrist. The shooting led to calls for tighter gun control in Russia. — AFP

Qatar Amir visits Saudi Arabia as rift eases

RIYADH: Qatar's ruler Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani landed in Saudi Arabia for talks Monday, in his second visit since the countries re-established relations in January following a three-year dispute. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman received Sheikh Tamim in the Red Sea city of Jeddah, according to images and a statement published by Saudi state media.

The visit, which came at the invitation of Saudi Arabia's King Salman, was aimed at discussing bilateral relations and other issues of "common interest", the official Qatar News Agency said. Saudi Arabia and its allies broke off ties with Qatar in June 2017. But in January of this year, the boycotting countries agreed to restore ties with Qatar following a flurry of diplomatic activity by the administration of former US president Donald Trump.

Sheikh Tamim last travelled to the kingdom in January for a summit hosted by Prince Mohammed in the desert city of Al-Ula, which led to Doha being readmitted to the regional fold. Since the reconciliation there have been cautious steps towards normality, including the resumption of air travel between the former countries and the reopening of Qatar's sole land border with Saudi Arabia. — AFP



JEDDAH: This handout picture provided by the Saudi Royal Palace Monday shows Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (right) receiving Qatar's ruler Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani upon his arrival in the Red Sea City of Jeddah. — AFP

Iran warns US navy over 'unprofessional behavior'

TEHRAN: Iran's Revolutionary Guards said yesterday they warned US vessels after Washington said warning shots were fired near Iranian attack boats, the latest confrontation between the rivals in the Gulf. The US had earlier said the warning shots were fired after more than a dozen Iranian fast attack boats buzzed close to a US Navy submarine and escort ships in the Strait of Hormuz on Monday.

The Revolutionary Guards' navy confirmed it had encountered seven US vessels in the incident, but said it warned them "while maintaining the legal distance ... against their risky and unprofessional behavior, after which they continued on their way".

It said in a statement that the US behavior included "flying helicopters, firing flares, and aimless, unnecessary and provocative shooting". The Guards said its navy was conducting "routine missions in the territorial waters" of Iran, but did not specify whether the American vessels had entered the Islamic republic's waters.

Pentagon spokesman John Kirby had said earlier that 13 Guards' boats approached the seven US vessels at high speeds, closing within 140 meters (150 yards) before one of the US vessels fired 30 shots in two volleys, until they moved away.

Risk of 'miscalculation'

"Sadly harassment by the IRGC-N is not a new



This handout photo courtesy of US Navy and made available yesterday shows two Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN) fast in-shore attack craft (FIAC), a type of speedboat armed with machine guns, conducting maneuvers while operating in close proximity to US naval vessels transiting the Strait of Hormuz. — AFP

phenomenon," said Kirby, referring to the Guards' navy. "It's unsafe, it's unprofessional. It's the kind of activity that can lead to somebody getting hurt, and can lead to a real miscalculation there in the region," Kirby added. Kirby pointed out that the Iranian actions took place in the Strait of Hormuz, where ships have little room to move.

"It's an international waterway and of course when you're in the strait, there are certain limits to your ability to maneuver," he said. In response, the Guards called on Washington to avoid "false narratives", and accused it of being "the center of instability, threat and insecurity in the region". The encounter was the second such incident in two weeks, according to the US Navy.

In late April, three Iranian fast inshore attack

craft provoked warning shots when they came close to two US vessels in international waters in the northern part of the Gulf, it said. And in early April four Guard vessels, three fast attack craft and a large Harth 55 catamaran similarly came close to two US Coast Guard patrol ships, crossing their bows while ignoring warnings.

No shots were fired in that encounter. In its statement, the Guards' navy said its forces will "calmly and confidently follow their missions in the Strait of Hormuz and the Arabian Gulf" and are ready to respond to "any miscalculation" by the US. The confrontations comes amid talks in Vienna between Iran and major powers on reviving a landmark 2015 nuclear deal abandoned three years later by then US president Donald Trump. — AFP

Mexico mothers: 'Where are our missing children?'

MEXICO CITY: Thousands of mothers of people missing in Mexico protested Monday to demand the authorities find their children, victims of the violence and impunity that plagues the country. "There's nothing to celebrate. Where are our children?" said Yolanda Moran, who attended the Mother's Day march in Mexico City in her wheelchair.

"We mothers have come to remind the authorities that they need to look for them," the 77-year-old said. She carried a large photograph of her son, Dan Jeremiel Fernandez, who disappeared on December 19, 2008 in the northern city of Torreon at the age of 35.

Dressed in white and with a rose of the same color in her hand, she said the mothers of Mexico's missing were exhausted by their ordeal. "We do not live. We survive. Every year we are older, more tired, sicker," she said. "Narco, military, prosecutor, the same filth!" read a banner carried by an elderly woman dressed in black.

More than 80,000 people have gone missing in Mexico since the government deployed the military in the war on powerful drug cartels in 2006, according to official figures. Around 300,000 more have been murdered over the same period, according to the authorities, who say most of the killings are linked to gang violence. The dead include three siblings aged 24, 29 and 32 whose bodies were found in a suburb of the western city of Guadalajara, prosecutors said on Monday. They had been missing since Friday night when they were taken from their home by suspected drug cartel members for reasons that are unclear, according to the authorities.

'Worn out'

In the northeastern state of Tamaulipas, "we have at least 100 people go missing every day, but not all are reported out of fear," said Miriam Cabrera, the mother of Romel Cabrera, who vanished on June 28, 2015. Patricia Springton brought photographs of her son, her husband, her sister-in-law and her niece, who were last seen on July 14, 2010 when they traveled to Nuevo Laredo in Tamaulipas.

"We spend our lives worn out, yes, with fear, but we're not going to stop" searching, she said, fighting back tears. Mexico has almost a hundred organizations of relatives of the missing who want prosecutors to create a national forensic data bank. According to official figures, there are at least 38,500 unidentified bodies with the forensic services.

Next to a carpet of photographs of the missing, 54-year-old Marisa Trejo accused the Mexican authorities of "indifference." President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador "made many campaign promises of support and has never really followed up on them," she said. — AFP

International

East Jerusalem hospital fills up after Al-Aqsa aggression

Several Palestinians lose eyes after being hit by Zionist bullets

JERUSALEM: Palestinians wounded in Zionist attacks at the Al-Aqsa mosque compound have filled the halls of an east Jerusalem hospital, where several had lost eyes after being hit by rubber bullets.

Ezzedine, a 19-year-old carpenter from the West Bank city of Nablus, said Monday that doctors at the large Makassed Hospital told him he would not regain sight in his left eye after a rubber bullet hit him while he visited the holy site. He said he came to Al-Aqsa to perform Ramadan prayers on Friday night when Zionist police began firing stun grenades and tear gas in clashes.

"They want to take a place that's not theirs," he said, referring to occupation forces' actions at Islam's third holiest site. Even though Zionist regime has insisted it is committed to the rights of Muslims to worship at Al-Aqsa, it seeks to instigate problems in the compound.

Rights group Amnesty International argued that Occupation forces have repeatedly deployed disproportionate and unlawful force to disperse protesters during violent raids on Al-Aqsa. More than 700 Palestinians have been wounded since Friday in attacks at Al-Aqsa and in other parts of occupied east Jerusalem.

Makassed director general Adnan Farhoud said the hospital had received over 200 patients since

the unrest began. Most injuries were to the head, chest and limbs, he said—arguing the wounds showed that the forces intended to cause significant injury. When "you mean to harm someone, you shoot at the head", he said, describing the inhuman tactics being used by the occupation forces.

'Provoke the youths'

The Palestinian Red Crescent said it opened a field hospital to treat the wounded before evacuating patients to local hospitals. The Augusta Victoria Hospital in east Jerusalem opened a special emergency room to treat the injured.

Farhoud said the violence in Jerusalem was the worst he had seen in years, although less severe than in 1990, when nearly 20 Palestinians were killed in clashes with police at Al-Aqsa.

"Before, they were using live bullets," Farhoud said. "Now, they're using rubber bullets". One patient, who was wheeled into surgery on a stretcher, had suffered a spleen injury after being hit with a rubber bullet. Another, Siraj, 24, sat in a wheelchair in jeans torn away from his legs, which were both wrapped in white gauze.

White paint covered his shirt from his early morning work renovating apartments. He said he went from work to Al-Aqsa to pray, and was wounded when Zionist police entered the mosque



JERUSALEM: Palestinian medics evacuate a wounded person who was hit by bullets fired by occupation forces in Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque compound on Monday. — AFP

and began firing stun grenades.

"They shot everyone, young and old people," he said. "They shot a stun grenade toward me and hit

my legs. I feel the pain and I hope it subsides". The actions have served to "provoke the youths", argued Siraj. — Agencies

Amnesty: Zionists using 'unlawful' force in Jerusalem

JERUSALEM: Amnesty International said Zionist entity is using "abusive and wanton force against largely peaceful Palestinian protesters" in east Jerusalem clashes that have wounded hundreds of demonstrators and dozens of police.

The entity yesterday firmly defended the conduct of its officers, insisting they have responded to violent Palestinian rioters with appropriate measures. But the London-based human rights group described some of those measures as "disproportionate and unlawful", accusing security forces of "unprovoked attacks on peaceful demonstrators". Amnesty's statement came amid surging tension in the annexed Jerusalem, much of it concentrated at the flashpoint Al-Aqsa mosque compound, Islam's third holiest site.

At Al-Aqsa and in clashes elsewhere in east Jerusalem, police used stun grenades, rubber bullets, tear gas and skunk water cannons.

Amnesty said the regime has used excessive force over multiple weeks of east Jerusalem protests. In one incident, it said the forces last week broke up a peaceful circle of Palestinians chanting against an attempt to evict them from their homes in the city's Sheikh Jarrah district. The forces on horseback sprinted toward the crowd, trampling a man who was trying to run away, Amnesty said.

Young whale in London's Thames is put down

LONDON: A juvenile minke whale that became stranded in London's River Thames has been put down after its condition deteriorated and vets decided it could not survive in the open water. The whale, measuring three to four meters (10-13 feet), was first spotted in southwest London on Sunday and was washed ashore at a set of gates controlling water flow.

Rescue efforts by the British Divers Marine Life Rescue (BDMRL) service and firefighters failed when the whale slipped its leash and then swam upriver, instead of towards the sea. "The last 45 minutes we were with the whale its condition was deteriorating, its breathing wasn't right and it wouldn't have survived much longer," BDMRL national coordinator Julia Cable said late Monday.

She said vets from London Zoo injected a "large" anaesthetic dose into the malnourished whale. It is thought the whale got separated from its mother and was unable to fend for itself. "It's always sad, but we now know that putting it back out into the open sea would have been sending it to starve out there," Cable said.

Minke whales are the smallest of the world's

Iran candidates register for presidential poll

TEHRAN: Iran yesterday opened registration for candidates hoping to succeed President Hassan Rouhani, who will step down following the June 18 elections after serving the maximum two consecutive terms allowed. The five-day registration period at the interior ministry ends on Saturday, with the names of candidates then handed to the conservative-dominated Guardian Council for vetting.

More than 20 public figures have officially announced their intention to run, with the final list



JERUSALEM: Zionist forces deploy in Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque compound after they stormed the compound Monday. — AFP

The rights group called on the international community "to hold the Zionist entity accountable for its systemic violations".

Clashes on Monday left more than 500

Palestinians wounded. The group Save the Children, also based in London, said it was "horrified" by the air strikes and demanded a stop to "the indiscriminate targeting and killing of civilians". — AFP



LONDON: A juvenile Minke whale, having been euthanized by vets from London Zoo, is lifted from the water at Teddington in southwest London after it had swum up the River Thames Monday. — AFP

great whales and typically grow to a length of 10 meters in adulthood. They can usually be found throughout the northern Atlantic and Pacific oceans but have been spotted as far north as the Arctic

and as far south as the Equator. In January 2006, a northern bottlenose whale became stuck in the Thames, sparking huge media interest. It died as it was being ferried back out to sea. — AFP

of those qualified due on May 26-27, the interior ministry said. Former Revolutionary Guards Corps' official Saeed Mohammad, a general and an advisor to Guards commander Major General Hossein Salami, was one of the first to submit his name Tuesday.

Mohammad, 53, who headed the Guards' construction and engineering arm for over two years, resigned last in March to run. Another was Mohammad Hassan Nami, an army general who was briefly telecoms minister under former ultra-conservative president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, state news agency IRNA said.

According to the Hamshahri daily newspaper, Nami is a former military attaché to North Korea, and also holds a doctorate in "public management" from Pyongyang's Kim Il-sung University.

Several top political figures are seen as possible

presidential hopefuls, but are yet to declare whether they will run. They include former parliament speaker Ali Larijani, judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi and Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.

The country's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has in recent months urged for high turnout, expressing hope that this would encourage the emergence of new young leaders, as the generation who oversaw the country's 1979 revolution is ageing. This year's election is also expected to feature a string of military figures, stirring unease over a possible militarization of the Islamic republic's politics.

The registration process comes as Iran and world powers are engaged in talks to revive a 2015 nuclear accord, from which the US withdrew unilaterally in 2018, reimposing crippling sanctions. — AFP



LONDON: Britain's Queen Elizabeth II reads the Queen's Speech on the Sovereign's Throne in the House of Lords chamber during the State Opening of Parliament at the Houses of Parliament in London yesterday. — AFP

Queen returns to public stage detailing govt's new agenda

LONDON: Queen Elizabeth II opened a new session of parliament yesterday, in her first public appearance since the funeral of her late husband Prince Philip, as she revealed the Conservative government's post-pandemic legislative agenda. Prime Minister Boris Johnson, buoyant after his party's triumph in local and regional elections in England last week, is vowing to deliver on his mantra to "build back better" with a wide-ranging raft of policies.

But he faces renewed questions over the UK's cohesion after pro-independence forces won a majority in elections to the Scottish parliament with pledges to hold another referendum on breaking away from the centuries-old union. Johnson's government, after rolling out a successful coronavirus vaccination drive, is intent on reopening the economy and refocusing on long-term promises to "level up" prosperity across Britain.

"My government's priority is to deliver a national recovery from the pandemic that makes the United Kingdom stronger, healthier and more prosperous than before," the 95-year-old monarch said in a speech from a gilded throne in the upper House of Lords.

Borders focus

The Queen said the government would introduce an environment bill to set legally binding emissions targets as Britain prepares to host the UN's COP26 climate summit in Glasgow in November. A "counter-state threats bill", meanwhile, will provide the security services with tools to tackle hostile activity by foreign states and foreign actors.

New measures will also aim to strengthen Britain's borders and deter "criminals who facilitate dangerous and illegal journeys", after rising numbers of asylum-seekers coming on boats across the Channel from France. Tightening immigration rules and securing borders were vote-winning promises of Johnson's campaign for leaving the European Union in Britain's 2016 Brexit referendum, as well as in securing his thumping 2019 election win.

But by differentiating between asylum-seekers who enter by legal channels and those who enter Britain from "safe" destinations like France, the government has provoked anger among refugee groups. The UN refugee agency UNHCR has said the proposals could breach international law and be "expensive and hard to implement". — AFP

International

Pfizer shot gets US nod for 12-15 year olds as India outbreak rages

Wealthy nations ease curbs, but many others struggle to secure doses

WASHINGTON: The United States drug regulator authorized the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for children aged 12-15 as the country aims to speed up its COVID-19 recovery, but the huge outbreak in India persisted with known coronavirus deaths approaching 250,000 yesterday. With some wealthy nations easing restrictions thanks to rapid inoculation drives but many others struggling to secure doses, the head of the World Health Organization slammed so-called "vaccine diplomacy" and called for cooperation without strings attached. Among those under pressure to do more for poorer countries is the United States, where more than 115 million people have been fully vaccinated and authorities have started to ease curbs to help with the recovery of the world's biggest economy.

Those efforts got another boost Monday when the US Food and Drug Administration authorized the Pfizer shot for 12- to 15-year-olds. "This is a promising development in our fight against the virus," said President Joe Biden. The US Centers for Disease Control said its advisory committee will now meet to discuss a recommendation for this age group.

The move has been criticized, however, by some public health experts who say these doses would be better used in other countries where highly vulnerable people are still waiting for vaccines, instead of a low-risk group in the United States. The head of the European Medicines Agency said Monday that the EU could also soon approve the Pfizer-BioNTech jab for the 12-15 age group, as early as this month as several nations on the continent aim to revive their economies.

Ireland on Monday lifted domestic travel restrictions and Greece opened nursery, elementary and middle schools ahead of kicking off the tourism season from May 14. But Spain, which at the weekend lifted a six-month state of emergency and allowed travel between regions, sounded a note of caution after joy-



MIAMI, Florida: Sylvia March, from Argentina, gets a Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccination from a health-care worker at Miami International Airport in Miami, Florida. — AFP

ful crowds celebrated in the streets without masks or social distancing.

"The virus threat still exists," Justice Minister Juan Carlos Campo wrote in El Pais, urging Spaniards to behave "responsibly." Spain was one of the nations hardest hit in the first months of the pandemic, which has so far claimed more than 3.3 million lives worldwide.

India outbreak worries

The death toll in India, suffering from one of the worst outbreaks in the world, approached 250,000 yesterday—a number experts warn is much lower than the actual figures. The surge appeared to be easing in major cities. But reports from rural areas suggested the virus is rampaging through India's vast hinterland, home to around two-thirds of its 1.3 billion people and where access to healthcare is limited.

er, Fikri said. "Initially, rescuers were having difficulties to evacuate victims to a rescue vehicle because the terrain at the site was challenging," Fikri said, but in the end all survivors went to hospital for emergency treatment. The disaster occurred just two weeks after another landslide hit the Chinese-backed Batang Toru hydropower project in North Sumatra, killing 10 people. Three people were still missing when rescuers ended their search last week.

Fatal landslides and flash floods are common across the country during the rainy season. Last month, more than 200 people were killed in a cluster of far-eastern islands and neighboring Timor Leste as Tropical Cyclone Seroja turned small communities into wastelands of mud and uprooted trees.

Indonesia's disaster agency estimates 125 million people—nearly half of the country's population—live in areas at risk of landslides. The disasters are often caused by deforestation and poor mitigation planning, according to environmentalists. — AFP

Seven killed in landslide at Indonesia mine

JAKARTA: At least seven people were killed and one reported missing after a landslide at an Indonesian gold mine, authorities said yesterday. Torrential rains triggered a landslide on Monday, inundating the mine with mud mixed with stones and debris in South Solok regency, West Sumatra, said the local emergency department head Fikri, who like many Indonesians goes by one name. In a statement, the department said "at least seven killed and one is missing".

Rescuers managed to save nine survivors from the mud and were combing the area to find the missing min-



SOLOK: Rescuers retrieving bodies after a landslide at a gold mine in south Solok, West Sumatra province yesterday, where at least seven people were killed and one reported missing. — AFP

Panic, prayers: The day John Paul II was shot

PARIS: Saint Peter's Square in Rome was packed with 20,000 faithful hoping to catch a glimpse of John Paul II on that fateful May afternoon 40 years ago. Suddenly as his open white Fiat "Popemobile" eased through the crowd, the pontiff collapsed-shot at close range by a far-right Turkish nationalist whose motives remain mysterious to this day.

At 5:41 pm on May 13, 1981 AFP flashed: "Pope John Paul II wounded by two gun shots." The 60-year-old Karol Wojtyla was immediately rushed to hospital. He was hit in the abdomen, left hand and right arm. Two women in the Polish-born pope's entourage were also hurt. Rome was gripped by panic. Paramedics, police and journalists rushed to the scene and to the hospital.

Italian authorities quickly confirmed the shooter — 23-year-old Mehmet Ali Agca—had been arrested and that his weapon was a Browning handgun. His accomplice—another Turk-Oral Celik fled and was arrested a few years later in France for drug trafficking and then extradited to Italy.

Wildly popular

The news set off a frenzy around the world and prayers flooded in for the first-ever Slavic pope. Elected in 1978, the charismatic Jean Paul II had made

several international trips that turned into massive media events and proved wildly popular. His insistence on direct contact with the faithful-taking children in his arms and allowing people to touch him—was completely new, but complicated the work of his security team.

The atmosphere at the Vatican that day was "unreal and mind-blowing" according to one AFP journalist. Worried Catholics gathered in St Peter's Square repeated Vatican Radio prayers blasting out from loudspeakers as police choppers flew low above them.

One woman in the crowd cried out everyone's worst fear: "The pope is dead." But the famously tough John Paul II was out of the woods—no vital organ had been affected and he came through the critical surgery lasting nearly six hours.—AFP



In this file photo, Pope John Paul II waves to the crowd in Paris during his official visit in France on May 30, 1980. — AFP

As many as 45 bodies washed up on the banks of the Ganges river near the border between Bihar and Uttar Pradesh—two of India's poorest states. Locals suggested that people were putting the bodies of relatives who had died of COVID-19 into the river because they could not afford wood for funeral pyres or because crematoriums were overwhelmed. While some people even in normal times prefer to immerse bodies in the river rather than cremate them, the Times of India quoted an unnamed police officer as saying there has been a surge in the number of floating bodies found recently.

The WHO has warned that the B.1.617 variant spreading in India appears to be more contagious, classifying it as a "variant of concern at the global level."

'Vaccine diplomacy'

The head of the WHO on Monday slammed nations for using COVID-19 vaccines as a tool for "geopolitical maneuvering," saying the world needed transparent cooperation instead of competition. "Vaccine diplomacy is not cooperation," Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters. He was responding to a question about allegations that countries such as Russia and China have donated large quantities of their homegrown vaccines to desperate nations in exchange for market access and influence. And there were fresh concerns about the upcoming Tokyo Olympics, already delayed by a year, as Japanese superstar Naomi Osaka said she was "not really sure" the coronavirus-hit event should go ahead.

Tokyo and other parts of Japan are currently under a coronavirus state of emergency, and doubts are swirling about the ability of organizers to stage the Games safely. And in Hong Kong, authorities abandoned a plan to make vaccines mandatory for foreign domestic workers, mostly poor women from the Philippines and Indonesia. Manila's top diplomat had said the proposal "smacked of discrimination." — AFP



Rescuers searching leopards which escaped from a wild park in Hangzhou, in China's eastern Zhejiang province. — AFP

Chinese hunt for leopard, dangle chickens as bait

SHANGHAI: Residents in a Chinese city were warned to stay indoors as authorities released flocks of chickens as bait to track down a leopard that escaped from a safari park, state media reported yesterday. The leafy lakeside city of Hangzhou has been on edge since late last week, when residents began spotting leopards roaming around local hills covered in forest and tea plantations. The leopard is one of three that escaped on April 19 — the other two have since been recaptured—a lapse that police said was concealed by the Hangzhou Safari Park's management for nearly three weeks to avoid hurting its visitor numbers during a long holiday last week.

The incident has unleashed a torrent of Chinese internet posts savaging the park for endangering the public, and lamenting the abysmal safety and animal-welfare record of the country's chaotic zoos and wildlife parks. Public outrage has also been fanned by footage of one of the big cats being mauled in a forest by a pack of fierce hunting dogs, and another showing one of the recaptured leopards with part of its hind foot missing.

The first leopard was quietly recaptured by the park on April 21, and the second last Friday by a far larger government search organized as news of the escapes went viral. But the remaining feline has so far eluded the thousands of search personnel using tracker dogs, powered parachutes, and armed with drones and night-vision and heat-detection equipment.—AFP

HK scraps mandatory vaccines for foreign domestic workers

HONG KONG: Hong Kong yesterday scrapped a plan to make coronavirus vaccines mandatory for foreign domestic workers after the proposal sparked an outcry and a diplomatic tussle.

But authorities ordered all foreign helpers to undergo another round of mandatory testing, triggering renewed criticism from the Philippines. Health officials planned to roll out mandatory inoculations for the 370,000 domestic workers in the city, mostly poorly paid women from the Philippines and Indonesia.

Those wanting to apply for work visas—or renew their current ones—would need to show they had received two doses. But on Tuesday city leader Carrie Lam announced a U-turn.

"The government has decided not to request mandatory vaccination when helpers renew their contracts," she said, adding the decision had been made

News in brief

British activist cleared in Thailand

BANGKOK: A rights activist hit with almost a decade of lawsuits after raising concerns about labor conditions at a Thai pineapple company received a court decision yesterday clearing him in the final case against him. Andy Hall faced a series of defamation charges after contributing to a 2012 report on alleged poor working conditions, low wages and child labor at Natural Fruit's factory. In 2016 the Briton was found guilty of criminal defamation and given a suspended three-year prison sentence before the conviction was overturned in June last year. The company later launched a 300-million-baht (\$9.6 million) civil defamation case but dropped the case before it went to trial last year. — AFP

Taiwan bans large events

TAIPEI: Taiwan yesterday banned large gatherings after a cluster of local infections prompted authorities to raise the coronavirus alert level in a place with one of the world's best pandemic responses. The self-ruled island has been hailed as a global leader in containing the COVID-19 pandemic with just 1,210 confirmed cases, 12 deaths and minimal social distancing needed once the initial outbreak was quelled. Last year Taiwan recorded 253 straight days without any local infections. But in recent weeks a small but growing outbreak involving the staff of Taipei-based China Airlines (CAL) and a Novotel airport hotel has sparked alarm. — AFP

China blasts Danish conference

COPENHAGEN: China yesterday blasted a democracy conference in Copenhagen attended by Taiwan's president and a Hong Kong activist alongside Danish government officials this week, qualifying it a "political farce". The Copenhagen Democracy Summit was held Monday and yesterday in the Danish capital and organized by the Alliance of Democracies, an organization targeted by Beijing sanctions in March and founded by former NATO boss Anders Fogh Rasmussen. In addition to Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen and Hong Kong democracy activist Nathan Law, Danish Foreign Minister Jeppe Kofod also participated in the forum by video link, which Beijing said violated "the one-China principle." — AFP

Uzbekistan jails anti-graft blogger

TASHKENT, Uzbekistan: A court in Uzbekistan has sentenced a blogger known for speaking out on corruption to 6.5 years in jail on extortion and libel charges, his lawyer told AFP yesterday. The case of Otabek Sattoriy, a popular video blogger from the southern town of Termez in the Central Asian country, was widely viewed as a test for authorities who according to rights groups have been clamping down on free speech ahead of a leadership election in October. A court in the southern Surkhondaryo region sentenced Sattoriy to six years and six months in jail on Monday, lawyer Umidbek Davlatov told AFP, calling the verdict "completely unfair" and pledging to appeal. — AFP

Moscow rejects US ransomware claims

MOSCOW: Russia yesterday rejected US accusations that a Russia-based group was behind a ransomware attack that forced the shutdown of the largest oil pipeline in the eastern United States. "We categorically reject the baseless fabrications of individual journalists and reiterate that Russia does not conduct 'malicious' activity in the virtual space," the Russian embassy in the United States said in a statement. On Monday, US President Joe Biden said there was no evidence of Russian government involvement in the cyberattack on the US fuel pipeline but said there were indications the ransomware was "in Russia." — AFP

after meetings with officials from the Philippines and Indonesia. Philippine foreign affairs secretary Teodoro Locsin had previously said the initial proposal "smacked of discrimination".

Hong Kong health officials announced the mandatory vaccination plan and the testing of all domestic workers last month after two were found to be infected with one of the more virulent strains of the coronavirus. They said domestic workers were "high risk" because they often work with the elderly and meet in parks on Sundays—usually their one day off a week.

Labour groups representing domestic workers said they felt they were being singled out, noting that the families they worked for—as well as locals working in environments such as care homes—were not required to get vaccinated. They also pointed out that wealthier foreign migrants such as the city's white-collar financial workers were not forced to get vaccines when outbreaks of the coronavirus were traced to their well-heeled districts.

The last round of compulsory testing saw long queues form at facilities across the city. Three coronavirus cases were uncovered over nine days. Yesterday, Lam said all non-vaccinated helpers would be ordered to undergo a second round of testing by the end of the month.—AFP

Business

WEDNESDAY, MAY 12, 2021

Slowest China population growth in decades

Changing society has significant economic and political implications

BEIJING: China's population has grown at its slowest pace in decades, reaching 1.41 billion, census results showed yesterday, highlighting fears of a looming crisis over an ageing society. The growth of 5.4 percent over the past decade was the slowest since the 1960s, and comes alongside a sharp drop in the number of working-age people. China remains the world's most populous nation - but its neighbor India is catching up with around 1.38 billion people, and its youthful population is expected to overtake China in the near future.

After nearly 40 years of a controversial "one-child" policy, Beijing in 2016 allowed families to have two children as fears grew about China's shrinking workforce. China imposed the policy in the late 1970s, forcing couples to have only one baby in a dramatic effort to slow population growth. But the relaxation of the rule is yet to produce the expected baby boom to help stall a demographic slump in a country which is getting old fast.

"The census not only confirmed rapid population ageing, but also sustained low fertility," said Wang Feng, professor of sociology at the University of California, Irvine. "At that low a level, the population cannot sustain itself." The changing society has significant economic and political implications for the world's second biggest economy.

The number of people aged between 15 and 59 dropped nearly seven percentage points, while those over 60 was up more than five percentage points. The surging number of elderly would challenge Beijing to spend more on healthcare and pensions,

said Wang, and "justify its legitimacy by providing the basic social benefits."

Falling marriage rates have played out in slower birth rates, as have rising costs of living and increasingly empowered and educated women delaying or avoiding childbirth. Ning Jizhe from China's statistics bureau said China's fertility policy had achieved "positive results" but conceded the ageing population "imposed continued pressure" on development.

China's gender balance has also been skewed by the one-child policy and a centuries-old social preference for boys which prompted a generation of sex-selective abortions and abandoned baby girls. The latest census data showed the country still has 34.9 million more men than women, making up just over 51.24 percent of the population.

In the near term, Ning said the coronavirus pandemic had also discouraged couples from having children. COVID-19 "increased the uncertainty of everyday life and increased worries around hospitalized childbirth," he added. There were around 12 million births in 2020, he told reporters - the lowest number since 1961. The average size of a family is now 2.62 people, census data showed, down from 3.10 people 10 years ago.

Urban and mobile

In a stark sign of changing society, the urban population grew by 236.4 million. More than 63 percent of Chinese people now live in urban areas. However, nearly 500 million now work in places other than their official household registration, known as the hukou,



DANZHAI, China: A medical staff member takes care of a newborn baby at a hospital in China's south-western Guizhou province yesterday. —AFP

which can make it harder for families to access schools or healthcare.

Yun Jiang, editor of China Neican at the Australian Centre on China in the World, said Beijing has already "moved to a more 'pro-birth' direction" because it

needs a large population to sustain its international influence. China is trying to remove barriers against having children and promote conservative social attitudes "such as shaming single women and penalizing working women", she said. —AFP

G7 must invest \$10tn for sustainable recovery: Report

PARIS: G7 nations should collectively spend a trillion dollars a year over the next decade to put the world on a path to sustainable growth, a report requested by Britain's prime minister said Monday. As rich countries, still reeling from a pandemic that saw global GDP drop four percent in 2020, transition from rescue to recovery, investment must flow in the right direction, said lead author Nicholas Stern, former chief economist at the World Bank and author of the landmark Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change.

The shift from brown to green energy, the protection and restoration of nature, reducing social inequality, facilitating the rollout of vaccines in developing nations - all of these goals must be pursued at once, the report noted. "The world is confronting a complex set of interwoven challenges," Stern told journalists in a Zoom press call as the report was released. "Unless you tackle them together, you are not going to do very well on any of them."

"Get it right, and we have a much more attractive way of growing and developing," he added. "Get it wrong, and we have a lost decade for development, stuttering growth, increased problems of social cohesion in the richer world, and we undermine the future of the climate and biodiversity for generations to come."

A G7 gathering in England starting June 11 is an opportunity for wealthy nations to take the lead, he added. Formed in the mid-1970s, the G7 club of major industrialized nations includes the US, Germany, Britain, Japan, France, Canada and Italy. A trillion dollars a year spread across these seven economies would translate to about two percent of their pre-pandemic GDPs, the report calculated. The independent report, set in motion by British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, said G7 nations should not leave the June meeting without closing the \$20 billion funding gap for COVAX, the UN-led effort to vaccinate the developing world against COVID.

Symbol of trustworthiness

The grouping should also double their efforts so as to cover the shortfall in the long-standing, rich-nation pledge to provide \$100 billion per year in climate finance by 2020. Exactly how much has been provided in recent years is sharply contested, but even the most generous tallies fall tens of billions short. "One hundred billion dollars is small in relation to the overall investment demand," Stern told AFP in an interview. "But it is important symbolically because that was a commitment by the rich world to help with the transition in the poor world. It is a symbol of the trustworthiness."

The report calls for structural policies that leave no doubt about where things are headed. These include the rapid phase-out of fossil fuel subsidies totaling hundreds of billions per year; ramping up the price companies pay for carbon pollution; and building climate resilience and environmental protection into all development policies.

The disclosure by corporations of exposure to climate risk - currently done on a voluntary basis - should become mandatory, the report said. A recent report from CDP, a non-profit that tracks corporate environmental policy, found that half of financial institutions have failed to assess the impact of their portfolios on climate change. —AFP

Kakao to buy Radish app for \$440m

ASEOUL: Online fiction app Radish is being bought for \$440 million by South Korean Internet conglomerate Kakao, the two firms said yesterday, making a multi-millionaire of its 30-year-old founder only five years after he set it up. The deal is one of two acquisitions Kakao announced yesterday totaling nearly \$1 billion as it seeks to expand in English-language markets.

Pay-to-read platform Radish presents serialized storytelling in bite-sized instalments optimized for smartphones, with readers paying around 20 to 30 US cents to access the next episode immediately, or wait for an hour to read it for free. Likened to a Netflix for novels, Radish recruited in-house soap-

opera playwrights including several Emmy Award winners to "present the newest and brightest in entertaining, diverse serial fiction to readers", the company says.

There are currently more than 50 such original series, and the category accounted for more than 90 percent of the company's revenue of \$20 million last year, it said. It also acts as a platform for independent writers, and says on its website that some make nearly \$40,000 every three months. Founder and CEO Lee Seung-yoon set up the company after graduating from Oxford in 2016 and attracted funding from investors including SoftBank Group's venture arm and Lowercase Capital.

The unit buying his firm, Kakao Entertainment, already produces original content of its own from web novels to TV series, movies and music, he said, adding the acquisition would realize his vision "on a much larger scale and in a fascinating way". Kakao said it had also separately acquired

New Yorkers start to return to offices in hybrid mode

NEW YORK: From large corporations calling employees back to business district skyscrapers to the return of lunchtime lines at salad bars: signs that workers are returning to New York's offices, albeit in "hybrid" mode for now, are multiplying. Several companies emblematic of America's financial capital are preparing for a huge in-person return of staff after 14 months of widespread teleworking and a vigorous vaccination campaign.

JP Morgan Chase bank led the way at the end of April when it announced that it would bring all of its US staff back to the office on a "rotational" basis starting in early July. Then last week, fellow New York financial giant Goldman Sachs sent employees a memo telling them to prepare to return to the office from June 14. The instructions came around the same time that New York Governor Andrew Cuomo announced that most of New York's pandemic-era restrictions will be lifted on May 19 as Covid-19 positivity rates, now around two percent,

continue to fall. Local government is also making moves: City hall brought back 80,000 employees last Monday. The announcements accelerate a return-to-work movement that was just getting under way in America's largest city. New York has taken a cautious approach to reopening after finding itself the early epicenter of the US's outbreak in spring 2020.

Just 16 percent of workers had returned to offices at the end of April, up from 13 percent in January, according to Kastle Systems, which specializes in building security. "There's definitely an upward trend, but it is an incremental trend," Kastle Systems chairman Mark Ein told AFP. "It is a slowly building wave."

New York occupancy rates are below the US average but some insiders are predicting a sharp increase in the next two months. "We've seen a dramatic shift," said Craig Deitelzweig, president of Marx Realty, a company managing seven buildings in Midtown and Wall Street. Its occupancy rates passed 30 percent last week, against less than 20 percent previously. "The tenants who weren't back were saying September and now we're hearing June or July, some even in May," he said.

'Optimism'

Potential clients scouting out new offices have also picked up, he said, with many expressing a demand for

E-waste recycling matter of national security: Report

PARIS: Recovering precious elements from e-waste is a security imperative for Europe that should be written into law, according to a report Monday that said it was "crucial" to ensure industry competitiveness and sustain tech-

dependent lifestyles in the region. Circuit boards, magnets in disk drives and electric vehicles, batteries and fluorescent lamps are among items containing critical raw materials - including gold, silver and cobalt - that could be recycled and reused, the research found.

This would safeguard supplies for consumer electronics and even the defense industry, said the consortium behind the European Union funded CEWASTE report, which said the fate of these materials was a "societal challenge". Despite these essential materials being vulnerable to geo-political upheavals, it said, Europe remains too reliant on foreign supply, with recycling rates "close to zero".

"We've been recycling for centuries, it's one of the old-

'Ripple effects': Botswana-Zambia bridge a boon

KAZUNGULA, Zambia: A road and rail bridge linking Botswana and Zambia was inaugurated on Monday, marking the completion of a multi-million-dollar project aimed at easing congestion at border crossings throughout the southern African region. The curved Kazungula bridge, which stretches for 923 m over the Zambezi River, provides a long-needed alternative route for hauliers.

"This will lower the cost of doing business," Zambia's President Edgar Lungu said at the ribbon-cutting ceremony, anticipating "an increase in trade and competitive-

ness, job creation, tourism and other positive ripple effects". Construction of the \$259 million project began in Dec 2014, co-funded by the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), regional governments and other grants. Namibia and Zimbabwe joined the consortium in 2018.

The bridge will facilitate intra-regional freight transport by allowing trucks to bypass the notorious Beitbridge border post between Zimbabwe and South Africa, which is perennially congested, with vehicles spending hours and sometimes days queuing to cross. At Monday's ceremony, Botswana's President Mokgweetsi Masisi said the bridge would "open avenues for improved trade".

And Zimbabwe's leader Emmerson Mnangagwa hailed what he called a "milestone achievement" for the region. The current leader of the African Union and president of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Felix Tshisekedi, also attended the event. —AFP

webtoons mobile platform Tapas, which presents bite-sized comics on the go and has published over 90,000 stories, for \$510 million.

Founded in 2012 by South Korean entrepreneur Chang Kim, the San Francisco-based company has become a "magnet for webtoon fans and content creators", Kakao said in a press release. Some South Korean internet firms have struggled to expand their operations overseas and Kakao said the deals would help it to "expand its original content business in North America and other English-speaking regions."

While at university, Radish CEO Lee became president of the Oxford Union debating society, a post which has previously been held by political leaders including British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and late Pakistani leader Benazir Bhutto. Asked whether he was interested in going into politics one day, Lee told AFP: "No I am not." —AFP



NEW YORK: Rob Byrnes, President at East Midtown Partnership, works in his office in midtown Manhattan on May 7, 2021. —AFP

outdoor spaces and windows that open - not always the case in Manhattan skyscrapers. "Before I would look through my window at the avenue and there would not be a single person on the sidewalk," said Robert Byrnes, president of the East Midtown Partnership, a business association. "Now, it is still not packed, but I can see a few dozen people from my window. There's definitely a sense of optimism," he added. —AFP

est professions," said Pascal Leroy, from the WEEE Forum, one of the authors of the report. "What makes this era different from previous eras is that we need the critical raw materials to make products that sustain our high tech lifestyle," he said.

With these elements needed for wind turbines and electric cars, they also play a crucial role in meeting climate goals and manufacturing competitiveness. But Leroy said Europe's supply chain had become "too vulnerable". He told AFP the defense industry was particularly exposed, with everything from computer systems to drones reliant on external supplies such as rare earth elements, which almost exclusively come from China. —AFP



KAZUNGULA, Botswana: An aerial view of the newly built Kazungula bridge over the Zambezi river on Monday. —AFP

Business

It's all about the money honey: Australia, NZ clash over manuka

Explosion in demand pushed honey exports to new record in 2019-20

SOMERSBY, Australia: Beekeepers in New Zealand are seeking the exclusive right to use the "manuka" label for their honey, pitting them against rival Australian farmers over a prestige product that can fetch hundreds of dollars per jar. Manuka honey takes its name from the Maori term for *Leptospermum scoparium*, the flowering shrub whose nectar forms its essence, which is found in both Australia and New Zealand.

But Australian production could soon be dealt a heavy blow, with a group of New Zealand producers launching proceedings in multiple countries to register the term "manuka" and claim its exclusive use. If they are successful, it would be devastating for Australian producers like Ana Martin and Sven Stephan.

Last year they bought land where a crop of *Leptospermum scoparium* was growing in Somersby, about 100 km north of Sydney, installing around 50 hives on the side of a hill. The couple have almost 300 hives across several locations along the coast of New South Wales. "Being a beekeeper is a seven-day-a-week job," Martin told AFP. "And the returns are lim-

ited. With manuka though, the margins are greater."

They sell their honey directly at markets, and increasingly now, over the Internet. At the end of the first season at Somersby, they collected 2.5 tons of manuka honey, Martin said. Online, a 250-gm jar sells for roughly \$20-60, depending on its composition - although some higher end brands can cost hundreds.

'Misleading'

But the New Zealand producers behind the move to register the term "manuka" complain the Australians are misusing the name. "In the mind of the consumer, manuka represents a badge of origin that it comes from New Zealand," John Rawcliffe, spokesman for the Unique Manuka Factor Association, told AFP. "Manuka is a Maori word."

He said that Australian beekeepers use the name "manuka" for all varieties of *Leptospermum scoparium*, of which there are 80. "This is misleading and misrepresents the product sold. It's like calling all citrus fruits lemons to get a higher market price," he continued.

Protected status by geographical designation is common in Europe, where products such as champagne and Parma ham fall under the European Union's Protected Food Names scheme - which proponents say helps maintain high standards for consumers. But Australian producers deny there is a difference in the quality of their honey. "Our honey has the same chemical composition as New Zealand honey," said Paul Callander, President of the Australian Manuka Honey Association.

He also dismissed the heritage argument. "It's proven that Australia has been producing manuka honey since at least the 1840s," he said, pointing out that "manuka" is the common name for *Leptospermum scoparium* in Tasmania and Victoria state.

Huge export value

Not all producers in New Zealand are behind the push to register the name. Comvita, the biggest producer of honey in the country, has been associated with the Australian firm Capilano since 2016, producing and selling manuka honey in Australia. But for those without a business interest across the Tasman Sea, the



This file picture taken on April 20, 2021 shows beekeeper Sven Stephan explaining about manuka honey in the New South Wales town of Somersby. —AFP

stakes are considerable.

An explosion in demand attributed to the pandemic pushed honey exports to a new record in 2019-20, of which manuka honey made up 76 percent. Gwyneth Paltrow and tennis star Novak Djokovic are among the celebrities to tout the gold-

en-brown condiment for its supposed health benefits. Despite volumes ten times smaller than those exported by China, in 2020 New Zealand became the world's largest exporter of honey by value, with cumulative sales estimated over 300 million US dollars. —AFP

Germany halts Facebook sharing WhatsApp data

BERLIN: A German regulator yesterday slapped a three-month ban on Facebook collecting user data from WhatsApp accounts and referred the case to an EU watchdog, citing concerns about election integrity. The Hamburg Commissioner for Data Protection and Freedom of Information, which has jurisdiction because Facebook's German branch is based in the city, sent the order to the social network which owns the popular messaging service.

The tech giant informed WhatsApp users earlier this year that they must consent to a new data use policy to continue using the service. The German authority said in an emergency decision that the

terms of that agreement were now null and void in Europe's top economy for three months. It will hand the case over to the European Data Protection Board, an independent EU body that enforces rules throughout the 27-nation bloc.

The head of the German regulator, Johannes Caspar, said past Facebook data protection breaches as well as Germany's general election in September showed the "dangers" of "mass building of user profiles" that could be exploited. "This ruling is intended to protect the rights and freedoms of the many millions of user across Germany who give their permission to the new use and privacy policy," he said.

"That includes not only the private sphere but also the possibility of using profiles to influence voter choices and manipulate democratic decisions," Caspar noted that with nearly 60 million users in Germany WhatsApp was "by far" the country's most popular social media app. WhatsApp on Friday stepped back from its plan to require users to accept the new terms which critics said could

expand data collection from its two billion users around the world. The service, which was set to enforce its new data-sharing policy on May 15 - following a delay in response to a user outcry - said on its website that it would not immediately cut off users who don't accept the new terms, although it would send reminders to those who don't opt in. The update will allow additional sharing of information from WhatsApp with Facebook and its other applications such as Instagram and Messenger, such as contacts and profile data, but not the content of messages which remain encrypted.

A WhatsApp spokesman said the German order "is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the purpose and effect of WhatsApp's update and therefore has no legitimate basis". He said the update actually "provides further transparency about how we collect and use data".

As the Hamburg authority's "claims are wrong, the order will not impact the continued roll-out of the update," he added. —AFP

China factory gate prices jump as commodities rally

BEIJING: China's factory gate inflation rose at its fastest rate in nearly four years last month, data showed yesterday, as a strong recovery in the world's number two economy sees a surge in demand for key commodities such as iron ore and copper. The forecast-beating jump in prices comes as global investors grow increasingly worried that the blast in economic activity expected to be caused by the easing of lockdowns and reopening of economies could force central banks to wind back their ultra-loose monetary policies.

Having largely contained the coronavirus crisis early last year, China has enjoyed months of improvement and was the only major economy to expand in 2020. The recovery has helped the country's manufacturing sector bounce back strongly and its voracious appetite for commodities return. That has pushed the price of iron ore and copper, which are used in a wide variety of goods, to record highs.

The producer price index (PPI), which measures the cost of goods at the factory gate, rose 6.8 percent on-year in April, the National Bureau of Statistics said, the highest since October 2017 and well up from the previous month's 4.4 percent. Analysts had predicted strong growth owing to the low corresponding figures for last year, when much of the country was closed to contain the coronavirus.

"In April, domestic industrial production recovered steadily, the prices of international commodities such as iron ore... rose, and prices in the production sector continued to rise," said senior NBS statistician Dong Lijuan. The key driver remains the rally in global commodity prices, said Capital Economics in a note, adding that supply shortages may persist for a while longer - keeping producer



This file photo taken on May 8, 2021 shows workers checking rolls of sheet aluminium at a factory in Wuhan, in China's central Hubei province. —AFP

prices elevated in the near-term.

China's economy has bounced back since authorities brought the coronavirus crisis largely under control through strict lockdowns and border restrictions, and Beijing set a 2021 growth target of above six percent for the year with a mass vaccination campaign under way. Official data on Tuesday also showed China's consumer price index (CPI) rose to 0.9 percent on-year in April - slightly lower than expected. Dong said the increase came as "domestic consumption continued to recover and prices were generally stable".

As domestic tourism continued to increase, the prices of air tickets and hotels increased, she said. China's CPI, a key gauge of retail inflation, had in recent years been driven up by pork prices after an African swine fever outbreak ravaged stocks. This has since stabilized with officials working to boost supplies of the country's meat staple.

ed by billionaire entrepreneur Jack Ma, with a record \$2.78 billion fine last month for abusing its market dominance with anti-competitive practices.

Two weeks ago regulators said they had also launched a similar probe of Meituan, a consumer lifestyle super-app through which users order consumer goods and book entertainment, health and leisure services. Resulting pressure on Meituan shares turned into a rout after CEO Wang Xing last Thursday posted on social media a classic ancient poem about the tyrannical rule of China's first emperor, which was widely viewed as a swipe at authorities.

The current broad tech clampdown gained pace only after Ma publicly criticized regulators in October, so Wang's post sparked fears of similar retribution against Meituan. Compounding Meituan's troubles, an influential Shanghai consumer advocacy group on Monday accused the platform of problems with refunds and misleading content on its mobile app.

"Using such a cryptic poem at such a sensitive time, investors will shiver in fright," said a posting

ING chief economist for Greater China Iris Pang, however, cautioned that the ongoing semiconductor chip shortage globally may soon bring "price increases in many parts and goods such as home appliances, cars, and computers" as well. "We believe that the chip price increase has already pushed up prices of fridges, washing machines, TVs, laptops and car prices in April," Pang added, noting that rising costs could also squeeze producers' profits.

But analysts believe policy rates are expected to remain stable this year, with ANZ Research noting policymakers had made employment and financial risks top priorities. Capital Economics analysts added that industrial metal prices were likely to fall later in the year with a tighter policy stance weighing on construction activity. "We don't think inflation will rise to the point where it triggers a major policy shift by the (central bank)," they said. —AFP

on Gelonghui, a popular stock-discussion account on China's Twitter-like Weibo. Wang quickly deleted the post and has said it was mistakenly interpreted. Shares of Meituan, which is backed by Chinese tech giant Tencent, had surged since it listed in Hong Kong in 2018, vaulting it into the ranks of China's most valuable tech companies.

Meituan has vowed to present authorities with a "rectification" plan to address what China's national market watchdog has called "suspected monopolistic behaviors". Financial regulators summoned 13 internet companies in late April to order them to make changes to their fintech operations, after 34 major companies were earlier told to respect anti-competition guidelines.

Aside from the huge fine on Alibaba, its financial arm Ant Group was forced to scuttle a planned record-shattering \$35 billion Hong Kong-Shanghai IPO late last year. Ant has pledged to comply with government demands to bring its fast-growing online lending, credit and wealth management businesses in line with banking regulations. —AFP

News in brief

Philippines economy shrinks

MANILA: The Philippine economy shrank in the first three months of the year as coronavirus restrictions suppressed activity. Gross domestic product contracted 4.2 percent from a year ago, the statistics authority said, marking the fifth straight quarter of decline as efforts to combat COVID-19 deepened the country's economic pain. The number of infections has surpassed a million in the Philippines, where authorities have used crippling lockdowns to ease pressure on overstretched hospitals. But the measures have thrown millions out of work, forced businesses to scale back operations and smothered consumer spending. —AFP

Moscow rejects US attack claims

MOSCOW: Russia yesterday rejected US accusations that a Russia-based group was behind a ransomware attack that forced the shutdown of the largest oil pipeline in the eastern United States. On Monday, US President Joe Biden said there was no evidence of Russian government involvement in the cyberattack on the US fuel pipeline but said there were indications the ransomware was "in Russia". The FBI identified the group behind the hack of Colonial Pipeline as DarkSide, a shadowy operation that surfaced last year and attempts to lock up corporate computer systems and force companies to pay to unfreeze them. —AFP

Renewable energy powers ahead

PARIS: Renewable energy grew at its fastest rate in two decades, driven primarily by gains in China and wind power, the International Energy Agency said in a report yesterday. Around 280 gigawatts (GW) of electricity production capacity was added last year, a 45-percent increase from the amount added in 2019, according to the IEA. That was the biggest gain since 1999. Renewable energy accounted for 90 percent of new electricity generation installed last year. New wind turbine installation nearly doubled last year to 114 GW. Installation of new photovoltaic solar panels should also continue to break records, hitting 160 GW by 2022. —AFP

Norway taps oil wealth

OSLO: Norway will spend billions of dollars more than planned from its oil revenues to mitigate the impact of the pandemic, the government announced yesterday, as tough elections loom in September. In an amended draft finance bill, the rightwing government said it plans to spend a record 402.6 billion Norwegian kroner (\$49 billion) of its oil revenues, which normally goes into its sovereign wealth fund the largest in the world. Having put away most of the country's oil revenues for several decades, Norway has the world's largest sovereign wealth fund, now worth more than €1.1 trillion. —AFP

US states oppose kids' Instagram

SAN FRANCISCO: Officials representing most US states on Monday called on Facebook chief Mark Zuckerberg to nix plans to launch a version of Instagram for children. In a letter to the founder and chief of the leading social network, 44 state attorneys general argued that such a service would be "harmful for myriad reasons". Concerns expressed by attorneys general included cyberbullying, predatory adults, mental well-being, and Facebook's missteps on data protection and privacy, according to a statement released by New York Attorney General Letitia James. —AFP

German investor confidence jumps

BERLIN: German investor sentiment jumped to its highest level in two decades in May on hopes that consumers will send growth soaring once Europe's biggest economy finally reopens shops, bars and restaurants. The ZEW institute's monthly barometer measuring economic expectations rose 13.7 points in May to 84.4, its highest reading since 2000 and by far the highest since the beginning of the pandemic, data showed yesterday. ZEW's assessment of the current economic situation in Germany jumped by 8.7 points to minus 40.1 - a marked improvement on the previous month but still deep in negative territory. —AFP

Meituan tumbles after CEO's poetic swipe at officials

SHANGHAI: Shares of Chinese online giant Meituan plummeted for a second straight day yesterday amid a run of bad headlines that included the CEO posting an ancient poem viewed as a veiled criticism of China's government. Meituan's Hong Kong-listed shares closed more than five percent lower yesterday - and down around 12 percent since last week - as investors bet it would become the next big Chinese tech company humbled by government regulators.

Beijing has moved aggressively to loosen Big Tech's hold on the daily finances of consumers and - analysts believe - to curb the sector's growing influence on society by using anti-monopoly probes. Regulators hit e-commerce titan Alibaba, co-found-

Business

AUB reports net profit of \$159.6m for period ended March 31, 2021

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank BSC (AUB) reported a net profit attributable to its equity shareholders of \$159.6 million for Q1/2021 (Q1/2020: \$171.4 million, -6.9 percent) primarily due to lower net interest income driven by low-key benchmark interest rates and reduced activity based fees and commission and other income resulting from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The basic and diluted earnings per share were US 1.6 cents in Q1/2021 versus US 1.7 cents in Q1/2020.

Comprehensive income attributable to the owners of the bank for Q1/2021 was \$174.8 million (Q1/2020: \$-37.0 million). Net interest income was \$207.0 million in Q1/2021 (Q1/2020: \$213.8 million, -3.2 percent) and total operating income was \$291.0 million in Q1/2021 (Q1/2020: \$318.7 million, -8.7 percent). Meanwhile, net interest income and total operating income improved by

3.8 percent and 0.7 percent compared to the trailing Q4/2020 quarter with improved core interest and fee income streams.

Non-performing loans ratio stood at 2.7 percent (31 December 2020: 2.6 percent) with specific provision coverage of 85.2 percent (31 December 2020: 85.9 percent). Provision coverage levels are calculated on a cash provision basis excluding the value of the additional significant non-cash (real estate and securities) collateral available against non-performing loans.

The cost to income ratio was maintained at 27.7 percent (Q1/2020: 27.1 percent) reflecting AUB's continuing cost discipline and well entrenched intelligent spend approach achieved through streamlining of processes and leveraging its on-going digital transformation initiatives.

The Group's equity attributable to owners at 31

March 2021 increased by 1.2 percent to \$4.1 billion (31 December 2020: \$4.0 billion). Return on Average Equity for Q1/2021 was 15.0 percent (Q1/2020: 15.6 percent). The AUB Group's total assets on 31 March 2021 was marginally lower (-1.6 percent) to \$39.4 billion (31 December 2020: \$40.1 billion) reflecting prudent balance-sheet management under subdued operating and funding conditions. Return on Average Assets was at 1.7 percent for Q1/2021 (Q1/2020: 1.9 percent).

Meshal Al-Othman, AUB Chairman, commented "While governments across the world are in various stages of rolling out their mass vaccination programs, global and regional economies are still being impacted by the resurgence of new virus variants which adversely affect business confidence and delay recovery efforts. AUB continues to navigate these challenging market conditions in

a balanced and structured manner and its results reflect its conservative stance in terms of risk assessment and management."

"AUB will continue to focus on providing a safe operating environment for all staff, clients and counterparties, on building a seamless remote capability through its existing digital initiatives to transact its business client needs and on protecting its core earnings capacity and multi country franchise until business as usual conditions can be restored".



Meshal Al-Othman

Mezzan Holding reports Q1 2021 financial results

KUWAIT: Mezzan Holding KSC, one of the largest manufacturers and distributors of food, beverage, FMCG and pharmaceutical products in the Gulf, announced the company's financial results for the first quarter ended 31 March 2021.

The company recorded KD 73.4 million in revenue, driven by its food manufacturing and distribution, fast-moving consumer goods and healthcare as well as Mezzan's industrial segment. Earnings Before Interest, Tax, and Depreciation and Amortization (EBITDA) grew by 1 percent due to the reduction in Selling, General & Administrative Expense (SG&A). Mezzan's Q1 2021 Net Profit to Parent Company Shareholders grew by 6.8 percent compared to Q1 2020, as a result of improved operating results.

Q1 2021 Financial Highlights:

- Revenue: KD 73.4 million, down 1.4 percent
- Operating Profit: KD 6.4 million, up 0.9 percent
- EBITDA: KD 8.7 million, up 1.0 percent
- Net Profit to Parent Company Shareholders: KD 5.0 million, up 6.8 percent

Commenting on the results, Mezzan Holding Executive Vice Chairman Mohammad Jassim Al-Wazzan, said: "I am proud to announce that Mezzan has started 2021 strong, with an increase of 6.8 percent in net profit to parent company shareholders during our first quarter compared to the same period last year. Despite the challenges that we continue to encounter as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Mezzan managed to increase profitability, generating an operating profit of KD 6.4 million, an increase of 0.9 percent compared to the first quarter of 2020. These results are a proof to Mezzan's robust, defensive business model."

Mezzan Holding CEO, Garrett Walsh, commented: "We are pleased to announce consistently strong quarterly profits since the beginning of COVID-19 pandemic, while maintaining a steady financial position, stable asset quality metrics and strong capitalization".

Q1 2021 Financial Performance Review: Food Business Line:

Total Revenue for the Food Business Line reached KD 44.6 million, a decrease of 3.6 percent compared with the same period in 2020. The Food Business Line accounted for 60.8 percent of Group Revenue. The Business Line comprises the following three divisions: Manufacturing and Distribution (generating 46.0 percent of Group Revenue), Catering (generating 10.0 percent of Group Revenue) and Services (generating 4.8 percent of Group Revenue).

- Manufacturing and Distribution: Q1 2021 revenue increased by 2.0 percent.
- Catering: Q1 2021 revenue decreased by 15.6 percent.
- Services: Q1 2021 revenue decreased by 21.1 percent.

Non-Food Business Line:

Revenue reached KD 28.8 million, an increase of 2.2 percent compared with the same period in 2020. The Non-Food Business Line accounted for 39.2 percent of Group Revenue. The Business Lines comprises the following divisions: FMCG and Pharmaceuticals business division (generating 37.3 percent of Group Revenue) and Industrials (generating 1.9 percent of Group Revenue).

- FMCG and Pharmaceuticals: Q1 2021 revenue increased by 1.5 percent boosted by strong performance of KSPICO and pharmaceutical segment.
- Industrials: Q1 2021 revenue increased by 19.1 percent.

Regional Business Highlights in Q1 2021:

- In Kuwait: Q1 2021 revenue grew by 0.6 percent due to strong performance in FMCG and healthcare segment, as well as strong performance in Mezzan's industrial segment.
- In UAE: Q1 2021 revenue increased by 3.6 percent due to the increase in distribution activities.
- In Qatar: Q1 2021 revenue decreased by 18.1 percent due to the decline of catering business line.
- In KSA: Q1 2021 revenue increased by 15.6 percent as Mezzan continues to launch new products.
- In Afghanistan: Q1 2021 revenue decreased by 57.3 percent due to the departure of U.S troops from the country.
- In Jordan: Q1 2021 revenue increased by 16.5 percent due to improving Mezzan's logistics operations.

Double-digit profit growth confirms KFH's strong financial position

KUWAIT: Acting Group Chief Executive Officer at Kuwait Finance House (KFH) Abdulwahab Al-Roshood said that the positive financial indicators achieved by KFH in Q1 2021, despite the exceptional economic conditions, and the double-digit net profit growth at 12.9 percent, confirm its solid financial position and credit worthiness as well as its high efficiency in dealing with fluctuations.

In an interview with CNBC Arabia TV, Al-Roshood added that net financing income increased 5.3 percent to KD 153.6 million, the cost to income ratio for the Group stabilized at 37.3 percent, down from 51.3 percent in 2014, financing portfolio increased 1.1 percent to KD 10.9 billion, and deposit accounts stabilized at KD 15.3 bn.

Al-Roshood pointed out that the Group total provisions and impairment charge decreased 25 percent to KD 56 million, including Financing, investment and other provisions.

He explained that due to the pandemic and its

negative repercussions on local and global economy, KFH's exiting deals reached only KD 6.7 million as of the end of Q1 2021. Al-Roshood added that exiting from non-strategic investments is part of KFH strategy that focuses on core banking business and sustainable profits.

He added that the Group's non-performing financings decreased to 2.47 percent as of the end of Q1 2021, as per the CBK's accounting principles. Total debt coverage ratio stood at only 220 percent and 206.8 percent for KFH solo and the Group respectively as of the end of the first quarter of 2021.

As for the contribution of KFH subsidiaries in the Q1 net profit, Al-Roshood said that their contribution until end of Q1 2021 reached 35.4 percent, whereas KFH-Turkey's contribution was 35 percent compared to 23.3 percent.

He added that financing receivables as of the end of the first quarter of 2021 reached KD 10.870 billion, i.e. an increase of 1.1 percent compared to end of year 2020, most of the growth was achieved in the corporate sector.

KFH reported net profit of KD 50.0 million for the first quarter of 2021 for KFH shareholders, an increase of 12.9 percent compared to the same period last year. Earnings per share for the first quarter of 2021 reached 5.97 fils; an increase of 12.6 percent compared to the same period last year. Total oper-

stances, our banks are taking large provisions, while our real estate and hospitality sector waits for people to go back to a more normal way of life.

KIPCO reported a net loss of KD 8.4 million (\$-27.8 million) in the first quarter (the three months ended March 31, 2021), as a consequence of the situation that the local and international business communities are facing.

In the first quarter, the company's revenue came to KD 169.7 million (\$561.2 million). Consolidated assets for the first three months of the year came to KD 10.1 billion (\$33.4 billion), compared to KD 10.4 billion (\$34.4 billion) reported at year-end 2020.

Faisal Al-Ayyar, KIPCO's Vice Chairman (Executive), said: "We said in our recent Shafafiyah Investors' Forum

KIPCO announces operating profit of KD 15.4m for Q1 2021

KUWAIT: KIPCO - the Kuwait Projects Company (Holding) - has announced an operating profit of KD 15.4 million (\$50.9 million) for the first three months of 2021.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have an impact on the Group's core businesses, as second waves hit different parts of the world. Under these cir-

AUB offers services to customers during Eid Al-Fitr holidays

KUWAIT: On the occasion of the blessed Eid Al-Fitr, Ahli United Bank (AUB) congratulates and extends its warm wishes to His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the government, the citi-

Growing movement for 'fair share' climate commitments

PARIS: When US President Joe Biden pledged last month to cut his country's carbon emissions in half by 2030, Japan and Canada quickly followed suit. But many green groups and scientists say that this is still not good enough. Biden's initiative may have won praise from political allies, but these campaigners want to see a different calculus rooted in history and ethics.

To keep the world from tilting into catastrophic warming, they argue, developed nations that got rich burning fossil fuels must face their historic responsibility for the climate crisis - and pay for it, too. When countries struck the landmark Paris Agreement in 2015, they committed to limit global temperature rises to "well below" two degrees Celsius compared to pre-industrial levels.

Nations also agreed to strive for a safer warming cap of 1.5C through voluntary emissions-cutting plans, known as National Determined Contributions, or NDCs, that would be ratcheted up in scope and ambition every five years. "What they refused to allow was any assessment of how the individual pledges compared to each other," Brandon Wu, director of policy and campaigns at ActionAid USA, told AFP.

"As civil society, we thought that was a really crucial piece of the puzzle - it's important both whether all the pledges add up to the 1.5C goal, but it's also important whether they're fair relative to one another."

The concept of "fair share" emissions cuts has been gaining traction among environmental and human rights organizations for years. The methodol-

ogy is simple enough: Calculate the amount of carbon currently in Earth's atmosphere attributable to a specific country's historic greenhouse gas emissions, then factor in that country's capacity - measured in wealth - to help other nations reduce their own emissions.

This year a coalition of around 175 climate groups launched US Climate Fair Share. Far from an emissions cut of 50 percent by 2030, the groups said the US's "fair share" would be equivalent to 195 percent of 2005 levels. That means the US would need to nearly completely decarbonize its own economy, then facilitate significant emissions cuts in countries around the world through investment in clean energy and infrastructure.

"Even if we go 100-percent zero emissions - not net-zero, but real zero - by 2030, that's still not our fair share, because we have such a historical legacy of climate pollution," said Wu. "We're not calling for negative emissions or anything like that. We're calling for international finance to support reductions elsewhere."

'Who made this mess?'

Climate Action Tracker, a think tank that compiles and evaluates national emissions reduction plans, found that the pledges made during last month's summit would, if fully implemented, knock 0.2C off projected warming. But the "emissions gap" between what has been promised and what is needed to stay below 1.5C remains enormous: even the latest round of commitments would - if honored - still see Earth warm 2.4C this century.

Michael Mann, director of Penn State's Earth System Science Center and author of "The New Climate War", told AFP that the emissions gap does not account for "fair share" cuts. "It simply tells us what the global reductions in carbon emissions must be to achieve certain critical targets - for example to avoid dangerous 1.5C warming," he said. "How they

are divided up is a matter of policy, politics and ethics," he added. "Speaking as a concerned citizen, and not just a scientist, I do think countries like the US with a legacy of two centuries of producing carbon pollution have a special obligation to lead."

The US is by far history's largest emitter, accounting for more than 28 percent of all carbon pollution since 1850. Yet it is far from alone in having an outsized historical contribution to climate change. The Climate Equity Reference project, launched by think tanks EcoEquity and the Stockholm Environment Institute, applies the bedrock UN climate treaty principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities" to managing Earth's remaining carbon budget.

Their fair-share calculator shows that - in a scenario where 1.5C is achieved through emissions cuts alone - the European Union should reduce its carbon pollution by the equivalent of 170 percent. In total, high-income countries would need to slash emissions by 136 percent, the calculator shows.

Conversely, climate vulnerable nations with virtually no responsibility for historic emissions, can "fairly" continue roughly along current emissions lines such that 1.5C remains in play. "It sounds dry and complex but it's really just basic ethics," said Wu. "OK, who made this mess? You have to clean it up." "And if you have more wealth and more privilege than your neighbours, then you should correspondingly do a little more."

Most wealthier nations plan to deploy carbon cutting schemes to help achieve their net-zero emissions targets. In 2019, then-prime minister Theresa May pledged that Britain would "eradicate its net contribution to climate change by 2050". A subsequent report by the Chatham House think tank said there were "many reasons to question" Britain's path to net-zero, which relies heavily on carbon dioxide removal projects. —AFP



Abdulwahab Al-Roshood



Faisal Al-Ayyar



Business



Abdulaziz Al-Batain, Omar Al-Thuwaini and Mijbil Alayoub with the team.



Alayoub and Nazem Al-Ghabra with interior ministry staff.

OOREDOO AT THE FOREFRONT OF LOCAL HUMANITARIAN AID

KUWAIT: Humanitarian aid is of exceptional importance to Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, mirroring its core mission of launching and supporting humanitarian initiatives that aim to improve lives, support the community and needy, and achieve sustainable development that promote prosperity while protecting the earth.

Since the beginning of Ramadan, Ooredoo Kuwait's humanitarian journey has exceeded, in which it was keen on launching humanitarian initiatives and community activities that inspire all, reflect the values of the blessed month of Ramadan and the authentic norms and traditions of the Kuwaiti people, and aim of nurturing a culture of good deeds and giving among the community.

Philanthropic Activities

Ooredoo Kuwait, in association with Al-Najat Charity Society, has intensified its humanitarian campaigns during Ramadan including; "Teach me Islam", a campaign aimed to educate 4000 converts the principles of Islam, Arabic language of the Qur'an-, Sharia sciences and Islamic studies.



Mijbil Alayoub

"Your righteous deeds will pay off", is another campaign aspired to establish an integrated village that includes all the basic facilities and provide a decent life for the needy families.

"Orphan Sponsorship" campaign, continued for three days, and the monthly sponsorship cost was KWD 15. Hence, a sponsor's support helps cover essential needs, such as food, clothing, health care, or education. Through this initiative, Ooredoo and Al-Najat Charity Society aimed to sponsor 350 orphans in various poor countries.

Moreover, and as part of Ooredoo Kuwait's continues support to Humanitarian campaigns, and Al-Najat Charity Society groups of initiatives during the last ten days of Ramadan, another initiative was launched with the aim of offering young children and youth who have lost any parts of their bodies like an arm or leg in result of wars and accidents, with artificial limb. The charity also aimed through this humanitarian initiative, to change their

reality and inspire them to rely on themselves in performing daily activities such as walking, eating, or dressing.

Driven by the company's social responsibility program, Ooredoo Kuwait has also donated KWD 5,000 to Al-Najat Charity Society, for its drilling wells campaign. The campaign aims to provide clean drinking water for the poor countries including; Niger, Bangladesh, Mauritania, India, Tchad, and others; and defeating diseases resulting from clean water scarcity that leads to losing hundreds of lives every day. The campaign aims to dig 500 artesian wells, with a total cost of KWD 250,000.

Ooredoo Kuwait also handed over than a hundred food baskets for the needy families in the country. Ooredoo's designated team together with Al-Najat Charity Society volunteers distributed the food baskets across the country. Ooredoo's charity campaign is integral to its commitment to enable collective humanitarian work, promote social responsibility, and increase awareness among the local community.

Girgian

As part of its social responsibility, Ooredoo Kuwait continued its humanitarian initiatives by actively participating in all social events that bring the community closer to each other especially during these times. Ooredoo Kuwait shared the joy of Girgian with its employees and the heroes at the Ministry of Interior (MOI), who are in charge of protecting the country's internal security, honoring their efforts and dedication during these challenging times. The company has also distributed SIM cards, with free internet and minutes to keep them in touch with their family and friends.

'The Joy of Giving'

Ooredoo has launched special online offers in celebration of the holy month of Ramadan, and as part of its Ramadan campaign "the joy of giving". The company was keen to design these offers and provide valuable gifts, taking into account the current circumstances and to encourage customers to stay at home and make the best use during this holy month.

Free 5G routers

Customers had the chance of getting a free 5G router during Ramadan with Ooredoo Kuwait's exclusive Shamel Internet plans while enjoying unlimited 5G internet for only KWD 20 per month.

Customers had the privilege of choosing one of these free routers; Huawei CPE Pro 2, Huawei CPE, Huawei 5G Portable routers, or Nokia FastMile 5G Gateway.

Free premium smartphones

Customers also had the chance of getting a free premium smartphone with Ooredoo Kuwait's exclu-

community a better place and create a safer digital world for ourselves and others. The campaign aimed to encourage community members to adopt strategies that make the Internet a platform that allows everyone to share their ideas freely and respectfully and encourages creative thinking so that everyone can better enjoy the Internet. The campaign inspired people to give the Internet a bet-



Alayoub, Al-Ghabra and Mohammed Al-Khattaf with interior ministry staff.

sive Shamel 5G postpaid plans and enjoying unlimited YouTube and social media internet. Customers had a wide range of options to select from including; Samsung S21, and iPhone 12 family, or any other device. Hence, the Samsung S21 family plans start from KWD 25 per month, while the iPhone 12 family plans start from KWD 24 per month.

Ramadan TVC

Ooredoo Kuwait in association with Ooredoo Group launched an advertising awareness campaign during the holy month of Ramadan that shed light on the fact that the Internet can be a powerful and useful tool when used in the right way, and it is the responsibility of all of us to make the Internet

ter future, by making them realize that the Internet is our collective responsibility.

Mijbil Alayoub, Senior Director, Corporate Communications, Ooredoo Kuwait, said: "Ooredoo Kuwait stands at the forefront of companies in supporting humanitarian and societal campaigns, by launching and participating in many humanitarian, social, charitable and volunteer activities inside and outside the country."

"Ooredoo as a pioneering company in humanitarian aid, will continue extending a helping hand to the needy communities and countries which goes in-line with the company's social responsibility strategy" Alayoub added.





Sufi Dervish dancer Muayad Al-Kharrat, 28, dances with his lit dress at a restaurant in the Shahgur district of the old city of Syria's capital Damascus. — AFP photos

Twirl and spin: Damascus family preserves Sufi whirling tradition

Three-year-old Anas Al-Kharrat gracefully raises one hand to the sky as his long white robe twirls around his tiny spinning body. His dancing skills run in the family-

Damascus restaurant. "He is the youngest dervish dancer in Syria". Whirling-a sort of moving meditation through which Sufis seek to commune with the divine-sees performers twirl to the hypnotic rhythm of prayer, until they reach a trance-like state.

Popular in Iran, Afghanistan and Turkey, the dance emerged alongside Sufism-a spiritually focused approach to Islam, founded by followers of 13th-century Persian mystic and poet Jalal Al-Din Rumi. The Kharrat family is one of the most reputed in Damascus, and boasts 20 dervish dancers who often perform during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. Muayad started twirling as a child, taught first by his grandfather, then his uncle and finally his father. At 28, he now owns a fragrance shop in a popular Damascus market, but his real passion lies in Sufi spiritual practice. "Sufism in general is a means to worship and exaltation," he said. "Whirling is just one way of reaching God."

'Humility'

Muayad said he can twirl dozens of times per minute "without moving an inch away from the axis". In war-ravaged Syria, whirling offers relief from the woes of a conflict that has been exacerbated by a dire economic crisis and the coronavirus pandemic, he said. "Whenever I feel distressed... I confine myself to my room, and turn and turn until I feel at peace." In the living room of their Damascus home, Muayad pulled a long white robe over Anas's head before helping him with a matching jacket and a tall burgundy felt cap.

Around them stood relatives in matching outfits and similar "sikke" caps, which can be brown or black and are designed to emulate the stick shape of the first letter of the word God in Arabic ("Allah"). They then descend a long staircase towards a courtyard, to practice whirling to the rhythm of prayer with Muayad's brother Mahmoud. The 34-year-old is teaching the children how to hold their arms while twirling. "By raising our



arms we are begging for mercy from God and sending a prayer to the heavens," Mahmoud said, gesturing toward the sky. "Placing our hands against our chest is a sign of submission and humility before God."

Sufi Dervish dancer Mahmoud Al-Kharrat (center), his brother Muayad (right behind), Muayad's son Anas (center below) and other members of the Kharrat family pose for a picture in costume at their home in the Shahgur district.



Sufi Dervish dancer Mahmoud Al-Kharrat (right), 34, guides other members of his family as they dance at a courtyard in their house.

his dervish dancer father Muayad is whirling next to him, in front of a spellbound audience. "Anas learnt to whirl before he learnt to talk," his father said, speaking inside a



Three-year-old Sufi Dervish dancer Anas Al-Kharrat (left) and his cousin Yasser, dressed in their dance costume, dance at a restaurant.



Sufi Dervish dancers of the Kharrat family descend a staircase at their home.



Sufi Dervish dancers of the Kharrat family don their costumes at their home.



Sufi Dervish dancer Muayad Al-Kharrat (behind), 28, dances with his three-year-old son Anas (front) by their home.



Sufi Dervish dancer Muayad Al-Kharrat, 28, dances with his lit dress at a restaurant.

Lifestyle | Features



A Sufi Dervish dancer of the Kharrat family dances at a courtyard in their house.

Ramadan special

Before the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011, Mahmoud performed in several European countries, and even toured the United States. "We spent more time outside Syria than inside," he said. Travel restrictions imposed on Syrians due to the conflict brought the family's performances abroad to a halt, forcing them to keep up the tradition by performing at local events. "We have performed in restaurants and weddings," Mahmoud said. Evening performances during Ramadan "are one of our last hopes" to make a living, he added.

The holy month is a busy time of year

for whirling dervishes, who perform for audiences sipping coffee or smoking shisha in cafes and restaurants after a day of fasting. Almost every popular spot in the capital offers some form of dervish performance to attract customers. "We eagerly await the month of Ramadan to share this ritual with people," said Mahmoud. "Whirling is for every time and place, but it is even more spiritual during Ramadan". — AFP

(From left) Sufi Dervish dancers Yasser, Anas, and Muayad Al-Kharrat, members of the Kharrat family, dance at a restaurant.



Sufi Dervish dancer Mahmoud Al-Kharrat (right), 34, dances with other members of his family at a courtyard in their house.



Sufi Dervish dancer Muayad Al-Kharrat, 28, dances at a restaurant.



Three-year-old Sufi Dervish dancer Anas Al-Kharrat dances with his family members at a restaurant.

Forty years on, Bob Marley's rich legacy thrives

It's been four decades since Bob Marley's death, a period longer than the reggae icon's brief but potent life that skin cancer ended when he was 36. Yet Marley lives on as a voice of the dispossessed, the palpable vibrancy, spirit of protest and moral zeal of his songs including "One Love," "Redemption Song" and "I Shot The Sheriff" enduring in a way few bodies of popular music have ever done. His rich anthems of peace and struggle, hope and discontent, still reverberate globally and especially in his native Jamaica, a small nation whose rich culture its most famous son popularized on an international stage.

"It is said the brightest stars sometimes don't burn as long and, in many ways, Bob Marley was our brightest star; he accomplished a lot in a short period of time," said Judy Mowatt, an original member of the influential I-Threes trio whose vocals backed Marley. "Looking back now, I believe in many ways, he was before his time," Mowatt told AFP. "His words have been prophetic—he was a man who believed everything he sung, it wasn't just lyrics and music."

'Money can't buy life'

Marley was diagnosed with acral lentiginous melanoma in 1977, which was first discovered underneath a toenail when he suffered a foot injury playing football. He opted against doctors' recommendations that he amputate his toe, a procedure that would have violated his staunch Rastafarian faith. While in New York in 1980 to perform two shows at Madison Square Garden, Marley collapsed during a Central Park jog. He was rushed to the hospital, where doctors found the cancer had crept into his brain, lungs and liver.

Marley performed what would be his final show in Pittsburgh on September 23, 1980. Not long after, he cut his tour short and underwent months of ultimately unsuccessful alternative cancer treatment in Germany. On his way home to Jamaica to receive one of his nation's highest awards, the Order of Merit,

Marley's condition worsened. He landed in Miami to seek emergency treatment. "Money can't buy life," he reportedly told his son Ziggy from his hospital bed before his death on May 11, 1981, forty years to the day on Tuesday.

The Wailers, reunited

Learning of Marley's death is a moment seared into Mowatt's consciousness. "It was a Monday morning, sitting on the veranda like I am now, and I got the phone call that Bob passed," she said. "It was very painful. All the years we have worked together has come to a closure and it just hit me. "Bob was gone forever."

Marley was given a state funeral in Jamaica on May 21, 1981, that combined elements of Ethiopian Orthodox and Rastafarian tradition. He was eulogized by former Prime Minister Edward Seaga and buried in a chapel near his birthplace, with his guitar. This year's 40th anniversary of Marley's death is particularly poignant, as 2021 marked the death of the last surviving member of the original Wailers, Bunny.

"This is the first year that we are memorializing Bob's transition anniversary from 1981 in the context of all three Wailers leaving, Peter (Tosh) having left in 1987, and Bunny surviving them both for 40 years and 33 years respectively, transitioning here in 2021," Maxine Stowe, Bunny Wailer's long-time manager, said. The Wailers "are now reunited in another plane of existence," Stowe said. The group in the 1960s helped transform reggae, with its heavy bass lines and drums, into a global phenomenon with untold impact.

The genre—which emerged out of Jamaica's ska and rocksteady styles, also drawing from American jazz and blues—has influenced countless artists and inspired many new music styles including reggaeton, dub and dancehall. The style is often championed as a music of the oppressed, with lyrics addressing sociopolitical issues, imprisonment and inequality. "His voice was an omnipresent cry in our electronic world, his sharp features, majestic locks and prancing style a vivid etching on the landscape of our minds," Seaga said during his eulogy. "Most people do not command recollection. Bob Marley was never seen. He was an experience which left an indelible, mystical imprint with each encounter," Seaga continued. "Such a man cannot be erased from the mind. He is part of the collective consciousness of the nation." — AFP

'Tears of joy': Milan's La Scala opera house reopens to public

Milan's legendary La Scala opera house erupted into huge applause on Monday to hail a stirring performance at its triumphant reopening after six months of silence imposed by the coronavirus pandemic. The performance came a day before the 75th anniversary of a historic concert in 1946 that celebrated the postwar reopening of La Scala which had been bombed three years earlier and rebuilt. The musicians and performers were greeted by loud applause and volleys of "Bravos!" from the small but enthusiastic

audience of 500 lucky music lovers.

'Magical'

To respect social distancing, the musicians took over the ground-floor seating area, with the audience confined to the balconies. Only 500 spectators will be admitted for each performance for the time being—a fraction of La Scala's normal

capacity of 2,000. "It was magical, the return to the passion of the big premiere evenings", raved one of the opera-goers, Pia Matteoni. The retired teacher, in black evening dress with a big pearl necklace, had shunned the concerts streamed online during the lockdown, waiting instead for the big reopening.

'Tears of joy'

Emotions were running high. "We have all listened to recorded concerts from our armchairs, but this has nothing to do with the emotion of live music, the quality and beauty of natural sound," said Dominique Meyer, La Scala's director since 2020. "I am sure that with the return of the spectators to La Scala, there will be tears of joy," the Frenchman, who previously headed the Vienna Opera for a decade, said. Making her La Scala debut on Monday was 34-year-old Norwegian soprano Lise Davidsen, delivering moving interpretations of arias from Wagner's "Tannhaeuser", Richard Strauss' "Ariadne auf Naxos" and Tchaikovsky's "Queen of Spades". The concert ended with the famous chorus of slaves, "Va, pensiero", from Verdi's "Nabucco", the ode to freedom also sung during Toscanini's concert in 1946.

'Signalling Italy's revival'

La Scala's reopening was preceded by Italian conductor Riccardo Muti leading the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra for the first time in more than five months on Sunday in the northern Italian city of Ravenna. And Muti returns to La Scala on Tuesday for the 75th anniversary. "La Scala has always been a symbol for the Milanese and for Italy, it is the second Italian brand in terms of reputation, behind Ferrari," said Meyer, an economist by training.

"Paradoxically, it is La Scala giving the signal for the revival of an entire country, whereas at the beginning of the health crisis, it was said that culture was not an essential activity," he added. Despite having performed virtually, musicians and singers said it was no substitute for the thrill of a concert. —AFP



A general view shows the Scala Opera House prior a rehearsal in Milan. — AFP

audience of 500 lucky music lovers. "It's a huge emotion to be able to once more breathe in the atmosphere that only the public can give us," said first violinist Laura Marzadori, smiling broadly. "I hope this is a new beginning and that we won't stop again after these sad months of silence." Bass clarinetist Stefano Cardo called it "a double rebirth," as conductor Arturo Toscanini had opened La Scala after the war "and we are trying to revive it after the pandemic". More than 122,000 people have died during the pandemic in Italy, which reopened its cinemas and theatres on April 26. The storied opera house in Italy's financial capital has not been spared, with a total of 144 cases of COVID-19, including 64 in the chorus,

capacity of 2,000. "It was magical, the return to the passion of the big premiere evenings", raved one of the opera-goers, Pia Matteoni. The retired teacher, in black evening dress with a big pearl necklace, had shunned the concerts streamed online during the lockdown, waiting instead for the big reopening.

But with no intermission and the bars closed, one sound that was missing was the usual clinking of champagne flutes. Instead, guests were treated to hydro-alcohol gel, as well as temperature checks and masks. Cardo admitted to being "a little nervous" before the concert on Monday evening, which began with the majestic "Patria Oppressa" ("Oppressed Fatherland") from Giuseppe Verdi's

Posthumous DMX album set for release May 28

A posthumous album from rapper DMX, who died last month, is set for release on May 28, its producer announced Monday. "EXODUS" will feature all new original material, according to a statement from producer Swizz Beatz, who said the album will be released with Def Jam Recordings. "My brother X was one of the most pure and rare souls I've ever met. He lived his life dedicated to his family and music. Most of all, he was generous with his giving and loved his fans beyond measure," the producer said.

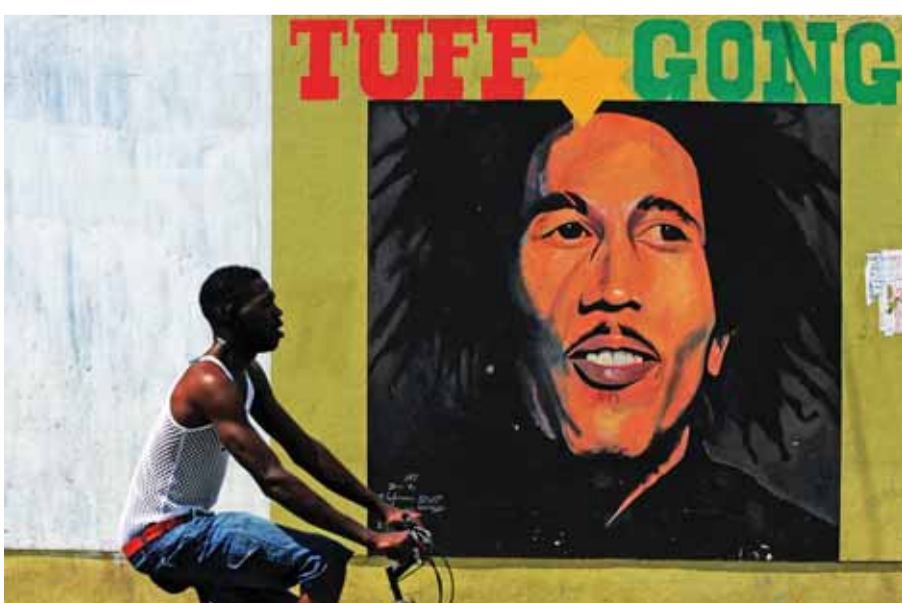
"This album, X couldn't wait for his



In this file photo people gather to pay homage to rapper DMX at Barclays Center in New York City. — AFP

fans all around the world to hear and show just how much he valued each and every single person that has supported him unconditionally." DMX, who reigned over the late 1990s and early 2000s and was among hip-hop's most vulnerable and endearing stars, died in April at age 50 after nearly a week on life support fol-

lowing a heart attack. The artist born Earl Simmons in the New York suburb of Yonkers saw his first five albums debut at the top of the Billboard top US songs chart, starting with his 1998 debut "It's Dark and Hell Is Hot," which featured the smash "Ruff Ryders' Anthem." — AFP



In this file photo taken a man pedals past a mural of late musician Bob Marley in Kingston. — AFP

Sports

Photo of the day



Competitor performs during Red Bull Car Park Drift at Souq Marfaa Palm Deira in Dubai. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

‘Change is coming’
at the top,
says Djokovic

Stefanos Tsitsipas

ROME: Novak Djokovic said Monday that the recent run of Masters 1,000 titles won by NextGen players is clear evidence that “change is coming” at the top of men’s tennis and his position as world number one is under threat.

Two of this year’s three Masters champions, Stefanos Tsitsipas and Hubert Hurkacz, have been first-time winners, while Matteo Berrettini reached his first such final at the Madrid Open. Alexander Zverev returns this week to Rome, the site of his first Masters title in 2017, fresh off a second triumph in the Spanish capital — and fourth overall at this level.

“The results are showing that,” Djokovic, who sat out the Madrid tournament, said ahead of his Italian Open defense. “There are guys like Tsitsipas, Zverev, Berrettini, (Andrey) Rublev that are winning against all of us and playing a lot and building their ranking points. (Daniil) Medvedev as well, of course, and challenging for the top spots. Dominic Thiem of course has been there for many years. It’s inevitable that it’s going to happen. The change on the men’s rankings, top of the rankings is coming. Whether it’s going to happen in a month or a year or whatever, I don’t know.”

Djokovic in March eclipsed Roger Federer’s record for the most weeks spent at number one. This week marks his 320th at the top of the men’s game. But the Serb, who won his 18th major at the Australian Open in February, insisted his focus now is on surpassing Federer’s haul of 20 Grand Slams — a record he shares with Rafael Nadal.

“I’m not personally paying too much attention anymore to the rankings as much as I am to my game for the Grand Slams. Those are the biggest focus tournaments right now at this stage of my career. I have managed to achieve the milestone of the historic ranking No. 1, and that was the focus up to recently. Now it’s more about really trying to peak at Grand Slams and make those count for my career.”

Djokovic has played just two events since winning in Melbourne. He lost to Dan Evans in the last 16 at Monte Carlo and was beaten by Aslan Karatsev in the semi-finals at home in Belgrade. He is gearing up for another bid for a second Roland Garros title, as he attempts to become the first man to win all four Grand Slams twice since Rod Laver in 1969.

Djokovic lost to Nadal in straight sets in last year’s French Open final. “I didn’t have too many matches. I didn’t play so great in Monaco and Belgrade, but I’m hopefully going to change that here in Rome and then another week in Belgrade before the French Open,” he said. “Four tournaments before the French is I think enough in terms of match play. So I’m building my fitness and I’m building just my game slowly step by step in order to peak in Paris. That’s definitely where I want to play my best.” —AFP

Japan’s Osaka ‘not sure’ Olympics
should happen as doubts grow

TOKYO: Japanese superstar Naomi Osaka admitted she was “not really sure” the coronavirus-hit Tokyo Olympics should go ahead as doubts grew about the Games just weeks before the opening ceremony. The four-time tennis Grand Slam winner joined fellow Japanese player Kei Nishikori in raising concerns, with Tokyo and other parts of Japan under a virus state of emergency. A top politician also warned that Japan still had to make a “careful decision” about whether to hold the Games, which have scant public support according to opinion polls.

Scrapping the 2020 Olympics, postponed last year as the pandemic advanced, is a concept that has never quite gone away, despite repeated assertions from officials that they will proceed. A survey by a leading Japanese daily released on Monday found 59 percent of respondents want the Olympics cancelled, underlining persistent public concerns over the risk of infections. Osaka, Japan’s biggest sports star and a major gold-medal prospect, said “to be honest, I’m not really sure”, when asked if the Olympics should take place as planned. “I’m an athlete, and of course my immediate thought is that I want to play in the Olympics,” the four-time Grand Slam winner told the BBC. “But as a human, I would say we’re in a pandemic, and if people aren’t healthy, and if they’re not feeling safe, then it’s definitely a really big cause for concern.”

Nishikori said there “definitely should be a discussion” on whether Tokyo should plough ahead. “I don’t know how much they are thinking about how they are gonna make (a) bubble, because this is not like 100 people,” he said. “It’s 10,000 people in the village and playing tournaments. So I don’t think it’s easy, especially (with) what’s happening right now in Japan.”

‘So much to think about’

America’s Serena Williams, who has 23 Grand Slam titles — one off the all-time record — as well as four Olympic golds, said she was yet to commit to Tokyo. “I haven’t spent 24 hours without her (three-year-old daughter Olympia) so that kind of answers the question itself,” she said at the WTA tournament in Rome. “I haven’t really thought much about Tokyo, because it was supposed to be last year and now it’s this year, and then there is this pandemic and there is so much to think about.”



TOKYO: Kaede Maegawa of Japan competes in the women’s long jump - T63 category during a para-athletics test event for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics at the National Stadium in Tokyo yesterday. —AFP

Athletes until now have largely stayed quiet about the Olympics, in contrast to last year when there was a welter of complaints before the historic postponement in March. A series of test events have been cancelled, postponed or held behind closed doors, underlining the challenges facing organizers.

Meanwhile, an increasing number of sections of the Olympic torch relay have been scaled back and moved off-road to prevent people from gathering to watch, with the relay legs in Hiroshima and Yamaguchi the latest casualties, organizers said.

At a para-athletics rehearsal yesterday, competitors told AFP they were training on the assumption the Games would be held. “It’s only natural that there are voices of disapproval. Can we really hold safe Olympics for everyone under these circumstances? I don’t think we can say yes with confidence right now,” said Tomomi Tozawa, a 100m T63 runner.

“But as an athlete, until we are told it’s cancelled, we need to presume it’s going ahead and prepare for that,” she said. Another para-athlete, Ikoma Tomoki, said he had “a strong desire for them to hold it, even given the circumstances.”

Olympic officials insist the Games can still be held safely and have released rulebooks they say will ensure the biggest international event since the pandemic began does not spread the virus. On Monday, International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach was forced to cancel a visit to Japan planned for this month, after the state of emergency was extended last week.

Toshihiro Nikai, number two in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, said Japan needed to take advice from “Olympic experts” before deciding whether to hold the Games. “A careful decision will be necessary in the future,” he said late on Monday, according to the Jiji Press news agency. —AFP

Kuwait figure skaters grab 17 medals in int’l tourney



KUWAIT: Members of the Kuwaiti figure skating girls team with head of Kuwait Winter Games Club Fehaid Al-Ajmi. —KUNA

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti figure skating girls team grabbed up to 17 medals in the online open international tournament that concluded in the Romanian capital Bucharest recently. The national champions won nine gold medals, six silver medals and a bronze

one in the three-day competition, head of Kuwait Winter Games Club Fehaid Al-Ajmi said on Monday.

Ajmi praised the Kuwaiti female players for their outstanding performance vis a vis top-notch competitors from various coun-

tries. Hussa Al-Saraawi won two gold medals, Khairiyah Al-Kanderi grabbed two gold ones, Lulwa Al-Darman and Lara Al-Barrak each snatched one gold and one silver medal, while Sara Al-Laho grabbed two silver medals. —KUNA

England stars told to put int’l
duty ahead of IPL matches

LONDON: England stars such as Ben Stokes, Jofra Archer and Jos Buttler have been told their international commitments will have to take precedence in the event of a fresh fixture clash with a delayed finish to this year’s Indian Premier League. The 2021 edition of the lucrative franchise Twenty20 tournament was suspended last week due to the devastating coronavirus outbreak in India.

There is speculation the IPL may resume midway through September, which could lead to a clash with England white-ball tours of Pakistan and Bangladesh that are meant to take place between the end of the home season and a T20 World Cup in India scheduled for October. Halting the IPL has left England with a potentially larger player pool than they envisaged for next month’s two-Test series at home to New Zealand.

Previously, the England and Wales Cricket Board had been prepared to let players miss those matches in order to honor their previously agreed IPL deals. A position that angered some England fans was justified by the ECB on the grounds that the New Zealand series had been a late addition to an already crowded fixture list.

But Ashley Giles, the England man-

aging director, has made it clear he expects national service to be the priority from now on in a year culminating with Joe Root’s men heading to Australia in a bid to regain the Ashes.

“We’ve got a full future tours program and if those tours are going ahead I’d expect them (IPL players) to be there,” Giles said Monday. “The New Zealand scenario was very different. A rearranged IPL...none of us knows what that looks like at the moment, where it’s going to be, or when or if.”

Giles, a former England left-arm spinner, added: “But we’ve got a lot of important high profile cricket including a T20 World Cup and Ashes, so we’re planning on the involvement of England players in England matches.” Giles reduced England’s backroom staff last month when he ditched national selector Ed Smith and gave his responsibilities to head coach Chris Silverwood.

“It’s a change I’ve been looking at for some time. For me, it’s more modern and it’s cleaner: let the coach pick the team,” said Giles. “His head’s on the block. I don’t want that to be the headline but it’s a conversation I’d have had with Chris...if we lose in Australia the pressure is on all of us. You might as well have a free run at it, it’s your team.” —AFP

Sports

Deschamps warns against complacency as France target World Cup and Euro double

PARIS: Didier Deschamps captained France to a World Cup and European Championship double as a player and is now hoping to repeat the feat as coach when the delayed Euro 2020 finally goes ahead in June and July. However, in an exclusive interview with AFP, the 52-year-old warned against any complacency from the defending world champions, saying major international tournaments are not won "just by clicking your fingers".

After lifting the World Cup in Russia in 2018, a gifted France squad is inevitably among the favorites to win the European Championship which concludes in London on July 11. However they could not have asked for a harder group in the first Euro to be held - despite the pandemic - in multiple countries all across the continent. France play Germany in Munich and Hungary in Budapest, as well as facing the reigning European champions Portugal.

"Two years at the highest level is a long time, even if it is not a lot in life in general. There are obviously big expectations after the success we have had and that is the aim of this squad, of this generation," Deschamps told AFP in Monaco as he pondered the chances of doing the double. West Germany held both trophies when they won the 1974 World Cup on home soil after winning the European Championship when it was just a four-nation event in Belgium in 1972.

Spain then pulled off the remarkable feat of winning back to back Euros in 2008 and 2012, either side of their 2010 World Cup triumph. Before that Deschamps skippered France to glory in 1998 and at Euro 2000 as they defeated Italy in extra time in

the final in Rotterdam. He has gone on to enjoy a remarkable coaching career, having success at Monaco, Juventus and Marseille before accepting the France job in 2012 and reviving the fortunes of the national team in stunning fashion.

Tough at the top

A side containing the likes of Kylian Mbappe, Antoine Griezmann and Paul Pogba beat Croatia 4-2 in the Moscow final three years ago and is now, Deschamps hopes, hungry for more. "Nobody can take away what we have done. It will always be there, but we need to tell ourselves that we can't just stop here, we need to go and try to win more titles," he said before warning of the looming threat from the likes of England, Spain, Belgium and several other sides at the Euro which kicks off in a month's time.

"You don't just win by clicking your fingers. The other nations are progressing, working hard, not sitting still. We need to have that ambition. When a tournament starts we want to go as far as possible." France's first game will be on June 15 against Germany, who had been as close to a sure bet as there is in international football before unravelling at the last World Cup, going out in the group stage.

Since then they have suffered an embarrassing 6-0 defeat by Spain in the Nations League and lost at home to North Macedonia in World Cup qualifying. Coach Joachim Loew will stand down after the Euro, and their slide is perhaps a warning to the French of what can happen. "It is very, very difficult to get to the very top, but it is even harder to stay there. You always need to challenge



PARIS: In this file photo taken on Sept 6, 2020 France's coach Didier Deschamps attends a team training session at the Stade de France in Saint-Denis. —AFP

yourself. We can't go higher, but sometimes there is not much in it to prevent you from dropping away," Deschamps added.

France have lost just three times in 28 games since the World Cup, despite Deschamps making regular changes in personnel and in playing style. That has included sometimes abandoning the 4-4-2 formation that was the foundation of their success in Russia for a back three, for example. "I felt that I

had to mix things up. It is not just about surprising the opposition but also about surprising yourself sometimes," he said.

Deschamps will name his 26-man squad for the Euro next week. His squad will get together on May 26 and will play friendly matches against Wales in Nice on June 2 and Bulgaria in Paris on June 8 before that mouthwatering opening game against Germany. —AFP

Iniesta to stay with Kobe for 2 more years

TOKYO: Spanish football legend Andres Iniesta celebrated his 37th birthday yesterday by signing a contract extension that will keep him at J-League side Vissel Kobe for two more years. The former Barcelona midfielder maestro joined Kobe in 2018 in a deal worth a reported \$30 million a year and recently recovered from a serious thigh injury.

"I will continue on my quest to make Vissel Kobe a stronger club," said the World Cup-winning midfielder, speaking through a Japanese translator. "I am determined to contribute as much as possible to bring this team to a higher level," he added sitting alongside Kobe's tech-billionaire owner Hiroshi Mikitani.

Iniesta's debut at Kobe in July 2018 ended with an embarrassing home defeat, but he helped lead the team to their first Japanese Super Cup title in 2020. Iniesta has enjoyed huge popu-

larity in Japan with analysts estimating he has generated more than \$100 million in ticket sales and merchandising revenue. He has appeared in TV commercials for Japanese sake and mobile phone services.

Named Kobe's captain in April 2019 after a shake-up at the club, Iniesta was sidelined for several months after he suffered a ruptured tendon in his right thigh last December. Following surgery in Barcelona, he was back training in April before returning to action in the J-League this month.

Widely considered one of the most gifted midfielders of all time, he scored the winning goal as Spain won the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, and he was a key member of the European Championship-winning side's of 2008 and 2012. Iniesta was the driving force behind four Champions League wins with Barcelona and helped the Catalan club secure domestic trebles in 2009 and 2015.

He also won nine La Liga titles, two European Super Cups and three FIFA Club World Cups, leaving Barcelona as the most decorated Spanish player of all time, with more than 30 trophies for club and country. His decision to join



TOKYO: Vissel Kobe player Andres Iniesta poses with Hiroshi Mikitani, Chairman and CEO of Rakuten and club chairman, as they display a cake to celebrate Iniesta's birthday at a press conference. —AFP

Kobe after 22 years at Barcelona, 16 of them as a first team player, was seen as a coup for Japanese football, which had been struggling to attract big names tempted by cash-rich Chinese clubs in the twilight of their careers.

Kobe owner Mikitani said Iniesta's decision to stay will help the team's ambition to be the top club in Asia

while elevating the standard of football in Japan. Iniesta "has not just improved Vissel's status, but he has improved the global recognition of the J-League," Mikitani said. Iniesta said he wanted to stay engaged with Vissel Kobe once his playing days were over, although he did not say in what capacity. —AFP

Parker willing to lead Fulham's promotion bid

LONDON: Fulham manager Scott Parker has been linked with the managerial vacancy at Tottenham but says his priority is to try and help his current club make an immediate return to the Premier League. Fulham joined West Brom and Sheffield United in being relegated from the Premier League following a 2-0 loss to Burnley on Monday. It is the first time that relegation from the division has been resolved with three games remaining.

Parker has been linked with Spurs - who he played for from 2011-13 - due to the crowd-pleasing style Fulham have played since he took over, initially in a caretaker capacity, in 2019. However, the 40-year-old former England midfielder said he was focused on having his say on where things went wrong and how Fulham can bounce straight back and avoid continuing the "rollercoaster" of relegation, promotion and relegation.

"I've been committed since I came

here - that's always been the case," said Parker, who signed an improved three-year contract last September to keep him at the club until the summer of 2023. Fulham's season only got going following the loan signings of Ademola Lookman and England midfielder Ruben Loftus-Cheek, after the first four games yielded no points.

Those two though could well return to their respective clubs - Bundesliga side RB Leipzig and Chelsea. However, Fulham will have funds to spend as they will receive £42 million (\$60 million) in parachute payments for being relegated. Parker can take encouragement that two of the three teams relegated last season have made immediate returns - Norwich and Watford - with the third team, Bournemouth, in the playoffs.

"What's key for me is we sit down, analyze and learn, are brave enough to see where we've gone wrong and not go through the same cycle," said Parker. "I'll be the first to put my point across along with all the others to bring this club back into this league and hopefully stay here." Parker can point to impressive results against some of the heavyweights.

They recorded away wins at Leicester City, Liverpool and Everton



LONDON: Burnley's Czech striker Matej Vydra collides with Fulham's French goalkeeper Alphonse Areola during the English Premier League football match at Craven Cottage on Monday. —AFP

as well as draws at Spurs and Arsenal. However, they only won five league matches all season and have the second-worst goalscoring record with 25 goals from 35 matches. Serbia striker Aleksandar Mitrovic, one of those who failed to find his form by scoring just three league goals compared to 26 in the promotion season, did not mince his words.

"We have failed this season," he said. "It was not good enough. We did not deserve to stay up. Overall, we have finished where we deserve to be. We did not show the big character, big mentality and we cracked under the pressure. We tried, we fought, we worked hard but we needed more quality on the ball. We got punished today and this season." —AFP

Miami rally for draw, decry lack of penalty call

LOS ANGELES: Lewis Morgan's late equalizer gave Inter Miami a 1-1 Major League Soccer draw against Atlanta United on Sunday, but inter were incensed at being denied a chance at a stoppage time penalty for the victory. Gonzalo Higuain fired a perfect cross in from the left to Victor Ulloa, who appeared to be fouled by Brad Guzan when after the Atlanta goalkeeper blocked his shot and Ulloa raced up to try again with the rebound.

Guzan, still on the ground, appeared to trip Ulloa with his arms, prompting Miami players to appeal for

a penalty call they didn't get. "That was 100 percent a penalty," Inter Miami coach Phil Neville fumed. "Poor refereeing. It got reviewed, so whoever reviewed it has let the referee down. We'll put that in the report."

Inter had trailed much of the match after Atlanta's Josef Martinez fired a left-footed shot from the center of the area into the bottom corner to open the scoring in the ninth minute. Scotland's Morgan finally got the equalizer with a left-footed blast that marked the 2020 Most Valuable Player's first goal of the season. Neville had challenged Morgan to step things up on attack, and he kept Morgan even though he was cramping late in the second half.

"I didn't want to take him off because I knew you need to keep your match winners, your players on the pitch that can produce moments of brilliance, and he did that," Neville said. Higuain was back in the lineup and his brother Federico came off the bench in the second half after they missed last week's match

against Nashville after the death of their mother.

But Inter were without injured starters Nico Figal and Robbie Robinson and midfielder Blaise Matuidi exited in the 14th minute after colliding with Atlanta's Santiago Sosa. The match marked a reunion of sorts for Neville and Gabriel Heinze. The two were teammates for one season at Manchester United and Heinze was named head coach of Atlanta shortly before Neville was tapped to lead David Beckham's Inter Miami.

Elsewhere the Seattle Sounders rode second half goals from Raul Ruidiza and super-sub Fredy Moreno to a 2-1 victory over the Portland Timbers in a Cascadia regional clash. Bill Tuiloma fired in a stunning free kick for the Timbers just before the final whistle, but it was the Sounders who came away with their third victory in four matches this season. With 10 points they top the Western Conference standings. —AFP

News in brief

Germany adds Mueller

BERLIN: Germany coach Joachim Loew has reportedly contacted Thomas Muller and is poised to reverse the forward's 2019 exile by naming the Bayern Munich player in his Euro 2020 squad. According to daily Bild yesterday, Loew has phoned Muller and "told him he wants to recall him" when the 26-man Germany squad for the European Championship is named on May 19. Muller, 31, has been in outstanding form for Bayern, who were confirmed Saturday as Bundesliga champions for the ninth straight season. Muller has made 100 appearances for Germany since 2010 and was a key part of the squad which won the 2014 World Cup. —AFP

Flick agrees to deal: Report

BERLIN: Hansi Flick, who is stepping down as Bayern Munich coach at the end of this season, will take over the German national team after this summer's Euro, a German newspaper reported on Monday. Flick is expected to sign for three years, according to the Abendzeitung, a Munich newspaper, allowing him to lead the national team at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar and Euro 2024, which is scheduled to take place in Germany. Flick, 56, has long been considered the preferred candidate for the post of national coach by the German Football Association (DFB). He was assistant to Joachim Loew, who is standing down after 15 years, between 2006 and 2014, when Germany won the world title. —AFP

Ibra misses two games

ROME: Zlatan Ibrahimovic will be out for at least two matches with a knee injury, just a month before the start of Euro 2020, AC Milan coach Stefano Pioli said yesterday. The Swede, who returned to international football in March after a five-year absence, suffered the injury during Milan's 3-0 victory over top-four rivals Juventus at the weekend. He could be back for Milan's potentially crucial final Serie A match at second-placed Atalanta on May 23. Sweden open their Euro 2020 campaign against Spain in Seville on June 14, before further Group E games against Slovakia and Poland in Saint-Petersburg. —AFP

Injured McLean 'devastated'

LONDON: Norwich midfielder Kenny McLean says he is "devastated" to be missing Euro 2020 due to a knee injury, in what is Scotland's first appearance at a major tournament since the 1998 World Cup. The 29-year-old midfielder played in all three of Scotland's recent 2022 World Cup qualifiers, while he also played a key role in Norwich making an immediate return to the Premier League. Scotland begin their campaign at the delayed European Championship against the Czech Republic on June 14 in Glasgow. They then play old rivals England on June 18 at Wembley and face 2018 World Cup finalists Croatia on June 22 in Glasgow in their final group game. —AFP



FORT LAUDERDALE, Florida: Erick Torres #31 of Atlanta United and Leandro Gonzalez #6 of Inter Miami CF battle for a header during the second half at DRV PNK Stadium on May 9, 2021. —AFP

History made as Westbrook sets NBA triple-double record

LOS ANGELES: Russell Westbrook wrote his way into NBA history on Monday, bagging the 182nd triple-double of his career to break Oscar Robertson's 47-year-old record. Washington Wizards star Westbrook, who had equaled Robertson's record of 181 triples on Saturday, sealed his record-breaking triple with 8min 33sec remaining in Monday's 125-124 defeat to the Atlanta Hawks.

Westbrook's 36th triple-double of the season included 28 points, 21 assists and 13 rebounds. He is already assured of averaging a triple-double per game this season. A triple-double occurs when a player makes double-digit tallies in three of the five major statistical categories in a game — points, rebounds, assists, steals and blocks.

Westbrook has averaged a triple-double per game in four of the last five seasons, an eye-popping statistic that ensured he rapidly caught and overtook Robertson's historic benchmark, which had stood since 1974 and was once widely regarded as unbeatable. "Normally I don't like to pat myself on the back, but tonight I will," Westbrook said afterwards. "I am just so grateful for those that came before me."

The 32-year-old Westbrook now has several seasons left in his career to extend his record, with few of his contemporaries anywhere near his total. Westbrook has nearly twice as many triple-doubles as his nearest rival among currently active players. After Westbrook with 182, LeBron James is in second spot with 99 triples, while James Harden is third with 58.

Only two other players after Westbrook

and Robertson have scored 100 or more triples on the all-time rankings, with Earvin "Magic" Johnson third with 138 and Jason Kidd fourth with 107. "It's just a blessing...You put so much into the game," Westbrook said. "Just to be mentioned with guys like Oscar, Magic, Jason Kidd, those guys. It's just something I would never have dreamt about." Wizards coach Scott Brooks described Westbrook's achievement as "phenomenal."

"It's great for him," Brooks said. "You can't take anything away from him. The guy's a winner. He's making the basketball and the non-basketball world a better place. Not a lot of guys can do that, not a lot of guys have the impact that he has, on and off the court." Johnson, meanwhile, had paid tribute to Westbrook's record-breaking career prior to Monday's game, saying the Wizards ace didn't always get the credit he deserved.

'Give him his respect'

"When we show highlights, it's how many points somebody had, how far can they shoot out on the court," Johnson told The Athletic. "Russell Westbrook is neither one of those things. He gets all these triple-doubles, but you don't see him on the highlights. The things he's been able to do, hopefully, we will say, 'Give him his love, give him his respect.' This is really big. This is something I couldn't even do. I know how big it is."

Westbrook's critics have accused him of artificially inflating his personal stats to keep his triple-double tally ticking over, noting that a career that has included stints with the Oklahoma City Thunder



ATLANTA: Russell Westbrook #4 of the Washington Wizards is congratulated by Atlanta Hawks players after breaking the NBA career triple-double record in a game between the Washington Wizards and the Atlanta Hawks at State Farm Arena on Monday in Atlanta, Georgia. — AFP

and Houston Rockets and a 2017 NBA Most Valuable Player award has yet to yield an NBA Championship.

However, Robertson himself is among those who have dismissed the criticism of

Westbrook's failure to land a championship ring. "I think he's one of the elite guards in basketball, and I think it's ridiculous that some sports writers criticize him because he has not won a championship,"

Robertson told The New York Times. "Players don't win championships by themselves. You've got to have good management. You need to get with the right group of players." — AFP



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