



4 Over 2 million COVID vaccine doses administered in Kuwait



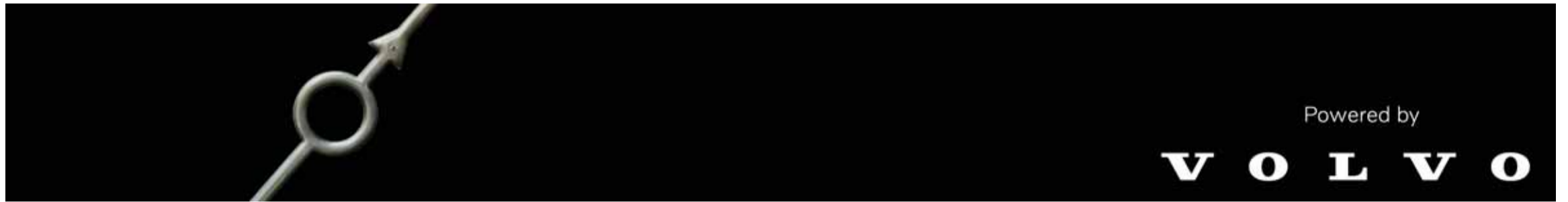
5 Will Biden close Gitmo 'War on Terror' prison?



8 IMF proposes \$50bn plan to end pandemic



16 Suarez strike leads Atletico to La Liga title as Real fall short



Amir reaffirms Kuwait's firm stand with Palestinian people

Kuwait launches donation campaign • Gazans pick up pieces after ceasefire



GAZA: A Palestinian man sells balloons in front of the destroyed Al-Shuruq building on Friday. — AFP (See Page 5)

KUWAIT/GAZA: HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received on Friday a phone call from Palestinian Hamas politburo chief Ismail Haniya. During the call, Haniya expressed utmost appreciation for Kuwait's deep-rooted stance with the Palestinian cause and unwavering support for the Palestinian people, as well as Kuwait's backing of all international efforts to resume the peace process in the Middle East, wishing everlasting health to HH the Amir.

HH the Amir reaffirmed Kuwait's firm stand with the Palestinian people until having its sovereign state with East Jerusalem as its capital in accordance to relevant international resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. HH the Amir further stressed that the Palestinian cause had been and will always be Kuwait's top and central cause.

Kuwait also launched on Friday an urgent relief campaign to support the Palestinian people. The campaign was organized by the ministry of social affairs in cooperation with the ministry of foreign affairs and some charity associations. The campaign began on

Friday afternoon with the participation of more than 31 charitable societies that launched a website to raise funds aiming to rebuild Gaza after the bombing attacks. Around KD 2 million (\$6.5 million) from more than 48,000 people was raised in the first several hours of the campaign.

In Gaza, Palestinians tried to piece back their lives yesterday after the devastating 11-day conflict with the Zionist entity that killed more than 200 people and made thousands homeless in the impoverished Palestinian enclave. Authorities started distributing tents, mattresses and covers to those in need in the Gaza Strip, an AFP reporter said, a day after a ceasefire ended deadly Zionist air strikes on the besieged coastal enclave.

Attention turned to rebuilding the territory controlled by Hamas, with the United Nations saying yesterday that at least 6,000 people had been made homeless. Rescue workers searched for bodies or survivors in mounds of rubble, as residents tried to assess what was left of their previous lives.

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News in brief

CBK issues crypto warning

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait warned against dealing or investing in cryptocurrencies amid increasing calls for investment in these digital assets. In a statement yesterday, the Central Bank said the warnings come due to sharp fluctuations in their prices, in addition to their non-compliance with any regulatory authority in Kuwait, which exposes speculators to large losses as well as the possibility of being exposed to fraud. The Central Bank said dealing in digital assets issued by unknown persons and exchanged under nicknames increases the risks of illegal transactions and money laundering. — KUNA

Building owner complains to ICC

THE HAGUE: The owner of a Gaza building housing international media that was destroyed in a Zionist air strike is lodging a complaint with the International Criminal Court. The complaint by Jawad Mehdi says the attack on May 15 which flattened Jala Tower, housing the offices of US news agency AP and Al Jazeera television, was a "war crime". "The owner of this building, who is a Palestinian, has mandated his lawyers to file a war crime complaint with the International Criminal Court," lawyer Gilles Devers said. Devers told AFP outside the court that the Zionist entity could show "no military objective" for the attack. — AFP

Govt targets 'Indian variant'

NEW DELHI: India's government has ordered social media platforms to take down content that refers to the "Indian variant" of the coronavirus. The B.1.617 variant was first detected in India last year and has spread to Britain and at least 43 other countries, where "Indian variant" has become a widely used term. "It has come to our knowledge that a false statement is being circulated online which implies that an 'Indian variant' of coronavirus is spreading across the countries. This is completely FALSE," read the order. Indian government officials have regularly used the term "UK variant" since the mutant British strain started spreading in India. — AFP

Wasmi romps to victory in by-election

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Prominent opposition figure Obaid Al-Wasmi won a parliamentary seat in an unprecedented fashion in a by-election held yesterday, securing a record number of votes and defeating his rivals impressively. For the first time in the history of Kuwait's parliamentary elections, Wasmi's total tally crossed 43,000 votes, eclipsing

the previous record high of just over 30,000 votes secured by another prominent opposition figure Musallam Al-Barrak, currently living in self-exile in Turkey to escape a jail sentence.

Wasmi's win was so impressive that all his 14 rivals together scored less than 8 percent of the total votes cast amid very low turnout, unofficially estimated at under 30 percent. The contestant in second place secured less than 1,300 votes. The seat fell vacant after the constitutional court nullified the election of opposition MP Bader Al-Dahoum on the basis of a controversial law which bars those convicted of insulting HH the Amir from holding public office.

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KUWAIT: Opposition figure Obaid Al-Wasmi is greeted by supporters after his victory in a National Assembly by-election held yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Deadly fungus stalks India's COVID wards

NEW DELHI: Coronavirus patient Parvesh Dubey died within just one week of contracting black fungus - the latest victim of a horrifying COVID-19 complication sweeping India. Thousands have developed the fungus in recent weeks in a wave of infections blamed on excessive use of steroids to treat the country's millions of COVID patients, experts say.

Previously very rare, mucormycosis, as it is scientifically known, is highly aggressive and surgeons some-

times have to remove patients' eyes, nose and jaw to stop it reaching the brain. The death rate is over 50 percent. Dubey, 33, was being treated for coronavirus in the central state of Madhya Pradesh before doctors moved him to a different hospital after the fungus was detected and his condition worsened.

"The doctors there operated on his nose and jaw. One of his eyes was already damaged and the doctor said they were working on saving the other one," a relative told AFP on condition of anonymity. Family members of Dubey's in different states across India scrambled to obtain medicines and get them to him by asking bus passengers to transport them to Madhya Pradesh, but it was too little, too late.

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JABALPUR, India: An attendant is seen next to a patient who recovered from COVID-19 and is now infected with mucormycosis at the Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Medical College on Friday. — AFP

Mind-controlled arm restores sense of touch

WASHINGTON: Imagine being able to control a robotic arm from a distance, using only your mind. Now imagine being able to feel when its fingers grasp an object, as though it were your own hand. US

researchers published a study in the journal Science about the world's first brain-computer interface that allowed a volunteer with paralysis from the chest down to accomplish this very feat.

The team say their work demonstrates that adding a sense of touch drastically improves the functionality of prosthetics for quadriplegics, compared to having them rely on visual cues alone. "I am the first human in the world to have implants in the sensory cortex that they can use to stimulate my brain directly," Nathan Copeland, 34, told AFP. "And then I feel as if a sensation is coming from my actual hand."

In 2004, Copeland was in a car accident that left him with a serious spinal cord injury and without the use of his hands or his legs. He volunteered to participate in scientific research, and six years ago underwent a major operation to have tiny electrodes implanted in his brain. Two sets of 88 electrodes the width of a strand of hair are arranged into "arrays" that resemble tiny hairbrushes and penetrate deep into the brain's motor cortex, which directs movement. Fewer than 30 people in the world have these kinds of implants, the study's co-lead author Rob

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Local

Kuwait welcomes ceasefire in Gaza, calls for efforts to achieve peace

Foreign Minister condemns Zionist crimes, policies

KUWAIT/NEW YORK: Kuwait welcomes the ceasefire agreement reached in Gaza, the Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry said on Friday. In a statement, the foreign ministry applauded the international and Arab's continued efforts that helped to reach a ceasefire agreement, hailing Egypt's efforts in this regard. The ministry affirmed that the agreement is a step to help save lives and end the violence for which the Zionist occupation authorities bear responsibility. However, achieving stability in the region requires concerted international efforts to resume the peace process in the Middle East and to establish an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative, it added.

Zionists' crimes

Kuwait had condemned "with the strongest of terms" crimes and policies carried out by the Zionist occupation forces in the occupied Palestinian territories, including the city of Jerusalem. This came in a speech by Kuwait's Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah in the special session of the 75th UN General Assembly, held in New York City on Thursday to discuss current events in the occupied Palestinian territories, and the situation in the Middle East.

Moreover, Kuwait denounces all of the Zionist entity's illegal settlement schemes, its bids to seize Palestinians' houses and properties, particularly citizens' assets in Jerusalem, namely in Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, seeking to evacuate the holy city of its population for sake of Judaizing it, the Kuwaiti top diplomat stressed. Such practices are illegal and illegitimate breaches and constitute flagrant violation of the relevant international resolutions and ref-

erences that affirm that unilateral measures and decisions aimed at altering the legal and historic status in the occupied territories are invalid and false; they create neither a right nor a commitment, Sheikh Dr Ahmad said.

The attacks and crimes perpetrated by the Zionist occupation forces are part of a chain of violations of Security Council resolutions 242, 478 and 2334; among others, stipulating that sanctity of Jerusalem cannot be desecrated, he indicated. He further renewed Kuwait's adherence to Arab, Islamic and international efforts to stop the ongoing onslaught, as the aspired settlement is based on the two-state solution, Security Council resolutions, the land for peace principle, the road map and the Arab peace initiative—all designed to enable the Palestinians establish their state and garner their independence.

FM meets UN Chief

As part of his official visit, Sheikh Dr Ahmad met on Friday with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in New York. During the meeting the two discussed cooperation and ways to bolster coordination in the future. The two sides also tackled developments in the region and international arena. The UN chief praised Kuwait's role and exerted efforts to strengthen peace and stability around the world. Earlier, the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister participated in a joint session held between Guterres and the ministers of foreign affairs of Arab countries participating in the special session of the 75th General Assembly of the Nations.

Sheikh Dr Ahmad had discussed with his Palestinian and Indonesian counterparts the current situation in the occupied Palestinian lands. The meetings with Palestine's Riad Al-Malki and Indonesia's Retno Marsudi came on the sideline of



GAZA CITY: Palestinian children who have returned to their neighborhood, stare at the damaged from their home, hit by Zionist entity's bombardment in Gaza City, after a ceasefire brokered by Egypt between Zionist and Hamas, on Friday. —AFP

the 75th UN General Assembly, and in line with the State of Kuwait's support of international efforts for a ceasefire in occupied Palestine. Minister Malki; most notably, valued the State of Kuwait's "honorable" stance, as well as its leadership and people's "historic and pivotal" role in championing the Palestinian cause.

Furthermore, Sheikh Dr Ahmad held similar talks with his Jordanian counterpart Ayman Al-Safadi and UNGA President Volkan Bozkir, and later discussed the latest developments with his Turkish, Pakistani and Maldivian counterparts: Mevlut Cavusoglu, Makhdoom Shah Mehmood Qureshi and Abdulla Shahid respectively. —KUNA

Kuwait raises \$6.5m for Palestine so far

KUWAIT: A state-supervised fundraiser for Palestine in Kuwait has already collected around \$6.5 million as of yesterday. The campaign, which is supervised by Kuwait's Ministry of Social Affairs and Foreign Ministry, ends on June 18.

Kuwait continues to provide all needs for people in the Gaza Strip through the Kuwaiti Red Crescent, said KRCS Chairman Dr Hilal Al-Sayer Friday. In a statement to the press, Dr Sayer affirmed that the KRCS is keen to provide the Gaza Strip with all urgent relief requirements. Since the brutal Zionist aggression on the Gaza Strip, the association has taken upon itself to support and alleviate the suffering of the afflicted in the Strip by handing out food baskets and donating two ambulances to the Palestinian Red Crescent.

He also noted that the association will send a team next Sunday on a relief plane loaded with medicines and medical supplies to Gaza, adding that the delegation will head to the Strip in coordination and cooperation with the Egyptian Red Crescent. Dr Sayer said that the citizens and resi-



GAZA CITY: A Palestinian woman who has returned to her neighborhood, cooks a meal in what remains of her home, hit by Zionist entity's bombardment in Gaza City on Friday. —AFP

dents can donate to help the people in Gaza through the association's website or by visiting their headquarters. —KUNA

Foreign Minister meets US Special Envoy for Yemen

NEW YORK: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah met Friday in New York City with US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking. During the meeting, Lenderking briefed on latest developments in the Yemeni file, praising the State of Kuwait's contributions; both on political and humanitarian levels, to restore safety and stability to Yemen. Meanwhile, the country's top diplomat reaffirmed the State of Kuwait's firm and principled stance regarding Yemen's safety and stability according to the Saudi peace initiative, the Gulf peace initiative, outcomes of the Yemeni inclusive national dialogue and the UN Security Council resolution 2216. Sheikh Dr Ahmad also stressed significance of the United States' role in the Yemeni file, as well as Kuwait's support of the Special Envoy efforts in this regard. —KUNA



NEW YORK: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking. —KUNA

Amir reaffirms Kuwait's firm...

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The latest round of bombardment killed 248 people in Gaza, including 66 children, and wounded more than 1,900 since May 10, the Hamas-run health ministry says. The United Nations says more than half of those killed, the overwhelming majority in Zionist air strikes, were civilians. The Zionist entity claims it has killed "more than 200 terrorists", including 25 commanders.

In front of a flattened tower block where she used to rent out apartments, Aisha Mousallem was wearing black. "Even if I lost no one in my family, I'm in mourning," she said. Sarah Muscroft, the head of the UN humanitarian agency (OCHA) in the occupied Palestinian territories, said the intensity of the bombardment had led to "extensive damage in across Gaza". "Over 6,000 people have been rendered homeless as a result of the hostilities," she said.

More than 1,042 housing or commercial units were estimated to have been completely destroyed, and 800,000 people have no regular access to water. "The building effort is going to be really quite profound," she told AFP. Earlier yesterday, shopkeepers assessed the damage, finding many supplies coated in thick layers of dust.

Wasmi romps to victory in...

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III the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and III the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

commended cooperation and coordination undertaken by numerous public bodies, which helped facilitate the voting process in the fifth constituency. The supreme judicial committee tasked with overseeing the matter, ministry of interior, ministry of information, ministry of health, ministry of education and Kuwait Fire Force were singled out for praise.

Wasmi, a professor of law at Kuwait University, decided to contest the seat after a group of veteran opposition politicians pressed him in a bid to compen-

Shopkeeper Wael Amin Al-Sharafa said he had stocked up his shop with new clothes to sell during the usually busy season of Eid Al-Fitr at the end of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan. "But now it's all lost," he said. "Who will pay for all this? I have no idea."

Rami Abu Amira and a dozen other fishermen prepared their nets before heading out to sea for the first time in two weeks. "We need to eat," he said after the Gaza coastguard allowed fishing again. Abu Amira said, however, he would stick close to the coastline, adding: "We, fishermen are scared (the Zionist) navy will shoot at us. It's up to everyone to decide whether to go or not."

Convoys of lorries carrying aid began passing into Gaza Friday through the Kerem Shalom crossing after it was reopened by the Zionist entity, bringing much-needed medicine, food and fuel. The UN's Central Emergency Response Fund said it had released \$18.5 million for humanitarian efforts. The latest round of Zionist bombardment forced 91,000 people to flee their homes in Gaza, according to OCHA. Thousands returned to their homes on Friday to examine the damage.

Both the Zionist entity and Hamas were fast to claim victory, as two Egyptian security delegations arrived to monitor the deal. Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the Zionist entity's bombing campaign had been an "exceptional success". Hamas' Haniya said they had "dealt a painful and severe blow that will leave its deep marks" on the Zionist entity, and thanked Iran for "providing funds and weapons". — Agencies

sate for the loss of Dahoum's seat and maintain the opposition's strength in the National Assembly. Wasmi contested the seat in the fifth constituency, the largest in the country with 166,000 voters. According to unofficial figures, fewer than 50,000 voters cast their ballots.

With Wasmi leading from the very beginning with a huge margin, his supporters staged noisy celebrations. Wasmi was elected to the Assembly for the first time in the Feb 2012 Assembly elections, which were declared null and void four months later by the constitutional court over a procedural flaw.

An outspoken politician, Wasmi is expected to embolden the opposition, which has around 31 MPs in the 50-member house. The country has seen ongoing political disputes between the opposition and the government, in addition to government-backed Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem, since the Dec 5 election. Since then, the Assembly has held only a few sessions, which were dominated by heated exchanges and boycotts.

Mind-controlled arm restores...

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Gaunt, an assistant professor in the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at the University of Pittsburgh, told AFP. What's unique about Copeland is an additional set of electrodes that are connected to his somatosensory cortex, which receives and processes sensations. "When we're grabbing objects, we use this sense of touch very naturally to improve our ability to control," explained Gaunt.

The team developed an interface that is "bi-directional" - meaning not only can it "read" instructions from the brain and send them to the artificial limb, it can also "write" sensations from the device and transmit them back. The idea of sending tactile feedback to the somatosensory cortex goes back decades, but doing so in a way that is controlled and is understandable by the circuitry of the brain was a challenge.

Deadly fungus stalks India's...

Continued from Page 1

"We lost him in a week. We did whatever was possible with available resources," the relative said.

India normally deals with fewer than 20 black fungus cases a year but now there are several thousand across the country including more than 2,000 in Maharashtra state, home to India's financial capital Mumbai. At least nine Indian states have declared the problem an epidemic. The cities of New Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad and Bangalore have opened special wards.

Indian media reports suggest hundreds have died in the past few days. Authorities have not said how many have perished nationally but a government alert to state authorities has called for teams of surgeons and specialists to be ready for a rise in cases. Before the coronavirus pandemic, only those with severely compromised immunity, such as HIV or organ transplant patients, were at risk.

The current rapid rise in fungus cases is largely being attributed to the uncontrolled use of steroids to treat patients for coronavirus. "People have started using (steroids) liberally, excessively and inappropriately," Professor K Srinath Reddy, from the Public Health Foundation of India, told AFP. He said contaminated water in oxygen cylinders or air humidifiers also provid-

ed an opportunity for the fungus to spread rapidly. After operating on Copeland to install the electrodes, the team held their breath. "No one knew what to expect because this had only been done in monkeys and you can't ask a monkey what something feels like," said Copeland. Then came the moment of truth, when they tried sending their first touch signal. "It was really faint," he recalled. He asked them to try again, to be sure it was real. "Oh yeah, that's what that feels like, and it was just super cool," he said.

Before the interface could be put to work with the robotic arm, the scientists had to perform a series of tests with Copeland. First, they needed to learn which electrodes caused what sensation when activated, and which fingers they were associated with, to set up the robotic hand correctly. They also made him watch videos of the robotic arm moving left or right and recorded the electrodes that lit up when he was asked to "think" it was him controlling it.

Finally it was time to try it out. Copeland sat next to the metallic black robotic arm and was asked to pick up a series of small objects like rocks, spheres, and place them on a box - with either the tactile sensors switched on, or off. — AFP

ed an opportunity for the fungus to spread rapidly.

Bhartiben Shah complained of severe headaches after receiving steroids for 12 days and then she developed a swollen eye, her son said. "An MRI scan showed a spot, but it was not clear whether it was black fungus. But we admitted her to the hospital soon after." Smit Shah, 25, told AFP. A biopsy confirmed the infection and it has now been 10 days since Bhartiben was admitted. "I'm helpless but just hoping that she gets better," he said.

When coronavirus case numbers started exploding across India in March and April, social media was awash with desperate pleas for medical oxygen, hospital beds and drugs from families with sick relatives. Now Indians including Shah are turning to social media again in the hunt for drugs to treat black fungus. Most of the requests are for amphotericin B liposomal injections. India's health minister on Thursday said production of the shots was being increased.

"There should have been a more prompt response - both at the state and central level - in terms of recognition of the problem, the potential for it to grow into a serious problem and for giving proper advice not only on prevention but also treatment," Professor Reddy said.

Amulya Nidhi, a health activist in Madhya Pradesh, said the government had earlier failed to prepare an adequate supply of coronavirus medicines such as remdesivir and plasma, and then failed to learn its lesson by doing the same with fungus medications. "The government should have acted when it found out about the very first (fungus) case... People are not supposed to be begging for life-saving medicines." — AFP

Local

COVID-19 patients cast their votes in fifth constituency by-election

Ministers hail good turnout, organized voting process



KUWAIT: Health Minister Dr Basel Al-Sabah in a group photo with health workers at a polling station yesterday. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat and Fouad Al-Shaikh



Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Al-Sabah visits a polling station to oversee the process of work.

KUWAIT: COVID-19 patients were present to cast their votes in the by-election for the fifth constituency yesterday. Authorities designated special polling stations for COVID-19 patients, providing them with all needed requirements. Amid the tough restrictions due to the spread of the COVID-19 in the country, the Interior Ministry and the Health Ministry members played a prominent and effective role to help achieve a successful the parliamentary by-elections.

Health Minister Dr Basel Al-Sabah affirmed meanwhile that the electoral process went in an "excellent and organized manner," pointing out that it is part of the Kuwaiti democracy. During a tour to one of the polling stations, the minister said that there are 27 schools designated to receive the voters of the fifth constituency in the by-election, including the main school set to receive COVID-19 patients. The ministry has provided every polling station with the necessary requirements, as well as more than 14 ambulances for any emergency during the electoral process, he added.

Good numbers

In the meantime, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Justice Abdullah Al-Roumi said the number of people casting votes in the by-elections was good despite the heat. Voters committed to health measures including wearing masks and maintaining social distancing. Roumi also Minister of State for Integrity Enhancement, said after his visit to Ibn Zahr Al-Andalusi school, one of the polling stations. The minister thanked advisors and members of the judicial system for supervising the election, as well as the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Justice and other departments that cooperated to organize the event.

Kuwait Transparency Society described the voting process as "smooth and organized" due to collaboration of state authorities, candidates and voters. Heyam Al-Duwailah, the society's board member, said a team from society visited a polling station in Salem Al-Mubarak High School and witnessed facilities provided by Ministries of Justice, Interior and Health which contributed to smooth voting process. Duwailah members of the judiciary in polling stations were verifying identities of voters, as well as making sure law was applied.

She said Ministry of Health workers were taking temperature of voters before entering the polling stations and making sure everybody was wearing masks and maintaining physical distancing. Kuwait

Transparency Society, said Duwailah, wanted to make sure the electoral law has been implemented and all violations like illegal funding or biased of committee supervising elections were reported. The society, she added, was also registering positive remarks of the whole voting process. She said more than 60 volunteers were visiting 26 polling stations to follow-up elections.

KRCS volunteers

At least 60 volunteers from the Kuwaiti Red Crescent Society participated in the fifth constituency by-election, said KRCS Secretary-General Maha Al-Barjas. She affirmed that the association volunteers' participation was represented by assisting the elderly voters and people with special needs, in addition to the distribution of medical supplies. She also noted that the volunteers joined a specialized first aid training, in addition to receiving instructions on how to provide humanitarian services on election day. Furthermore, she stressed the association's keenness to coordinate with state institutions, the most important of which is the Ministry of Interior and the General Administration of Civil Defense, adding that the KRCS's participation comes from its humanitarian goals aimed at providing services and first aid to everyone in need.

A noticeable number of senior citizens headed to the election centers to vote for one MP in the by-elections for the fifth constituent of the 16th legislative term. The elderly went to cast their votes in the early hours to avoid the rising heat at noon and afternoon and keep away from the expected large crowds of voters in the evening. The organizing committees provided wheelchairs to help the elderly reach the vote-casting booths easily, with the help of men and women of the General Department of Civil Defense. The event also saw the presence of the Ministry of Health's medical emergency teams to deal with any health issues.

Kuwait's fifth constituency voters had headed to polling stations yesterday to choose their representative among fifteen candidates in the 14th by-election in Kuwait parliament history. The voting process kicked off at 8:00 am and closed 8:00 pm, after which the heads of the committees announced the end of the voting process to elect a winner for the vacant seat that was occupied by Dr Bader Al-Dahoum. About 166,222 eligible voters are registered in the fifth constituency. —KUNA



Voters wait for their turn to cast their votes at a polling station.



Policemen and voters are seen inside a polling station.



A man casts his vote at a polling station in Ahmadi.



A man casts his vote at a polling station in Sabahiya.



A woman registers to cast her vote.



A woman casts her vote.



A senior citizen is being helped at a polling station.



A police officer checks a voter's temperature at the entrance of a polling station.

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Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.netDHAMAN celebrates
healthcare technology
management week

KUWAIT: Health Assurance Hospitals Company (DHAMAN) recently organized a series of biomedical engineering events to celebrate international Healthcare Technology Management Week (HTM). DHAMAN Biomedical Engineering Manager Hussain Al-Sayegh said: "Our activities during HTM Week aim to raise awareness about healthcare technology as a growing field of interest for many engineers and technicians."



Hussain Al-Sayegh

DHAMAN's webinars addressed major topics, such as health technology top 10 innovations, the need for health technology assessment organizations, as well as HTM challenges and prospects, he noted. Sayegh added: "We hosted both public and internal activities during HTM Week with the participation of experts from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon to discuss various aspects of healthcare technology management for the benefit of biomedical engineers at DHAMAN and other organizations in terms of education, careers and development. In addition, the speakers shared their experience and outlook with other biomedical engineering professionals to establish common practices and build a network to advance this vital part of the healthcare sector."

Over 2m COVID-19 vaccine doses administered in Kuwait

Ministry reports 16 deaths, 2,500 new cases in two days

KUWAIT: Health workers have administered more than two million COVID-19 vaccine doses to people in Kuwait, according to covidvax.live. This comes as Kuwait has lodged 16 deaths and more than 2,500 new cases in two days while the country has moved into easing COVID-19 restrictions.

Kuwait's Ministry of Health on Friday reported eight COVID-19 deaths and 1,345 infections in the previous 24 hours, one day after it reported eight deaths and 1,168 cases. The figures took the country's death toll to 1,719 and the caseload to 297,206 as of Friday. Meanwhile, the number of COVID-19 patients receiving medical care reached 12,574, including 171 in ICUs as of Friday. Total recoveries reached 282,913 after the ministry reported 993 and 980 recoveries on Friday and Thursday respectively.

The Cabinet had ended the partial curfew, imposed a few months ago to combat the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, from the first day of Eid Al-Fitr on March 13, as government spokesman Tareq Al-Mazrem said the country was heading for reopening various sectors on gradual basis. The government also allowed dining inside restaurants and cafes from 5:00 am to

8:00 pm starting today. Cinemas and theatres were reopened only for people who have been vaccinated provided customers strictly observe all health conditions like wearing face masks and observing social distancing.

Mazrem also said that the ban on the entry of all expatriates into Kuwait will continue indefinitely, and any exemptions must be made by the coronavirus high committee. The Cabinet also decided to halt all commercial flights, except cargo service, with Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka due to the widespread of the coronavirus pandemic in those countries. Travelers from the four countries are banned from arriving into Kuwait directly and must spend at least 14 days in a third country, he said.

The Cabinet also decided to increase the percentage of employees in public and private offices to a maximum of 60 percent starting from May 17. Mazrem said authorities hope to move gradually into further easing steps as the health conditions in the country stabilize and more people are vaccinated. All public and private celebrations including weddings and gatherings at Diwanis will continue to be banned, Mazrem said.



KUWAIT: People wait in line to be vaccinated at Kuwait Vaccination Center in this file photo. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

COVID-19 quarantine eased for vaccinated Kuwaitis as of yesterday

KUWAIT: People who received COVID-19 vaccine or those who recovered from the virus will not have to be placed in quarantine in Kuwait as of yesterday, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation said. DGCA said travelers exempted from quarantine were those who took their first dose two weeks before coming to the country, or people whose recovery from the virus did not exceed 90 days, DGCA Deputy Director General for Planning and Projects Saad Al-Otaibi said. Entry of arrivals to Kuwait is currently exclusive to Kuwaitis and their companions who are first degree relatives (father, mother, wife, husband and children) as well as domestic helpers.

All travelers should provide a PCR test certificate

with a negative result, and this certificate should be produced at least 72 hours before the flight time, said Otaibi, also DGCA spokesman. He said travelers should also pay for one PCR test through "Kuwaitmosafer" platform before boarding the plane. The passenger will be in quarantine but they must carry out a PCR test within three days from arrival date, and if proven negative, they can leave quarantine.

Otaibi said citizens and their companions who are first degree relatives as well as domestic helpers were banned from traveling unless they were inoculated by approved vaccines: Pfizer-BioNTech, Oxford-AstraZeneca, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson. He said there were exemptions of citizens holding certificates from Ministry of Health of their inability to be vaccinated due to health conditions, women with an MoH pregnancy certificate, all age categories not subjected to vaccines, students abroad and diplomats in Kuwait. Otaibi said non-Kuwaitis were still banned from entering the country until further notice.

IATA Travel Pass

Separately, Kuwaiti privately-owned carrier Jazeera Airways said yesterday it will carry out a trial of the IATA Travel Pass, a mobile app that provides verified documentation on traveller COVID-19 tests and vaccination results. The digital pass also informs "passengers on what tests, vaccines and other measures they require prior to travel, details on where they can get tested," according to the global airline cartel, IATA.

Passengers will be able to upload a copy of their passport, vaccination certificate and negative PCR examination results in a safe and private manner to prove that they meet travel requirements, the airline said. Several carriers around the world have begun their own trials of the digital pass, it added. The statement also quoted IATA Regional VP Kamel Al-Awadhi as having confirmed that several airlines have found the app to be successful, adding that Jazeera Airways will be the first budget carrier in the region to carry out its own test. —KUNA

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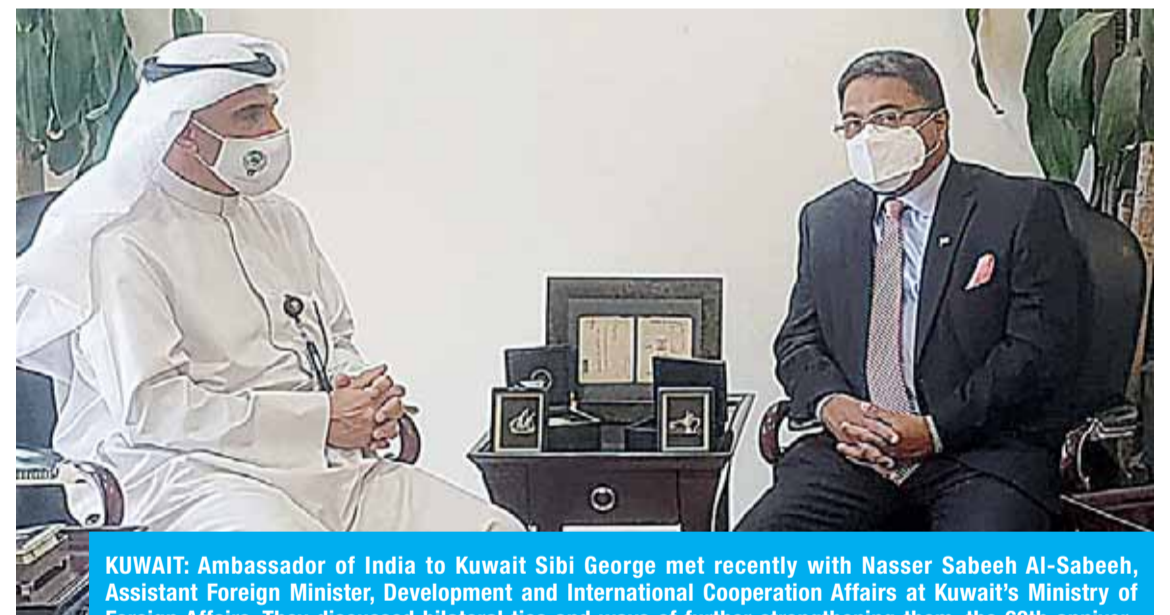


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KUWAIT: Ambassador of India to Kuwait Sibi George met recently with Nasser Sabeeh Al-Sabeeh, Assistant Foreign Minister, Development and International Cooperation Affairs at Kuwait's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They discussed bilateral ties and ways of further strengthening them, the 60th anniversary of the Kuwait-India diplomatic relations, coordination on emergency medical supplies to India, and matters of mutual interest.

Diplomatic Women's Committee mark Kuwaiti Women's Day

KUWAIT: The Diplomatic Women's Committee - Kuwait prepared an online program to celebrate Kuwaiti Women's Day, which was announced by the late His Highness the Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The event is celebrated on May 16 to mark the day Kuwaiti women won their political rights, especially rights to elect and vote.

The honorary chairperson of the Diplomatic Women's Committee, Sheikha Halah Bader Muhammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, offered her gratitude and congratulations to Kuwaiti women for their true courage, spirit, and determination in fighting for their rights, and for their contribution as front-liners in the war to combat COVID-19. Sheikha Halah said, "Our program today is to honor Kuwaiti women for the great efforts they have made standing side by side with their male counterparts."

Also participating in the online program was Secretary-General of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters Kamel Abdul Jalil, who congratulated Kuwaiti women and narrated parts of their strong role in society. Dr Ahmed Al-Shatti, Director of the Capital Health District, reviewed the strong role of Kuwaiti women to fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, especially the role of doctors,



Sheikha Halah Bader Muhammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah



Kamel Abdul Jalil



Nargis Al-Shatti

who have been working 24 hours with critical cases. He praised the women front-liners for sacrificing their time, health and families in order to protect others. "Indeed, Kuwaiti women deserve to be honored," he stated.

The Ambassador of the French Republic to Kuwait Anne-Claire Legendre participated by in a video message speaking about the role of Kuwaiti women and their efforts working for the sustainable development programs, serving their nation and contributing to its prosperity and development.

In a video message by the Vice President of the United Nations Office (UNDP), Hideko Hadzialic mentioned that Kuwaiti women were distinguished in all their social, cultural and political activities to serve the Kuwaiti society. Members of DWC, the lady diplomats accredited to the state of Kuwait shared their gratitude and congratulation messages for the remarkable achievements of Kuwaiti Women in all aspects of life with pride.

At the end of the program, Diplomatic Women's Committee's Advisor Nargis Al-Shatti spoke about the historical role of the Kuwaiti woman for the struggle of their rights and their sacrifices during the brutal Iraqi invasion in 1990, when they bravely defended their country. She said women were able to write an illustrious chapter in the history of Kuwait filled with many honorable stories.

International

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This aerial view taken on Friday shows a neighborhood in Beit Hanun in the northern Gaza Strip, that was targeted by Zionist air strikes. — AFP

Gaza family home reduced to crater

'The war isn't over, it's still there in front of me and inside me.'

BEIT HANUN: Walking down a sandy path in the northern Gaza Strip, father of six Ramez Al-Masri points to a huge crater where his home used to be. A ceasefire early Friday ended 11 days of relentless Zionist air strikes on the besieged coastal enclave run by Islamist group Hamas. But the truce was too late to save the Al-Masri family's home.

"When I came home and I saw this massive hole instead of our building, I was in shock," said the 39-year-old Palestinian. "The war isn't over, it's still there in front of me and inside me." The house - or what remains of it - is in Beit Hanun, the village closest to the Erez Crossing between northern Gaza and the Zionist entity. Last week, a Zionist officer called him late at night to tell him to flee his home with his wife and children.

They had just enough time to rush for shelter in a nearby clinic. A few minutes later, a Zionist air strike pummeled down through their three-storey house, blasting a six-meter-deep crater in the ground, shat-

tering the water and sewage networks and blowing out windows in nearby buildings. In a young neighbor's bedroom, glass shards, mangled metal and lumps of concrete lay on the ground near a large red heart and a message painted on the wall: "Happy birthday, my love."

'Stench of death'

Zionist air strikes have killed at least 248 people including 66 children in Gaza since May 10, the health ministry says. The Zionist entity says fighters too have been killed. Twelve people were killed in the Zionist entity, including a child and a teenager, with one soldier struck by an anti-tank missile, Zionist authorities say. The Zionist bombing campaign was the deadliest since a 2014 conflict in the Gaza Strip.

In that war too, Masri lost a home, which he said had taken him all of three years to rebuild. "Will it now again take me another three years to rebuild?"

he asked. "Will it take until the summer of 2024?" For the moment his family is staying with relatives and waiting for aid - local or international - so they can rent a new home while they wait.

The 2014 war had ravaged the enclave. The Zionist army sent in ground troops who engaged in heavy clashes with Hamas, leaving buildings riddled with bullet holes. This time the war just came from the air. For the first time in days, tens of thousands of Gaza residents ventured out of their homes on Friday, checking on neighbors, examining ravaged buildings, visiting the sea - and burying their dead.

In the nearby village of Beit Lahia, a tall building had been flattened to a pile of smashed concrete layers. "There were nine dead here. We searched for them for 18 hours after the Zionist strike, which crushed everything," said 59-year-old Rabah Al-Mahdoun. A policeman nearby said everything had been permeated by the "stench of death".

Above the mountain of rubble, a foul smell grasped at the nose and throat. Elsewhere in the strip that day, rescue workers pulled five bodies from what appeared to once have been a tunnel. Umm Mohammed says she lost her family home and donkeys in the Zionist air strikes. "Everything is destroyed, we have nothing left," she said. Her children were petrified through the latest round of bombardment, she said. — AFP

"My son Akram was just four days old when the 2014 war broke out, and I had told myself I wanted to make sure he never had to live through that again," she said. She wonders now if, after they rebuild their home, it will again be demolished in another round of violence. "We need peace," she said. A neighbor, Thaeir, interrupted. "Real peace means an end to the (Zionist) blockade on Gaza" in place since 2007, he said. It means "being able to approach the checkpoint with (the Zionist entity) without being shot at, and to cross over to work in (the Zionist entity)". — AFP

Slow vaccine rollout hits Latam as COVID claims million lives

MONTEVIDEO: COVID-19 has caused the death of more than one million people in Latin America and the Caribbean where slow vaccine rollouts are preventing an exit from the pandemic crisis. Since the coronavirus was first detected in the region in Sao Paulo in late February 2020, AFP has recorded over 1,001,400 deaths - almost 30 percent of the global total - and more than 31.5 million cases.

Nearly 90 percent of the fatalities have been notched in just five countries, which represent 70 percent of the region's total population: Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Argentina and Peru. "Right now the situation is terrible. We've never had something like this in our country," Jacil Farias, an 82-year-old pensioner from Brazil, told AFP a few days ago.

Worst-hit countries

Brazil is the second-worst affected country in the world by COVID-19 deaths after the United States and has the highest overall death rate in Latin

America. Daily fatalities have dropped by a third since passing 3,000 in the first half of April, though. Mexico, the second-worst affected country in the region, has seen daily COVID deaths fall even more precipitously from 1,300 at the end of January to just 170.

The capital Mexico City will re-open schools from June 7 following in the footsteps of two states that have already done so and four more that will do so at the start of June. The opposite is happening in Colombia, though, where unprecedented daily deaths of 500 combined with mass anti-government street protests have left the country with two simultaneous crises, on top of already extant poverty and violence.

Colombia was due to co-host the Copa America football tournament with Argentina starting on June 13 but was stripped of its position by South American football's governing body CONMEBOL due to its problems. Carissa Etienne, Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) director, said on Wednesday



MONTEVIDEO: In this photo taken on April 20, 2021, health workers take care of a patient at a COVID-19 ICU in a private hospital. — AFP

day the body was "expecting even greater increases" due to the recent street protests. The situation in Argentina is also drastic, with 35,800 new cases and 435 deaths registered on Thursday.

President Alberto Fernandez announced a nine-day lockdown beginning yesterday with the country going through its "worst moment in the pan-

demic". "People aren't taking care, none of us are being careful and we want to go out and travel," Alicia Sepulveda, a resident of Buenos Aires, told AFP. Neighboring Uruguay, which was lauded throughout much of 2020 as a model for managing the pandemic, hit rock bottom in April and currently has the highest global daily death rate. — AFP

Belgian soldier lurked near target's home

BRUSSELS: A Belgian soldier with suspected extreme-right views who absconded with military weapons spent two hours lurking near the home of a potential assassination target, officials said Friday. An investigating judge has opened a probe into an alleged "terrorist attempted murder" four days after 46-year-old Jurgen Conings disappeared, leaving behind "troubling" letters threatening coronavirus experts.

The search for the serviceman, which has been

joined by specialist police units from four countries and troops backed with armored cars and helicopters, has focused around a national park in north-eastern Belgium, near the Dutch border. But four days later, officers have lifted a cordon around the Hoge Kempen park, near where the suspect's abandoned car was found earlier in the week with anti-tank rocket launchers inside. He is thought to have taken more weapons with him and gone on the run.

Officials have said Conings - dubbed the "Belgian Rambo" in the press - was on a monitoring list of suspected far-right extremists and had been stripped of a high-level security clearance and disciplined over racist and violent social media posts. Now, he is also the subject of an investigation by anti-terror prosecutors. Potential targets - such as renowned virologist Mark Van Ranst - have been moved to places of safety under police protection.

"The work of the investigation is continuing," the spokesman for the federal prosecutor's office Eric Van Duyse said. "An investigating judge has been assigned on a count of attempted terrorist assassination and possession of weapons in a terrorist context."

Justice Minister Vincent Van Quickenborne said the suspect, who disappeared on Monday, had spent more than two hours that evening near the home of one of his potential targets. Broadcaster VRT reported that the target was Van Ranst, but the minister did not confirm this. — AFP



Jurgen Conings

Will Biden close Gitmo prison?

WASHINGTON: The approved release of three detainees locked up in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba for nearly two decades has raised expectations that President Joe Biden might try to close the notorious US military prison. A high-level review board on May 17 signed off on the release of the oldest of the 40 so-called detainees still at Guantanamo, 73-year-old Pakistani businessman Saifullah Paracha, as well as two others.

Despite being arrested and secretly rendered to the US military prison on the Caribbean island between 2001 and 2003, the three were never charged - like most of the others still there. Tarrred by accusations of extra-legal imprisonment, denial of rights and torture, Guantanamo has been a human rights shame for Washington since it was opened in January 2002 as a "War on Terror" prison for people suspected of connections to the Sept 11, 2001 attacks by Al-Qaeda.

Within a few years the United States had seized around 780 people, most on slim evidence of Al-Qaeda ties, and taken them to Guantanamo as war prisoners. Many underwent torture in secret CIA locations before their transfer to the prison. Only a dozen have been shown to have strong connections to 9/11 or other attacks.

Biden was vice president when then president Barack Obama ordered the prison closed two days after taking office in 2009, with the idea that those tied to 9/11 would be tried in US civilian courts. But the idea was deeply unpopular and Congress blocked it. Instead Obama over eight years quietly freed hundreds of prisoners after the Guantanamo Periodic Review Board (PRB) cleared them.

That process ground to a halt when Donald Trump took office in 2017. Now, President Biden has inherited an expensive, legally dubious and, for many, embarrassing camp still holding 40 men that could outlast the two-decade war in Afghanistan sparked by 9/11. Asked in April if Biden will close the base, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki replied that he "remains committed" to doing so. — AFP

International

'Ecological disaster' feared as Greece battles forest fire

270 firefighters, 16 aircraft and army fighting the blaze

ATHENS: Hundreds of firefighters battled Greece's first major forest fire of the summer yesterday, as experts warned of a "huge ecological disaster" in the nature conservation area near Athens. The fire, which broke out late Wednesday in the Geraneia mountains some 90 kilometers (55 miles) west of the capital, is "one of the biggest in the past 20 to 30 years, and has come early in the season," fire chief Stefanos Kolokouris told ANTI television.

He said better weather conditions allowed firefighters to bring the main front of the outbreak under control late on Friday, but there remain "several active and scattered" blazes. More than 270 firefighters, backed by 16 aircraft and by the army, were fighting the blazes, the fire service said. No injuries have been reported, but a number of houses have been damaged or destroyed and a dozen villages and hamlets evacuated. The scale of the damage, notably for farmers, will only be clear once the fire is completely under control, the civil protection agency said.

But experts and associations quoted in Greek media have warned of an "ecological disaster on an immense scale". Some 54 percent of the dense and hitherto protected pine forests have been burnt, the leftist Avghi daily said. And 6.1 percent of the mountain range is part of the European Union's Natura 2000 network of nature conservation sites. Euthymios Lekkas, professor of environmental disaster management at the University of Athens, said the fires have burnt more than 55 square kilometers (21 square miles) of pine forest

and other land, some of it agricultural.

"It's a huge ecological disaster that needs work to avoid landslides and terrible flooding in the autumn," he told ERT public television. The civil protection agency said the blaze started near the village of Schinos next to the resort of Loutraki, apparently by someone burning vegetation in an olive grove.

Tortoises and hedgehogs

Smoke from the fire choked Athens with ash falling from the sky. Rescue associations sought Friday to help injured animals, burned or dehydrated from the fires, bringing food, water and first aid. One organization, Caesar's Paradise, said birds, tortoises, hedgehogs and wild boar as well as cats and dogs had been found dead from the smoke and flames. The Greek NGO ANIMA said it was particularly concerned because the fires erupted "in the spring, when animals give birth to their young".

"It's difficult for newborns to run or to fly with their own wings like adults," the organization said on social media. The WWF launched a petition calling on the government to take "serious prevention measures against forest fires". Greece faces violent forest fires every summer, fanned by dry weather, strong winds and temperatures that often soar well above 30 C (86 F). These may be of natural origin, or criminal, with a view to real estate speculation, or due to negligence. In 2018, 102 people died in the coastal resort of Mati, near Athens, in Greece's worst-ever fire disaster. —AFP



MAVROLIMNI, GREECE: A firefighting airplane sprays water to extinguish a wild fire on Mount Geraneia, west of Athens yesterday. —AFP

News in brief

One dead in Amsterdam stabbings

AMSTERDAM: Dutch police were yesterday investigating a spate of stabbings in Amsterdam in which one person died and four were injured, but said there were no indications of terrorism. A 29-year-old man was arrested at the scene after the attacks happened late on Friday in an area of bars and restaurants near the capital's museum quarter, police said. "The police is conducting an extensive investigation into the various incidents and the circumstances," Amsterdam police said in a statement. "The investigation team led by the Public Prosecution Service is keeping all options open, but at the moment has no direct indications that there is a terrorist motive." —AFP

International airliners in near-miss

KINSHASA, DR Congo: Passenger planes from Portuguese carrier TAP and Ethiopian Airlines were involved in a near-miss over the Democratic Republic of Congo, government sources said yesterday. "Very alarming information in my possession indicates (there was) a very high risk of disaster in the airspace of our country," Transport Minister Cherubin Okende Senga said in a letter seen by AFP. He said the incident occurred on Wednesday and involved two aircraft of Ethiopian Airlines and TAP on international flights "which narrowly avoided colliding at the intersection of two air routes above" the city of Lubumbashi. —AFP

Germany imposing quarantine

BERLIN: Germany will impose a quarantine on people arriving from Britain due to the spread there of the coronavirus variant first found in India, the Robert Koch health institute said Friday. From today, all travellers arriving from the UK will have to submit to a quarantine period of two weeks, regardless of whether they can provide a negative test result for the virus. Only German citizens and residents of Germany will be allowed to enter from Britain, with air, rail and bus companies banned from transporting all other passengers from the country. —AFP

6 killed at pro-Palestinian rally

CHAMAN, Pakistan: A bomb blast Friday at a pro-Palestinian rally killed at least six people and injured 14 in a Pakistani city bordering Afghanistan, officials said, in the latest violence to hit the restive area. Senior local police official Ahmad Mohiuddin said explosives were packed into a motorbike parked near the vehicle of a religious leader taking part in the rally in Chaman, Balochistan province. Pictures from the scene showed broken glass, rubble, and blood stains. "It was an improvised explosive device which went off as participants began to disperse," added Tariq Mengal, a senior local administration official. No group has claimed responsibility. —AFP

Strong quakes rattle 2 regions of China

BEIJING: A series of strong earthquakes rattled northwest and southwest China, leaving at least two people dead, local officials and seismologists said early yesterday. Both Qinghai province in the northwest on the Tibetan plateau and Yunnan province in southwestern China are areas prone to earthquakes. And both tremors were shallow, meaning they generally cause more damage. The Yunnan quake, which had a magnitude of 6.1, struck first at 9:48 pm Friday (1348 GMT) near the city of Dali, a popular tourist destination, the US Geological Survey said. It was followed by at least two aftershocks, USGS said. —AFP

Nigeria's top army commander killed in air crash

ABUJA, Nigeria: Nigeria's top-ranking army commander Lieutenant General Ibrahim Attahuru and other officers were killed on Friday when their plane crashed in bad weather in the country's north, officials said. Chief of Army Staff Attahuru was only appointed by President Muhammadu Buhari in January as part of a shakeup of the top military command to better fight surging violence and a more than decade-long jihadist insurgency. Attahuru died as news also emerged that Nigeria's Boko Haram jihadist leader Abubakar Shekau had himself been seriously wounded or possibly killed after clashes with a rival Islamic State-allied faction.

President Buhari, a former general first elected in 2015, has been under increasing pressure from allies and critics alike over his government's handling of mounting security problems in Africa's most populous country. In a statement, Buhari said the crash "was one mortal blow to our underbelly, at a time our armed forces are poised to end the security challenges facing the country". The army spokesman said on Twitter that ten other officers including the plane's crew also died in the crash in north Kaduna state. The incident occurred as the

plane was landing at the Kaduna International Airport "due to inclement weather," the armed forces said in a statement.

Jihadist rivalries

Nigeria's military has been battling an Islamist insurgency in the northeast since 2009, a conflict that has killed more than 40,000 and displaced around two million more. Attahuru had once been in charge of leading the frontline offensive against Boko Haram's commander Shekau in the northeast in 2017. Local intelligence sources said Shekau had been seriously wounded this week when IS-allied rival jihadists attacked his stronghold in the Sambisa forest in the northeastern state of Borno.

Sources said Shekau was wounded when he shot himself to try to evade capture after militants from the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) surrounded him following a series of battles between the rival groups. Nigeria news outlets have been filled with unconfirmed reports about the death of the man who made international headlines in 2014 when his fighters kidnapped nearly 300 schoolgirls from the remote town of Chibok.

One intelligence source said on Friday Shekau had already died from his wounds in Nainawa village on Thursday, though that was not confirmed by authorities. "He was buried in the night in an unmarked grave to avoid exhumation by either the Nigerian military or rival jihadists," the local intelligence source said. The Boko Haram leader has been reported killed several times since the con-



MAIDUGURI, Nigeria: In this file photo Commander of the Operation Lafiya Dole Major General Ibrahim Attahuru speaks at the army headquarters, in Maiduguri, Borno State in northcentral Nigeria. —AFP

flict began, only to reappear later. Nigeria's army has said it was still investigating the reports and neither ISWAP or Boko Haram have issued any statements about the Sambisa attack or Shekau's whereabouts.

But analysts said his loss would be a huge blow to his Boko Haram faction and potentially allow ISWAP to consolidate its territorial control in Nigeria's northeast. ISWAP has emerged as the dominant force in Nigeria's conflict, showing a sustained ability to carry out complex attacks on the military and recently overrunning several army bases. —AFP

Spanish enclave in a quandary over Ceuta's 'lost boys'

CEUTA, Spain: Days after up to 10,000 people surged across the Moroccan border into Spain's Ceuta enclave, many hundreds are still here, mostly minors, posing a quandary for the tiny territory. "We can't yet say how many people entered Ceuta—we estimate between 8,000 and 10,000, and it seems 6,600 have returned to Morocco," Mabel Deu, one of the city's deputy leaders, told reporters on Friday. Most of the migrants swam, but some came in inflatable boats, with Spanish government officials saying 1,500 of them were under 18. That figure has not been confirmed by the city.

"We don't know how many minors came in," Deu said. By Friday, Ceuta had 438 children and teenagers in its care at two locations and was preparing a third, she said, acknowledging there were still "a good few hundred people wandering around the city". Those at the centers are registered, fed and clothed and given a

place to stay after being tested for COVID-19. But many others are sleeping rough in parks or doorways, penniless and hungry.

Some came alone, while others crossed the border with friends or older siblings. Most are boys, either teenagers or in their early 20s. "They told us they came to visit or that they were coming to see a football match with Ronaldo," Deu said, accusing the Moroccan authorities of "manipulative tricks" to encourage the huge wave of arrivals.

'We can't cope'

Earlier this week, Ceuta officials admitted they were completely overwhelmed, appealing for a show of solidarity from Spain's 17 regions. "We cannot cope, there are too many children," Carlos Rontome, another of the city's deputy leaders, told Spanish national radio. "We are the frontier, we're the breakwater, but we have limited capacities. We're a small city of 19 square kilometers (seven square miles)... so it's very difficult to absorb all these people," he said.

"The only solution is to distribute them among the other regions." This week, Spain's regions agreed to take in



CEUTA, Spain: In this file photo, migrant minors wait to be tested for COVID-19 upon their arrival to the Spanish enclave of Ceuta. —AFP

200 unaccompanied minors who were already in Ceuta to free up space for the new arrivals. "The problem cannot fall on (Ceuta's) shoulders alone... The whole country must tackle the problem while taking into account the best interests of the minor," said Social Justice Minister Ione Belarra. Save the Children

said the proposal could ensure the youngsters were better cared for. "We believe that this measure could serve to alleviate the immediate pressure on Ceuta's protection system while offering better care to these children," Carmela del Moral, the NGO's head of child policies, told AFP. —AFP

Tensions flare between addicts, Parisians in 'Stalincrack'

PARIS: Crack has wreaked havoc in northeastern Paris for decades, but tensions between addicts and residents fed up with disturbances have reached breaking point in recent weeks. Angry locals threw mortar fire-works at crack smokers in early May, as the violence between the two groups crossed a new threshold. The presence of crack smokers has long been a source of tension with residents, who complain of the noise, increased crime and regular fights that break out between users. Authorities responded to the latest flare-up by grouping addicts in a nearby park, to avoid them roaming the streets and causing disturbances.

But neighbours of the Jardins d'Eole park have met the decision with dismay, fearful that massing the drug users will transform the area into a no-go zone. "It just moves the problem, it doesn't change anything," said head of a residents' group Frederic Francelle. "It's going to end badly," he added. Crack is created by cutting cocaine with another agent, such as baking soda, for an intense and highly addictive high. After police raids cleared several camps of addicts dotted around the city, including the notorious "Crack Hill" near the Paris ring road, many headed to the Stalingrad area in northern Paris.

The area, named after the World War II battle in the USSR where Soviet forces defeated Nazi occupiers, is now dubbed "Stalincrack". A bustling multicultural district with plenty of shops, cinemas and cheap restaurants, Stalingrad has long been the heart of the city's crack community. But residents say that shouting, insults, fights, disorder and damage have increased since the first lockdown to contain the coronavirus in

spring 2020 — at times provoking angry reactions.

Incensed by multiple awakenings in the night, Francois—who wanted to remain anonymous—started chucking glass pots and eggs to disperse the rowdy addicts. The 37-year-old father went even further and bought a paintball gun. During the first lockdown, he said he shot at addicts up to three times a week. But he admits defeat. "It's time to move..." he said. Taty, originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo, was on the receiving end of a paintball a couple of weeks ago.

But he has no hard feelings. "We're the violent ones. There are old people in the neighborhood, I understand that they need rest," he said. Paris prosecutors have opened an investigation into the incident early this month when mortar fireworks were hurled from the ground floor of a building at a group of crack users huddled together. "The question was not if there would be a confrontation, but when," said local resident Maelle, a project manager in the luxury industry who spoke on condition of anonymity. —AFP

International

Biden: 'No illusions' on difficulty of North Korea denuclearization

Moon declares South Korea and US share the 'same soul'

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden acknowledged Friday there is no easy path to getting North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons but reaffirmed his "iron-clad" commitment to the US alliance with South Korea after talks with President Moon Jae-in. "We're under no illusions how difficult this is - none whatsoever. The past four administrations have not achieved the objective. It's an incredibly difficult objective," Biden told reporters at a press conference with his South Korean counterpart at the White House.

The US leader also announced he had named veteran diplomat Sung Kim, the former US ambassador to Seoul, as his special envoy for North Korea. Facing a nuclear-armed North Korea and an increasingly assertive China, Biden stressed his faith in traditional US alliances. Biden called the US-South Korean partnership "the linchpin of peace, security" and promised a "shared approach" to the stand-off with North Korea.

He said that during their talks at the White House he and Moon discussed "freedom of navigation" for international shipping in the South China Sea, as well as "peace and stability" around Taiwan, which has been subjected to growing Chinese saber-rattling. Moon called denuclearization of the Korean peninsula "the most urgent common task".

US relations with historic allies in Asia and Europe suffered turbulence under Donald Trump, who recast long-standing partners as cutthroat business competitors and freeloaders. Biden has worked quickly to restore the previous balance, with an eye on the challenge from China. Moon came to Washington as Biden's second foreign guest and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, who visited last month, was the first.

"It should send a clear message about the importance of these partnerships and alliances that

the first bilateral meetings the president has had ... are with Japan and South Korea," White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki told reporters Friday.

War hero

Upon his arrival for the talks with Biden, Moon declared that South Korea and the United States share the "same soul", forged in their bloody Cold War-era conflict with North Korea at the start of the 1950s. Symbolizing the deep, complex history behind those bonds, Moon was invited to witness Biden awarding the Medal of Honor - the highest US military decoration for bravery - to a 94-year-old US veteran of the Korean War.

Then first lieutenant Ralph Puckett was wounded in 1950 while leading US and Korean soldiers in the desperate defense of a hill against an overwhelming force of Chinese troops - an early episode in Beijing's decisive entry into the war. The White House said this was the first time any foreign leader had taken part in a Medal of Honor ceremony.

Biden-Kim meeting unlikely

Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo and her South Korean counterpart held separate talks involving a raft of CEOs with a focus on high-tech manufacturing - battery technology, semi-conductors and 5G wireless. But the bulk of the Biden-Moon meeting was on China and the North Korean nuclear arsenal. Reflecting the scale and complexity of both issues, however, it was no surprise that little concrete emerged - in public at least.

The White House says it is abandoning former attempts to reach a so-called "grand bargain" with Pyongyang or simply showing what diplomats termed "strategic patience". Now the White House is touting "a calibrated practical approach" - diplo-



WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden (right) and South Korean President Moon Jae-in participate in a joint press conference in the East Room of the White House in Washington, DC. —AFP

matic jargon, it seems, for being realistically low-key, while open-minded. "We understand where previous efforts in the past had difficulties and we've tried to learn from those," a senior White House official said.

Asked if Biden would consider following up Trump's headline-grabbing but ultimately fruitless summits with North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un,

the US president said it would have to be an entirely different terms. Biden said he "would not meet" unless there was a concrete plan for negotiating on the nuclear arsenal. And he made a clear criticism of Trump's chummy relationship with Kim, saying he "would not do what had been done in the recent past. I would not give him all he's looking for - international recognition". —AFP

Will COVID catastrophe hurt Modi?

NEW DELHI: India is suffering a coronavirus catastrophe with millions of infections and nearly 300,000 dead but it is likely to have a limited impact on the political fortunes of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Here's why.

How bad is the situation?

A massive surge in cases has overwhelmed the health system in many areas. Officially, the death toll is nearing 300,000. But many experts say the true figure could be three or four times higher - and maybe more. Hundreds of bodies have been dumped in rivers or buried in shallow graves. Barely three percent of people are fully vaccinated. India's top virologist recently quit a scientific advisory panel after criticizing the government's "stubborn resistance to evidence-based policymaking".

Was the government complacent?

In early 2021 it appeared India might have overcome the pandemic. India has "saved the world from disaster by bringing the situation under control," Modi said on Jan 28. Huge political rallies for a string of elections and mass religious gatherings went ahead, including the Kumbh Mela with millions of mostly maskless pilgrims. The authorities did little to prepare for another wave of infections, critics say. Oxygen production was not increased and field hospitals were dismantled.

Has Modi's popularity suffered?

Two recent surveys, Twitter hashtags like

#Modiresign and a barrage of anecdotal evidence strongly suggest so. Emblematic for many is the fact that all the while work has continued on a grandiose revamp of the Indian parliament area. "(Bodies) are literally floating in the river Ganga," said student Oindrila Ghosh, 19. "Why is the government prioritizing this (project) more than the health and safety of the public?"

Some rank-and-file supporters of Modi's Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP) are unhappy. The government "made a terrible mistake by not planning for a COVID second wave disaster," Amit, 38, a self-declared "hard-core" BJP supporter told AFP. "This will make people like me not vote in the next election for the BJP, or any party."

Shailja Jain, 28, said since voting for Modi in 2019 her support had already taken a hit from the BJP's "fascist, communal, casteist, hyper-capitalist agenda". "But their handling of the COVID-19 pandemic was the absolute last straw," the chartered accountant told AFP.

How is Modi fighting back?

Helped by its social media army, the BJP has gone on the offensive, blaming state governments and others for ignoring what it says were Modi's repeated warnings of a second wave. This week the BJP released a "toolkit" purportedly compiled by the opposition Congress party aimed at "spreading fake, negative news and stirring up discontent". Congress called it bogus and Twitter labelled a tweet by the BJP's national spokesman featuring screenshots of the alleged masterplan as "manipulated media".

Will it hurt Modi long term?

The BJP failed to win the state election in West Bengal and did poorly in some constituencies in Uttar Pradesh. Some attribute this to Modi's handling of the pandemic. But local issues were big in these elections, and the BJP did well in Assam and Puducherry and

ble to the virus," the Roma activist told AFP.

Anti-vaccine sentiment

Often blamed for petty crime, the Roma—who make up around seven percent of Hungary's population of 9.8 million—face widespread poverty and exclusion from mainstream Hungarian society and sometimes racially-motivated violence. Many live in one of around 1,300 mostly-Roma settlements on the edge of villages and towns like Kistarcsa that house approximately 200,000 people, according to official data. Radics told AFP that some 13,500 settlement dwellers have registered for the job so far thanks to the campaign. "There's a long way to go. We look for local leaders in each community to continue the project once we leave to go to another settlement," he said.

The campaign also produced videos made for sharing on social media that feature Roma celebrities like rappers to appeal to younger age-groups, as well as singers who are trusted by older people. "The government's vaccination promotion billboards only feature white faces, so the videos provide strong Roma voices to counter the anti-vaccination voices that are common in places like this," Radics said. Trained by health workers, the activists are

gram yet to air. "Aung San Suu Kyi is in good health. She's been staying at home and will appear in court in a few days," he said in an excerpt released on social media Saturday.

The general was speaking in Burmese and his comments were translated into Chinese by the network. Asked about Suu Kyi's political achievements, the military leader said: "In short, she has done everything she can." Suu Kyi has not been seen in public since she was placed under house arrest. She has been hit with a string of criminal charges including flouting coronavirus restrictions during last year's election campaign and possessing unlicensed walkie-talkies. The most serious charge alleges that she violated the country's colonial-era Official



AMRITSAR: Activists of the National Students' Union of India (NSUI) place a banner on the billboard with a picture of India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi and a message in Punjabi reading "Mr. Modi, Why did you send our vaccines abroad?". —AFP

made substantial gains in West Bengal despite failing to clinch the state.

Nationally, the only real rival is the ailing Congress, and the next general election isn't scheduled till 2024. "The Congress has completely collapsed everywhere," said Kanchan Gupta from the Observer Research Foundation. "Once initial anger subsides, people (will) start looking at things more rationally," Gupta told AFP.

Michael Kugelman from the Wilson Centre said the current situation "will be forgotten soon enough". This is the case even if the pandemic continues. "Modi is likely to go into the next election from a position of strength - no matter how the pandemic plays out," he told AFP. But Pratap Bhanu Mehta, a contributor to the Indian Express daily, is not so sure. "This crisis is so personal to most people, it's not an abstract crisis. It's not happening to other people, it's happening everywhere," he said. —AFP



KISTARCSA, Hungary: Local residents wait for their registration for the COVID-19 vaccination in Kistarcsa near Budapest, Hungary. —AFP

armed with answers to typical questions about the side-effects and effectiveness of jabs, as well as how to deal with aggressive anti-vaccine sentiment. "We don't try to convince anyone, just to give them information," said Radics's activist colleague Fruzsina Balogh, adding that conspiracy theories around vaccines have deterred many Roma. —AFP

Secrets Act. Suu Kyi is expected to appear in person in court yesterday for the first time, after weeks of delays to her legal case. Her legal team have faced an uphill battle to meet with their client in private.

The junta on Friday threatened to dissolve Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party over alleged voter fraud in the 2020 election. Union Election Commission chair Thein Soe said an investigation into November's election result was almost complete. "What shall we do with the (NLD) party that (acted) illegally? Should we dissolve the party or charge those who committed this (illegal activity) as traitors of the nation? We will analyse and consider taking this action," he said, in a video posted to a local media outlet's Facebook page. —AFP

Countries urge patent waivers than just jabs

GENEVA: Dozens of countries have revised a proposal at the WTO for patent waivers for medical tools needed to combat COVID, insisting it must be broader than just vaccines, non-governmental organizations said yesterday. More than 60 countries have presented a revision of their text before the World Trade Organization on ditching intellectual property protections for COVID-19 jabs and other medical tools while the pandemic rages, according to the Doctors Without Borders (MSF) charity and NGO Knowledge Ecology International (KEI).

KEI published what it said was the revised text, which pushed for the waiver to be broad and long-lasting. The WTO did not immediately verify the authenticity of the document, but a Western diplomat close to the waiver discussions confirmed it was genuine and had been distributed to all WTO members. That text said the waiver should cover all medical "prevention, treatment and containment" tools needed to battle COVID.

In addition to vaccines, it should include treatments, diagnostics, vaccines, medical devices and protective equipment, along with the material and components needed to produce them, it said. It also said the waiver should last for "at least three years" from the date it takes effect, following which, the WTO's General Council should determine whether it could be lifted or should be prolonged.

'Frightening increase'

"We are pleased to see the governments sponsoring the COVID-19 intellectual property waiver proposal reaffirm that the waiver aims to remove monopoly barriers for all medical tools ... needed to tackle this pandemic," MSF South Asia chief Leena Manghaney said in a statement. "With a frightening increase in infections and deaths in developing countries, and with potentially promising treatments in the pipeline, it is crucial that governments have every flexibility at their disposal to beat back this pandemic," she said.

The WTO has since October faced calls led by India and South Africa for the temporary removal of such IP protections, in what proponents argue will boost production in developing countries and address the dramatic inequity in access. That notion has long met with fierce opposition from pharmaceutical giants and their host countries, which insisted patents were not the main roadblocks to scaling up production and warned the move could hamper innovation.

The positions appeared to shift earlier this month, when Washington came out in support of a global patent waiver for the jabs, with other long-time opponents voicing openness to discuss the matter. The European Parliament voted narrowly this week to urge Brussels to get behind the proposal. Observers have however said the ambitions for the waiver appear to differ significantly among the longtime supporters and those now coming around to the idea, who have seemed to focus more narrowly on vaccines.

It remains unclear if countries will be able to see eye to eye, but with the pandemic that has killed over 3.4 million people still far from over, there is intense pressure on them to do so. With the new revision on the table, MSF called for "governments to immediately move towards text-based negotiations," insisting there was no time to lose.

In light of the WTO's usual glacial pace in decision-making - with agreements requiring consensus backing by all 164 member states - a deal could meanwhile take time. According to MSF, more than 100 countries overall now support the proposal, including China and Russia. A full 62 countries are now official co-sponsors of the proposal, with Indonesia, Fiji, Vanuatu and Namibia having joined in recent weeks. —AFP

Hungary's Roma battle COVID on their own

KISTARCSA, Hungary: Hungary's Roma community has been largely left out of the country's aggressive COVID-19 immunization rollout and has been forced to fend for itself, leaders of the poverty-stricken minority say. "No one else is looking after us, so we have to do it ourselves," said Jozsef Radics, 53, one of the organizers of the "Vaccines for Life!" campaign that aims to sign up Roma living in isolated communities for jabs.

Greeting local residents as they enter a ramshackle yard on the edge of Kistarcsa, a small town east of Budapest, Radics explains the registration process, sets up email addresses if needed and inputs their data into an official database. "These people are disadvantaged in many ways, including lacking information and access to the internet, which makes them particularly vulnera-

Myanmar's Suu Kyi in good health, says junta leader

YANGON: Myanmar's junta chief has said deposed civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi is in good health and will appear in court within days during the general's first television interview since the coup. Min Aung Hlaing, who toppled Suu Kyi in a February 1 putsch, gave a two-hour interview to Hong Kong's Phoenix Television on Thursday, with the full pro-

Business

SUNDAY, MAY 23, 2021

IMF proposes \$50bn plan to end pandemic

Gap between rich and poor countries in accessing vaccines addressed

WASHINGTON: The IMF on Friday proposed a \$50 billion plan to end the COVID-19 pandemic, with a target of vaccinating at least 40 percent of the world's population by the end of 2021. The modest financial commitment pales in comparison to the massive stimulus rolled out by rich nations, including the latest \$1.9 trillion US package approved in March. "One of the key messages of this proposal is that the amount that's needed is not very big," IMF chief economist Gita Gopinath told reporters.

The plan is dwarfed by the economic benefits the International Monetary Fund calculates would be gained by an early end to the pandemic, amounting to \$9 trillion from the faster economic recovery. IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva presented the plan to world leaders at the G20 Global Health Summit in Rome, that aims to have at least 60 percent of the

world's population vaccinated by the end of 2022.

But in addition to the global goal, the IMF seeks to address the gap between rich countries and poor in accessing the vaccines, she said. "Our proposal sets targets, estimates financing requirements, and lays out pragmatic action," Georgieva said. "For some time we have been warning of dangerous divergence of economic fortunes. It will only worsen as the gap widens between wealthy countries that have access to vaccines and poor countries that do not."

More support for Covax

As India faces a COVID emergency with more than 4,000 deaths daily, Georgieva warned that there will be no lasting end to the economic crisis without an end to the health crisis. The IMF called for more action by the G20 nations, including

grants, concessional lending and donations of COVID-19 vaccines and treatments.

At the end of April, less than two percent of the population of Africa had been vaccinated while more than 40 percent of the population in the United States and more than 20 percent in Europe had received at least one dose of vaccine, the IMF said. The fund is prioritizing closing the vaccine gap to put the world back on the path to growth to "help bring the pandemic substantially under control everywhere for everyone's benefit," Georgieva said.

Gopinath noted that the most costly investments, including vaccine development, were already made, but "there is a deep inequity in access to these vaccines". The IMF is calling for additional support for Covax, the global vaccine-sharing program created

to try to address unequal access. The initiative remains severely underfunded and has faced significant supply shortages.

Those subsidies would come through donations of surplus doses and ensuring the free cross-border flow of raw materials and vaccine, the IMF said. The \$50 billion is a combination of at least \$35 billion in grants - \$22 billion of which G20 nations have already pledged - and \$15 billion in low-cost lending, the IMF said.

Georgieva said rich nations are being asked to contribute most to this effort, but would see the bulk of the benefits. Those governments are likely to see "the highest return on public investment in modern history, capturing 40 percent of the GDP gains and roughly \$1 trillion in additional tax revenues," she said. — AFP

App Store would be 'toxic' mess without control: Apple CEO

SAN FRANCISCO: Apple's online marketplace would become a "toxic" mess if the iPhone maker were forced to allow third-party apps without reviewing them, chief executive Tim Cook told a high-stakes trial Friday challenging the company's tight control of its platform. Cook, the last scheduled witness in the case brought by Fortnite maker Epic Games, offered a robust defense of Apple's procedures for reviewing and approving all the apps it offers for iPhone and iPad users.

"We could no longer make the promise... of privacy, safety and security," without full control of the marketplace, Cook said under questioning from Apple attorney Veronica Moyer in federal court in California. Cook said Apple's review process helps keep out malicious software and other problematic apps, helping create a safe place for consumers. Without this review, the online marketplace "would become a toxic kind of mess," he said. "It would also be terrible for the developer, because the

developer depends on the store being a safe and trusted place."

Cook's testimony caps a high-profile trial which opened earlier this month in which Apple is accused of abusing a monopoly on its marketplace by creating a "walled garden" that squeezes app makers. Epic, maker of the popular Fortnite video game, is seeking to force Apple to open up the marketplace to third parties seeking to circumvent Apple's procedures and commissions of up to 30 percent. Apple booted Fortnite from its App Store last year after Epic dodged revenue sharing with the iPhone maker.

'Not about money'

Under cross-examination, Cook sparred with Epic lawyer Gary Bornstein about the profitability of the App Store. Cook disputed Epic's contention that its profit margin on apps was some 80 percent, but financial details were not disclosed in court due to confidentiality concerns. The Apple executive said the proprietary payments system challenged by Epic was about convenience for consumers, more than about profits. "We always put the user at the center of everything we do," Cook said. "It has nothing to do with money."

During his testimony, Cook defended Apple's policy of barring apps directing consumers to other platforms to purchase subscriptions or credits for games



OAKLAND: Apple CEO Tim Cook (obscured) waves as he leaves court with Apple general counsel Kate Adams following his testimony at the United States District Court on Friday. — AFP

and other services. "It would be akin to Best Buy advertising that you can go across the street to the Apple Store to buy an iPhone," he said. But District Court Judge Yvonne Gonzalez Rogers, in a series of harsh questions for Cook at the end of his testimony, suggested that Apple's cut is too high even if reduced to 15 percent after the first year. — AFP

Argentina's beloved beef becomes bone of contention

BUENOS AIRES: The grill master salts the cut of beef that will go into the fire, from where it heads to the table where a hungry family is gathered. It is an age-old ritual for Argentines to get together over a jaw-dropping "asado," but one that has grown increasingly out of the reach of many of them. "Aside from being nourishment, beef is the center of the whole barbecue culture we Argentines have," said Emmanuel Lapetina, president of La Pena meat-packers. "It is the get-together: it is the Sunday barbecue; and it is the excuse to get together with the family on weekends."

But all those heart-warming, stomach-inspiring moments of glory that people here experience with their grass-fed beef are under threat because of low purchasing power. Despite high international prices, local inflation has seen the cost of beef surge a stunning 65 percent. The government is keen to find a way to help more people be able to afford what

feels like a birth right.

But a pricing row between the government of center-left president Alberto Fernandez and livestock producers drove the latter to declare a nine-day production halt. "Nobody wants to stop eating 'asado'. It is in our culture to eat beef, that's why so there's so much tension when it gets very expensive," said Lapetina.

Argentina, recognized worldwide as a top flight grass-fed beef producer, is the world's number four beef exporter. It made 3.4 billion dollars in 2020 beef sales, with much going to Russia and China. Locals' love for prized cuts has actually turned beef into a hot black market commodity.

And meat producers are suspicious of government involvement. Back in 2006, when Nestor Kirchner was leading the country and Fernandez was his chief of staff, a restriction on meat exports, initially planned for six months, ended up being extended for 10 years. During that period, 12.5 million head of cattle and 19,000 jobs



BUENOS AIRES: A butcher works at the butcher's shop of the Don Julio restaurant in the Palermo neighborhood on May 20, 2021. — AFP

were lost that have not yet been recovered, according to the Chamber of Commerce of Meat and Derivatives.

Gustavo Caballero, 34, has been a grill master for seven years at Don Julio restaurant in Buenos Aires, recognized in 2020 as the best in Latin America by the prestigious 50 Best Restaurants ranking. Before the COVID-19 pandemic it had an average of 500 diners per day. "What I like, what I am really passionate about, is to see every time someone

comes and eats a good barbecue. When they leave happy, that is something very special for me," Caballero said, as the tables placed on the terrace outside for health reasons began to fill up. The restaurant goes to great lengths to procure the best meat. It has a refrigerator manager who goes to the market to look for the best cuts before any other buyers arrive, and since last year it has been running its own butcher shop in the Palermo neighborhood, one block from the restaurant. — AFP

Reps reject Biden infrastructure bill

WASHINGTON: Republican lawmakers have rejected a new White House infrastructure proposal that lowers the overall price tag in a bid to gain the opposition party's support, potentially raising the likelihood President Joe Biden's Democrats pass the measure on their own. The White House on Friday had proposed reducing the cost of the \$2.3 trillion American Jobs Plan to \$1.7 trillion by having other bills cover some of the projects it would pay for and cutting out some spending altogether, but a key Republican lawmaker said she still wouldn't support it.

"There continue to be vast differences between the White House and Senate Republicans when it comes to the definition of infrastructure, the magnitude of proposed spending and how to pay for it," said a spokeswoman for Shelley Moore Capito, who is part of a group of Republican senators negotiating with the Biden administration over the proposal.

"Based on today's meeting, the groups seem further apart after two meetings with White House staff than they were after one meeting with President Biden. Senate Republicans will further review the details in today's counteroffer and continue to

engage in conversations with the administration."

Biden had in March proposed the measure that would direct money towards fixing roads and bridges as well as expanding services like broadband internet and increasing climate change resiliency across the United States. But with his Democratic Party controlling Congress by a small margin, he is under pressure to find Republican support for the bill, and on Friday Press Secretary Jen Psaki said he would cut its cost down by \$500 billion "in the spirit of finding common ground".

"This proposal exhibits a willingness to come down in size, giving on some areas that are important to the president... while staying firm in areas that are most vital to rebuilding our infrastructure and industries of the future, making our country more competitive with China," she told reporters.

The Republican rejection increase the chances that Democrats will attempt to pass the measure through a parliamentary procedure that could see it clear the Senate without opposition votes, which the party's leader in the chamber has hinted they could do. There were also signs the party's progressive wing would not support a scaled-down bill. "A smaller infrastructure package means fewer jobs, less justice, less climate action, and less investment in America's future," Democratic Senator Ed Markey tweeted after the White House detailed the proposal. — AFP

Ethiopia grants new telecoms license in bid to revamp sector

ADDIS ABABA: Ethiopia has granted an operating license to a consortium of firms including Kenya's Safaricom, Vodafone and Vodacom, officials said yesterday, a move that will end the state's monopoly over its stunted telecoms sector. The consortium bid \$850 million for the license, senior finance ministry adviser Brook Taye told AFP. The shake-up of the potentially lucrative sector - currently dominated by state-owned Ethio Telecom - is a cornerstone of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's economic reform agenda.

Abiy, who is running for a new term in hotly anticipated national elections next month, hailed the news on Twitter yesterday, saying the consortium's bid "offered the highest licensing fee and a very solid investment case". He said the consortium would bring the largest infusion of foreign direct investment in Ethiopia to date, and that "our desire to take Ethiopia fully digital is on track."

Abiy's government planned to award two new telecoms licenses, but in late April it announced it

had received only two bids after some firms that initially expressed interest - including France's Orange and the UAE's Etisalat - opted not to submit. The second bid of \$600 million from South Africa's MTN was "not enough" and was therefore "rejected", Brook said. Balcha Reba, director general of the Ethiopian Communications Authority, told AFP that the second license would soon be re-tendered.

Risk factors

Ethiopia is currently mired in a six-month-old conflict in its northern Tigray region, and tensions are running high with Sudan and Egypt over issues including disputed border territory and Ethiopia's massive dam on the Blue Nile River. These factors might have discouraged some firms from bidding for a license, said Chiti Mbizule, analyst at Fitch Solutions.

"Although operators tend to take a more long-term view of the markets they are looking to enter, for the more risk averse players, it can't be ruled out that the political and economic outlook could play some role in their decision to hold off entering the market at this stage," Mbizule said. Some companies might have also been put off by a central bank directive that had prevented foreign-owned firms from providing mobile financial services. — AFP

G7 to end state financing for coal power plants

LONDON: The Group of Seven wealthy nations on Friday agreed to end state financing of coal-fired power plants by the end of this year, and to "mostly decarbonize" electricity supplies in the 2030s. Ahead of a leaders meeting in Britain next month, G7 countries' climate and environment ministers also reaffirmed their commitment to limit keep temperature rises below 1.5 degrees Celsius by 2050, following a two-day virtual meeting.

Scientists say any increases beyond that will trigger uncontrollable climate change. "Recognizing that continued global investment in unabated coal power generation is incompatible with keeping 1.5C within reach, we stress that international investments in unabated coal must stop now," the ministers said.

UK lawmaker Alok Sharma, who is president-designate of the COP26 UN climate summit to be held in Glasgow in November, said the consensus was "a clear signal to the world that coal is on the way out". The move follows a recommendation from the International Energy Agency earlier this week that all future fossil fuel projects must be scrapped if the world is to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 and limit warming to 1.5C.

German Environment Minister Svenja Schulze called the agreement "an important step forward" that gave credibility to industrialized nations to urge others to follow suit. Her French counterpart, Barbara Pompili, said it "sets the stage for a radical transition towards clean energy", hailing Japan, which had resisted, for getting on board.

The G7 countries - Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United States and Britain - are home to major carmakers, and further agreed to "significantly accelerate" the shift away from petrol in the transport industry within the decade. Fossil fuels should also be mostly phased out from G7 countries' electricity supplies by the 2030s.

The grouping reiterated that it aimed to eliminate "inefficient fossil fuel subsidies" by 2025 and encouraged all countries to follow suit. Meanwhile it vowed to "champion" new global biodiversity targets, including conserving or protecting at least 30 percent of global land and at least 30 percent of the global ocean by 2030 to halt, and reverse biodiversity loss. — AFP

Business

Too thirsty? France's Volvic blamed as streams run dry

Water shortages already impacting region's biodiversity

VOLVIC, France: The lush volcanic hills surrounding Volvic in central France have long been a source of mineral water prized worldwide, but locals and geologists warn that too much is now being pumped out, putting the entire region at risk. "We used to have water up to our knees and the stream could turn two mills," said Pierre Grodecoeur, 69, pointing out the flow outside the house where he was born in Les Moulins Blancs.

The mills are long gone, Grodecoeur said, and these days the stream bed is often dry. His village in the Auvergne region is just down the road from the hulking Volvic bottling plant owned by French food and beverage giant Danone. Since 2014, the government has allowed Danone to bottle up to 2.8 million cubic meters a year - or 2.8 billion one-liter bottles. That translates into an extraction of nearly 89 liters per second from the Volvic water table, compared with just 15.6 liters when bottling operations first began in 1965.

But at the nearby fish hatchery of Saint-Genest-l'Enfant, a registered landmark dating from the 17th century where the Volvic source naturally emerges, there are now some months when no water flows at all. The owner, Edouard de Feligonde, had to shut down the fishery a few years ago after duckweed formed slick green films over basins that became stagnant for lack of current. "Danone is destroying a historical monument so that it can send its bits of plastic to the other side of the world," said Feligonde, who is waging a legal battle against the multinational with the lawyer and former environment minister Corinne Lepage.

'Desertification'

Robert Durand, a geologist, told AFP that the aver-

age flow rate at the Volvic source had fallen to 50 liters per second, far below the 470 liters per second measured in 1927. Water shortages are already impacting the region's biodiversity by reducing the natural humidity of the forested hills. "It can be described as the beginning of a desertification," said Christian Amblard, an expert with France's CNRS research institute in Clermont-Ferrand, the historic capital of Auvergne.

He cited declines in black alder trees and the siskin songbirds that nest in them, and in ash trees and golden orioles. "Only the hand of man and Volvic are responsible," he said. Laurent Campos-Hugueney, a farmer and member of the Water is a Public Good collective, said streams around Volvic no longer flow strongly enough to support irrigation. "There hasn't been any plant or vegetable operations in the area for several years," he said.

But Jerome Gros, director at the Volvic bottling site, disputed the claim that his operations were sucking the waterbed dry and said Danone was investing heavily in protecting the source. "We have saved 380 million litres between 2017 and 2020 even as sales remained stable," Gros told AFP. In 2014, for example, Volvic needed to pump out two liters to fill a one-liter bottle, with the excess used for sterilizing and rinsing equipment. "Today we're down to just 1.4 liters for every liter bottled," he said.

'Shooting itself in the foot'

Critics are not convinced, noting that Volvic pumps up water from up to 100 meters deep, and that stream depletions cannot be ascribed to the weather since rainfall has remained steady over the past years. "It's like you're emptying a bathtub from the bottom,"

purchase lab-grown chicken composed from animal muscle cells.

The alternative food industry was already on the rise before the pandemic, with startups like Beyond Meat and Impossible Foods winning praise for vegan items that surprised many consumers with their likeness to meat in terms of taste, odor and texture. In April 2019, Burger King made waves after launching the first vegan version of its popular "Whopper" sandwich. Since then, most big fast-food chains have followed suit, while producers have joined Nestle in introducing meatless supermarket products.

During COVID-19, meat alternatives enjoyed a temporary surge in interest as some consumers sought healthier products. Sales of Beyond Meat products spiked initially before moderating. The surge also came as production problems, due partly to COVID-19 outbreaks, temporarily curtailed conventional meat availability, though supplies later stabilized. "The pandemic opened people's eyes to the risks of the meat industry, the relative fragility of its value chain," said Jan Dutkiewicz, a fellow at Concordia University and Harvard Law School who writes often on food and environmental studies.

Investor interest in alternative meat is keen in part because of the environmental costs of conventional



VOLVIC, France: An employee works at the French mineral water company Volvic on May 5, 2021. — AFP

said Francois-Dominique de Larouziere, a geologist who is member of the local Preva environmental preservation group.

Authorities have also allowed Volvic to spread its volume allotment over the entire year, meaning it can pump more in summer when demand spikes, leaving everyone else high and dry. The government's top official for the region, Philippe Chopin, told a parliamentary commission in April that "environmental conditions, in particular drought, caused a drop in the aquifer that we do not believe can be blamed" on

Volvic's extractions.

His assertions were rejected by many in Volvic, where the issuance of building permits was suspended last August because of the risk of drinking water shortages - though the mayor denied any proof that Volvic's operations were the cause. "How can you tell people they can't water three tomato plants in the middle of summer, when they see full trucks leaving this factory?" De Larouziere said. "Danone is shooting itself in the foot, but when the faucet stops running, it's going to be painful." — AFP

Oatly surge shows alternative food hot commodity

NEW YORK: The rousing stock market debut of dairy alternative Oatly underlines anew people's enduring appetite for vegan products. If anything, that hunger has grown during the COVID-19 pandemic. Following a heady Nasdaq debut on Thursday and another surge in Friday's session, the Swedish food company is now valued at about \$13 billion, a lofty level for one that took in \$421 million in revenues last year from sales of oat-based milk, ice cream and other products not made with space-age technology.

Oatly is far from alone in the emerging space. Earlier this month, Nestle launched a new non-dairy milk made with peas, adding to a slate of plant-based options for burgers, sausages and tuna. At its vast chain of coffee shops, Starbucks now offers four creamers made from something other than cow's milk: soy, almonds, coconut and, since March, oats. And in Singapore, since December consumers have the option to

purchase lab-grown chicken composed from animal muscle cells.

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Investor interest in alternative meat is keen in part because of the environmental costs of conventional



CHICAGO: Oatly oat milk and chocolate oat milk are seen on May 20, 2021. —AFP

meat production, as well as concerns about animal welfare. Investments in alternative food tripled in 2020 to \$3.1 billion, according to the Good Food Institute, a nonprofit. This included \$2.1 billion for plant-based meat, egg and dairy companies; \$360 million for cultivated meat companies; and \$590 million for fermentation companies devoted to protein alternatives. — AFP

Polish firm opens cutting-edge solar energy plant

WROCLAW: A Polish company on Friday launched the world's first industrial production line of solar panels based on groundbreaking perovskite technology, which could revolutionize access to solar power. Named after the Baltic goddess of the sun, Saule Technologies makes sheets of solar panels using a novel inkjet printing procedure invented by company founder Olga Malinkiewicz.

"We're scaling up, going from laboratory to production line," said Malinkiewicz, whose firm is based in the southern city of Wroclaw. The cutting-edge technology has been in the works for close to a decade but the plant opening comes at a fortuitous time, as the EU member is experiencing a solar boom.

Poland has long relied on coal for most of its energy needs but under an

EU plan to cut emissions, its mines are set to shut by 2049. Photovoltaic panels coated with perovskite film are light, flexible and can easily be fixed to almost any surface to produce electricity even inside buildings.

Manufacturing costs are down thanks to the inkjet printing procedure for perovskites, which makes it possible to produce the panels under lower temperatures. Malinkiewicz developed the processing method in 2013 while still a PhD student at the University of Valencia in Spain. Her discovery earned her an article in the journal Nature as well as an award from MIT and top spot in a competition organised by the European Commission.

Now, "we're opening the world's first factory of perovskite solar cells," she told AFP. She said "demand already exceeds production capacity", which is



WROCLAW: An employee of Polish firm Saule Technologies walks past a production unit for solar panels on May 20, 2021. —AFP

estimated initially at an annual 40,000 sq m.

In the Himalayas and outer space The first commercial orders have come in from the Internet of Things and construction sectors. The technology

involved consists of printing layers of photovoltaic cells onto transparent plastic sheets. The panels can be made very small or large, and can also be cut down in size or glued together to cover greater surface areas. —AFP

After battle, hedge fund wins Tribune newspaper chain

WASHINGTON: A hedge fund won approval Friday after a bitter campaign to acquire Tribune Publishing and create the second-largest US newspaper chain, raising fears of deeper newsroom cuts in the troubled sector. Tribune shareholders approved the deal to sell the group to Alden Global Capital, rejecting pleas from unions and media watchdogs who have blasted the investment group for drastic newsroom job cuts it has made at its other media properties.

The transaction assigned a \$633 million value to the group, which includes the New York Daily News, Baltimore Sun, Orlando Sentinel, South Florida's Sun-Sentinel, Virginia's Daily Press and Virginian-Pilot, Hartford Courant and The Morning Call in Allentown, Pennsylvania. Combining the dailies with Alden's other properties will create the second-largest US newspaper group behind USA Today owner Gannett, industry analysts say. Alden, which already owned about one-third of Tribune shares, will take the company private, delisting its shares, in the deal set to close June 30.

The sale comes after a failed alternate bid from Maryland billionaire Stewart Bainum, who wanted to create a nonprofit news operation at the newspaper in Baltimore and possibly others. The deal heightened concerns that Alden would follow its policy of deep newsroom cuts to boost profitability at its media operations.

"Alden has a track record of cutting local newsrooms to the bone," said Jon Schless, president of the NewsGuild, which represents journalists at some of the Tribune dailies. "Alden's playbook of massive cuts will mean fewer journalists able to cover their communities, hold the power to account and provide a voice to the voiceless." Chicago Tribune reporter and NewsGuild representative Gregory Pratt tweeted after the vote: "We are all deeply concerned by Alden Global Capital's purchase of Tribune Publishing. It is a sad, sobering day for journalism. @chicagotribune and the city we love. But we will continue to fight for a better newsroom and each other." — AFP

Healthcare...for New Kuwait

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Business

Markaz installs electric vehicle charging stations in its apartment buildings in Kuwait

KUWAIT: In line with the growing trend for electric vehicle ownership in Kuwait, and to better serve the tenants' needs, Kuwait Financial Centre KPSC "Markaz" recently installed electric vehicle charging stations at two of its properties in Kuwait. The charging stations located in dedicated parking spaces in Al Nada Tower in Dasman and Al Maha Tower in Bneid Al Gar are operational and tenants can use the facilities free of cost.

Commenting on the announcement, Khaled Al-Dousari, Analyst, MENA Real Estate, Markaz, said: "The installation of the charging stations reflects our commitment to delivering added value to our clients and enhancing the appeal and performance of our assets. Putting customers at the heart of our business, we develop commercial and residential real estate solutions that match the current and future needs of our valued tenants. We also attach great importance to making improvements to our offerings in line with new trends in the market and to the fullest satisfaction of our customers to maintain longer tenancy, lower turnover, and higher occupancy."

Al-Dousari added: "Markaz has placed sustainability at the heart of its business model and the electric vehicle charging stations at our properties demonstrate how it permeates through

various aspects of our business and operations. We hope the new facilities, which represent our contribution towards achieving net-zero carbon footprint in Kuwait through our smart, environmentally friendly, and sustainable properties, will inspire our tenants and our stakeholders to adopt electric vehicles and embrace renewable solutions to reduce carbon emissions."

Growing environmental concerns means that Corporate Social Responsibility has become more important than ever. The integration of social and environmental concerns in business operations and interaction with stakeholders will achieve a balance of economic, environmental and social imperatives, while at the same time addressing the expectations of clients and stakeholders.

Markaz has always been keen on doing business responsibly and sustainably and has adopted the best standards, processes, and procedures to ensure that its operations and offerings generated meaningful impacts on people, clients, the community, and the environment.

In keeping with this commitment, the company launched its second Sustainability Report in November 2020, covering the reporting period of 2018 and 2019. The report, which is in alignment with the United Nations Development Program's Sustainable Development Goals and the Kuwait National Development Plan (KNDDP), was aimed at measuring and evaluating its sustainability performance and reporting the results transparently to both its internal and external stakeholders.

It is worth mentioning that Markaz Real Estate Fund (MREF) has achieved since its inception in 2003 an annualized IRR of 7.61 percent and a total return of 6.42 percent. It currently owns 17 income-generating properties that are distributed between investment and commercial properties across Kuwait's prime locations. Furthermore, MREF has a total AUM of KD 68 million (as of April 2021) and has developed two main projects (Al Nada and Al Maha Towers).

In the heart of Dasman, Al Nada Tower is a 27-floor high-end residential tower overlooking Gulf Road. Similarly, Al



Khaled Al-Dousari



Maha Tower, situated in Bneid Al Gar, has 22 floors with spectacular views. Both are ideal destinations due to their strategic locations near the city centers, trade zones and famous shopping centers.

Adding to that, they feature superior amenities including rooftop infinity pools, fully equipped gyms, rooftop

barbeque area, high-speed Internet, 24/7 security services, landscaped gardens, and outdoor and indoor children play areas that enable kids to safely enjoy. These amenities offer tremendous possibilities for achieving comfort, security, an independent lifestyle and enhanced quality of life.

Capital Intelligence affirms investment grade rating for Kamco

KUWAIT: Kamco Invest, a regional non-banking financial powerhouse with one of the largest AUMs in the region, announced that Capital Intelligence Ratings has maintained Long- and Short-Term Corporate Ratings of Kamco Invest at 'BBB' and 'A3', respectively. Despite the impact on the Kuwait economy from the drop in oil prices, economic impacts and imposed restrictions due to COVID-19, the outlook on the ratings remains 'Stable'.

Capital Intelligence believes that COVID-19 will remain a global public health issue for some time to come, but one that will differ in its impact depending on the geography and wealth of individual countries. In general terms, wealthier countries will have greater resilience in terms of providing financial support to

both companies and citizens, with Kuwait strongly placed in this category. Previously, Capital Intelligence were too optimistic when they assumed that COVID-19 represented a temporary but severe shock to most economies and that the ease of restrictions to allow economic activity and financial conditions will begin to return to normalcy by Q4 2020.

Aside from the country's economic and financial outlook, Capital Intelligence stated that Kamco Invest's main credit strength for its rating is the Company's business model with substantial assets under management (AUM). This provides a large and stable revenue stream aside from the growing investment banking business although transaction volumes are still being hampered by government anti-COVID-19 measures.

The real estate platform is generating regular asset management fees and although the geograph-



Faisal M Sarkhou

ical expansion has made a limited earnings contribution to date, it offers considerable opportunities for the future. Further key credit strengths include low leverage and debt-equity ratios on a net basis, sound liquidity and low refinancing risk, backed by a strong and capable management team.

Faisal Mansour Sarkhou, Chief Executive Officer, commented, "Capital Intelligence's investment grade rating of Kamco Invest's reaffirms the strength of the Company's financial position, business model and management capabilities despite the disruptions caused by the pandemic." It is worth noting that Kamco Invest has assets under management of KD 4.02bn (\$13.3bn) and enjoys a strong financial position and a healthy capital structure with KD 52.7mn in shareholders' equity, a net debt to equity ratio of 0.29x, with 25.7 percent of total assets in cash & cash equivalent as of March 31, 2021.

Sarkhou concluded, "We will continue to uphold our commitment towards our stakeholders as we mitigate the risks of the pandemic, while effectively seeking new investment opportunities and solutions for our valued clients. With the government's ongoing vaccination campaign and Kuwait's path towards normalcy, we are optimistic about the future."

AUB congratulates winner of Al-Hassad Eid Al-Fitr draw

KUWAIT: In accordance with full preventive guidelines and measures set by health authorities, Ahli United Bank (AUB) held the Eid Al-Fitr draw on May 19, 2021 of Al-Hassad Islamic account, which is the very first draw account in Islamic banking in Kuwait and has won the "Best Savings Product in Kuwait 2019" by the prestigious Banker Middle East Magazine for the numerous unique features it provides. Al-Hassad Islamic account offers over 750 prizes over a 12-month period and has reshaped the lives of thousands lucky winners.

The bank announced the KD 100,000 Eid Al-Fitr draw winner as Mariam Abdullah Al-Enezi. The draws of Al-Hassad include several cash prizes, such as KD 100,000 each Eid and the grand quarterly

draw of KD 250,000 prize which continues to be a key aspiration for customers who are wishing to fulfill their dreams. Al Hassad offers 20 weekly prizes of KD 1,000 for each winner.

In addition to this attractive package of rewards, Al-Hassad Islamic account incorporates a wakala contract for projected annual profits, making this account beneficial to all customer segments that are aspiring to build their short and long-term savings through a unique savings account with many advantages.

For the first time in Kuwait, the AUB Al-Hassad presents the "Privilege Draw", which is a quarterly draw of KD 25,000 exclusively for Al-Hassad customers who maintained their balances for more than one year and have not won a prize in the past five years. For all draws, the clients are eligible for one draw chance for each KD 50 deposited in their Al-Hassad account.

It is worth mentioning that Al-Hassad Islamic account has won the "Best Savings Product in Kuwait 2019" by the prestigious Banker Middle East Magazine for the numerous unique features it



provides. Such features include the simplest and easiest program, highest number of winners, largest prize value, unique draws during Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha, loyalty multipliers, unique online account opening feature, transparent draws held during radio shows with live broadcast on the Bank's social media platforms.

MTC wins highest 5 Star award from Mitsubishi Motors

KUWAIT: Maseelah Trading Co (MTC), the sole authorized distributor of Mitsubishi vehicles in Kuwait since 1972, has won another prestigious award from Mitsubishi Motors Middle East and Africa (MMMEA). MTC stood 1st amongst Mitsubishi distributors in the Middle East and Africa and won a 5 Star Gold Award in After Sales for Business Excellence.

MTC achieved this award for faring consistently high in Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI), Fix It Right First Time (FIRFT), parts and accessory business growth and retention of customers together with Dealer Operating Standards (DOS) certification of more of our service centers. This is the second consecutive year Maseelah trading retaining this prestigious position in the region.

The award was announced by MMMEA senior leadership team last month during the Annual after-sales virtual meeting. Maseelah Trading Co (MTC) offers Mitsubishi customers and owners the best value and services in Kuwait, and invites them to visit their Showroom at Al-Rai area on the Fourth Ring Road from 8:30 am to 8:00 pm.



KFH continues its support of 'Diraya' campaign

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) continues its active participation in Diraya banking awareness campaign launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) and in collaboration with the Kuwait Banking Association (KBA), by publishing educational and awareness materials on social media platforms and on different channels, with the aim of shedding light on the rights of customers and making them aware of their obligations when dealing with banks.

KFH support of the "Diraya" comes from its firm belief in the importance of enhancing financial literacy among various segments of society and making the best use of banking services in their diversity and comprehensiveness.



The campaign aims to raise awareness of the customer's rights regarding personal finance operations, whether consumer or residential loans, the mechanism

for submitting complaints about banking services, various bank cards, ways to avoid exposure to fraud, and awareness of high-risk investments and other important related issues. KFH constantly organizes training courses for its employees to raise their expertise in the field of fraud and combating financial crimes, especially electronic crimes, and urges them to share this information in a simple and focused manner with customers through direct contact on service delivery sites and through social media tools and channels.

The "Diraya" awareness campaign comes in support of the objectives of CBK and its community program aimed at spreading banking culture among all members of society, and raising public awareness of the most important financial issues and how to protect assets from fraud, not to mention clarifying the role of the banking sector in general and banking products it provides in particular. The campaign includes presenting a set of instructions, tutorials and advice that are periodically published through various media outlets and social media platforms in collaboration with KBA and local banks, and will continue until the end of this year.

Logitech announces Bahar and Partners as distribution partner

KUWAIT: Logitech designs products and experiences that bring people together through music, gaming, video and computing. The company has announced the appointment of Mohamed Abdulrahman Al-Bahar and Partners as its partner for its video conferencing range of products.

The announcement was made on a webinar attended by Loubna Imenchal, Head of Video Conferencing, Africa, Middle East, Turkey, Central & East Asia- Logitech; Abraham Mammen, Head of Video Collaboration - GCC & Levant, Logitech; Ihab Al-Khatib, Group General Manager, Bahar Kuwait Holding Group; Abdullateef Hamad M A Al-Bahar, Bahar Kuwait Group Holding Family Representative; and Ankur Saluja, Divisional Manager, Al-Bahar & Partners.

Established in 1961, Bahar & Partners is a market leading enterprise solution provider that offers comprehensive solutions and services for enterprise customers in electronic chip cards, payment technologies, video conferencing, digital collaboration, audio visual solutions, security, surveillance automation, and print and digital imaging.

This announcement is in line with Logitech's aim of bringing the benefits of its video conferencing solutions to more organizations across key verticals including healthcare, education, and government. Logitech is empowering partners including Bahar & Partners to engage, provide support and serve local customer needs.

Speaking on the occasion Loubna Imenchal said, "This collaboration provides the best solutions to our customers in Kuwait who can benefit from improved communication, greater efficiency and a more highly motivated workforce with Logitech's innovative video conferencing solutions and Al-Bahar's market expertise."

Ihab Al-Khatib said, "We are very excited to welcome Logitech to the Al-Bahar Group portfolio. With the rapidly changing corporate environment, there are many growth opportunities for Logitech and Bahar & Partners across education, healthcare and other sectors to provide digitally enhanced collaborative workspace and learning solutions."

Logitech is ramping up market access to its latest lineup of video conferencing products in Kuwait. As Logitech's distribution partner for video collaboration solutions in Kuwait, Al-Bahar will help bring Logitech's video collaboration products and tools to many verticals including healthcare, education, banking and many more. The partnership can facilitate joint initiatives across the business environment involving major strategic video conferencing services like Microsoft Teams and Zoom.

The Bahar & Partners' field sales and support team will support Logitech customers with a strong emphasis on after-sales operations, and increased customer satisfaction. Bahar & Partners has been able to demonstrate consistent growth across different business sectors by enhancing its solutions portfolio and creating infrastructure to facilitate market reach.



Tix from Norway performs the song "Fallen Angel" during the dress rehearsal of the final of the Eurovision Song Contest in Rotterdam. — AFP photos



Go_A from Ukraine performs the song "Shum" during the dress rehearsal of the final of the Eurovision Song Contest.



Manizha from Russia performs with the song 'Russian Woman'.



Jeangu Macrooy from the Netherlands performs the song "Birth Of A New Age" during the dress rehearsal of the final of the Eurovision Song Contest in Rotterdam.



The Roop from Lithuania performs the song "Discotheque".



Jendrik from Germany performs with the song 'I Don't Feel Hate'.

GLITTERY EUROVISION FINAL TO LIFT PANDEMIC GLOOM

The Eurovision Song Contest final returns in Rotterdam yesterday after a year off, bringing giant angel wings, cheesy lyrics and a message of hope in the time of coronavirus. Italy, France and Malta are the favorites to win a unique version of the love-it or hate-it kitschfest, which is defiantly going ahead in the Dutch port city under pandemic rules.

This year's theme is "Open Up", and measures including limited fan numbers and compulsory testing could be a model for events like Euro 2020 and the Tokyo Olympics as the world emerges from lockdown.

Organizers insist that the relentlessly upbeat contest, cancelled last year for the first time since it was created 65 years ago to unite war-blighted Europe through song, is more relevant than ever. "These are times where we are debating each other, fighting a pandemic. Now it's also time to have some fun," Eurovision project manager Dave Geensen told AFP this week.

They say the show must go on despite a number of scares, with Iceland ruled out of yesterday's live show after a band member tested positive, forcing them to

take part via a recorded performance instead. A similar fate has befallen 2019's Dutch winner Duncan Laurence, who came down with coronavirus symptoms during rehearsals this week.

'Impatience and joy'

However the focus during yesterday's final-one of the world's most watched television events with an audience of nearly 200 million people-will be on the music and the flamboyant costumes worn by the 26 finalists. Italian punk rockers Maneskin are the bookmakers' favorites, but French chanteuse Barbara Pravi is hoping to end her country's 44-year losing streak with her song "Voila". Often compared to legendary singer Edith Piaf, Pravi said it was "not pressure I feel, it's impatience and joy", despite a nation's hopes for a first win since 1977 riding on her shoulders. Malta's 18-year-old sensation Destiny Chukunyere has also attracted attention for her stunning voice and bold wardrobe choices, and is third favorite for her song "Je Me Casse" (French for "I'm outta here").

They will all be performing to an audience of just 3,500 fans who are allowed in the live audience at Rotterdam's cav-



Daði & Gagnamagnið from Iceland perform with the song '10 Years'.

ernous Ahoy Arena, only around one fifth of its full capacity. Audience members will have to wear masks when they move around but not while in their seats. Performers meanwhile have spent the week in a biosecure bubble and are strictly separated from members of the press and other staff at the venue. Everyone entering the site must be tested for coronavirus every 48 hours with a rapid breath test-and if that fails to produce a proper result with a nasal PCR swab-with

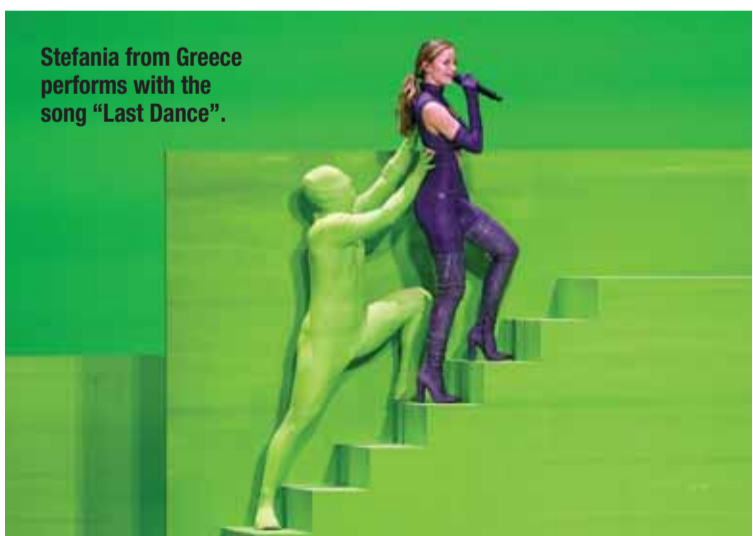
the result linked to their entry pass. The Dutch government allowed a live audience as part of its FieldLab programme, which has also carried out concerts and other events as it tries to open up social life.

'Nul points'

Some 3,500 fans were also allowed into each of this week's two semi-finals, which offered a glimpse of the weird and wonderful offerings in store. Highlights

included Cyprus' entry "El Diablo" (Spanish for "The Devil"), which has been accused of blasphemy and satanism by the Cyprus Orthodox Church and religious groups. Russia's contestant Manizha has angered conservatives with her song "Russian Woman"-even as she wowed audiences with a huge Russian doll-style dress that burst open to reveal the singer in a red boiler suit.

"I've hit a nerve," the Tajik-born refugee and feminist activist told AFP in March. Norway's contestant Tix, who took to the stage in huge white angel wings, takes his stage name from the tics that he suffers as a result of having Tourette's Syndrome. And tiny San Marino pulled off one of the surprises of the competition with a cameo from US rapper Flo Rida, helping them qualify from Thursday's second semi-final. At the other end of the scale, Spain and Germany look set to battle it out to avoid the dreaded "nul points"-when countries fall foul of good taste and national rivalries and end up without scoring.—AFP



Stefania from Greece performs with the song "Last Dance".



James Newman from the United Kingdom performs with the song 'Embers'.



San Marino's Senhit (center) and US rapper Flo Rida perform "the song Adrenalina".

Alabama lifts ban on yoga in schools-but meditation is still a no-no

Students in Alabama can now learn yoga at school-but they still can't deliver the traditional "namaste" greeting to their teacher. The southern state's governor, Kay Ivey, revoked a 30-year-old law Friday that banned the popular practice, letting public schools teach and practice yoga, though stripped clean its cultural, spiritual and religious elements. "All instruction in yoga shall be limited exclusively to poses, exercises, and stretching techniques," the new law says. Those poses have to use the English names, like the "downward dog" and "the warrior."

Meanwhile, it says, "Chanting, mantras, mudras, use of mandalas, induction of hyp-

notic states, guided imagery, and namaste greetings shall be expressly prohibited," meaning meditation, Hindu/Buddhist style, is out. The state, dominated by conservative Protestants, banned yoga in public schools three decades ago, saying it could not be separated from its Hindu beliefs. Albert Mohler, theologian and president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, had written that yoga was innately Hindu and that contradicted the teachings of the Christian church.

"The embrace of yoga is a symptom of our postmodern spiritual confusion, and, to our shame, this confusion reaches into the church," he wrote. That view has still not left

Alabama's schools. The new law requires parents to sign a permission letter to allow their children to learn yoga at school. "I understand that yoga is part of the Hinduism religion," the letter must say. Moreover, local school boards will have the choice of permitting yoga or opting out.

The effort to permit yoga in schools was led by a young African-American state lawmaker, Jeremy Gray. The new law "prioritizes our children's health and wellness and brings Alabama schools into the 21st century," the state Democratic party said in a statement. — AFP

Animal rights group blocks UK McDonald's sites

Animal rights protesters yesterday blockaded four British distribution centers for fast-food chain McDonald's, demanding they become fully plant-based by 2025. The Animal Rebellion group said they intended to block the distribution sites in Hemel Hempstead, Basingstoke, Coventry and Greater Manchester — all in England — for at least 24 hours.

"We are in the middle of a climate and ecological emergency and we are still con-

suming huge quantities of meat on a scale that is just not sustainable for our planet," a protester in Coventry said in a video posted on Twitter. McDonald's confirmed that its distribution centers were currently facing disruption. "We are assessing the impact on deliveries to our restaurants and to menu items.

"We apologize to our customers for any disappointment caused," said a spokesperson. Coventry police said they "recognize the right to a peaceful protest, however there are safety concerns as the sole entrance and exit point to the distribution site has been blocked and this is causing significant disruption to businesses, which we are taking seriously." — AFP

Lifestyle | Features



Cristina Moreno, 18, carries her baby at her home in Juquila Yuvinani village, Metlatonoc municipality, Guerrero state, Mexico. — AFP photos



Cristina Moreno, 18, holds her baby at her home in Juquila Yuvinani village, Metlatonoc municipality, Guerrero state, Mexico.



A girl carries logs for self-consumption at home in Juquila Yuvinani village, Metlatonoc municipality, Guerrero state, Mexico.

'We're not animals': The Mexican girls sold as brides

Eloina Feliciano begged her mother not to sell her into marriage aged 14 under an ancestral tradition in their indigenous community in southern Mexico, but her pleas were in vain. "I don't want to be sold," she remembers telling her mother at their home in the mountains of Guerrero state. "We're not animals. Animals are the ones who are sold," added Feliciano, now 23, who lives in the municipality of Metlatonoc in one of Mexico's poorest areas.

She became one of many girls from her Mixtec community subjected to a tradition that critics say traps women in abuse and leaves the groom's family mired in poverty. Today such agreements are still made in dozens of communities in Guerrero, but calls are growing for an end to the practice of selling daughters.

The payments demanded by the brides'

parents, who will only consider men from the region for their daughters, range from \$2,000 to \$18,000, residents told AFP. "The girls are completely vulnerable. Their new family enslaves them with domestic and agricultural tasks" and sometimes "in-laws abuse them sexually," said anthropologist Abel Barrera, director of the Tlachinollan Center of Human Rights of the Mountain. Due to the "growing precariousness" of these communities, he added, "the indigenous ancestral ritual of giving away maidens in return for a dowry from their first menstruation has been lost and girls are now being commodified."

Indigenous people represent around 10 percent of Mexico's population of 126 million, and almost 70 percent live in poverty, according to official figures. More than 94 percent of Metlatonoc's 19,000 inhabitants do not have basic services in their homes,

and nearly 59 percent have difficulty feeding themselves, according to national statistics institute INEGI.

'Make you suffer'

Maurilia Julio, a 61-year-old midwife, was also sold as a child and made sure her own daughters avoided the same fate. "They make you suffer for the simple fact of having bought you," she said in her earthen floor home made partly of mud and animal dung. "Many women say 'I'm going to sell my daughter for 110,000, 120,000 pesos (\$5,500-\$6,000) because I want money,' but it makes me very sad to hear because they're their children," she said.

Next to a grayish, smelly river, a woman who did not want to be named for fear of reprisals from her neighbors condemned the practice. "Women who are sold have to

take care of their father-in-law. 'I'll pay for you and I can do whatever I want to you,' is what they say," she said. A mother of two adolescent girls, she fears that her husband will repeat the tradition.

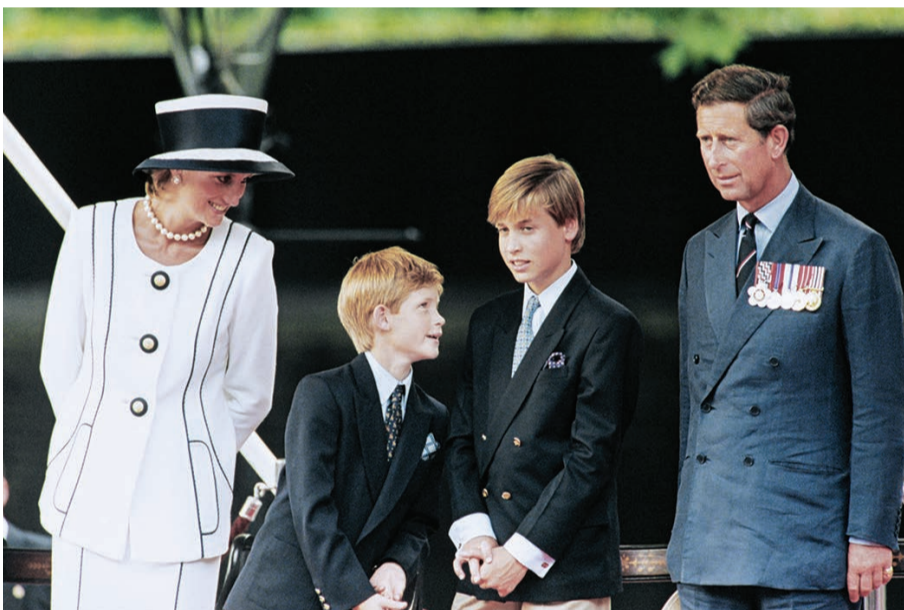
'Help us'

More than 3,000 girls between the ages of nine and 17 gave birth in Guerrero last year, some of them after being sold into marriage, according to official figures. "We want it to change but people say 'I do what I want because I have my daughter and no one is going to tell me what to do,'" said Victor Moreno, a 29-year-old resident. "We would like someone to help us, to pass a law so that this changes," he added.

Moreno married under the same kind of arrangement and although he does not mistreat his wife, he opposes the tradition because he had to move to northern

Mexico to work as a day laborer to pay the debt. "Here we're poor people. We cannot afford to buy a daughter-in-law to marry our sons and we struggle a lot to pay," said the father of two. Benito Mendoza, a member of the non-governmental organization Yo quiero, Yo puedo (I want to, I can), gave awareness raising workshops until the group ran out of funds in February.

Brides' parents ask for money "because they believe that they must recover what was spent bringing up their daughters," he said. So far only around 300 people in the area have agreed to stop the tradition, according to a community leader. "Most continue to sell their daughters," said Feliciano. — AFP



In this file photo taken on August 19, 1995 Prince Charles, Princess Diana and their children William and Harry watch the march past on a dais on the mall as part of the commemorations of VJ Day. — AFP photos

Ex-BBC chief steps down from high profile job over Diana probe

Former BBC chief who was criticized for his "woefully ineffective" probe into Martin Bashir's deception in securing a bombshell interview with Princess Diana yesterday resigned as chair of Britain's National Gallery. Journalist Bashir tricked Diana into giving a 1995 BBC television interview in which she lifted the lid on her troubled marriage to Prince Charles, an independent investigation concluded on Thursday.

Tony Hall, who had led an earlier investigation into the interview and was later named head of the BBC, said he had "today resigned as Chair of the National Gallery. "As I said two days ago, I am very sorry for the events of 25 years ago and I believe leadership means taking responsibility," he said in a statement released by the world-renowned London gallery. "I have always had a strong sense of public service and it is clear my continuing in the role would be a distraction to an institution I care deeply about".

Retired senior judge John Dyson said Bashir commissioned faked bank statements that falsely suggested some of Diana's closest aides were being paid by the security services to keep tabs on her.



In this file photo taken on September 06, 1997 (from left to right) Britain's Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, Britain's Prince William, Earl Spencer, Britain's Prince Harry and Britain's Prince Charles, Prince of Wales follow the coffin of Diana, Princess of Wales, to Westminster Abbey for her funeral service.

Bashir then showed them to Diana's brother Charles Spencer, in a successful bid to convince him to arrange a meeting between himself and Diana and earn her trust.

Questions have long been asked about how Bashir convinced Diana to talk on the BBC's flagship "Panorama" pro-

gram in November 1995, which was watched by a record 22.8 million people and won a string of television awards. In it, she famously said "there were three people" in her marriage - her, Charles



and his long-time mistress and now wife, Camilla Parker-Bowles - and also admitted adultery. Bashir, now 58, was little-known at the time of the interview but went on to have a high-profile career on US television networks, and interviewed stars such as Michael Jackson.

'Woeful incompetence'

He returned to work for the corporation as religion editor until he stepped down last week, citing ill health, just hours before Dyson's report was submitted to BBC bosses. A 1996 internal inquiry by Hall cleared Bashir of wrong-doing, but Dyson called that probe "flawed and woefully ineffective". In particular, it did not ask Diana's brother, Charles Spencer, for his version of events, Dyson said, lambasting it for failing to scrutinize Bashir's actions properly.

"If they had been able to test Mr Bashir's account by asking him to comment on Earl Spencer's detailed account, it is very unlikely that they would have believed him and concluded that he was an 'honest and honorable man,'" he wrote. Hall admitted that the probe "fell well short of what was required", and said he was "wrong to give Martin Bashir the benefit of the doubt".

Diana's son Prince William said the interview had made "a major contribution" to the demise of his parents' relationship, while the BBC's "woeful incompetence" in uncovering the truth had "contributed significantly to her fear, paranoia and isolation" in her final years. Diana died in a high-speed car crash while being chased by paparazzi photographers in 1997. Hall took charge of the BBC in 2013, and stepped down last year. — AFP

That '70s Show' actor Masterson to face trial on rape charges

US actor and Scientologist Danny Masterson must stand trial for the alleged rape of three women at his home in the Hollywood Hills, a Los Angeles judge ruled Friday. "That '70s Show' star Masterson denies the accusations made by the women, who were previously also members of the secretive California-based group and said they did not come forward earlier for fear of reprisals from its hierarchy. "I found all three witnesses to be credible and the evidence sufficient to support the charges," said Judge Charlene Olmedo, ordering Masterson to be formally arraigned on June 7 and to hand over his passport by that time.



In this file photo US actor Danny Masterson attends the premiere of "Forgetting Sarah Marshall" at the Chinese theatre in Los Angeles. — AFP

Masterson, 45, allegedly raped the women, all in their twenties at the time, "by force or fear" in separate incidents between 2001 and 2003. He faces a maximum sentence of 45 years to life in prison if convicted on all charges. He is currently free on \$3.3 million bail. Masterson rose to fame with the 1998 launch of retro sitcom "That '70s Show," where he played the character of Steven Hyde alongside fellow stars Mila Kunis and Ashton Kutcher. He co-starred again with Kutcher on Netflix's "The Ranch," but was fired in 2017 and written off the show after Los Angeles police confirmed they were investigating multiple rape allegations against the actor. — AFP

Eiffel Tower to reopen July 16 as France eases COVID curbs

The Eiffel Tower will reopen on July 16 after several months of closure due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Paris landmark's operator said on Thursday. Visitor numbers will be limited to 10,000 a day to meet social distancing requirements, fewer than half of their pre-COVID levels, operator Sete told AFP. All floors of the monument will be accessible to visitors, except some areas where reno-

vation work is ongoing. Only 50 percent of the usual numbers will be allowed in the lifts. The Eiffel Tower has been undergoing the most extensive revamp of its 130-year history to look its best for the 2024 Paris Olympics, including with a paint job to give it a distinctly golden hue.

But painting was suspended after traces of lead were found in existing layers, making it hazardous to continue. The re-opening marks the emergence of the 10-tonne metal landmark from its longest closure since World War II. It was shut down for more than three months during the first COVID wave in the spring of last year, and then again in the autumn. "After several months of closure, we are impatient to have our staff and visitors back with, of course, a strict compliance with sanitary protocols," Sete president Jean-François Martins said in a statement. Online bookings will open on June 1. The monument, completed in 1889, usually receives about seven million visitors every

year, some three-quarters of them from abroad.

But because of COVID restrictions, it now expects a loss of 70 million euros (\$85 million) for 2021, after a loss of 52 million last year, forcing it to seek fresh financing. "We cannot absorb both loss-making years with our existing capital," Martins said, adding he expected the Paris authorities "to help us get through this". France on Wednesday loosened restrictions in a return to semi-normality after more than six months of COVID-19 curbs. Cafes and restaurants with terraces or rooftop gardens can now offer outdoor dining, under the second phase of a lockdown-lifting plan that should culminate in a full reopening of the economy on June 30. Museums, cinemas and some theatres are also reopening after being closed for 203 days. Disneyland Paris, another tourist magnet, said on Monday it would reopen on June 17. — AFP



People walk on the esplanade des Droits De L'homme at the Trocadero Square in front of the Eiffel Tower, where a giant artwork by French street artist and photographer Jean Rene, aka JR, is on display in Paris. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features

LADY GAGA OPENS UP ABOUT RAPE, PREGNANCY AT AGE 19



In this file photo Singer/actress Lady Gaga attends the premiere of "A star is born" at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles. — AFP

US singer Lady Gaga said in a documentary out Friday that she was raped by a music producer and became pregnant at age 19, an ordeal that eventually caused her to have a "total psychotic break." The New York artist had previously revealed that she was raped by an industry producer when she was starting out in the business. She said this caused post-traumatic stress disorder that she still deals with, even if she says it is now under control. "I was 19 years old and I was working in the business and a pro-

ducer said to me: 'Take your clothes off,'" she said in the documentary "The Me You Can't See," which was co-created by Oprah Winfrey and Prince Harry for the Apple TV+ platform. "I said no. And I left," Gaga recounts.

"And they told me they were going to burn all my music and they didn't stop asking me and then I just froze and I just... I don't even remember," she said in tears. The 35-year-old, who has never revealed the identity of her rapist, said she would continue to keep his name from the public

because she does "not ever want to face that person again." Gaga, whose real name is Stefani Germanotta, said that the producer "dropped me off pregnant on a corner by my parents' house," and that she had been "locked away in a studio for months." She revealed that it was only years later, when an anxiety attack led her to the hospital, that she realized she had post-traumatic stress disorder.

"I had a total psychotic break and for a couple years I was not the same girl," Gaga said. "It's like your brain goes

offline and you don't know why no one else is panicking but you're in an ultra-state of paranoia," Gaga said. "It's really a very real thing to feel like there's a black cloud that is following you wherever you go telling you that you're worthless and should die." She estimated that it took two and a half years of therapy to get the urge to harm herself under control. "I learned all the ways to pull myself out of it," she said. — AFP

Great spot: Rare Persian leopard pair sighted in Pakistan

A pair of rare Persian leopards sighted in Pakistan for the first time last year have been filmed and photographed in the wild, officials said Friday. Sharifuddin Baloch, a senior conservation official in Balochistan province, said the pair were first spotted by rangers in the Hazarganji Wildlife Park six months ago. Adult leopards are solitary in the wild and pair only to mate. "We equipped our staff with cameras and binoculars to film the pair and take photos," Baloch said. "This month our staff succeed-

ed." Persian leopards are a panther subspecies native to Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and the Caucasus.

They are extremely rare, however, and listed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as endangered. Fewer than 1,000 are believed to exist in the wild, with another 200 in captivity. "We are taking steps to protect the rare species," Baloch told AFP, adding officials were sharing data with the IUCN. Video shot by park officials shows one of the leopards beautifully camouflaged on a rugged, rocky hillside until it stands up and pads away.

Baloch said there was no previous record of the creature ever being sighted in Pakistan. Panthera tulliana is bigger and has a different spot pattern to the more common Indian leopard (panthera fusca) found across Pakistan. Pakistan is also home to vulnerable snow leopards (panthera uncia) in the northern Himalayas. — AFP



This handout video grab shows a rare Persian leopard (Panthera Tiliiana) at the Hazarganji-Chiltan National Park on the outskirts of Quetta. — AFP

Armani returns to live fashion show audiences

More than a year after switching to virtual shows, Italian fashion house Armani announced Thursday the return of live audiences, starting with its Spring/Summer Men's collection next month. The June 21 Giorgio Armani show will take place in Milan, while on July 6, the Giorgio Armani Prive fashion show will be held at the Italian embassy during the Paris Fashion Show for Haute Couture.

"The return to live attendance has been decided following the current general improvement in public health with relation to the pandemic," the group announced. — AFP



Giorgio Armani

Dating apps team up to make vaccinating hot

Vaxxing, not waxing, is the new must-do before a hot date, with dating apps joining the White House on Friday to promote COVID-19 shots. Tinder, Hinge, Match, OkCupid, BLK, Chispa, Plenty of Fish, Bumble, and Badoo are all adding vaccination status to the more expected details on dating profiles as part of a rollout over the next few weeks. Getting the shot may also do more for lovers than keep them healthy, the White House said in a statement. "According to research from OKCupid, people who are vaccinated or plan to get vaccinated receive 14 percent more Matches than

people who don't plan to get vaccinated," it revealed.

Among the extra incentives being offered by Tinder, for example, is access to the "Super Like" feature to "help them stand out among potential matches," the White House said. The apps include BLK, which is targeted at African Americans, and Chispa, which is largely used by the Hispanic community. They will also help users locate where they can get vaccinated. "It is kind of a funny thing to talk about, but the truth of the matter is people do want to get back to their normal lives," Andy Slavitt, a senior White House COVID advisor, told reporters.

In a statement, OkCupid said the phrase "I'm vaccinated" increased over 1,400 percent in May compared to January. More than seven in 10 daters on the app say they will get the COVID-19 vaccine, and only seven percent of singles now say they're not comfortable with in-person dating. Tinder said it was enabling members to display stickers such as "I'm Vaccinated" or "Vaccines Save Lives" on their profile.



LOYAC launches its part-time program in collaboration with Cinescape

In partnership with KNCC, LOYAC launched the LOYAC and Cinescape part-time program which started on the first day of Eid with 50 interns who have been vaccinated against the COVID-19 virus.

Nada Ali, Professional Development Department Manager at LOYAC, stated that LOYAC is always eager and ready to support companies and organizations with qualified interns. She said: this program will allow the participants to work in Cinescape's screens and communicate with the public and customers, as well as ensuring following the safety guidelines put in place to ensure the health and safety of the cinema's visitors. She proceeded: this collaboration stems from the strategic

partnership with Kuwait National Cinema Company and the shared belief in their roles in empowering the youth and offering them suitable opportunities to develop their personal and professional skills.

From his side, Mr Fawaz Abdulaziz Al-Fadhlah, Finance Manager at KNCC explained that this collaboration between LOYAC and KNCC started years ago and includes different programs and campaigns targeting the youth specifically which we always aim to support and instill contribution and growth values.

He added: we look forward in this campaign that started with the re-opening of the cinemas in Eid Al-Fitr to provide a special experience for the upcoming generation by offering them a part-time opportunity where they learn about everything related to working in the cinema and customer service. Our aim in this campaign is to prepare the youth for their professional and career paths in the private sector. In the end, we hope this opportunity fills the youth's free time and utilizes their creativity.



Nada Ali

China's Mars rover starts roaming the Red Planet

China's Mars rover drove from its landing platform and began exploring the surface yesterday, state-run Xinhua news agency said, making the country only the second nation to land and operate a rover on the Red Planet. The launch last July of the Tianwen-1 Mars probe, which carried the Zhurong rover, marked a major milestone in China's space program. Tianwen-1 touched down on a vast northern lava plain known as the Utopia Planitia a week ago and beamed back its first photos of the surface a few days later.

The Mars probe and rover are expected to spend around three months taking photos, harvesting geographical data, and collecting and analyzing rock samples. The six-wheeled, solar-powered, 240-kilogramme (530-pound) Zhurong is named after a Chinese mythical fire god. China has now sent astronauts into space, powered probes to the Moon and landed a rover on Mars—the most prestigious of all prizes in the competition for dominion of space. The United States and Russia are the only other countries to have reached Mars, and only the former has operated a rover on the surface.

Several US, Russian and European attempts to land rovers on Mars have



This picture shows an image taken by the navigation camera of China's Zhurong rover on the surface of Mars, showing the rover's solar panels and antenna, after it landed on Mars. — AFP

failed in the past, most recently in 2016 with the crash-landing of the Schiaparelli joint Russian-European spacecraft. The latest successful arrival came in February, when US space agency NASA landed its rover Perseverance, which has since been exploring the planet. The US rover launched a small robotic helicopter on Mars which was the first-ever powered flight on another planet. — AFP

Spanish town parties in the name of science

Clinical studies never looked so good: for a few hours on Thursday in a beach town near Barcelona some 400 people said adios to pandemic distancing and partied like it was 2019 — all in the name of science. Masks were the only visible sign of the times as participants were given free reign to bar hop, dance and drink indoors and outdoors at cafes and clubs along a 400 meter stretch of street in the town of Sitges. The aim of the study: to test whether clubs can reopen without posing a threat of contagion.

Besides agreeing to wear either FFP2 or surgical masks, revelers were required to present a negative antigen test taken a few hours prior to the study. "When I saw there was finally the chance to go and party I didn't think twice," happy participant Nuria Miralpeix, 38, told AFP. "The last time I went out was in March 2020. Since then I've been shut in and now I feel like a student who's dying to party on a Thursday!" added the financial director, smiling.

Though the feeling of freedom only lasts a few hours, Edgar, 37, said one must "take advantage." The street in Sitges hosting the

study is known historically for its nightlife. Parties here provided a safe space for homosexuals when they were persecuted under the Franco dictatorship from 1939 until 1975. Organizers requested that participants respect social distancing for five days after the study to eliminate the risk of contamination.

Then another antigen test will reveal whether the party was responsible for any new cases. Clubs and bars in Catalonia were barely able to open for one month between last spring's confinements and new measures imposed in July. "This clinical study should open the way for the return of nightlife—the only sector that remains completely shut down," regional health official Marc Armengol said. Sponsored by the city and Catalan health officials, the experiment follows two other studies conducted during concerts in Barcelona.

In December a team of researchers carried out a pilot project that brought together 500 previously-tested revelers who were able to dance without social distancing-but with masks. Days later, none of the participants had contracted COVID-19. At the end of March another test concert brought together some 5,000 people with organizers saying there was "no sign" of contagion afterwards. — AFP



People gather at terrace bar during a trial clinical study for a possible reopening of nightlife party in Sitges. — AFP

Sports

Kane hints at Man City move, praising 'striker's dream' De Bruyne

LONDON: Tottenham forward Harry Kane has hinted at a move to Manchester City as speculation mounts over his future, calling the champions' star midfielder Kevin De Bruyne a "striker's dream". Kane has reportedly told Spurs he wants to leave at the end of the season and the England captain has been linked with City, Manchester United and Chelsea.

Kane has now raised the prospect of a move to Pep Guardiola's title winners, naming City's De Bruyne as a perfect team-mate. City are reported to be interested in signing the 27-year-old, but Spurs will not let their talisman go without a fight, especially as he is under contract for the next three years.

Kane is determined to stay in the Premier League and when asked by former Manchester United defender Gary Neville which player would help him score more goals he said: "De Bruyne for sure. When I watch De Bruyne play he's a special, special player and some of the balls I see him put in for City are just a striker's dream if I'm honest." Kane this week told Neville that he doesn't "want to come to the end of my career and have any regrets".

Tottenham caretaker boss Ryan Mason, who replaced the sacked Jose Mourinho in April, is a close friend of Kane after playing with him in the club's youth academy. Asked if he could understand Kane's desire to win silverware while in the prime of his career, Mason said: "Of course no player wants to end their career with regrets. It's normal. If you speak to any player in the world we say the same. I can't speak over transfer value and people's stock and all that. In football things change so quickly. At the moment Harry is a Tottenham player and he's going to be

involved at the weekend and hopefully he can win the Golden Boot."

'Missed opportunity'

Kane has scored 165 Premier League goals, 95 behind all-time top scorer Alan Shearer, and he wants to topple the former Blackburn and Newcastle striker. The forward, who has 22 top-flight goals this season, told Neville's YouTube channel The Overlap that injuries were the main threat to his ambition to break the record.

"Of course there's always the option of maybe moving abroad one day but I don't think that really interests me in the near future," he added. Kane has been involved in two Premier League title races with Spurs, has lost two League Cup finals, and was on the defeated side in the 2019 Champions League final.

The forward admits the club missed opportunities to win silverware under former boss Mauricio Pochettino, who is now in charge at Paris Saint-Germain, and challenged Spurs chairman Daniel Levy to deliver quality additions to help rebuild.

Tottenham, who have missed out on the Premier League's top four for a second successive season, look unlikely even to qualify for the Europa League ahead of their final league match against Leicester today.

"For one reason or another we didn't quite do what we needed to do and kind of where we're at now I feel like we're kind of at a rebuild stage again if I'm honest," Kane said. "I'm not going to say it's not there anymore of course — one or two good players can take the team over the line with Liverpool and City and teams like that. But for sure I feel like it was an opportunity missed for the club to do something special." — AFP



LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur's English striker Harry Kane controls the ball during the English Premier League football match between Tottenham Hotspur and Aston Villa at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London, on May 19, 2021. — AFP



DECINES-CHARPIEU: In this file photo taken on April 25, 2021 Lille's Turkish forward Burak Yilmaz reacts after scoring during the French Ligue 1 football match between Olympique Lyonnais and LOSC Lille at the Groupama Stadium in Decines-Charpieu near Lyon, south-central France. — AFP

Lille ready to knock PSG off perch in tense French finale

PARIS: A tight French title race culminates tonight with table toppers Lille a win away from dethroning Neymar and Kylian Mbappe's Paris Saint-Germain as champions. Christophe Galtier's outfit have no major stars but are unbeaten away since November and travel to mid-table Angers, a team who have lost five of their last six league games.

On 80 points, Lille hold a slender one-point lead over PSG who won the French Cup in midweek. Galtier has been a tower of strength at the head of three-time former champions Lille, and is confident his charges will complete the job. "Our campaign has been built on away performances, we just have to stick to our guns," he said.

Turkish veteran striker Burak Yilmaz, 35, is Lille's top scorer with 15 goals, compared to the league-leading 26 of Mbappe, but there is a palpable sense of unity at the club. Lille, bidding to win the title for the first time in a decade, have a budget which is smaller than that of Lyon, Marseille and Monaco as well as PSG.

PSG coach Mauricio Pochettino insisted his side will hold their nerve at Brest who are desperate to avoid being dragged into the relegation play-off spot. "We have to believe it's possible, do our job by winning our match at Brest and see if Lille run into trouble," said Pochettino, whose charges will take the title with a win if Lille draw or lose. If they are successful, PSG will be crowned French champions for a record-equaling 10th time.

'Something wonderful'

On what could be an enthralling last day, Niko Kovac's Monaco, on 77 points, will hope to qualify for the Champions League for the first time since 2018. Monaco were beaten 2-0 midweek by PSG in the French Cup final but former Bayern coach Kovac said his side had already moved on. "If we win at Lens on Sunday we will have transformed our season into something wonderful," said Kovac.

The south coast side will however be looking anxiously over their shoulders at Lyon who can still snatch third place. Dutch striker Memphis Depay, in his last game before he becomes a free agent, vowed he'd help Lyon get three points at home to Nice.

"The only thing that counts right now is qualifying Lyon for the Champions League," said Depay, who arrived from Manchester United and is tipped to join Barcelona. "I want to leave here a mature player who assumed his responsibilities." At the bottom, Nimes and Dijon are already relegated, but there are six sides fighting to avoid a relegation play-off. — AFP

Enyimba believe they can wipe out Pyramids' three goal advantage

JOHANNESBURG: Enyimba coach Fatai Osho insists the Nigerian club can reach the CAF Confederation Cup semi-finals despite needing to overcome a three-goal deficit when they host Egyptian outfit Pyramids today. "This tie is not over," he told reporters. "Some shocking defending, tiredness and a lack of concentration cost us dearly in Cairo. We were not three goals worse than our opponents."

Goals by Ramadan Sobhy and Ibrahim Adel came gift-wrapped from hesitant and careless defenders as 2020 runners-up Pyramids established a 4-1 quarter-final first-leg advantage. Here is a look ahead to the return matches with Pyramids, Raja Casablanca of Morocco and JS Kabylie of Algeria expected to secure last-four places with Jaraaf of Senegal or Coton Sport of Cameroon.

Enyimba v Pyramids

Enyimba have won all four home matches in the Confederation Cup, but each victory has been by a one-goal margin with the team from southeastern city Aba averaging only 1.5 goals per match. Captain Augustine Oladapo, Victor Mbaoma and Cyril Olisema have claimed seven of the eight goals Enyimba notched in the African equivalent of the UEFA Europa League, so much will hinge on their performances. Pyramids have their sights on the semi-finals and a probable meeting with Raja, who beat the expensively assembled Cairo club twice in the group stage.

Raja v Pirates

Raja take a perfect four-victory home record this season into a clash of former CAF Champions League winners against famed Soweto club Orlando Pirates. Although the odds have tilted toward a Moroccan victory after they forced a 1-1 draw in South Africa, Pirates' coach Josef Zinnbauer is upbeat despite his side failing to score in their last three away games. "We respect Raja because they are one of the most successful clubs in Africa, but we travelled to Casablanca without fear. Ben Malango is a dangerous forward and needs to be constantly policed."

Jaraaf v Coton

Jaraaf and Coton, who take a 1-0 lead to Thies near Dakar, represent countries desperate for African club glory. No Senegalese club has lifted an African trophy with Jeanne d'Arc coming closest by reaching the 1998 final of the now-defunct CAF Cup. Cameroon last celebrated success 40 years ago when Union Douala lifted the African Cup Winners Cup, another competition that was discontinued after the 2003 final.

Kabylie v Sfaxien

This north African showdown has taken a surprise turn with Kabylie building a 1-0 advantage in Tunisia over record three-time Confederation Cup title-holders Sfaxien. The first meeting was a tale of two penalties with leading Sfaxien scorer Firas Chaouat missing and Kabylie captain Redha Bensayah converting. Kabylie boast an unbeaten home record in Africa this season, winning four matches and drawing one, and are expected to progress given they need only draw to do so. — AFP

FIFA 'open to everything' including World Cup every two years

LAUSANNE: FIFA on Friday launched an overhaul of the international football calendar beyond 2024, saying it is open to "everything" including the organization of a World Cup every two years, despite opposition from wilting players and fears over a devalued product. The 71st FIFA Congress voted by a large majority to carry out "a feasibility study on the consequences of the organization" of World Cups for men and women "every two years".

No deadline has been set for such a controversial reform to the sport's crown jewel, the main income generator for FIFA since its creation in 1928, and which has been contested every four years since 1930 for men and 1991 for women.

FIFA's football development chief Arsene Wenger suggested in March that the World Cup, the European Championship and other international tournaments be held every two years. It was an idea dubbed "unrealistic" by European Leagues, a body which groups 37 leagues and club associations in Europe, but still featured in a report carried out by Wenger and released last week.

FIFA president Gianni Infantino said at the end of March that he was open to any ideas for the post-2024 football calendar and earlier this month promising "interesting discussions" on Wenger's proposals. A biennial World Cup is tempting for broadcasters but would be fiercely opposed by federations, leagues and clubs who fear player burnout.

"Maybe we should ask UEFA and FIFA to extend the year. Maybe we could have 400 days a year," said Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola last month. A World Cup every two years would also spell the end of friendly matches, lead to a reorganization of qualifying structures and require clubs to release their internationals every summer.

Mickelson, Oosthuizen share PGA lead at windy Kiawah

KIAWAH ISLAND: Phil Mickelson, chasing a historic sixth major title at age 50, shared the lead with South Africa's Louis Oosthuizen after Friday's second round of the PGA Championship at windy Kiawah Island. American left-hander Mickelson, who could become golf's oldest major champion, and Oosthuizen, the 2010 British Open winner, were deadlocked atop the leaderboard on five-under 139 after 36 holes on the formidable Ocean Course. "I'm heading into the weekend with an opportunity and I'm really excited about it," Mickelson said. "If you told me (I was leading) Sunday night, I'd really enjoy it. Right now, there's a lot to do."

Oosthuizen, who birdied five of the first 12 holes, nearly fired the first bogey-free round of the week but missed a nine-foot par putt at the 18th to shoot a four-under 68. "It has got to be up there as one of my best," Oosthuizen said of his round. "It was tough. I'm just glad I was striking it really good."

With a victory, Mickelson would erase the age mark set by American Julius Boros when he won the 1968 PGA Championship at 48. Mickelson birdied five of his last eight holes, closing with a 23-foot birdie putt at the ninth to shoot 69 as a COVID-19 limited crowd of about 10,000 roared in delight. "It's really fun to make a putt on the last hole and have a round like that," Mickelson. "The support here has been really special."

Four-time major winner Brooks Koepka, playing with pain after right knee surgery in March, eagled the par-5 seventh and 11th holes but made two bogeys in the last four holes to shoot 71 and stand third on 140. "It was definitely a difficult day. It was tough to make putts," Koepka said. "(Knee) feels fine. I'm four-under. It's all there."

Masters champion Hideki Matsuyama, trying to complete the first half of a calendar Grand Slam, made six birdies but closed with a bogey to shoot 68 and stand on 141, sharing fourth with South Africans Christiaan Bezuidenhout and Branden Grace. "I really hit my driver

'Blank sheet of paper'

The year of 2024 also coincides with the introduction of a new format for the UEFA Champions League, providing for 100 additional matches. Clubs risk their players picking up more injuries with such a dense calendar, while the economic benefits are also uncertain, according to Raffaele Poli, head of the CIES Football Observatory. "One should be aware of the risk of making a product less prestigious by making it less rare," Poli told AFP.

Poli also warned that a proliferation of international tournaments would eat away at the value of broadcast rights for both domestic championships and continental club competitions. "Let me be very clear: the starting point is not 'the calendar is full and so nothing changes'," Infantino told the Congress. "The starting point is the exact opposite of that. We have a blank sheet, we are open to take on board all views and opinions about how we can make the international calendar better."

Infantino reiterated his intention to "find a date" for a Club World Cup which he wants to see extended to 24 teams, despite widespread opposition to the plan. However, he argued at length Friday for FIFA to play a key role in rewriting the calendar.

He said the organization is the "only body" that "generates" and "redistributes" its revenues "around the world" unlike continental confederations and leagues. "Let me explain," he added Friday. "Today, big leagues generate billions in revenues from all over the world - and these revenues are distributed where? To the 18-20 clubs in their leagues, with a small percentage going in solidarity." He added: "The only body which is generating revenues from all over the world and redistributing and investing all over the world in solidarity is FIFA." — AFP



KIAWAH ISLAND: Phil Mickelson of the United States chips to the second green during the second round of the 2021 PGA Championship at Kiawah Island Resort's Ocean Course on Friday in Kiawah Island, South Carolina. — AFP

and second shots very well and that gave me a lot of birdie opportunities, which I was able to capitalize on," Matsuyama said. "Hopefully my play will carry over to the weekend."

Grace, who holed out from 70 feet to birdie the 10th, plunked a tee shot into the water at the par-3 17th on the way to a double bogey-bogey finish to shoot 71. "Just trying to stay alive out there," Grace said. "It was such a grind." Only 18 players were under par after 36 holes.

Mickelson was the first 50-and-over player in the top five of a major after 36 holes since American Fred Couples at the 2012 Masters and the first at a PGA since Hale Irwin in 1999. Since the PGA Championship adopted a stroke-play format in 1958, the only prior 50-and-over player to lead or share the lead after 36 holes was Sam Snead in 1966 at age 54.

Oosthuizen, 38, has had a runner-up finish in all four majors since his lone victory at St. Andrews 11 years ago. He went 25 consecutive holes without a bogey, highlighted by a 33-foot birdie putt at the fourth, before stumbling in the brisk breezes. "I played really well, hit the golf ball well, putted nicely," Oosthuizen said. "I got a lot of opportunities. I just played really solid." It was the first time since 2008 at Oakland Hills that there were no bogey-free rounds at a PGA through 36 holes. — AFP

Sports

Morant shines as Grizzlies oust Warriors to grab playoff 8th seed

LOS ANGELES: Ja Morant scored a team-high 35 points as the Memphis Grizzlies beat the Golden State Warriors 117-112 in overtime on Friday to close out the play-in tournament and grab the final seed in the NBA playoffs.

Morant helped clinched the winner-take-all victory with a spinning floater from 10 feet with four seconds left in overtime as the Grizzlies advanced to the playoffs for the first time in four years. The Warriors were eliminated from the postseason.

"That's the shots I want to take," said Morant who also had a career high five threes. "I like it when the pressure is on me. I lift my game. I got all the confidence in the world in my game." The youthful Grizzlies won two straight games in the play-in tournament to earn the eighth seed and will now face the top seeded Utah Jazz in the first game of their series tonight in Salt Lake City.

This was the second meeting between the two teams in six days as the 2020 rookie of the year

Morant rebounded from a poor performance in a 113-101 loss to the Warriors in the final game of the regular season. With the 21-year-old Morant leading the way, the Grizzlies are the youngest NBA team in the post-season in a decade.

"We know we are a young team. We have some vets that lead us," said Morant. "It is my first time making the playoffs, but we got some players who have been in playoffs before. They let us know what to expect."

Xavier Tillman nailed a go-ahead three pointer with 87 seconds left in overtime to make it 110-109 and then Morant iced it with two short jump shots in the final minute. The Warriors ended the regular season as one of the hottest teams in the league then lost a heartbreaker 103-100 to the Lakers on Wednesday followed by another gut-wrenching loss to the Grizzlies.

"We were two fourth quarters from being the seventh or eighth seed," said Curry, who is in the running for league MVP. "It is frustrating that this is the end and

this is how we are going out. It is a very tough way to end it, coming down to the wire and us giving everything we had in the tank."

Curry had a game-high 39 points, Andrew Wiggins had 22 points, and Draymond Green finished with a triple double of 11 points, 16 rebounds and 10 assists for Golden State, which trailed by as many as 17 points in the first half.

"We would have loved to go into playoffs and tried to make run," said Warriors coach Steve Kerr. "Obviously it is a crushing way to go out, two straight games both gut punches. We felt like we had control the other night and lost, and we didn't have control of this one, but could have won."

Dillon Brooks scored 14 points, Grayson Allen finished with 12 and Tillman tallied 11 for Memphis. Morant said they hope to carry the confidence over from this win into the next series. "It is going to be a fight. They are the best team in league and we got to lock in on our game plan," said Morant. — AFP



SAN FRANCISCO: Ja Morant #12 of the Memphis Grizzlies shoots the ball to win the game against the Golden State Warriors during the 2021 NBA Play-In Tournament on Friday at Chase Center in San Francisco, California. — AFP

Verstappen tops Monaco practice, smash rules Schumacher out

MONACO: Mick Schumacher smashed up his Haas car in Monaco Grand Prix third practice yesterday forcing the session to be red-flagged with Red Bull's Max Verstappen topping the timesheets and ruling the German rookie out of qualifying.

Schumacher, whose father Michael was a five-time Monaco winner, was unhurt in the accident which gave his team's mechanics an impossible job to repair his extensively damaged car in the two hours before Q1 at 1300 GMT. "Unfortunately Mick won't compete in this afternoon's #MonacoGP Quali session, due to chassis damage sustained in the #FP3 accident" Haas tweeted. As a result Schumacher's first experience of Formula One's mythic race will be tainted by having to start in 20th place on Sunday's grid.

Red Bull's Verstappen was 0.047sec quicker than the Ferrari of Carlos Sainz with Charles Leclerc in the

other Ferrari third to follow up their encouraging showing in Thursday practice when the session was stopped with under two minutes to go.

Mercedes world champion Lewis Hamilton was down in seventh, 0.726s off Verstappen, not having had the chance to put in a fast lap. Hamilton leads Verstappen by 14 points in the drivers' standings going into this iconic fifth leg of the season.

With the tight unforgiving narrow street circuit making overtaking difficult — the 2003 race is infamous as the only F1 race in history to not have one single overtaking maneuver — a good qualifying performance is essential. As for Schumacher, he will not forget his first Monaco weekend in a hurry for all the wrong reasons after oversteering coming out of Casino Square to smash into the barriers, ripping off his car's entire rear leftwing. — AFP



MONACO: Haas F1's German driver Mick Schumacher drives during the third practice session at the Monaco street circuit in Monaco yesterday ahead of the Monaco Formula 1 Grand Prix. — AFP

Pacquiao says he'll fight Errol Spence in August

LOS ANGELES: Philippine boxing icon Manny Pacquiao said Friday he'll fight unbeaten unified welterweight world champion Errol Spence in Las Vegas in August. The 42-year-old legend will be fighting for the first time since he beat Keith Thurman in July 2019 for the WBA welterweight title. He revealed his plans with a Twitter post of a promotional poster for the bout captioned "Pacquiao v Spence, August 21, 2021, Las Vegas, Nevada".



LOS ANGELES: In this file photo taken on June 20, 2019 Filipino boxer Manny Pacquiao attends an afternoon training session at Wild Card Boxing in Los Angeles on June 20, 2019. — AFP

The Athletic, citing an unnamed source, reported that Pacquiao had signed a deal for a bout to be available on Fox pay per view, and the venue was expected to be the MGM Grand. But Pacquiao told The Athletic in an interview from the Philippines that he hoped the fight would be at Allegiant Stadium, the 70,000-seat stadium of the NFL's Las Vegas Raiders. Pacquiao, a serving senator in the Philippines, told the US sports outlet that the fight "might be" his last. If so, he appears to want to go out with a bang. "I love to challenge the top guy," the eight-division champion told The Athletic. Spence, the 31-year-old WBC and IBF champion, is 27-0 and coming off a dominant December victory over Danny Garcia — his first fight since surviving a near fatal rollover car accident. — AFP

Red Bull Solo Q 2021 Kuwait Finals Breakdown

KUWAIT: The LoL esports event finale was fire, where the reigning champ and the underdog competed for the Kuwait title. The Red Bull Solo Q Finals came to a roaring finish in Kuwait, and they delivered exactly what the fans were waiting for. The two Grand Finals competitors, Omran "Alpha Kuronii" Fouad, and Hussam "LEBANON Flamer" Merachli, battled it out in an exhilarating end to the event which started with an original pool of 224 players.

The host with the most was Muhammed Salahelden Mohammed, or NewFolder for the IGN. He is a big league Egyptian gamer, and managed the matches from top to bottom. He was joined by LoL heavyweights from across the region with Soliman "Snow" Taha, the most famous LoL player in the region, and Omar "Thorned" Ibn Omar, another well-known Saudi gamer joining him in as casters.

The Finals analysts consisted of more gamers who know the game of Red Bull Solo Q (and everything related to LoL, period) inside-out. In the Finals NewFolder was joined by Hamza "Glyph" and Basel "Cut" Barakeh. Safe to say they didn't miss a beat. Fun fact, this was the first time that NewFolder and Glyph were on screen together.

Standing tall

If you're thinking the Final lineup in 2021 sounds very similar to the Final from last year, you'd be absolutely correct! In the previous Solo Q Final we saw the same gamers competing to be the best, and Alpha Kuronii was crowned champion.

The 2021 rematch had gamers buzzing, and ultimately saw LEBANON Flamer exact his revenge against Alpha Kuronii this time around. Both players came in swinging, and the match was so worthy of a Red Bull Solo Q National Final.



The gutsy move that LEBANON Flamer put his trust behind was on skipping the ban on champion Kalista, knowing full well that Alpha Kuronii would prefer her. But here's the catch: he knew the matchup well and wanted to go up against Alpha Kuronii's Kalista. It worked out in his favor, and he was able to etch out a win this time. LEBANON Flamer took the win with Caitlyn. He found his advantage state by destroying the ward early, and finished it by zoning out Alpha Kuronii with the swath of his level 2 minion wave.

Post-win chat

LEBANON Flamer was excited to breakdown his match reaction with us, and here's the inside scoop of what was happening in his head over the course of the finals. He felt like he messed up against Alpha Kuronii the last time and really wanted to score first place this time. LEBANON Flamer realised his big mistake last year was not properly learning the matchup, because he went into it not realizing that Alpha Kuronii played Irelia. He was determined not to go into this Finals the same way!

Besides knowing the matchup this time, and skipping the ban, he had his own plans on what to do had his own champions get removed from play. Should the banhammer have come down on Caitlyn, he would have played Varus, and barring that he would have chosen Master Yi. As we can now see after his reveal, even his backup had a backup.

Classifieds

HOSPITALS

| | | | |
|---------------------------|----------|------------------------|------------|
| Sabah Hospital | 24812000 | Al-Razi Hospital | 24846000 |
| Amiri Hospital | 22450005 | Physiotherapy Hospital | 24874330/9 |
| Maternity Hospital | 24843100 | | |
| Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital | 25312700 | Clinics | |
| Chest Hospital | 24849400 | Kalzen center | 25716707 |
| Farwaniya Hospital | 24892010 | Rawda | 22517733 |
| Adan Hospital | 23940620 | Adaliya | 22517144 |
| Ibn Sina Hospital | 24840300 | Khaldiya | 24848075 |
| | | Kaifan | 24849807 |
| | | Shamiya | 24848913 |

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Saifuddin, holder of Indian Passport No. Z2814221, having permanent address 42, Laheri Building 3rd Floor No. 30, S.V.P Rd. Null Bazar, Mumbai - 400003, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as: Given Name: Saifuddin and Surname: Amjawala. (C 0249)

I, Kherunnisah, holder of Indian Passport No. Z2814395, permanent address 42, Laheri Building 3rd Floor No. 30, S.V.P Rd. Null Bazar, Mumbai - 400003, residing in Kuwait at present, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as: Given Name: Kherunnisah Saifuddin and Surname: Amjawala. (C 0249) 23-5-2021

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Pastry Chefs or Experienced Bakers

- Must be fluent in English
- Has knowledge in using computer order system and inventory management

Please share your CVs via
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Suarez leads Atletico to La Liga title

Real Madrid fall short despite beating Villarreal



VALLADOLID: Atletico Madrid's players celebrate after winning the Spanish league football match against Real Valladolid and the Liga championship title at the Jose Zorrilla stadium yesterday. — AFP

VALLADOLID, Spain: Atletico Madrid won La Liga and Luis Suarez found vindication, his goal securing the 2-1 victory over Real Valladolid yesterday that clinched his team another remarkable Spanish title. Suarez began the season crying after being forced out of Barcelona but ended it with his 21st goal of the season earning Atletico a first league triumph since 2014, this one at the expense of Real Madrid.

Atletico knew victory would guarantee them the title regardless of what Real Madrid did at home to Villarreal but it was never comfortable, with Valladolid taking a shock early lead. Real Madrid were behind too for most of the afternoon but Karim Benzema equalized in the 87th minute and Luka Modric even scored a late winner for 2-1 at Valdebebas, leaving Atletico hanging on at the end, as they were suddenly one goal away from squandering it all.

When the final whistle blew, the players ran onto the pitch, Suarez underneath a pile of red and white shirts, with Europe's most nerve-wracking and

unpredictable title race finally complete. Just over a week ago, coach Diego Simeone said this was the "Suarez Zone" and so it proved, the Uruguayan scoring the winner against Osasuna last week to keep the title in Atletico's hands and then again on the last day to put their name on the trophy.

This is only the second time in 17 years that a team other than Barcelona or Real Madrid have won the title, with Atleti claiming the other one under Simeone in 2014. Atletico went into the game having been top since December and on the back of beating Osasuna with two goals in the last eight minutes, a victory that was so dramatic it felt like it would prove decisive.

But Atletico have done nothing the easy way this season, with their 10-point lead in February cut to two in May and their position at the top of the table relying on numerous slip-ups from both Real Madrid and Barcelona. So it was apt that faced with beating Real Valladolid, who were 19th in the table, they still had to scrape over the line.

Several hundred Atletico fans gathered in

Valladolid's Plaza Mayor in the hours before kick-off to sing songs and a similar number made it outside the stadium, where they were cordoned off in a cess-pit of nerves and anticipation.

Players screamed

Suarez had a couple of early openings but any hopes for a comfortable afternoon were dashed in the 18th minute when Valladolid took the lead. It came from an Atletico corner as Yannick Carrasco lost the ball and Valladolid broke at speed, ping-pong passes through midfield and finally through to Oscar Plano, the former Real Madrid youngster who pulled away and fired past Jan Oblak.

There was plenty of time left and the other consolation for Atletico was Real Madrid fell behind too, Gerard Moreno's poked pass causing confusion at the back, with Yereimi Pino prodding Villarreal into the lead. Atletico pushed as Suarez's effort curled wide and Felipe headed straight at Jordi Masip but they also looked for calm. Players screamed at Oblak to give the team a moment to regroup. Simeone told

the substitutes to quieten down.

Both title contenders were trailing at half-time but Atletico came out with renewed vigor and a crucial few minutes fell their way. Real Madrid struck first, Benzema heading in Casemiro's cross before Angel Correa levelled for Atletico as well, collecting on the edge of the area and firing through the legs of Jawad El Yamiq.

Atletico's equalizer, though, was made all the more precious after Real Madrid's was ruled out, Benzema's left arm shown to be offside by VAR. Valladolid might have scored again but Shon Weissman headed over with the goal gaping and then Atletico took the lead, a gift of a pass-back by Sergi Guardiola allowing Suarez to skip clear. Suarez slid the ball past Masip before ending up under a pile of Atletico teammates.

Real Madrid equalized in the 87th minute, Benzema curving a delightful finish into the top corner and it was still not over. Modric scoring again to leave Atletico with some nail-biting final moments. They got over the line. — AFP

Toulouse win record fifth European Champions Cup

TWICKENHAM, United Kingdom: Toulouse saw off 14-man La Rochelle to be crowned European club rugby union kings for a record fifth time following a dramatic finish to the Champions Cup final at Twickenham yesterday. La Rochelle played most of the match a man down after center Levani Botia was red-carded for a head-high tackle on opposition full-back Maxime Medard in the 28th minute.

"The history is everywhere around the club, it hits you straight way when you get there so for us it was a huge motivating factor to live up to the standard that had already been set up for us," Toulouse No. 8 Jerome Kaino told Channel 4. "To be able to get that fifth star is unreal," he added.

Yet despite La Rochelle's disadvantage, the score was still level at 12-12 until the hour mark as Toulouse's Argentina center Juan Cruz Mallia crossed for the opening try of the match. France fly-half Romain Ntamack, who along with La Rochelle counterpart Ihaia West had already kicked four penalties, converted to put Toulouse seven points in front.

Ntamack then landed another penalty to put Toulouse two scores in front at 22-12 with barely 10 minutes left. Yet in the 73rd minute La Rochelle hit back with a try from former New Zealand scrum-half Tawera Kerr Barlow. But West's conversion bounced off the right post and clear, meaning La Rochelle needed a try, rather than a penalty, to draw level with time running out. — AFP

Lewandowski topples Mueller goal record

BERLIN: Robert Lewandowski yesterday broke Gerd Mueller's 49-year-old record when he bagged a 41st Bundesliga goal of the campaign seconds before the final whistle on the last weekend of the season. Mueller, 75, is suffering from severe dementia, but "The Bomber" remains an iconic figure in German football as the Bundesliga's all-time top scorer with 365 goals, well ahead of Lewandowski's tally of 277.

Many thought Mueller's record of 40 goals for Bayern Munich in 1971/72 would never be matched until Lewandowski rounded the goalkeeper to score in the same club's 5-2 rout of Augsburg on Saturday after equaling the record last weekend. "It was tense until the last second, I would have liked to have scored earlier," a relieved Lewandowski told Sky. "Sometimes you also have to stay patient, which was difficult. I always believed that a chance would come. That was a special and historic moment."

While Mueller scored his 40 goals over 34 league games in 1971/72, injury and squad rotation meant Lewandowski broke the record in just 29 matches. Bayern scored 101 goals in the league in 1971/72 and 99 this season. Physically, the 32-year-old Lewandowski is very different to Mueller, who was 26 in the 1971/72 season.

Athlete, artist

"Robert is an athlete, Gerd was an artist," Mueller's wife - Uschi Mueller - told magazine Sport Bild. At 1.84 m and 79 kg, Lewandowski is a model athlete,

renowned for his strict diet and training program. Mueller, at 1.76 m and 80 kg in his prime, was nicknamed "short fat Mueller" by former Bayern coach Zlatko Cajkovski. The pair share an insatiable appetite for goals.

Lewandowski has hit the net on average every 60 minutes this season, while "The Bomber" scored every 77 minutes in 1971/72. Lightning reaction speed is another similarity. Mueller was a copybook penalty box striker, who could transfer the ball from his right to left foot with bewildering speed. His low center of gravity helped Mueller steal an edge over defenders in the first few meters. Given a sniff of goal, he was an ice-cool finisher.

Lewandowski is just as dynamic, but in contrast to Mueller, he is happy to shoot from outside the box or use the space to outspurt defenders. They share the killer instinct when the ball is near goal, often being alert to a rebound and waiting until the last second to pounce, as Lewandowski demonstrated yesterday.

Lewandowski started 2020/21 with a bang, converting a penalty and providing two assists in an 8-0 thrashing of the Schalke, a record result for the opening game of a Bundesliga season. He failed to score in the next game, a shock 4-1 loss at Hoffenheim, but provided all four goals, including a late match-winning penalty in a nervy 4-3 home win over Hertha Berlin last October.

He was rested for one game in late October after scoring ten goals in his first five games, then hit a purple patch with 25 in 20 league games. A knee injury playing for Poland in late March left Lewandowski on 35 goals after a hat-trick against Stuttgart.

After three weeks out, he returned with a goal in the shock loss at Mainz before hitting a hat-trick in the 6-0 home win over Moenchengladbach which won Bayern the title. While Lewandowski has scored consistently, Mueller had sporadic purple patches,



MUNICH: Bayern Munich striker Robert Lewandowski poses with the trophy for the leading goal scorer of the Bundesliga 2020-2021 season yesterday. — AFP

netting just three goals in the first nine games of the 1971/72 season. However, he had scored 18 goals by the halfway point, including four in an 11-1 thrashing of Dortmund in November 1971.

He then hit five goals in a 7-0 thrashing of Oberhausen which sparked a run of 16 goals in just seven games, finishing the season with six goals in three games. "Gerd spread fear and terror in defenders", said Bayern assistant coach Hermann Gerland, who faced Mueller as a Bochum defender in the 1970s. And almost half a century later, Mueller was in Lewandowski's thoughts when he scored at Freiburg last weekend. — AFP