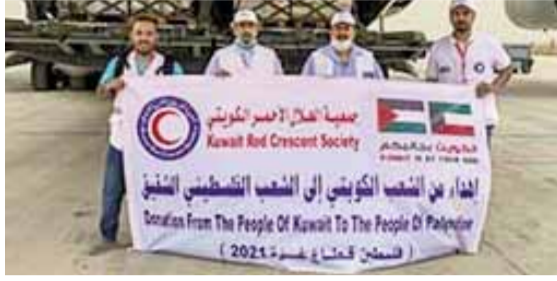




3 Kuwaiti plane heads to Egypt carrying medical aid for Gaza



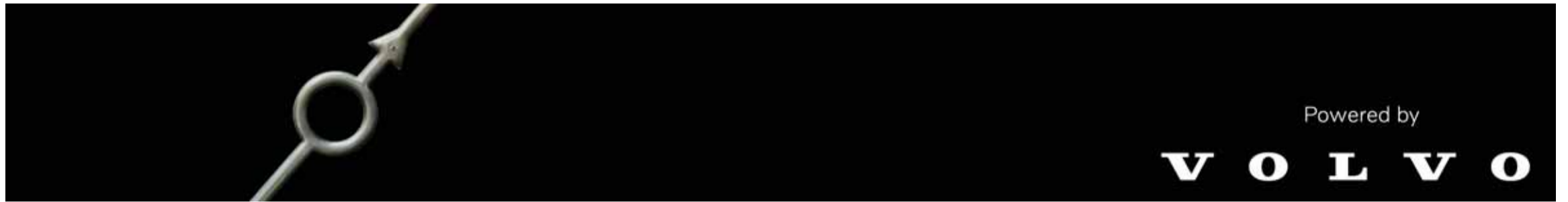
8 Iran rolling blackouts blamed on heat, drought, crypto-mining



11 Italian rockers Maneskin win pandemic-defying Eurovision



14 India Olympic medalist arrested over murder case after manhunt



Govt boycotts grilling session, MP files to grill prime minister

Opposition hails Wasmi's victory • MP calls to allow expats to return



KUWAIT: MPs mill about at the National Assembly after the government boycotted the parliamentary session yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The government yesterday boycotted a special session demanded by MPs to debate grillings against three ministers. The premier and all Cabinet members did not attend the session. National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem adjourned the session immediately, saying he was informed that the government will not attend.

As a result, MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri filed to grill HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah over the government's boycott and a number of other issues. He accused the premier of not respecting the constitution, failing to disclose his wealth to the Anti-Corruption Authority and issuing a decision to bar unvaccinated citizens from traveling.

Ghanem said he received the grilling and informed the prime minister. The speaker also circulated the agenda of the next regular sessions tomorrow and Wednesday amid concerns that the sessions will not be allowed to convene like a previous one a month ago.

Opposition MPs say a decision taken by the Assembly on March 30 to delay grillings of the

prime minister until the end of 2022 is illegal and breaches the constitution, while the speaker and the government insist it is legal. The opposition refuses to discuss any issue unless the prime minister is grilled, which is rejected by the speaker and the government.

Meanwhile, opposition lawmakers yesterday welcomed the landslide victory by veteran opposition figure Obaid Al-Wasmi to become member of parliament, saying the impressive win is a clear message to the government. According to official results, Wasmi, a professor of law, secured a record high 43,810 votes or over 92 percent of all votes cast in a by-election in the fifth constituency.

The election was held to fill the seat of opposition figure Bader Al-Dahoum, whose election was nullified by the constitutional court for being convicted in court for insulting HH the Amir. Speaking after the results were officially announced late Saturday night, Wasmi immediately called on Ghanem to resign in order to defuse continued disputes "created by him".

"The message of the people is very clear...This exceptional political solidarity has cancelled

Continued on Page 2

Joy, relief as dine-in resumes at restaurants

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Restaurants and cafes resumed dine-in services yesterday after a three-month ban - albeit only till 8 pm - bringing joy to customers and restaurateurs alike. Haide Somera, a sales manager at a foreign real estate company, was elated. "Our activities are related to real estate and we usually meet our clients at restaurants or cafes. During the dine-in ban, we were

struggling for sales, because people are hesitant to invest during the pandemic, and after they closed restaurants and cafes, we had no place to meet. The office is only good for signing documents; normally, deals are closed at a restaurant," she said.

Meliza Mendez, owner of a Filipino restaurant in Souq Salmiya, thanked the government for allowing dine-in services again. "The past few months were a struggle for many restaurants. If you don't have promotions, you cannot earn anything, not even enough to pay the staff," she said. Mendez complained that during the no-dine-in months, the real estate company that owns the building in which her restaurant is located did not give any rent relief.

"I assumed they would give us dis-

counts like last year, but it didn't happen not even leniency for payment. I paid every single month and was even struggling to pay my staff. But it's my business and I had to take charge, so I dipped into my savings," she said.

It was the same struggle for newly-opened restaurant, also in Souq Salmiya. "I opened the restaurant at the height of the pandemic. It was busy, as many people were using my resto for their parties. But it didn't last long," owner Jerry Seden said. "Imagine the money I lost. I rent the entire sixth floor of the building and I am paying a huge amount for it. They gave a 20 percent discount, but only in March and April. My customers are mostly Filipinos and they are not into ordering food and eating at home - they want to dine in," he said.



KUWAIT: People enjoy a meal at a restaurant in Kuwait City yesterday after the government eased dine-in restrictions. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (See Page 4)

Extreme weather kills 21 runners during China race



Rescuers carry equipment as they search for runners competing in a 100-km cross-country mountain race near Baiyin in China's northwestern Gansu province on Saturday. — AFP

BEIJING: Twenty-one people were killed after hail, freezing rain and high winds hit runners taking part in a cross-country mountain race in China, state media said yesterday. The extreme weather struck a high-altitude section of the 100-km race held in the scenic Yellow River Stone Forest in northwestern Gansu province Saturday afternoon. Among the dead were elite Chinese long-distance runners, local media reported. Official news agency Xinhua confirmed that 21 of the 172 participants

Continued on Page 2

Cable car accident kills 13 in Italy

ROME: Thirteen people died and two children were seriously injured yesterday when a cable car slammed into the side of a mountain in northern Italy, emergency services said. The toll could rise further from the accident in Stresa, a resort town on the shores of Lake Maggiore in Italy's Piedmont region, the Alpine rescue service said on Twitter.

Traumatized Gaza children 'scared of dying'

GAZA: When a Zionist air strike targeted a security office near her home in Gaza this month, 10-year-old Zeina Dabous frantically scribbled a note and slipped it under her mother's pillow. "Mummy, my love, I am very very scared. If we all die, put us in the same grave all together so I can stay in your arms," she wrote. "I want to wear my

A spokesman said two children aged nine and five had been seriously injured and taken by helicopter to a pediatric hospital in Turin. A statement by Prime Minister Mario Draghi expressed his "profound grief" and offered his condolences to the victim's families. The 20-minute cable car ride, popular with tourists, links Stresa with the 1,500-m summit of the Mottarone mountain, and offers spectacular views of the Alps.

The ministry of infrastructure said in a statement that the accident occurred around 12:30 pm as the cabin, with 11 people aboard, was about 100 m from the summit.

Continued on Page 2



Rescuers are seen near a cable car that crashed to the ground in the resort town of Stresa on the shores of Lake Maggiore in the Piedmont region of Italy yesterday. — AFP

Eid clothes," she added, of the outfit she never got to wear for the celebration after Zionist air strikes on the Palestinian enclave started on May 10.

Though a ceasefire has since Friday halted the air raids, experts warn that children in the besieged coastal strip will likely carry the mental scars for years to come. Psychologists say many are showing signs of depression, anxiety, behavioral disorders or irritability, and many are wetting their bed. At home in Gaza City just before the bombing stopped, Zeina said she was constantly petrified and barely sleeping.

Continued on Page 2



GAZA: Maysa Abu al-Awfi plays with her brother Ahmad and sister Maram at their grandfather's home in Gaza City on May 20, 2021, after their home was demolished in a Zionist strike. — AFP

Local

Amir congratulates Wasmi on winning by-election

Sheikh Nawaf receives senior state officials



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



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



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Integrity Enhancement Abdullah Al-Roumi.



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



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah, and Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of congratulations to winner of fifth constituency's by-election for National Assembly Dr Obaid Al-Wasmi Al-Mutairi, wishing him well in his endeavor serving the country. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah

sent similar cables to the elected MP. The electoral committee of the fifth constituency had announced Dr Wasmi as winner of the 2021 parliamentary by-election on Saturday. Head of the committee Judge Abdullah Al-Othman said Dr Wasmi garnered 43,810 votes. The turnout was 28 percent. Born in 1971, Dr Wasmi has a PhD in Procedural Law and is a teaching staff member at the Faculty of Law, Kuwait University.

In other news, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at Seif Palace yesterday. His Highness also received His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. Moreover, His Highness Sheikh Nawaf received Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of

Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah, and Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Integrity Enhancement Abdullah Al-Roumi. Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince received His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled, Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali, Roumi and Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah yesterday at Seif Palace. — KUNA

Govt boycotts grilling session...

Continued from Page 1

factionalism and sectarianism in the country...There is no factionalism or sectarianism in Kuwait from today," Wasmi said. Dahoum said the victory indicates that the "corrupt" official must step down voluntarily, otherwise they will be forced to go, adding the Kuwaiti people will bring about the downfall of corrupt people.

Extreme weather kills 21 runners...

Continued from Page 1

had died, citing the local rescue command headquarters. The other 151 are now safe, according to state media. Baiyin city mayor Zhang Xuchen said that at around midday Saturday a section of the rugged ultramarathon course - between kilometers 20 and 31 - was "suddenly affected by disastrous weather".

"In a short period of time, hailstones and ice rain suddenly fell in the local area, and there were strong winds. The temperature sharply dropped," Zhang said. Shortly after receiving messages for help, marathon organizers dispatched a rescue team. At around 2 pm, weather conditions worsened and the race was called off, Zhang said.

The victims included top domestic marathon runners Liang Jing and Huang Guanjun, local media reported. Liang had won multiple Chinese ultramarathons in recent years. Huang, who was deaf-mute, won the men's hearing-impaired marathon at the 2019 National Paralympic Games held in Tianjin. Father-of-one Lu Zhengyi, who took part in several marathons, was also reported by local media as one

"It's yet another powerful message sent by the Kuwaiti people. It is a historical day," MP Hamad Rouh Eldin said. MP Muwaizri said the message must be understood, adding that "we will crush corrupt people". MP Hasan Jowhar described the victory as historic and exceptional, saying it is a victory for the constitution.

MP Thamer Al-Suwait described the outcome as a "popular uprising" against attempts to undermine the constitution and the National Assembly, adding that the results show the Kuwaiti people expressed their anger and rejection of such attempts. Suwait also criticized the government for not treating expats like Kuwaitis, who are allowed to leave the country and return, while expats can't return if they leave.

of the victims. "As the event's organizer, we feel a deep sense of guilt and self-blame, express our deep mourning for the victims and deep condolences to their families and the injured runners," Zhang said. The race, backed by the Baiyin city government and the Chinese Athletic Association, has been held for four successive years.

Xinhua reported that some of the runners suffered from hypothermia, and Zhang said earlier that eight people were being treated for minor injuries and were in a stable condition. Video footage broadcast on state media showed emergency rescue personnel in combat fatigues carrying flashlights as they climbed through the rocky terrain at night.

Some marathon participants, wrapped in heavy-duty blankets, were filmed being put on stretchers by rescuers. Photos published by Chinese media also showed a group of runners huddled together on the mountainside, some wrapped in insulation blankets.

"My whole body was soaked through, including my shoes and socks. I couldn't stand up straight because of the wind, I was very worried I'd be blown over. The cold became more and more unbearable," one survivor was quoted as saying in local media. "While descending the mountain, I was already experiencing hypothermia symptoms." — AFP

Traumatized Gaza children...

Continued from Page 1

"They're always bombing," she told AFP. After a strike hit very close, "before sleeping I wrote a note in red pen to my mother and slipped it under the pillow because I was scared I would die," she said. Zeina is one of around a million children living in Gaza, according to the UN's children agency UNICEF.

Zionist strikes on Gaza killed 248 Palestinians, including 66 children, and have wounded another 1,900 people, the Gaza health ministry says. There is controversy about how many of those killed in Gaza were combatants, and how many were civilians. Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the bombing campaign had killed "more than 200 terrorists" in Gaza.

Zionist air strikes also pounded the densely populated enclave in 2008-2009, 2012 and 2014. When the last war raged, Zeina was no older than four. "A whole generation of children has been ravaged by repeated conflicts," said Zeina's grandfather, Saeed Dabous. The charity Save the Children on Friday warned that children in Gaza would suffer for years to come. They "are suffering from fear

and anxiety, a lack of sleep, and are displaying worrying signs of distress, such as constant shaking and bedwetting," it said.

In their grandfather's home, Maysa Abu al-Awf, 22, held her two-year-old brother Ahmad on her lap and tried to comfort him after they lost two sisters and dozens of relatives in a devastating air strike. "I'm scared, I'm scared," Ahmad constantly repeated, a scab on his hand and stitches on his bare foot. Maysa said that whenever he heard an explosion, he cried out. "I tell him, 'don't be scared, it's just the sound of balloons popping'."

After air strikes demolished their four-storey family home in Gaza city on Sunday last week, Maysa, little Ahmad and their sister Maram, who is seven, screamed for hours under the rubble before they were rescued. Their two sisters - 20-year-old dentistry student Shaima and 17-year-old school pupil Rawan - did not survive.

Sitting beside her grandfather, Maram shook as she recounted being trapped under the rubble. "I called out for Mummy... I called for them to get me out," she said. At the site of her demolished home, AFP saw Maram's favorite red teddy bear lying in the debris, foam spilling from its left leg. "I am sad," Maram said. "All my books and notebooks were burnt."

In the Gaza Strip's main Shifa Hospital, their 16-year-old cousin Omar was in shock after the same strike killed his two brothers and father, who was the head of internal medicine at the facility. — AFP

Cable car accident kills...

Continued from Page 1

The ministry said the accident appeared to have been caused by a ruptured cable near the top of the route. Regional president Alberto Cirio said he was "devastated" at what he termed "an enormous tragedy which takes our breath away."

Giovanni Toti, president of the neighboring region of Liguria, noted that the tragedy had occurred just as Italy was emerging from months of COVID-related restrictions. Yesterday, he said, was supposed to have been "a day of re-opening rich in

hope". European Council President Charles Michel offered a tweet in Italian expressing his "most sincere condolences to the families and friends who have lost a loved one in this tragic accident."

Fire service images showed debris from the white and red cabin in a steep wooded area where access appeared difficult. The cable car was closed between 2014 and 2016 for maintenance work. Europe has seen a number of similar cable car accidents over the past 50 years. Nine German skiers were killed on Sept 5, 2005, when an 800 kilo concrete block fell from a helicopter transporting it near the popular Austrian Tyrol resort of Soelden onto a cable carrying their cabin. In Feb 1998, a low-flying US military jet severed a cable at Cavalese, a ski resort in Italy's Dolomites, killing 20 people. Cavalese was also the scene of a 1976 disaster when a steel supporting cable broke, killing 42 people. — AFP

Local

Amir reiterates Kuwait's firm stand with Palestine in call with Abbas

Kuwaiti relief plane heads to Egypt carrying medical aid for Gaza



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah made a phone call to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on Saturday, in which he reiterated Kuwait's welcoming of the ceasefire agreement in Gaza. His Highness the Amir also reaffirmed Kuwait's strong stand with Palestine "which constitutes a key pillar of Kuwait's policy", and limitless support to the Palestinians to achieve their rights and goals of establishing an independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital. Meanwhile, President Abbas expressed appreciation for Kuwait's stand and efforts "embodied through its historical stand in support of the Palestinian cause in all arenas."

In the meantime, Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) announced that the first relief plane has taken off from Abdullah Al-Mubarak Air Base, carrying medical aid to Cairo Airport in Egypt to be delivered to the Palestinian people in Gaza Strip who are facing difficult living conditions due to the brutal Zionist aggression. The relief flights of Kuwait's humanitarian "Air Bridge" to Gaza Strip began yesterday, which is a translation of the keenness of His

Highness the Amir of Kuwait, Kuwaiti government, and Kuwaiti people, to support the brothers in Gaza Strip, KRCS Chairman Dr Hilal Al-Sayer said.

He added that the plane was carrying 40 tons of medicines, medical supplies, blankets and wheelchairs, accompanied by a number of volunteers who would go to the Rafah crossing and deliver them to the Palestinian Red Crescent, noting that KRCS distributed food baskets and two ambulances for the brothers in Palestine over the past days. He pointed out that the Kuwait Red Crescent field team will visit the wounded and Palestinian families, whether in Al-Arish or in the Gaza Strip, to provide their needs urgently, stressing that the Society will not hesitate to provide all kinds of support to the brothers in Palestine.

Dr Sayer praised the Kuwaiti official position, the Foreign Ministry, Ministry of Health and the Kuwaiti Embassy in Cairo for taking practical steps and humanitarian moves to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, expressing his deep thanks to the Ministry of Defense through the Kuwaiti Air Force, which sent the air bridge to Egypt. He stressed that Kuwait "is



always proactive in providing relief to the Palestinian people and standing with our brothers in Gaza." He called for the international community and humani-

tarian organizations to take the necessary measures to deliver the largest amount of relief and medical aid to the brothers in the Gaza Strip. — KUNA

KRCS distributes 200 tons of agricultural products in Lebanon



BEIRUT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) started yesterday distribution of 200 tons of agricultural products to needy Lebanese families and Syrian refugees in Lebanon. In a statement to the press, Deputy Chairman of KRCS Anwar Al-Hasawi said the society aims to support farmers and needy citizens as well as refugees by buying crops from

Lebanese farmers and distributing the produce to these segments, in coordination with the Lebanese Red Cross. He underscored necessity of such projects to help Lebanese people and Syrian refugees in their difficult living conditions. Meanwhile, Head of KRCS's mission to Lebanon Dr Musaad Al-Enezi said that the society is keen on carrying

out humanitarian projects that can benefit the largest low-income segments of the population in Lebanon. He has affirmed that the KRCS is continuing humanitarian and relief projects that support people, refugees and hospitals, affected with the fiery explosion that hit the Lebanese capital in August 2020. — KUNA

Health Minister participates in Arab meeting

KUWAIT: Kuwait Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah yesterday took part in a virtual meeting of the 55th session for Arab Health Ministers council. Dr Basel said in a statement the Arab health ministers discussed issues of Arab strategy projects, anti-coronavirus measures and methods of obtaining vaccines and distributing them fairly to Arab countries. He stressed on importance of the ministerial meeting for coordination and exchange information to enhance capabilities of health systems and support health development plans and programs. He mentioned that the ministers also discussed a report on health conditions in Palestine, including East Jerusalem and Syria's Golan Heights. He pointed out that the Council also discussed matters concerning the Executive Office of the Health Ministers Arab Council for 2021-2022.

Kuwait sets new regulations for jewelry shops

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Minister of Commerce and Industry Dr Abdullah Al-Salman yesterday issued a new ministerial decision regarding precious handmade crafts and jewelry, imposing new regulations, namely tagging each displayed piece with a price. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry added in a statement the price tag must entail the company's name, serial number (barcode), carats, weight, and type of the piece, as well as its factorial value, along with the weight of the lobes and their type. Meanwhile, regarding the precious handmade crafts of special nature, they should be exposed to customers in an isolated and clear location at the shop, with a tag of the company's name, serial number (barcode), which is related to the electronic sale system, type, weight and description of the piece, it added. The precious jewelry commercial shops should tag the piece they sell with fixed price, and the price should be registered in the shop's commercial record, it added. —KUNA

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Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: People dine inside restaurants, adhering to the safety regulations, in Kuwait yesterday, on the first day after the government eased restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Crimes

Fireman dies after battling blaze

KUWAIT: Fireman Maj Abdulaziz Al-Dawas from Salmiya fire brigade died a few hours after volunteering to deal with a fire in his neighbor's house in Bayan. Investigations are being held to find out whether the fire caused the death or if it was of natural causes. Retired Maj Gen Khalil Al-Amir said it is possible smoke inhalation caused the death. He said Dawas noticed the fire on the roof of his neighbor's house, and although he was off-duty, he dealt with the fire as firemen arrived and put out the blaze. He said he was later told that Dawas was taken to hospital, where he died.

Domestic violence

A 35-year-old Serbian woman accused her 44-year-old Bosnian husband of beating her and submitted a medical report. She said the incident took place in their Nuzha home due to a domestic dispute. Meanwhile, a Kuwaiti woman said four women and their father beat her and damaged her luxury car. Investigations are being held in both cases.

Suicide report

Two Indians committed suicide by hanging themselves in Salwa and Khaitan within 12 hours, according to police. A friend of the deceased in Khaitan said he hanged himself after a dispute with an Indian woman. It is not known whether she is his wife or not. — Translated by Kuwait Times from Al-Anbaa

Restaurants, coffee shops open for public

KUWAIT: Restaurants and coffee shops opened yesterday for customers after a long period of closure. The Kuwait Cabinet has decided to reopen all eateries provided customers abide by health precautionary measures against COVID-19 and conduct temperature checks. Dining inside restau-

rants and cafes is allowed from 5:00 am to 8:00 pm, after which only takeaways and delivery orders are accepted.

The Ministry of Health had announced Saturday five COVID-19 deaths and 1,017 infections registered in the previous 24 hours. The new figures took the country's death toll to 1,724 and the caseload to 298,223, noted the ministry's spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad in a statement. He pointed out that 1,039 patients had recovered over the same period, raising the total to 283,952. He added that the number of people hospitalized with the virus stood at 12,574 as of Saturday, including 164 in ICUs. Dr Sanad revealed that 8,249 swabs conducted over the

same period, bringing the total to 2.51 million. He renewed calls to abide by health precautions to curb the spread of the virus.

The Cabinet had ended a 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 the country is heading for reopening various sectors on gradual basis. 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. All public and private celebrations including weddings and gatherings at diwanis are still banned.

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Kuwait Airways continues to vaccinate staff against COVID-19

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways Corporation (KAC) is continuing vaccinating its staff against COVID-19 in cooperation with the Ministry of Health. The vaccination process includes all employees working in operations and support departments, and those in affiliated companies. Onboard staff were already vaccinated during the holy month of Ramadan.

Public Relations and Media Director Fayez Al-Anezi said KAC is keen to vaccinate all its staff work-

ing in operations and support departments and in affiliated companies to be able to do their job in the best way in a safe and healthy environment. "Preserving the health and safety of our staff and clients is our priority," he said yesterday.

"Most of KAC's employees are in direct contact with clients, both at the airport and at offices in various locations all over Kuwait. So KAC, in cooperation with the ministry of health, set a plan to send mobile units to KAC's headquarters to hold the vaccination drive on Thursday," added Anezi. "Thousands of KAC employees are facing the risk of infection due to their work. So we worked hard to get all employees vaccinated," he said.

KAC also regularly disinfects offices, corridors, meeting rooms and other places where its staff works. "KAC is providing facemasks and sanitizers at all of its facilities. We also have informative stickers with health instructions on the walls and on the floor to prevent the spread of the virus. Also last month, we launched a huge awareness campaign to encourage people to get vaccinated, which was welcomed by citizens and expats," concluded Anezi.



Goma city 'spared' as river of lava from DRC volcano halts

Two months after Palma raid, Mozambicans still on the run

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GAZA CITY: Palestinian women pose for a 'selfie' picture in front of a demolished building in the Al-Remal commercial district in Gaza City, recently targeted by Zionist air strikes, yesterday. —AFP

UN urges 'political process' in Mideast

Gaza residents assess damage amid reconstruction moves

GAZA CITY: A UN official in war-battered Gaza yesterday called for a "genuine political process" to avert further bloodshed after the military conflict staged by Zionist forces on Gaza Strip and West Bank that ravaged the Palestinian enclave.

As emergency response teams worked to clear the rubble, and Gaza residents assessed the damage to their homes and shops, top UN staff visited the territory after an Egyptian-brokered ceasefire Friday halted 11 days of mutual bombardment.

Zionist air strikes on the Gaza Strip since May 10 have killed more than 200 Palestinians, rendered thousands homeless and laid waste to buildings and key water and power infrastructure in the blockaded territory. It was the latest such bombardment to hit the crowded Mediterranean coastal strip of some two million people after three previous wars with the Jewish state since 2008.

Philippe Lazzarini, head of the UN Palestinian refugee agency UNRWA, told AFP that the reconstruction needed to go hand in hand with efforts to create "a different political environment". "We need to have a genuine, genuine focus on human development, on proper access to education, on proper access to jobs, on proper access to livelihoods," he said. "But this needs to be accompanied by a genuine political process."

Speaking earlier to a group of journalists, he said "the layers of hardship in Gaza keep getting thicker" because the root causes of the conflict have not been addressed. US President Joe Biden on Friday pledged to help organize efforts to rebuild Gaza and said creating a Palestinian state alongside Zionist entity is the "only answer" to the conflict. "We still need a two-state solution," he said.

'No pause to breathe'

Zionist strikes on Gaza killed 248 Palestinians, including 66 children, and have wounded over 1,900

Greek firefighters control forest fire near Athens

ATHENS: Greek firefighters said yesterday they were slowly bringing under control a major forest fire in a nature conservation area near Athens as the government promised financial aid to those affected. No injuries have been reported so far in Greece's first big forest fire of the summer, but around a dozen houses have been destroyed or damaged and villages and hamlets evacuated in what experts warned could be an ecological disaster.

"The fire is officially diminishing. It'll be a matter of hours before we can bringing it fully under control," a spokesman for the firefighters, Vassilis Vathrakogiannis, told Greek news agency ANA.

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, according to fire chief Stefanos Kolokouris. More than 270 firefighters, backed by 16 aircraft and by the army, were fighting the blazes.

The scale of the damage, notably for farmers, will only be clear once the fire is completely under control, the civil protection agency has said. Government ministers were due in the Gulf of Corinth area yesterday to assess with local officials the extent of the damage and discuss financial aid. Some 54 percent of the dense and hitherto protected pine forests have been burnt, the leftist Avgchi daily said. And 6.1 percent of the mountain range is part of the European Union's Natura 2000 network of nature conservation sites.

'Ecological disaster'

The government said it will provide financial aid to

people, the Gaza health ministry says. Rockets and other fire from Gaza claimed 12 lives in the Jewish state. Some 357 people in the Zionist state have been wounded.

There is controversy about how many of those killed in Gaza were combatants, and how many were civilians. Lynn Hastings, of the UN humanitarian agency OCHA, said that beyond the material damage, the intense bombing had done severe harm to many people's mental health.

During the last war in 2014, "we had humanitarian pauses, where people were able to get out, and were able to go to the shops, they were able to feel safe again," she said. "That really speaks to the amount of trauma that was experienced this time, where there was absolutely no pause for people to breathe."

"The comments that I have heard are not 'I need access to water'—even though there are 800,000 people who don't have access to clean water right now—but... about the impacts on their lives overall and how they are ever going to recover from this," she said.

Authorities on Saturday started distributing tents and mattresses in the Gaza Strip, as OCHA said at least 6,000 people had been made homeless by the bombardment. Convoys of lorries bringing much-needed medicine, food and fuel entered Gaza on Friday through the Kerem Shalom crossing after Zionists reopened it.

The UN's Central Emergency Response Fund said it had released \$18.5 million for humanitarian efforts. The international community has welcomed the ceasefire and the UN Security Council on Saturday called for "full adherence" to it. Peace talks have stalled since 2014, including over the key issues of the status of occupied east Jerusalem and Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank.

Lingering tensions

The latest military escalation started after violent



ATHENS: Local residents look at a forest fire near the village of Pefkaneas, west of Athens. —AFP

those who have lost their homes, cattle or farmland as a result of the fire. "Immediate financial aid of 600 euros (\$730) will be provided to cover initial needs, and up to 6,000 euros will be allocated for repair works after an initial assessment of the damages," said deputy interior minister, Stelios Petsas.

He also promised substantial work to prevent future flooding in the area. 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 on Saturday. Greece faces violent forest fires every summer, fanned by dry weather, strong winds and temperatures that often soar well above 30 C (86 F). — AFP



GAZA CITY: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini speaks during a press conference at the UN compound in Gaza City yesterday. — AFP

clashes in Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque compound, Islam's third holiest site. Zionist forces had moved in on Palestinian worshippers at the site toward the end of the holy month of Ramadan. They were seeking to stop protests against the expulsion of Palestinians from their homes in the east Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah to make way for Jewish settlers.

The clashes prompted Hamas to launch rockets from Gaza towards Zionist entity on May 10. Palestinian presidential spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeina warned that the Jewish visits could "sabotage" the Gaza ceasefire. Palestinian news agency Wafa reported. Zionist police on Friday fired stun grenades at worshippers in the Al-Aqsa mosque compound, and occupation forces beat an AFP photographer who was covering the unrest. The incident was reminiscent of the tensions that sparked the latest round of conflict. — AFP

Iran's polls to split conservatives in two

TEHRAN: A presidential election in Iran next month could provide the final straw to split an already long-divided conservative political camp, after years of growing divisions.

While the list of approved candidates has yet to be released, the June 18 poll is already widely expected to be a showdown between conservative Ali Larijani, a former parliament speaker, and ultra-conservative judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi. According to the elections committee, close to 600 hopefuls—including 40 women—have registered to be candidates to succeed moderate President Hassan Rouhani, who is constitutionally barred from running for a third consecutive term.

But only a handful will be allowed to run after vetting by the Guardian Council, a conservative-dominated, unelected body in charge of overseeing elections. The first fractures within the conservatives date back to the "Green Movement", which emerged in 2009 during protests against the disputed re-election of populist president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. But it was the 2015 nuclear deal in Vienna that deepened the cracks.

In Iran, the word "conservatives"—"mohafezekaran" in Persian—is rarely used, a term that appeared in media only in 1997. Until then, only the "right" and the "left" were known within the "Followers of the Line of the Imam", the supporters of the Islamic republic's late founder, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. The other forces—from Marxists to liberals and nationalists—who took part in the 1979 revolution that toppled the shah were ejected. The essential ideological difference was economic: the left favored interventionism, the right less state control. After 1989, with the end of the Iran-Iraq war and Khomeini's death, the right dominated political life. — AFP

Thousands rally in France in support of Palestinians

PARIS: Several thousand people marched Saturday in Paris and other French cities in support of Palestinians after an 11-day conflict ignited by Zionist entity that killed 260 people, most of the Palestinians.

This weekend's Paris demonstration was restricted to a rally at the Place de la Republique. Last weekend, thousands of activists defied a ban on a similar demonstration to march in the capital.

The CGT trade union said up to 4,000 people attended the Paris rally and other demonstrations told AFP said the ceasefire had not resolved anything. "This fight concerns all those who are attached to the values of justice, dignity and law," he added.

Bertrand Heilbronn, president of the France Palestine Solidarity Association, which organized the Paris rally, a Palestinian flag draped around his shoulders. "The residents of Sheikh Jarrah are still facing the threat of expulsion and the Gaza Strip is blockaded," he added.

Other protests took place in cities around France. Regional officials said 1,100 people marched in the southeast city of Lyon, as many as on the previous weekend.

In the northern city of Lille, organizers said around 1,000 attended a rally while police put the number at 650. Other protests were held in the eastern French city of Strasbourg, as well as Toulouse and Montpellier in the south.

"Palestinians have a right to live in peace and have a state," said Imad Deaibis in Strasbourg. "The Jewish state has deprived us of our rights and of our houses. I am Palestinian but I no longer have the right to go there, my family has lost everything." —AFP

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International

Goma city 'spared' as river of lava from DRC volcano halts

5 people killed, thousands of terrified residents flee

GOMA, DR Congo: A river of boiling lava came to a halt on the outskirts of Goma yesterday, sparing the city in eastern DR Congo from disaster after the nighttime eruption of Mount Nyiragongo sent thousands of terrified residents fleeing in panic. Fire and strong fumes emanated from the blackish molten rock as it swallowed up houses, heading towards Goma airport on the shores of Lake Kivu, an AFP correspondent said. But the military governor of North Kivu province said "the city was spared" after "the lava halted near Buhene on the outskirts of Goma".

Five people were killed in accidents during the evacuations, said General Constant Ndimba, who was appointed governor early this month when the province was placed under a "state of siege" to combat violence by armed groups. "Several thefts from shops and an attempted escape of inmates" from the city's prison were reported, but "the situation is under control," he said. Thousands had fled during the night and many families slept on pavements surrounded by their belongings under a night sky turned red by fire and fumes. And around a dozen earth tremors were felt in the early hours. Ndimba said around 7,000 people had fled to neighboring Rwanda, but had begun to return early yesterday. Others who sought refuge in the Sasisi region to the southwest "also are beginning to return to the city center," he said. Goma appeared relatively calm as dawn broke, but people said they are still wary. "The situation seems to have calmed down for the moment," one resident said. "But people are still scared. The authorities still haven't made any official announcement so far this morning," he added. "There is a smell of sulphur. In the distance you can see giant flames coming out of the mountain," one resident, Carine Mbala, told AFP.

'Not sure it's over'

"People are wondering whether the volcano has

stopped, or whether it will continue, whether the lava will reappear," another resident said. A few cars were on seen on the streets, but no police or military presence was visible. "We're not convinced that the eruption is over in just a day. We're waiting," said one man. On Saturday, Communications Minister Patrick Muyaya had said that the government had activated an evacuation plan and was "discussing the urgent measures to take at present." The president of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Felix Tshisekedi, had said he would "interrupt his stay in Europe to return home to supervise the coordination of aid".

General Ndimba said Monusco, the UN mission in the country, NGOs and international organizations in the DRC held an emergency meeting yesterday with local and regional authorities to discuss the crisis. The first departures from Goma city came even before the official confirmation that Mount Nyiragongo had erupted at around 7:00 pm Saturday, spewing red fumes into the night sky.

'I'm scared again'

Power was already cut in large parts of the city when hundreds of residents began leaving their homes. Some headed out of the southern end of Goma towards the nearby border post with Rwanda, while others headed west towards Sake, in the neighboring Congolese region of Masisi. Resident Richard Bahati said he was incredibly worried about the eruption: "I lived through this volcano problem in 2002. The volcano had devastated all our homes and all our possessions. That's why I'm scared again this time." Electricity was cut off in a large part of the city, with thousands of people-encumbered with mattresses, food and parcels-heading towards the Rwandan border. "There are a lot of people on the road, a lot of cars, it's an escape," one man with his family in his car told AFP. "It is moving at a snail's pace,



GOMA, Dr Congo: This general view taken from Tchegera Island outside Goma on the lake Kivu in the East of the Democratic Republic of Congo shows flame spewing from the Nyiragongo volcano. —AFP

on three or four lanes," he said, adding: "There are children, women, old people who are on foot and the rain is coming. It's complicated."

Last flights

Several planes, belonging to Monusco and private companies, took off in the evening, according to an airport source, with a local adding they had also seen the unusual nighttime activity. In a May 10 report, the Goma Vulcanology Observatory

warned that seismic activity around the volcano had increased and warranted careful monitoring.

The last time Nyiragongo erupted was January 17, 2002, killing more than a hundred people and covering almost all of the eastern part of Goma with lava, including half of the airport's landing strip. During that eruption, the victims were mostly sick or elderly abandoned to their fate in the northern districts of the city with some looting also taking place. —AFP

Court rules bid to block Samoa govt change 'unlawful'

APIA, Samoa: A rare Supreme Court yesterday sitting in Samoa has cleared the way for the Pacific island nation to hold a parliamentary session expected to confirm its first change of government in almost four decades. The court overturned a late Saturday night announcement by head of state Tuimalealiifano Vaaletoa Sualauvi that cancelled today's historic parliamentary session without explanation. His decision was challenged by the opposition FAST party, whose leader Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa has the numbers to be installed as Samoa's first female prime minister.

Following a meeting in chambers with FAST and the ruling Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP), Chief Justice Satiu Simativa Perese declared the head of state's announcement was "unlawful". It is believed to be the first time a court has convened in the religious nation yesterday, when almost all activities are closed. FAST lawyer and former attorney-general Taulapapa Brenda Heather-Latu told reporters the court issued an interim declaration that stopping parliament going ahead was unlawful.

There was also a permanent declaration that a court order last week disallowing an HRPP bid to prevent the opposition from taking power, was "valid and is lawful", she said. "Those were basically the two orders. Our clients are prepared to address anything else that might come up, and continue to rely on God's grace." A court registrar told reporters that Attorney General Savalenoa Mareva Betham-Annandale "walked out" of the chambers meeting after being told several times by the chief justice to sit down. Should parliament open on Monday it will end weeks of political uncertainty in Samoa since the April 9 general election, which ended with FAST and the HRPP locked at 25 seats each with one independent in the 51-seat parliament.

When the independent sided with FAST, Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi—who has held the top job for 22 years-boosted his numbers by adding an extra MP to his party under provisions setting out the minimum quota of women in parliament. He then persuaded Sualauvi to call a second election for May 21. The courts overturned both measures and a panel of appeal judges on Friday rejected HRPP's bid for a stay on the rulings. Malielegaoi has insisted the HRPP still has the numbers to lead the nation of 220,000. —AFP

Death of Floyd and a year of turmoil in US

WASHINGTON: "Day of Enlightenment." That's how the George Floyd Memorial Center wants to commemorate May 25, the anniversary of the 46-year-old Black man's death under the knee of a white police officer in Minneapolis. "This day of brutality opened the world's eyes to the plight of

Black Americans," the website of the Memorial Center says. The aftershocks of Floyd's death are still being felt a year after his death.

Death captured on video

On Memorial Day weekend, the police were called after Floyd bought a pack of cigarettes at Cup Foods, where Floyd was suspected of using a counterfeit \$20 bill. A struggle ensued when police tried to place him into a squad car and he ended up face down on the street with his hands cuffed behind his back.

Derek Chauvin, a 17-year veteran of the Minneapolis police department, held

his knee on Floyd's neck for more than nine minutes until he passed out and died. As Floyd complained repeatedly that he could not breathe, bystanders urged Chauvin to get off his neck. A 17-year-old girl took a video of the arrest with her smartphone and the footage went viral.

Wave of protests

The video of Floyd's death sparked protests against racial injustice and police brutality across the United States and around the world. Protestors-Black and white—took to the streets in the largest protests in the United States since the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

Pandemic offers southern Italians chance to return home

CATANIA: Sipping a craft beer on a warm spring evening in Catania, Sicily, Corrado Paterno Castello spares a thought for friends and colleagues he left behind in Milan, 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) north. "Today, between meetings, I had a swim at the beach," the 29-year-old entrepreneur told AFP, with a beaming smile. "The quality of life you have here is very different from what you experience up north, and it is priceless." Workers across the world have taken advantage of enforced home-working during the coronavirus pandemic to move to warmer climes, requiring only a plug for their laptop and a decent internet connection. But in Italy, where for generations those from the relatively poorer south have sought work in the north, it has been a chance for people like Paterno Castello to go home-perhaps for good.

'Free to return'

Italy has an old history of regional disparities, driving internal migration from rural or underdeveloped areas, mostly in the south, to wealthier urban centers in the north like Milan, a business, fashion and finance hub. "Out of my high school class, nearly everybody left ... at least 15 out of 20 people," said Elena Militello,

Floyd family emerges as powerful voices against police brutality

WASHINGTON: With their tears, rage, dignity and solidarity, George Floyd's loved ones have become respected leaders of the fight against police brutality in the United States. "This just fell on my lap to take on and be his voice because he's no longer here," Bridgett Floyd said of her role since her brother died. Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, was killed on May 25, 2020 by a white police officer, Derek Chauvin, who knelt on his neck for over nine minutes.

Chauvin was convicted by a jury in Minneapolis, Minnesota, of murder and manslaughter on April 20 and is to be sentenced on June 25. The Floyd family received \$27 million in a settlement with the city. Captured on video by a bystander, Floyd's death sparked protests against racial injustice across the United States and around the world. Yesterday, members of the Floyd family plan to take part in a march in Minneapolis with relatives of other African-Americans killed in encounters with the police.

Among those planning to attend is Sybrina Fulton, the mother of Trayvon Martin, the teenager whose 2012

shooting death in Florida helped spawn the Black Lives Matter movement. "We want the world to see how us families are hurting because the police took a loved one from us," Bridgett Floyd said in response to a question from AFP during a meeting with reporters. "We feel each other's pain. We feel each other's struggles with this," she said. "So we come together and we stand in unity so the world can see how much this has affected us." The Floyd family has worked closely over the past year with other families, lawyer Ben Crump and civil rights leader Al Sharpton to push their anti-racism message. "Initially for us, it was personal, obviously, because we lost a loved one," Shareeduh Tate, Floyd's cousin, told AFP. "Shortly thereafter, we understood it was something far bigger than just the personal loss."

'Enormous potential'

Before the pandemic struck, Milan was seen as Italy's most dynamic and successful city. But the south has many advantages, from cheaper living costs to less traffic and pollution-and the weather. In Catania, average temperatures do not fall below 10 degrees Celsius (50 Fahrenheit), even in mid-winter.

Mariano Corso, a leadership and innovation professor at the School of Management of Milan's Polytechnic University, said the so-called south working phenomenon could benefit all of Italy. A healthy



CATANIA, Italy: Elena Militello, President of the South Working Association, poses during an interview with AFP in one of the halls of the co-working space "Isola Catania" at Palazzo Biscari. —AFP

"competition between territories" should drive up public services everywhere, and "for southern cities this is a huge opportunity to seize the moment ... and get back in the game," he said.

Public transport and internet can be a problem across the south, including in Sicily, but Militello's association is lobbying for better service. It is also teaming up with private investors developing co-working spaces for south workers. One is due to open next month in Palazzo Biscari, a grandiose 18th century palace in downtown Catania once used as a set for a Coldplay music video. —AFP



MINNEAPOLIS: People attend the free public art exhibit "Justice for George: Messages from the People" at Phelps Field Park near George Floyd Memorial Square in Minneapolis, Minnesota. —AFP

parents of Daunte Wright, a 20-year-old Black man killed in a Minneapolis suburb by a police officer who apparently confused her gun and her Taser. "When does it stop?" asked Brandon Williams, Floyd's nephew. "We don't want families to go through the pain that we go through." Philonise Floyd said that after Floyd's death "we all pretty much committed to the fact that we were going to be active and involved in ensuring that his death would not be in vain. —AFP

Most demonstrations were peaceful but some were marred by arson and looting and unrest continued in the Oregon city of Portland throughout the summer. A police station was set on fire in Minneapolis, where National Guard troops helped restore order. From London to Lisbon, demonstrators rallied to express solidarity with Black Americans or to denounce excesses by their own police forces.

Presidential election

As the Democratic presidential candidate, Joe Biden, who is the former vice president to America's first Black presi-

dent, Barack Obama, and a popular figure among African Americans, reached out to Floyd's family. Biden attended Floyd's funeral via video and pledged to dismantle "systemic racism" if elected to the White House. His presidential rival, Donald Trump, threw his support behind the police, declaring himself the "law and order" candidate and blaming "antifa" and leftist "mobs" for the violence.

Biden won the November 4 election, receiving overwhelming support from Black voters, who he singled out for thanks in his victory speech. "You've always had my back, and I'll have yours," Biden said. —AFP

International

Two months after Palma raid, Mozambicans still on the run

Tens of thousands displaced after IS militants' raid

PEMBA, Mozambique: A constant nervous smile on Julia Francisco's face masks the anguish of fleeing extremist militants roaming northern Mozambique, then giving birth on a boat sailing in rough Indian ocean waters. Relieved to be now safe in Pemba, the capital city of northern Cabo Delgado province, the 21-year-old mother sat under a makeshift shelter at Paquitequete beach, holding her four-day-old daughter, loosely wrapped with a burgundy floral fabric. After eight days on a fishing boat, she spent the next three on the beach before being moved to a transit center at a municipal stadium.

Seven months pregnant at the time, Francisco was home when IS-linked militants struck Palma what locals believed was an impenetrable town, replete with soldiers protecting a multi-billion dollar gas project. What followed the March 24 surprise raid was an orgy of violence and agony.

When the sound of gunfire started reverberating late that afternoon people didn't suspect it could be Al-Shabab, the local term for insurgents, she said. By time they realized what was happening, the militants had already entered the town and surrounding villages. People started fleeing.

"I knew that if I didn't run I would be caught," she told AFP speaking in Swahili, one of the common languages in northern Mozambique near the border with Tanzania.

Tens of thousands displaced

Between running, walking and hiding in the forests, the following 11 days were hellish. Over the next few days, several hundred people were airlifted by humanitarian agencies or ferried by private com-

panies vessels. But most were left to fend for themselves at Quitunda, a safe village near the heavily guarded gas plant.

The scramble to escape Quitunda still rages on. Private fishing boats charge the equivalent of between \$50 and \$80 per trip to Pemba—a crippling steep fare for the country's most impoverished region. Sailing with her father, mother-in-law and four-year-old son, Francisco went into labor, was midwifed by fellow passengers and Eliseth was born on May 17.

The displaced arriving in Pemba speak of many people who want to leave Quitunda. Aid agencies estimate there are around 20,000 people there. Almost daily, small boatloads of people arrive in Pemba from Palma district.

After nine days at sea, a rickety red-hulled wooden fishing boat sailed into Paquitequete beach on a calm autumn afternoon, carrying 49 weary survivors. A man stepped off the boat, a bundle of clothes tied in a cotton sheet delicately balanced on his head while his hands held two plastic jerrycans and a thermos flask. Armed police were at hand, vetting the new arrivals and thoroughly sifting through their luggage to check for any weapons before releasing them.

'Life is bad there'

Wearing a pair of ripped jeans and a black jacket, 50-year-old Sumail Mussa fiddled with his mobile phone trying to call relatives he hoped could take him and his wife and child, but has no credit left. "Life is bad there, so we left," said Mussa. Back at the stadium, there are 279 people, but the numbers vary from day to day with fresh arrivals and others leaving. Less than week after giving birth, Francisco is still



PEMBA: A woman carries her belongings off a boat as she arrives at Paquitequete beach in Pemba after fleeing Palma by boat with forty nine other people. — AFP

convalescing. She walks slowly with a slight gait, drawing water, washing and drying her laundry on the grass outside the stadium. "I'm in pain, I'm suffering because I don't have any family member (to help me)," she said, adding that her mother-in-law and father were immediately hospitalized on arrival. Her husband works in Maputo.

She has no idea where her mother, two sisters and a brother are. "I don't know if they are alive or not,"

she said, anxiously checking her mobile phone from time-to-time. "I have no news from Palma." Large swathes of northern Mozambique have for the past three years been the target of jihadist attacks that have killed more than 2,800 people and uprooted around 700,000 civilians from their homes. The latest bout of violence on Palma district, has displaced nearly 57,000 over the past eight weeks, according to the UN agency International Organization for Migration. — AFP

Bangladesh journalist granted bail

DHAKA: A leading Bangladesh journalist critical of the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic was granted bail yesterday, after her detention sparked days of nationwide protests.

Rozina Islam, 42, an investigative reporter for the country's largest Bengali daily Prothom Alo, was arrested by police Monday under the Official Secrets Act. She was later charged with stealing health ministry documents. Islam was granted bail after being ordered to surrender her passport and pay a bail bond of 5,000 taka (\$60) by the chief metropolitan magistrate of the capital Dhaka, her lawyer told reporters.

"We did not oppose her ad interim bail provided she submits her passport," Dhaka's chief prosecutor Abdullah Abu said. The passport submission was to prevent her from leaving the country, he said, adding that Islam was expected to be released from detention later.

Journalist unions and advocacy groups said Islam was detained for her stories, which included allegations that urgently needed medical equipment was left at Dhaka airport for months, and that bribes had been offered to recruit doctors. Before her formal de-



DHAKA: Journalists and colleagues of the investigative journalist Rozina Islam (not pictured) protest in Dhaka following her arrest on accusation of stealing documents and taking images by the health ministry. — AFP

tenion, Islam had spent five hours at the health ministry, according to a ministry complaint seen by AFP.

Her detention triggered nationwide protests by thousands of journalists as well as political and civil rights activists. Rights groups say a crackdown on the media has grown during the coronavirus crisis.

The general secretary of Bangladesh's National Press Club welcomed the court's bail decision but called for the case against her to be dropped.

"She has been asked to submit her passport, which is a curb on her freedom of movement," Elias Khan told AFP. "We have demanded that all the cases against her are withdrawn immediately... Bangladesh journalists still operate in a climate of fear."

Bangladesh has reported nearly 800,000 coronavirus infections and more than 12,300 deaths so far, but experts say the actual numbers are likely to be much higher. — AFP

Hassler: Chile's first communist mayor in Santiago

SANTIAGO: Until last Sunday, Iraci Hassler was a relative unknown in her native Chile, but the 30-year-old economist is set to take the reins as the first communist mayor of the municipality of Santiago, the area at the heart of the capital. "Transformative forces are making significant advances in Chile," Hassler told AFP in an interview, adding that she would focus on a development model that promotes "dignity."

Hassler was one of a number of unexpected victors during elections last weekend, principally aimed at picking the members of a new body that will rewrite the Augusto Pinochet dictatorship-era constitution. But voters also elected local mayors, councillors, and for the first time, regional governors.

"We saw that there was a lot of support, a lot of love, in the markets, on social media, especially amongst the youth," Hassler said. "Many people naturally became campaign activists, therefore I for one expected such a result."

Santiago's greater metropolitan region of seven million people is divided into 37 municipalities. In the center is the municipality of Santiago that includes the civic center and presidential palace—occupied by right-wing President Sebastian Pinera—amongst 400,000 inhabitants. Hassler views her election as the natural culmination of a social movement that exploded into life in October 2019.

Originating as a student revolt against a hike in metro fares, hundreds of thousands of people then came out onto the streets demanding change. At the heart of their discontent was the ultra-liberal economic model that they blamed for the rampant inequality in a country long lauded for its economic prosperity.

"Transformative forces are making significant advances in Chile and I think that also has something to do with what happened in the Santiago commune and on a national level," she said. When the protests broke out, demonstrators chanted "Chile Awakens" and painted the phrase all over the capital.

"I think there has been a moment of empowerment of people and of an awareness that, although it



HAVANA: Santiago's Mayor-elect of the Communist party, Iraci Hassler, visits a popular neighborhood to thank for the support received during her electoral campaign in Santiago. — AFP

seemed latent in Chilean society, has been strongly expressed since October 18 (2019) with a very high level of organization." Almost half of the elected members of the constitutional convention are independents while left-leaning candidates also fared much better than those from the ruling right.

There were also successes for leftists and women in the local and regional elections that demonstrate "a reflection on an unfair model, the neoliberal model that has been strictly implemented in our country." Now "the possibility arises to put good living (and) dignity as principal elements at the heart to transform to a new development model."

Communists have long had a bad reputation in Chile, where opponents present them as harbingers of poverty and the expropriation of private property. But that image is slowly changing, particularly amongst student movements and visible figures such as legislator Camila Vallejo, a 33-year-old geographer, and Daniel Jadue, the Communist Party's presidential candidate for November's elections. Vallejo made a name for herself during student demonstrations in 2011 demanding better and free education, while Jadue, the mayor of the neighboring working class Recoleta municipality, has introduced affordable community pharmacies. — AFP

Former magazine editor acquitted of rape in India

PANAJI: An Indian court Friday acquitted the former editor of a leading news magazine accused of raping a female colleague seven years ago in a high-profile case that made headlines across the country. Tarun Tejpal was acquitted of charges of rape, sexual harassment and wrongful restraint, public prosecutor Francisco Tavora said in the coastal state of Goa. "Seriously aggrieved. The State will be assailing the judgment," Tavora told AFP in a text message. Tejpal, the 58-year-old founder and former editor of Tehelka magazine, was accused of raping a female journalist in the lift of a five-star hotel in Goa in November 2013.

He was granted bail in 2014. The case came at a time when India's record on sexual assault was under the scanner following the fatal gang-rape of a New Delhi student in December 2012 that sparked widespread protests and resulted in the strengthening of anti-rape laws. Tehelka magazine had reported forcefully on gender inequality in the country, highlighting police and judicial insensitivity to rape victims as well as the misogynistic attitudes of many Indian men.

Women's rights campaigners attacked the court's decision, with activist Kavita Krishnan calling it "very unfortunate". "This is a case where there was an enormous amount of evidence and courageous action on the part of the complainant who lost no time in telling people what happened," Krishnan said. — AFP



Former journalist Tarun Tejpal (right) leaves after being acquitted in the sexual assault case, at the district court of Mapusa in Goa. — AFP

News in brief

Iran factory blast injures 9

TEHRAN: At least nine people were injured in a blast yesterday at a plant producing explosive materials in Iran's central province of Isfahan, ISNA news agency reported. The blast occurred at Sepahan Nargostar Chemical Industries at 4:00 am local time (2330 GMT) due to 'unclear reasons still being investigated,' said Mansour Shisheforoush, head of the province's crisis management organization. The company manufactures 'industrial-commercial explosive materials' and was established in 1941. — AFP

Haitians receive a reprieve

WASHINGTON: The United States on Saturday said it would allow tens of thousands of Haitian immigrants to reapply for temporary protected status to remain in the country for 18 months, citing the island nation's political crisis and rampant crime. "After careful consideration, we determined that we must do what we can to support Haitian nationals in the United States until conditions in Haiti improve so they may safely return home," Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas said in a statement. The announcement signals relief for a number of Haitian immigrants, whose legal status was in limbo following a 2017 announcement by then president Donald Trump that would have removed their TPS protection. — AFP

Russian police break up meeting

MOSCOW: Police on Saturday broke up a meeting of independent, elected Russian opposition figures, saying they had failed to observe coronavirus health restrictions, participants said. The May 22-23 forum brought together representatives from 30 regions to coordinate their campaign for the September legislative elections. Ahead of the vote, the authorities have cranked up pressure on the opposition, and particularly on supporters of leading Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, who is in jail. NGO OVD-Info said at least four people were arrested on the sidelines of the forum in the northwestern town of Veliki Novgorod. — AFP

Exiled activist held at Belarus airport

MINSK: Belarusian opposition Telegram channel Nexta said yesterday its former editor and exiled opposition activist Roman Protasevich had been detained at Minsk airport after his Lithuania-bound flight made an emergency landing. Nexta Live and its sister channel Nexta are prominent voices of the Belarus opposition and helped mobilize protesters during the demonstrations that gripped the ex-Soviet country last year after a disputed presidential election. — AFP

Johnson 'lied over COVID response'

LONDON: Ahead of a much-anticipated hearing into Britain's coronavirus response, former chief adviser Dominic Cummings has accused Prime Minister Boris Johnson of lying about pursuing a strategy of herd immunity when the pandemic first hit. Cummings is due to give evidence to the House of Commons select committees on health and science on Wednesday, and has already suggested he has a crucial document that will expose the government's handling of the pandemic when it first arrived in Britain early in 2020. — AFP

Business

MONDAY, MAY 24, 2021

Post-Brexit 'protocol' hits Northern Irish businesses

Discontent brewing among trade community in the province

BELFAST: Five months after the UK cuts ties with the European Union, the post-Brexit "protocol" governing Northern Irish trade is sowing discontent in the province. "Traditionally a box of seeds would take us four days to get from England to Northern Ireland," said Robin Mercer, owner of Hillmount Garden Centre in Belfast.

"It's taking four weeks now because of the paperwork involved," he told AFP. "And it costs £140 (\$200) for a box of seeds whether there's £400 (worth) in the box or £600." Britain officially left the EU in January 2020, but under the terms of the divorce, relations remained unchanged until the start of 2021.

Since then, London and Brussels have been trading on new terms, effectively keeping Northern Ireland in the EU customs union and single market for goods. The tailored arrangements are designed to sustain Northern Ireland's fragile peace but for Mercer—who operates three garden centers east of Belfast—it has undermined business. "The protocol, it needs to be abolished," he said.

Troubled ground

Some 3,500 people were killed in violence over British rule in Northern Ireland, including at the border with the Republic of Ireland. A 1998 peace deal ended the unrest between pro-UK unionists and pro-Ireland republicans,

and border infrastructure was removed as British troops withdrew.

But the 310-mile (500-kilometre) frontier with EU member Ireland posed a problem as Brexit approached, as it is the UK's only land border with the EU. The border was easy enough to keep open with both sides inside the EU. But with one in and the other now out, the prospect of checks and policing on goods in transit caused alarm in Dublin, Belfast and Brussels, and fears of fresh unrest.

The "Northern Ireland Protocol" instead shifted the necessary checks to Northern Irish seaports on goods arriving from mainland Britain-England, Scotland and Wales.

Protocol pains

UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson promised "emphatically" that trade between mainland Britain and Northern Ireland would remain unfettered. But Mercer, who employs about 70 staff, said that has not happened. New paperwork required to ship goods across the effective EU border is costing businesses time and money—and compounding stress caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

"Getting stock in has been a total nightmare. We have still not had one plant in from England," said Mercer. Ulster University has predicted that eco-

nomical output in Northern Ireland in 2020 would fall by as much as 9.6 percent as a result of the global health emergency.

Purchases and imports into Northern Ireland from mainland Britain vastly outweighed those arriving from Ireland and the rest of the bloc, according to official figures from 2018.

But that may be changing, according to Mercer. "None of the hauliers are prepared to do the paperwork and all of the hold-ups. We've actually had to start buying plants from Europe," he said.

Unacceptable

Garden centers are not alone in suffering setbacks in Northern Ireland, which already has the lowest GDP of any UK region. In the first weeks of this year, some Northern Irish supermarkets saw food shortages, as suppliers grappled with new import rules. Pressured by disruption, London made unilateral moves to delay until October the introduction of full custom controls on goods arriving in the province from mainland Britain. That prompted legal action from Brussels. But Mercer fears worse is to come, amid mounting calls from politicians for the situation to be resolved.

"This is the relaxed period as far as it goes with all the rules and regulations," he said. "At the end of the year they're going to start enforcing them more."



BELFAST: Owner Robin Mercer poses amongst flowering plants in a greenhouse at Hillmount Garden Centre in east Belfast where problems have arisen since the post-Brexit 'protocol' with seeds and plants from the UK proving harder to obtain. — AFP

In February, graffiti threatening port staff manning the new checkpoints caused protocol inspections to be suspended at Belfast and Larne ports. More worryingly, rhetoric around the protocol was at the center of unrest in unionist communities in April, fearful the "Irish Sea border" could end their place in the UK. "We can't have a difference in our status between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom without our

consent, and we do not consent to it," David Campbell of the Loyalist Communities Council (LCC) said Wednesday.

"No other country in the world would tolerate suppliers having to issue customs declarations to move goods from one part of its own territory to the other," he told UK lawmakers. "Why on earth would it ever be acceptable in the United Kingdom?" —AFP

US firms pushed to tally progress on racial justice

NEW YORK: The killing of George Floyd prompted a wave of promises from corporate America to advance racial equity. Nearly a year later, large US companies are under pressure to show progress on fulfilling those promises. Shareholders will vote in the coming weeks on some of those initiatives, including whether Walmart should report on the fairness of its pay scale and whether Facebook and Google/Alphabet should appoint a civil rights specialist to their boards.

Another frequently proposed option is a racial equity audit that compares a company's record with statements made in its glossy marketing materials.

Proponents characterize this report as a risk-management tool that can help protect brands.

"There are a good number of shareholders that recognize that this is an issue that could cause some reputational damage on a significant level," said Tejal Patel, corporate governance director at CtW Investment Group, an activist group that organized the drive

at several leading companies. Proposals calling for a racial equity audit garnered support of around 30 percent or more of shareholders at several large companies, including Citigroup, JPMorgan Chase, Goldman Sachs and Johnson & Johnson. And later this month, Amazon shareholders will weigh a similar audit plan.

"It is a work in progress," said Olivia Knight, racial justice manager at As You Sow, another advocacy group that has been active on proposals aimed at addressing racial justice and diversity, equity and inclusion or DEI.

'Banking deserts'

The current push by activists is a response to events last spring, when police killings of Floyd, Breonna Taylor and other African Americans sparked mass protests and a national reckoning on racial justice.

In the aftermath of that uprising, large companies were quick to issue statements supporting Black Lives Matter and promising to do more to be



Major companies pledged support for Black Lives Matter and announced investment initiatives following mass protests last spring. — AFP

responsive to non-white consumers, employees and communities. Activists have greeted these pledges somewhat skeptically, in part because of corporate America's lack of progress on promoting diversity at the highest levels. The largest US companies are still overwhelmingly led by white men.

CtW and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) late last year drafted resolutions calling for racial equity audits at eight large financial groups, several of which have settled multi-million government

probes on lending discrimination in recent years.

Large mainstream banks also have a reputation for shunning inner-city neighborhoods, creating "banking deserts" that make it more likely that residents will be forced to turn to predatory lenders.

The resolutions called for a once-over of firm operations, including lending practices and political contributions, that would be prepared in consultation with civil rights experts and released publicly. — AFP

UK to unveil plans for 'digital border'

LONDON: Britain is to announce plans for a "fully digital border" including the introduction of US-style electronic travel authorization to pre-check travellers to the UK, interior minister Priti Patel said yesterday.

The minister will announce the plans in parliament today as part of a wider overhaul of the country's immigration system, which will also include the introduction of a points-based migration system.

"Our new fully digital border will provide the ability to count people in and out of the country, giving us control over who comes to the UK," Patel said in a statement. "Our new approach will make it easier to identify potential threats before they reach the border," she added. Digitizing the border will mean officials "can now count who is coming in and out of the country and whether they have permission to be here," said her Home Office department.

Patel unveiled elements of her "New Plan for Immigration" in March, calling it "the most significant overhaul of our asylum system in decades." Tightening immigration rules and securing borders were key promises of those like Patel and Prime Minister Boris Johnson who argued for leaving the EU in Britain's 2016 Brexit referendum.

Under the new plans to be unveiled today, Patel is set to announce that people coming to the UK without a visa or immigration status will have to apply for an American-style Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA). The Home Office expects that around 30 million ETA applications will be processed each year.



LONDON: US-style electronic travel authorization will automatically determine the eligibility of visitors in advance.

"What I'm unveiling and proposing tomorrow is a new legal migration and border strategy... which is based upon digitalization of our borders, but also the simplification of our immigration laws," Patel told Sky News yesterday.

"I am introducing the new borders bill, which will come to parliament next month, where we will specifically clamp down and tackle the problems around illegal migration," she added.

"We will have not just greater checks, we've already got very, very significant law enforcement operations taking place in France, in Belgium... and we're really prosecuting and arresting the people smugglers." Last year, roughly 8,500 people arrived in Britain having made the perilous crossing across the Channel, one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, in small boats. — AFP

Iran blackouts blamed on heat, crypto-mining

TEHRAN: Iran has started rolling blackouts, local media reported yesterday, which officials blamed on heat, drought impacting hydropower generation, and surging electricity demand blamed in part on crypto-currency mining.

Power cuts in the peak summer months are not uncommon in Iran, but a government report this month said precipitation was down 43 percent compared to the country's long-term average, warning of reduced water supplies for the year.

Teheran and several other cities have been hit by unannounced power cuts that sparked complaints from consumers, disrupted businesses and damaged household appliances, Iran's state television reported. Rolling blackouts for the capital, Alborz and Khorasan Razavi provinces were announced by provincial power distribution companies, with neighborhoods losing power for at least two hours until evening.

Teheran had experienced brief unplanned outages on Saturday, said AFP correspondents after power cuts had also hit other major cities such as Shiraz and Isfahan from Friday, according to IRNA and ISNA news agencies. The national grid is overburdened from drought as well as "rising temperature and consumption and a new phenomenon called crypto-currencies," ISNA quoted national electricity company director Mohammad Hassan Motevalizadeh as saying. — AFP

France warns UK not to 'play' with Irish Brexit deal

THE HAGUE: France's European affairs minister warned Britain not to play games with special post-Brexit trading rules for Northern Ireland, as fears rise of a summer of violence in the province.

Clement Beaune urged London to be "responsible" over the so-called "protocol" for Northern Ireland, which kept it in the EU single market and customs union despite the UK's departure from the bloc. "We cannot accept that there is political game with such a sensitive issue," Beaune said in an interview with a small group of media including AFP in The Hague on Saturday after talks with the Dutch foreign minister.

"This is a central piece of European stability, you cannot play with this. We will never play with that. But we cannot accept that the protocol is taken lightly by any part," he added. "So I'm just saying, and we are discussing it of course with the British side, do not play with the protocol."

Tensions have been mounting in Northern Ireland over the so-called "protocol" that came into effect at the start of 2021, with the worst rioting in years breaking out in April and First Minister Arlene Foster announcing her resignation. Northern Ireland is still deeply divided between pro-UK mainly Protestant unionists and pro-Ireland largely Catholic nationalists, despite a 1998 peace deal that ended three decades of violence over British rule.

Unionists believe the protocol threatens Northern Ireland's status in the UK and the prospect of union with neighboring Ireland. British Brexit minister David Frost on Monday urged the EU to compromise over the protocol before Northern Ireland enters a tense summer of events marking the Protestant ascendancy over Catholics. Fears have grown that tensions could soar again around July 12, when pro-UK unionists annually commemorate events in the late 17th century that entrenched Protestant rule over the northern part of Catholic Ireland.

But Beaune, who met Ireland's foreign minister Simon Coveney in Dublin earlier this week along with France's foreign minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, said London should not try to argue in favor of scrapping the protocol. "The protocol is not a problem. The protocol is the solution to border problems that were created by Brexit," Beaune said.

Ireland's Coveney on Thursday warned Britain that unilaterally overriding the rules would be a "disaster". — AFP

Business

Unmanned supermarkets to the rescue in Sweden's rural areas

Grocery stores drop while superstores flourish in Sweden

ENKOPING, Sweden: One after another, grocery stores are shutting down in rural Sweden, leaving villagers to travel miles to buy food. But a new type of shop has sprung up in their wake: unmanned supermarkets in mobile containers.

In Veckholm, a village of a few hundred people 80 kilometers (50 miles) from Stockholm, the last grocery store closed more than a decade ago. Then, a year-and-a-half ago, even the little convenience store at the only petrol station locked its doors. Villagers were left with no choice but to travel a half-hour by car to the closest supermarket.

But in July 2020, an automated, unmanned grocery store came to town. In a container dropped in the middle of a field, open 24 hours a day, the 20-square-metre (215-square-foot) supermarket sells hundreds of items—and there's no cashier in sight.

"Since a while back, there has been nothing in this area and I think most of us living here have really missed that," said Giulia Ray, a beekeeper in Veckholm.

"It's so convenient to have this in the area," she told AFP, doing her own shopping and restocking the shop's shelves with her honey at the same time. Shoppers unlock the supermarket's door with an app on their smartphone. "We come here three times a week and buy stuff we need," Lucas Edman, a technician working in the region for a few weeks, told AFP. "It's a little bit more expensive but it's fine. It's a price I can pay to not go to another store."

He scanned his pizzas and soda on the app on his phone, which is linked to his bank account and a national identification system—an added anti-theft security, according to the store. And it's all done under the watchful eye of a single security camera.

Keeping costs down

In Sweden, the number of grocery stores—everything from superstores to small convenience stores—



Store manager Domenica Gerlach works in the Lifvs unmanned supermarket store in Veckholm, a village of a few hundred people, about 80 kilometers from Stockholm.



One of Lifvs unmanned supermarket stores is pictured in Veckholm, a village of a few hundred people, about 80 kilometers from Stockholm, near the city of Enköping. —AFP photos

has dropped from 7,169 in 1996 to 5,180 in 2020, according to official statistics. While the number of superstores has almost tripled in 24 years, many rural shops have closed down, often due, like elsewhere in Europe, to a lack of profitability. Daniel Lundh, who co-founded the Lifvs, has opened almost 30 unmanned stores in rural Sweden and in urban areas with no shops in the past two years.

"To be able to keep low prices for the customer, we have to be able to control our operation costs. So that means controlling the rent—that's why the stores are quite small—but also controlling the staffing cost," Lundh said. He plans to open his first unstaffed supermarkets outside Sweden early next year. Domenica Gerlach, who manages the Veckholm store, only comes by once a week to

receive deliveries. She also manages three other shops, all of them mobile containers.

Peter Book, the mayor of Enköping, the municipality to which Veckholm belongs, has only good things to say about the three container stores that have opened in his patch. And he'd like to see more. "It makes it easier to take a step to move there if you know you have this facility," he said.

Meeting place and 'salvation'

In Sweden, one of the most digitalized countries in the world, Lifvs, like its Swedish rivals AutoMat and 24Food which have also popped up in rural areas, benefits from a very wired population. In 2019, 92 percent of Swedes had a smartphone.

Ironically, the unmanned shops—plopped down

in the middle of nowhere—also play a role as a "meeting place" for locals. "You come here, you get some gas and you go inside and get something, and maybe someone else is here and you can have a chat," Ray said. Mayor Book echoed the notion, saying the stores make it possible to "connect society".

The pandemic has also proven the stores' usefulness, since no contact with other people inside the shop is necessary. Because of COVID-19, only one person at a time is allowed inside the Veckholm store. "My mother lives nearby as well and ... this has been a shop she could actually enter during all this time. She hasn't been (able to go) anywhere," Ray said of her 75-year-old mother. "This has been a salvation for her." —AFP

Markets mull Musk role in bitcoin turbulence

WASHINGTON: First he loved them, then he doubted them, but is he manipulating them? Tesla boss Elon Musk's tweets about cryptocurrencies like bitcoin are annoying their devotees and raising eyebrows among market watchers.

The saga started in February when Musk's company Tesla announced it would buy \$1.5 billion worth of bitcoin and later said it would accept the virtual currency as payment for its electric cars. But in mid-May, he broke hearts with tweets questioning the digital asset, particularly its vast consumption of electricity produced from polluting substances like coal. That sent bitcoin on a downward spiral causing it to plunge to \$30,000 from nearly double that 10 days earlier. It later regained some strength, climbing to about \$37,000 as of Friday.

"The fact that more people aren't outraged at #ElonMusk for purposefully crashing the cryptos is astonishing. Stop worshipping him," one Twitter user said. The post, typical of the backlash the flamboyant executive has caused, included a hashtag combining an unprintable insult with his surname and another Musk detractor went as far as to start a cryptocurrency using the hashtag.

Musk, who is most vocal on Twitter, continues to support dogecoin, another virtual currency that was created as a joke but has grown in popularity. However, his tweets and their influence on prices are drawing increasing attention from analysts. "You have to prove that his tweets has actually moved the market and it certainly seems that way. It does raise a host of issues," Todd Cipperman of Cipperman Compliance Services said.

India start-ups eye profits in pandemic era

MUMBAI: After dealing with two coronavirus funerals in two weeks, Raj Sharma was too grief-stricken to negotiate a third with profiteering hearse drivers and crematoriums, so he turned to one of the many new businesses that have sprung up around India helping struggling people while also turning a tidy profit.

Sharma—not his real name—was reeling from the loss of a third friend when he heard of Anthyesti Funeral Services, which provides "end-to-end" coronavirus funerals in four cities. "They pick up the body from the hospital and take care of everything," the 48-year-old New Delhi professor told AFP.

Anthyesti's COVID package cost about 30,000 rupees (\$400) — a bargain compared with the prices charged by hearse services that can be up to five times higher.

It brought him "mental peace that is worth any price". The company is one example of how entrepreneurs are discovering opportunities as India grapples with a worsening coronavirus crisis, offering a range of new services from funerals to Bollywood film set cleaners to budget deliveries.

Anthyesti—which means "last sacrifice" in Sanskrit—was founded in 2016 by former software engineer Shruithi Reddy Sethi, who wanted to clean up India's unregulated funeral industry.

But the 36-year-old never anticipated the dystopian impact of COVID-19, with shortages of space in

morgues, ambulances and even wood for funeral pyres. In many cases, relatives have had to wait days to bury or cremate their loved ones.

'People need monitoring'

"Where do these families go? They're just laying the bodies in a line at the cremation grounds, waiting for their turn to come," Sethi said. "The biggest benefit that we are offering is that our team is actually doing the waiting on the client's behalf."

Sethi provides medical insurance for the cremation workers, undertakers, embalmers and ambulance drivers that Anthyesti relies on—a rarity in an industry notorious for exploiting poorly-paid labor. The firm's revenues increased 20 percent last year and she expects turnover to double in 2021. While businesspeople like Sethi have adapted their firms during the COVID crisis, others have set up entirely new ventures.

When a nationwide lockdown last year put a stop to movie shoots, film-maker Aditya Gupta spent weeks binge-watching US business reality show "Shark Tank", little expecting that the entrepreneurial lessons would prove useful. As shoots resumed, the 34-year-old realised that his industry was totally unprepared for the pandemic fallout.

"On Indian film sets, no one's looking into health and safety like they should," he told AFP. He set up Life First Sanitisation last July, and has since worked with Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+ Hotstar and leading Bollywood production houses.

The company carries out COVID tests for cast and crew, sanitizes spaces and equipment with ultraviolet-C light, and enforces social distancing. Work begins before dawn and Gupta's team spends 14 hours on their feet enforcing safety protocols.

enforcing safety protocols.



In this file photograph, a man talking on a mobile phone in a shop displaying a bitcoin sign during the opening ceremony of the first bitcoin retail shop in Hong Kong. —AFP

Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC), which oversees derivatives, will take a more active role in regulating digital money. The Internal Revenue Service tax authority has started asking taxpayers to declare their holdings of these assets, and President Joe Biden's government has proposed expanding tax reporting of digital asset transfers between businesses.

Another bill in Congress would have the SEC and CFTC create a group with industry professionals to look at regulation of the sector. Meanwhile, the Federal Reserve this week said it is exploring its options when it comes to digital payments and even issuing an official, central bank-backed virtual currency. Aaron Klein, an expert in financial technology at the Brookings Institution, cautioned that "It's not the place for the government to regulate the value of bitcoin anymore that it should regulate the value of an Amazon stock or the price of gold."

Instead, "The goal is to make the market transparent and honest and protect the investors, not to focus on the price of the asset." —AFP

Tunisia PM visits Libya seeking economic aid

TRIPOLI: The prime minister of Tunisia, which is struggling with a deep economic crisis, called Saturday for a relaunch of economic cooperation with Libya at the start of a two-day visit. "Our economies complement each other, and what is good for Libya is also good for Tunisia," Mechichi said after landing in the capital of the oil-rich neighboring country. He was accompanied by several government ministers and around 100 business leaders expected to take part in a joint economic forum in Tripoli. Ten years since Tunisia's 2011 revolution, the North African country faces political and economic crises compounded by the coronavirus pandemic and lockdown measures. Unemployment has risen to 18 percent, with predictions it could reach 20 percent by the end of the year, according to a joint study by the government and United Nations. The IMF expects the country will see GDP growth of 3.8 percent this year, after an unprecedented 8.9 percent contraction in 2020.

"We will not abandon Tunisia to face alone the effects of the coronavirus pandemic or its political and security situation," said Libya's Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah.

He said Libya would remove restrictions on imports from Tunisia and Tunisian workers in the country would be given official papers. Libya and Tunisia also signed an accord aimed at "facilitating commercial trade and the movement of citizens" between the two states. Libya descended into chaos following the 2011 revolution that toppled and killed veteran dictator Muammar Gaddafi. The turmoil sharply reduced cross-border trade and turned Libya into a launchpad for a series of bloody jihadist attacks in Tunisia. —AFP



NEW DELHI: Scooter riders stay on the road delivering food and medicines during the lockdown. —AFP

"We've had cases where people take this very lightly and suddenly there's an explosion of cases," he said. "People need to be monitored like school children."

'Adapt to survive'

Changing producers' attitudes has been hard. "But once they burn their fingers... they realize how extremely helpful this is," he said, pointing to a recent outbreak that affected 45 crew on Bollywood superstar Akshay Kumar's upcoming film "Ram Setu". "All these people

were tested before, from catering to drivers to extras. Now imagine if those people had come on set without testing. One hundred and twenty people would have been at risk."

His firm turned profitable at the start of the year, Gupta said, declining to disclose revenues. In New Delhi, scooter rider Nimesh Singh has stayed on the road delivering food and medicines during the lockdown and seen his average fee more than double from 100 to 250 rupees. —AFP

Business

Jazeera Airways to join IATA Travel Pass program

First LCC in the region to pilot the IATA Travel Pass

KUWAIT: Jazeera Airways has confirmed that the airline will go into testing of the IATA Travel Pass. IATA Travel Pass is a mobile app that helps travellers to store and manage their verified certifications for COVID-19 tests or vaccines. It provides governments with the means to verify the authenticity of tests or vaccinations and the identity of those presenting their certificates and gives airlines the ability to provide accurate information to their passengers on test requirements and verify that a passenger meets the requirements for travel.

The digital solution will allow travellers to store their passport, COVID vaccinations and negative test results in one place to prove they meet travel requirements. All personal data is secure. The Travel Pass will be integrated into the Jazeera App to make the system convenient.

Travel Pass has been trialled by many airlines already, including Emirates Airline, Etihad Airways, Qatar Airways, Singapore Airlines, British Airways, Swiss, and Virgin Atlantic. From 1 May, passengers

travelling to Singapore have been able to use the pass as part of an ongoing collaboration between the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore (CAAS) and IATA. It is the first country where government, airline and IATA are working together on one system for opening up travel. Travel Pass is expected to be adopted as the gold standard around the world to enable the free and safe movement of travellers.

Rohit Ramachandran, CEO Jazeera Airways said, "We are pleased to be working with IATA on this significant technological development for international air travel. It is important for Kuwait that we are part of this global solution to enable citizens and residents to travel safely." Kamil Al-Awadhi, IATA Regional VP, Africa and the Middle East said, "Travel Pass has been successfully tested with a number of airlines and Jazeera will be the first low-cost airline in the region to join the development and roll-out. We will support them in every way we can to implement it quickly for the airline and its passengers."

Jazeera's recent Big Travel Survey revealed the im-



portance of contactless journeys for passengers during these times. The responses showed that there is a very high preference with over 90 percent of respon-

dents saying they would prefer to use self-check-in alternatives, mobile boarding passes and e-gates when travelling.

- International solution for safe travel
- Digital passport verifying & validating vaccination and test results

Burgan Bank names winners of Yawmi account draw

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced yesterday the names of the daily draw winners of its Yawmi account draw, each taking home a cash-prize of KD 5,000.

The lucky winners are:

1. Khaled Mohamad Al-Khaled
2. Hanan Abdulghafar Atash
3. Shrian Dhafer Al-Dosari
4. Yusri Ali Al-Khabbaz

In addition to the daily draw, Burgan Bank also offers a quarterly draw with more chances to win higher rewards, offering the chance to one lucky customer to win KD 125,000 every three months. The Yawmi Account offers daily and quarterly draws, wherein the quarterly draw requires customers to maintain a minimum amount of KD 500 in their account for two months prior to the draw date. Additionally, every KD 10 in the account will entitle customers to one chance of winning. If the account balance is KD 500 and above, the account holder will be qualified for both the quarterly and daily draws.

Burgan Bank encourages everyone to open a Yawmi account and/or increase their deposit to maximize their chances of becoming a winner. The higher the level of the deposit, the higher the likelihood to win.

Al-Tijari announces winners of Al-Najma account campaign

KUWAIT: Commercial Bank of Kuwait conducted the weekly draws on Al-Najma account and Salary Transfer Campaign yesterday. The draws were conducted in the presence of Ministry of Commerce and Industry representative Ahmad Al-Basman.

The results of the draws were as follows:

- Al-Najma weekly account - the prize of KD 5,000 went to winner Mirza Awgis Baig Mirza Idrees Baig
- Salary account campaign - the prize of up to KD 1,000 - went to the winner Zainab Hameed Boshehri

The bank stated that the salary campaign is aimed at customers who transfer their salaries of KD 500 or more to the Bank, especially Kuwaiti employees and residents working in the government, oil sectors and companies listed with the Bank as well as retirees, and take advantage of the benefits of this campaign and get an instant cash gift from KD 250 to KD 500 or an interest-free loan of 5 times the salary and a maximum of KD 10,000, Kuwaiti pensioner, along with expatriate customers who transfer their debt amounting to KD 10,000 or above to the Bank will receive an instant cash gift of 1 percent from their transferred debt.

The bank stated that Al-Najma Account prizes are distinguished by the highest cash prize and diversity of prizes throughout the year clarifying that the account offers weekly prize of KD 5,000, monthly prize of KD 20,000 and a semi-annual prize of KD 500,000 in addition to the largest prize - linked bank account payout of KD 1,500,000.

Al-Najma Account can be opened by depositing KD 100, and customer should maintain a minimum amount of KD 500 to be eligible to enter all draws on Al-Najma Account prizes. As for the chances of winning, the more balance a customer maintains in Al-Najma Account, the more chances the account holder will get to win, the account also offers additional benefits like the ATM card, a credit card against customer's account and all CBK banking services that customer can enjoy.

The bank revealed that Al-Najma account is available to everyone, and anyone can open Al-Najma account through CBK mobile application in simple steps from anywhere and at any time.

NBK Money Markets Report

US dollar falls as Fed keeps hawkish policy

KUWAIT: The US dollar continued to decline throughout last week as the Federal Reserve maintained their dovish policy stance despite acknowledging the robust US recovery at the start of this year. The combination of improving global growth and Fed's commitment to maintain loose monetary policy remains supportive for risk assets and encouraged the bearish dollar trend. The dollar did manage a rebound late on Friday however, after solid economic indicators showed healthy recovery in the US.

In the policy report, the committee acknowledged that activity and employment have "strengthened" driven by "progress on vaccinations and strong policy support." Inflation has also risen but "largely reflecting transitory factors." This is in-line with the Fed's strategy of tolerating a slight overshoot of inflation while focusing on the labor market for policy changes.

Markets however, were hoping for an update of the bank's forward guidance and tightening indications. Instead, the Fed remained vague saying it will "likely take some time for substantial further progress to be achieved" towards their goals to justify tapering quantitative easing. The result was a slight pull back in treasury yields, rebound in global equities, and US dollar downward pressure in general.

American families plan

At the same time, US President Biden had his first speech to Congress where he expressed his optimism over the outlook for the US economy. Vaccinations have been progressing well with the U.S. population now 29.1 percent fully vaccinated and 42.7 percent with at least one dose. The COVID relief packages alongside re-openings helped accelerate growth this year. Biden however, claimed there was still more to be done and pitched a new \$1.8 trillion social safety plan called the "American Families Plan" aimed at helping middle-income families. President Biden hopes to combine this is new fiscal package with his \$2.3 trillion "American Jobs Plan," which was focused on improving infrastructure. Just like the "American Jobs Plan," the "American Families Plan" is to be funded by taxes on the rich.

British economy picks up speed on lockdown exit

LONDON: Britain's economic recovery is picking up speed in the second quarter as it gradually exits coronavirus lockdowns, bright data showed Friday. COVID had sparked a major collapse in Britain's economy last year - the worst in the G7 - but recovery hopes are now rising thanks to mass vaccinations that have enabled a phased reopening.

At the same time, stock markets have wobbled in recent weeks over concerns that the reopening of economies around the world could spark a global inflationary spike. British retail sales surged by 9.2 percent in April as non-essential stores reopened, official data showed Friday.

Demand for clothing rocketed by almost 70 percent as consumers splashed their cash on new outfits. Easing travel restrictions prompted a similar spike in demand for motor fuel.

'Unprecedented growth spurt'

Britain's private sector activity meanwhile enjoyed record growth in May thanks to strength in manufacturing and services. IHS Markit's Britain

composite Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) survey, a key gauge of business activity, jumped to 62.0.

That marked the highest level since the index began in January 1998. The reading compared with 60.7 in April and remained above the 50-point level that indicates growth. "The UK is enjoying an unprecedented growth spurt as the economy reopens," said IHS Markit chief business economist Chris Williamson. "Factory orders are surging at a record pace as global demand for goods continues to revive, and the service sector is reporting near-record growth as the opening up of the economy allows more businesses to trade," he added.

Hotels, restaurants and other consumer-facing services reported the strongest upturns in demand.

"Business confidence has meanwhile hit an all-time high as concerns about the impact of the pandemic continue to fade," said Williamson. Britain is exiting lockdowns at a gradual pace.

The stay-at-home order began to be lifted in early March, while pubs, restaurants and cafes reopened last

Rates - 02nd May, 2021

Currencies	Previous Week Levels				This Week's Expected Range		3-Month Forward
	Open	High	Low	Close	Minimum	Maximum	
EUR	1.2092	1.2149	1.2015	1.2018	1.1900	1.2150	1.2041
GBP	1.3871	1.3976	1.3800	1.3814	1.3700	1.4000	1.3816
JPY	107.97	109.36	107.63	109.27	108.00	109.50	109.18
CHF	0.9134	0.9182	0.9077	0.9133	0.9025	0.9150	0.9111

US GDP

The US economy expanded at an annual rate of 6.4 percent in the first quarter of 2021 up from 4.3 percent in the fourth quarter of 2020. The increase reflected the continued economic recovery, reopening of establishments, and continued government response related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Robust demand for goods supported by two massive waves of fiscal stimulus saw consumer spending rise at a 10.7 percent annualized pace. The stimulus checks and growth in domestic demand did have a drawback as it led to a widening in the US trade deficit to a record \$90.6 billion. Exports of goods and services ticked down as the imports of goods and services jumped higher. This widening of the trade deficit is another weight that will pressure the US dollar as most importers sell their domestic currency to pay in exporter's currency.

Eurozone GDP

The euro-area economy slid into a double-dip recession at the start of the year as strict coronavirus lockdowns across the region kept many businesses shuttered and consumers wary to spend. Reports from the bloc's biggest members show how far behind the EU was in recovering from the pandemic amid a slow vaccine rollout.

There is improvement however, as output in the 19-nation euro area was -0.6 percent in Q1 against an expected -0.8 percent helped by a modest increase in France. The reading was also markedly better than 2020 Q4's reading of -1.4 percent. There is still optimism as vaccination rates start to pick up. The European Commission Economic Confidence Index jumped to its highest level since 2018 and Germany reached a new record of administering 1.1 million vaccine shots in a single day. These developments will limit the negative fallout from the Q1 GDP contraction for the Eurozone as a whole.

Bank of Japan

The Bank of Japan kept its policies unchanged last week as widely expected but updated its economic projections. The projections revealed that inflation is expected to remain well below the BOJ's 2.0 percent target over the forecast horizon signaling that loose monetary policy will have to be maintained. The core inflation forecast for the current fiscal year was lowered to 0.1 percent from a previous forecast of 0.5 percent, and the forecast for 2023 was shown to be at just 1.0 percent.

While the BoJ presented a more subdued outlook for inflation, it did upgrade the outlook for growth in Japan. The BoJ now sees the economy expanding faster in the current and next fiscal year by 4.0 percent and 2.4 percent respectively before slowing back towards long-term potential growth in 2023 when GDP is expected to expand by 1.3 percent.

Commodities

OPEC, Russia and their allies said they will stick to plans for a phased easing of oil production restrictions from May to July amid upbeat forecasts for a recovery in global demand and despite surging coronavirus cases in India. The group maintained its forecast of a demand growth of 6 million barrels per day for 2021.

Reuters last week also published a survey that forecasted a revival in oil demand that would support prices. The survey said that Brent Crude would average \$64.17 in 2021, up from last month's consensus of \$63.12 per barrel and the current \$62.3 average for the benchmark so far this year. Both forecasts show that analysts believe that vaccine rollouts will outpace the recent surges seen across the globe.

Kuwait

Kuwaiti dinar
USD/KWD closed last week at 0.30100.



LONDON: A pedestrian walks past shops, temporarily closed-down due to COVID-19 restrictions, as Britain enters a national lockdown. — AFP

month-alongside non-essential retail but had been limited to outdoor dining and drinking.

Non-essential retailers reopened for business from April 12 in England and Wales and two weeks later in Scotland. "Pent-up demand built up during lockdown continues to be released as the reopening of non-essential retail offered the public a welcomed opportunity to visit many of their favorite

shop," British Retail Consortium boss Helen Dickinson said Friday.

"Improved weather during April meant greater sales of fashion, particularly in outerwear and knitwear, as the public renewed their wardrobe and made plans to meet friends and family outdoors." Retail sales rocketed 42.4 percent compared with April last year, which was the first full month of the initial UK lockdown. — AFP

ITALIAN ROCKERS MANESKIN WIN PANDEMIC-DEFYING EUROVISION



Italy's Maneskin pose for pictures on stage with the trophy after winning the final of the 65th edition of the Eurovision Song Contest 2021, at the Ahoy convention center in Rotterdam. —AFP photos

Italian rock foursome Maneskin won the Eurovision Song Contest in Rotterdam on Saturday in a glammed-up message of hope for a world emerging from the coronavirus pandemic. As the tournament returned after a year off because of the virus, the high-kicking, lederhosen-wearing Italians beat off stiff competition from France and Switzerland with their song "Zitti e Buoni". Italy's third Eurovision win and its first since 1990 came after a nailbiting end to the kitschy competition, which went ahead amid strict protocols including mass testing and an audience limited to 3,500 people.

The theme of this year's Eurovision was "Open Up", and the Dutch government-backed coronavirus restrictions could be a model for mass events such as Euro 2020 and the Tokyo Olympics. Maneskin, featuring three men and one woman, said the whole evening of stomping songs and flamboyant costumes would bring cheer after more than a year of COVID-19. "We think that the whole event was a relief", singer Damiano David said after showering his bandmates with champagne during a press conference. "It was really incredible, the whole event, this Eurovision is going to be a lighthouse." Bassist Victoria De Angelis said their victory "could be a message of hope" to Italy, which was one of the countries in Europe hardest hit by the virus. "We're honored to be bringing it back after 31 years," she said of the Eurovision title, which means Italy is due to host next year.

'Rock and roll never dies'

But there was heartbreak for French singer Barbara Pravi, who came agonizingly close to ending her country's 44 years of hurt since its last Eurovision win with her moody number "Voilà". In a battle of contrasts, her emotional Edith Piaf-style performance on a dark stage went up against the Italians' bare-chested, punk-funk rock. Both sang in their native languages. A nailbiting finish ensured as Maneskin lay in fourth place after a vote by national juries that left Switzerland in the lead, before a huge public vote sent them soaring into the lead with 524 points. "Rock and roll never dies," singer David shouted as he picked up the microphone-shaped glass Eurovision trophy.

He later strongly denied taking drugs, after footage on social media showed him bent over a table during the competition. "I don't use drugs. Please, guys. Don't say that really, no cocaine," he told the press conference. The band's name comes from the Danish word for moonlight, as de Angelis is half Danish and they honed their craft by busking before taking part in talent show the X Factor in 2017. Switzerland's Gjon Muharremaj, 22, was the surprise package of the night, ending up in third place with the Sam Smith-style ballad "Tout l'Univers". Britain, which remains in Eurovision despite leaving the European Union, meanwhile suffered the humiliation of achieving the dreaded "nul points", winning none from either the juries or the public.

'New start'

The competition in Rotterdam was cancelled last year for the first time in the history of the 65-year tournament, one of the world's most watched television events with around 200 million viewers. This time 12 months ago the Ahoy Arena venue was being used as a makeshift hospital for the pandemic. And the run-up featured coronavirus scares, with Iceland's entry Dadi og Gagnamagnid ruled out of performing live when a band member tested positive for COVID-though they still managed to finish fourth.

Dutch 2019 winner Duncan Laurence meanwhile was also unable to take to the stage after coming down with symptoms of the disease during rehearsals this week. Contestants were in a "bubble" during the competition and every one of the thousands of people entering the Eurovision site had to be tested for coronavirus. But the mood of the love-it or hate-it extravaganza was relentlessly upbeat. Other highlights included Norway's contestant Tix, who took to the stage in huge white angel wings, and who takes his stage name from the tics of his Tourette's Syndrome. Cyprus' entry "El Diablo" (Spanish for "The Devil") was meanwhile accused of blasphemy and satanism by the Cyprus Orthodox Church and religious groups. Fans turned out despite the restrictions.

"I think it's the beginning of a new start," Saskia Scharree, 51, wearing a white and orange blazer decorated with traditional blue Dutch pottery designs, told AFP outside the arena. Flag-waving Finnish fan Oona Sainio, 27, said she and her family had come to soak up the atmosphere despite not having tickets. "We're big Eurovision fans and we wanted to be close to where it's all happening," said Sainio, 27, who lives in the Netherlands. —AFP



Italy's Maneskin celebrate on stage with the trophy after winning the final of the 65th edition of the Eurovision Song Contest 2021.



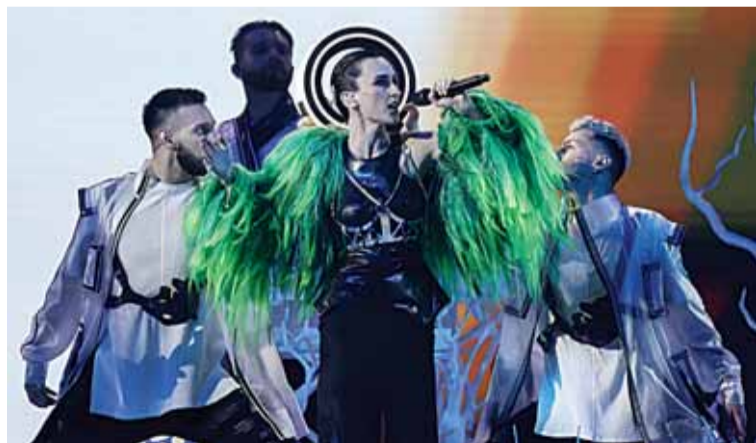
Finland's Blind Channel arrives on stage during the final of the 65th edition of the Eurovision Song Contest 2021.



Russia's Manizha performs during the final of the 65th edition of the Eurovision Song Contest 2021.



Spain's Blas Canto performs during the final of the 65th edition of the Eurovision Song Contest 2021.



Ukraine's Go_A performs during the final of the 65th edition of the Eurovision Song Contest 2021.



Moldova's Natalia Gordienko arrives on stage.



Netherlands' Jeangu Macrooy arrives on stage.



Dutch singer Glennis Grace and Dutch disc-jockey Nick van der wall, also known as Afrojack perform during the final.



Lithuania's The Roop arrive on stage.



Dutch singer and TV host Chantal Janzen (left) and Dutch singer and TV host Jan Smit speak on stage during the final of the 65th edition of the Eurovision Song Contest 2021.

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Switzerland's Gjon Muharremaj aka Gjon's Tears poses for pictures during the "Turquoise Carpet ceremony" of the 65th edition of the Eurovision Song Contest 2021.



Presenter of the Eurovision Song Contest Nikkie de Jager speaks during a press conference in Rotterdam, on May 19, 2021.



France's Barbara Pravi performs during the final of the 65th edition of the Eurovision Song Contest 2021, at the Ahoy convention center in Rotterdam.



United Kingdom's James Newman arrives on stage during the final of the 65th edition of the Eurovision Song Contest 2021.

What they're talking about at Eurovision in Rotterdam

The Eurovision Song Contest is never short of drama and its return after a year off was no exception, with a nailbiting finish and tense national rivalries. Here are some key talking points from the 65th edition of the competition, held in the Dutch port city of Rotterdam:

Drugs denial

The singer for Italy's Maneskin, Damiano David, strongly denied taking drugs when he was asked by a reporter about footage showing him bent over a table during the Eurovision ceremony went viral on social media. "I don't use drugs. Please, guys. Don't say that really, no cocaine. Please, don't say that," David told a press conference after the four-piece glam rockers were named winners.

because guitarist Thomas Raggi had broken a glass. The band later said on their Instagram stories that they were "ready to get tested because we have nothing to hide." "We are really shocked about what some people are saying about Damiano doing drugs. We really are AGAINST drugs and we never used cocaine," they said.

44 years of hurt

France saw its best chance in years to break its long Eurovision losing streak slip out of its grasp as singer Barbara Pravi came second to Maneskin. The favorite to win a week ago, Pravi was compared to Edith Piaf, with her moody number "Voilà" and an emotional performance against a dark background. But despite raucous support from many in the international media

she was pipped at the post, scoring 499 points to Maneskin's 524. France has been waiting for a Eurovision champion since 1977 when Marie Myriam won the competition. That's despite the country being one of the so-called "Big Five" guaranteed a place in the final each year, along with Germany, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom.

Swiss role

Switzerland's Gjon's Tears-singer Gjon Muharremaj, 22 — surprised many by ending up at the top of the leaderboard after the first round of voting by Eurovision's national juries. The 22-year-old, whose parents are from Albania and Kosovo, appeared in the French version of The Voice in 2019. He was then part of Mika's team, and reached the semi-final stage.

He worked on his song "Tout l'Univers" with one of the writers of "Arcade", the power ballad sung by 2019's Dutch winner Duncan Laurence. But the subsequent public vote brought a huge surge for Maneskin that took them into first place, leaving the Swiss feeling the sting of defeat.

Nul points for UK

The United Kingdom's James Newman suffered the humiliation of scoring the notorious "nul points"—getting no points at all on the leaderboard. Newman's song "Embers" failed to set Europe alight, with both the national juries and the public vote snubbing him. A good humored Newman raised a beer to the cameras to acknowledge what had happened. Britain may be wondering whether it would be a

good idea to leave Eurovision as it has the EU, as it also finished last in the song contest in 2019.

First transgender host

Eurovision got its first transgender host with Nikkie de Jager, better known as NikkieTutorials to her more than 13 million followers on Instagram and Youtube, where she gives beauty tips. De Jager was the online presenter and also took part in parts of the main live broadcast. She revealed she was transgender in 2020 in a video that has now been viewed more than 32 million times. De Jager's make-up tutorials have made her one of the most famous Youtubers in her field, and she has collaborated with US stars including Kim Kardashian, Lady Gaga and Katy Perry. —AFP

SHAMED BBC JOURNALIST APOLOGIZES OVER DIANA INTERVIEW

Martin Bashir, the BBC journalist who tricked princess Diana into giving an explosive interview, yesterday apologized to Princes William and Harry, but said claims linking his actions to her death were "unreasonable". A report by retired senior judge John Dyson published on Thursday found that 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. Bashir, 58, 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.



In this file photo journalist Martin Bashir speaks during the ABC portion of the Television Critics Association Press Tour at the Beverly Hilton Hotel in Beverly Hills, California. —AFP

Bashir told the Sunday Times he was "deeply sorry" to Diana's sons Prince William and Prince Harry. "I never wanted to harm Diana in any way and I don't believe we did," he told the paper. But William said Bashir's actions and the interview had made "a major contribution" to the demise of his parents' relationship and "contributed significantly to her fear, paranoia and isolation" in her final years. In his own release, Harry said that the deceptive practices had played a part in his mother's death. "The ripple effect of a culture of exploitation and unethical practices ultimately took her life," he said. Diana died in a Paris car crash in 1997, aged 36.

ple" in her marriage—her, Charles and his long-time mistress and now wife, Camilla Parker-Bowles—and also admitted adultery. Bashir was little-known at the time but went on to have a high-profile career on US television networks, and interviewed stars such as Michael Jackson. The pop singer's family also blame Bashir for his death, saying the fallout from the interview led to him to increasingly depend on drugs.

Bashir disputed the accusations, saying "I don't feel I can be held responsible for many of the other things that were going on in her life, and the complex issues surrounding those decisions." "The suggestion I am singularly responsible I think is unreasonable and unfair," he told the paper.

'I loved her'

He argued that the 1995 interview had been conducted on Diana's terms, and that they remained firm friends after it aired to an audience of 22.8 million people. "My family and I loved her," he said, revealing that Diana had visited Bashir's wife and newborn child in hospital and that the princess threw a birthday party for his eldest child at Kensington Palace. Bashir has said that he regretted showing Diana's brother forged documents, but that it had "no bearing" on the revelations aired during the interview.

Bashir worked for the BBC as religion editor until he stepped down just last week, citing ill health, hours before Dyson's report was submitted to BBC bosses. Former BBC chief Tony Hall, whom Dyson criticized for his "woefully ineffective" 1996 probe into Bashir's deception, resigned as chair of Britain's National Gallery on Saturday. A government review of the BBC's funding and governance is due next year, which Home Secretary Priti Patel yesterday called a "very, very important moment." "There's no question about that trust and confidence has been undermined, and now it's a time for the BBC to absolutely reflect upon the findings of this report and rebuild that trust and confidence," she told Sky News. —AFP

In it, Diana famously said "there were three peo-

Technical glitch blights virtual Glastonbury festival

A technical fault on Saturday left frustrated fans unable to access Glastonbury Festival's livestream concert at the famous farm site in southwest England, after the coronavirus pandemic led to the blockbuster event's cancellation. The five-hour virtual show kicked off with a performance by British rockers Wolf Alice, but many ticket-holders, who had paid £20 (\$28, 23 euros) to access a stream of the event, complained on Twitter that they missed it as their access codes were invalid.



File photo of people attending the Glastonbury Festival.—Reuters

"You've got thousands and thousands of us tweeting you saying we can't get in due to invalid codes. Almost 10 minutes in and we've all missed the start," wrote Twitter user Aimee Young. Event producers Driift Live tweeted: "Hello! We're looking into the issues of invalid codes urgently." Organizers later sent out a free link in time for an atmospheric sunset performance by US pop rock trio Haim in Worthy Farm's stone circle. They were followed by Glastonbury veterans Coldplay, who performed in front of the skeleton of the Pyramid stage, where the headline acts usually perform. Frontman Chris Martin joked that he had "never played in front of thousands of cows before" as he and his band braved the rain to perform classic hits such as "The Scientist", "Clocks" and "Fix You". Other performers include Blur's Damon Albarn and Michael Kiwanuka.

event was cancelled for a second year, said had hoped the event would be "like the festival but without people". "We're very excited to be able to show the farm in a way that people have never really seen it, with these incredible artists," she told BBC radio. The event will also be played on delay across four international time zones, with Eavis adding there will be "a number of unannounced surprise performances".

'An adventure'
Organizer Emily Eavis, who announced in January that the annual

Paul Dugdale, the event's director, said he hoped to recreate the event's sense of adventure. "The overarching vision of it was to... just try and take people on a bit of a journey. "Glastonbury is an adventure, and you never quite know what's around the corner and often the best parts of the festival are the parts you weren't expecting, and that's really fun," he said. Britain is gradually opening up after its latest Covid-19 lockdown, and the timing of the Glastonbury event, when many

smaller venues will be hoping to reopen, drew some criticism.

"I think what the live industry really needs right now is some collective, collaborative, joined-up thinking," Mark Davyd, founder and chief executive of the Music Venue Trust, wrote on Twitter. The virtual Glastonbury event also clashed with the final of the Eurovision Song Contest in Rotterdam. Glastonbury, held on a dairy farm in Somerset, southwest England, was forced to cancel in 2020 — the year of the event's 50th anniversary—because of coronavirus restrictions after some 135,000 people had already bought tickets. Headliners were meant to include pop superstar Taylor Swift and Beatles icon Paul McCartney. Organizers had hoped to stage the event in 2021, but reversed course after England entered a third lockdown at the start of the year following a surge in coronavirus infections, hospitalizations and deaths. —AFP

TikTok helping deaf Black Americans preserve their brand of sign language

"English is not my first language," writes Nakia Smith on her TikTok account, although the 22-year-old grew up in Texas. The young African American woman has been deaf since birth, and uses her large online following to promote her little-known dialect: Black American Sign Language. In her video clips, she tells her 400,000 followers about the differences between her language and the standard American Sign Language (ASL). Among other things, she signs with two hands rather than one, uses more space and makes more use of facial expressions.

"Growing up I learned to sign by watching older people in my family. Then when I went to school my friends didn't understand what I was signing. I realized that BASL was unique and wanted to put it out there for people to learn it," she said.

Those differences were also noted decades ago by Carolyn McCaskill, a professor at Gallaudet University in Washington, one of the largest institutions for the deaf and hard-of-hearing in the world. As a child in Alabama, she first learned sign language at a school for deaf Black children, before going to study at a school for white children once segregation ended. "The signing they used was so different, even though the schools were only 10 minutes away from each other," she said.

The earliest schools for the deaf and hard-of-hearing in the United States date from the early 1800s, but in 17 southern states and Washington, separate schools for Black students were established towards the turn of the century. In these 18 establishments, a distinct means of communicating through signs evolved organically from ASL. These schools lasted for some 70 years, until desegregation, which was long enough to allow the emergence of a dialect with its own characteristics.

Smith tells her followers that to sign "paper" in ASL, a person mimics a sheet of paper by tapping the left hand with the right hand, while moving the latter outwards. In Black American Sign Language, the person waves both thumbs outwards at shoulder level. "Black ASL came from ASL, but has more seasoning. It's more emotionally involved," she told AFP, with her brother acting as interpreter.

For her book, "The Hidden Treasure of Black ASL" McCaskill interviewed dozens of deaf African Americans to catalog the specifics of the dialect. Thanks to the geographic remoteness of the communities, American Black Sign Language

enjoys a rich variety, and some signs differ from one part of the American South to the next. Some remember a dire lack of resources at their schools, and untrained teachers who did not teach them the full diversity of standard American Sign Language. "We Black students were repetitive, we lacked variety, our sign language was quite limited," recalled Pamela Baldwin, who went to school in Arkansas during and after segregation, in an interview with McCaskill. That lack of resources explains the informality of a dialect that relies on a range of communication elements rather than the sole use of pre-established signs.



Nakia Smith

Dr. Carolyn McCaskill

Emotional vs... robotic
"Black people sign with more rhythm, more style, using words that reveal our emotions, more free-flowing," one former deaf Black student from Texas said during a conversation posted online by McCaskill as part of her research. "We match the flavor. I don't mean to offend white people, but their signs lack affect, it has no tone, it's robotic-like signing that shows no emotion." Today, Black American Sign Language survives primarily by being passed on from generation to generation, as in the case of Smith, who learned it from her grandfather. This makes it almost impossible to estimate how many people actually speak it, said McCaskill.

"We have older Black deaf individuals who are passing away due to aging, but it's very vibrant,

the younger generation wants to preserve the language," she said. McCaskill launched the nation's first-ever Black deaf studies center in 2020 with colleagues at Gallaudet, which offers a minor in the history and culture of deaf African Americans. She hopes her center will serve as a base for the preservation of the dialect, but recognizes the importance of figures like Nakia Smith and her popularity on social media.

"Her videos went viral and reached out to different pockets of the community, which is great," she said. For her part, Smith wants more visibility for sign language, standard or Black, and would like to get involved in the entertainment industry to help bring about change. "I want to see it in popular culture, in books and TV shows, wherever," she told AFP. —AFP

Lifestyle | Features

SALT THERAPY AND A DOSE OF FUN HELP POLES FIGHT LONG COVID



Picture shows a salt therapy area at the former Wieliczka Salt Mine Health Resort complex located 135 meters underground in Wieliczka, Poland. —AFP photos



Picture shows people doing salt therapy exercises at the former Wieliczka Salt Mine Health Resort complex located 135 meters underground in Wieliczka, Poland.



gyrating with gusto to the sounds of “Girls Just Want To Have Fun”, a group of middle-aged Poles is fighting off lingering COVID symptoms with gym circuits. But this is no ordinary fitness workout. It is taking place 130 meters (427 feet) underground in a cavernous space next to a dark green brine lake in a former salt mine in southern Poland that dates back to the 13th century. “When I came down here, I was enchanted by this place,” participant Jadwiga Nowak told AFP, as other track-suit-clad attendees raise fitness balls in the air, ride exercise bikes and jog on the spot.

“I felt this atmosphere, this calm, this silence and this air is totally different from the one on the surface. There is magic here,” said the 60-year-old, who was on a ventilator for 16 days with COVID after being hospitalized in October. One of the world’s oldest salt mines, Wieliczka is recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. Over the centuries, miners turned it into a unique work of art, carving out a maze of tunnels leading to chambers and shrines complete with salt chandeliers. It is a tourist attraction, but also a health resort that has been offering salt therapy—mostly inhalation but also brine baths—to patients with pulmonary issues for nearly 200 years. It is now also taking in former COVID patients who have been referred through the public healthcare system for three-week stays, as well as private paying customers.

Blowing soap bubbles

Visitors go down the former mine shaft in a lift in groups of 10 or 15 and walk along salt-encrusted tunnels, following the tracks once used by mine trains. Once inside the Wessel Lake Chamber, which is 15 meters high and covered in wooden decking, patients



Picture shows a signpost indicating the way to the health resort at the former Wieliczka Salt Mine located 135 meters underground in Wieliczka, Poland.

are put through a series of breathing and stretching exercises and monitored by a doctor.

“As a rule, patients who had COVID have far worse symptoms than those with normal asthma. But former COVID sufferers can regain their normal health. On average, there is a 60- to 80-percent improvement in their physical tests” after their Wieliczka stay, said physiotherapist Agata Kita. Scientists estimate that 10 to 15 percent of former COVID sufferers get long COVID, with symptoms of fatigue, impaired concentration, body pain and breathing problems. Poland has taken a lead in rehabilitation programs and research into long COVID, launching its first facility for post-COVID patients in September.

One of the hospitals taking part in the effort is in



Picture shows a woman blowing soap bubbles as part of a therapy at the former Wieliczka Salt Mine Health Resort complex.

Glucholazy on the border with the Czech Republic, where patients are also offered mental health care and virtual reality games to test their reaction skills. Doctors there told AFP during a visit this week that they had found more than 50 distinct lingering physical and psychological symptoms for people who had COVID.

“Apart from the pulmonary symptoms, there are also muscle and joint pains, trouble with balance and coordination, memory and concentration loss and symptoms related to stress and depression,” said Jan Szczegielniak, who works on rehabilitation at Glucholazy. Among the patients is Piotr Zyjewski, a taekwondo trainer who had to self-isolate at home for 37 days after contracting COVID in October. “Before, I would start every day with a run of at least 20 kilo-

meters (12 miles) and do taekwondo courses in the evenings. That went on all week, I had a very high endurance level. “Now it’s difficult for me to accept that I have trouble walking for 20 minutes,” he said.

‘I feel better’

Back at Wieliczka, the chamber echoes to the sounds of loud breathing exercises. With its little alcoves carved in the rock, the place has the air of surreal theatre. In one corner, patients can be seen blowing soap bubbles or pinwheels to test their breathing. There is plenty of joviality and even giggling during one exercise which appeared to be a form of “tag”—but many of the participants were severely ill only recently.

Salt therapy, or halotherapy, is popular in Central and Eastern Europe, although the international scientific community is divided over its true benefits and some scientists believe it has only a placebo effect. But Magdalena Ramatowska, a doctor at Wieliczka, said she has seen beneficial effects. “Above all, the air is pure here. Without any allergens. This environment is excellent for respiratory tracts.

“There is high humidity, very little current and a lot of salt air which acts against inflammations and bacteria,” she said. Lucyna Szulc, who went into hospital in March with COVID and spent 20 days on a ventilator, is also convinced the salt mine is doing her good. “When I came out of hospital, my breathing was very weak,” the 59-year-old said. “Now, I feel better. I also feel my physical condition is improving. It is easier to exercise faster and keep up with the people who had COVID well before me,” she said. —AFP

RAT KILLERS OF NEW YORK: DOGS, VOLUNTEERS HUNT BRAZEN RODENTS



Jason Rivera of ‘The Ryder’s Alley Trencher-fed Society (R.A.T.S.)’ and his dog attempt to catch a rat in lower Manhattan in New York City. —AFP photos



A jagdterrier kills a rat after hunting it in lower Manhattan.

Late on a Friday night, eight dog enthusiasts and their pet pooches prowled several dark alleys in New York’s Lower East Side with one mission: to hunt and kill as many rats as possible. The dogs, mostly terriers, pant and strain at their leashes before diving into trash bags and emerging seconds later with a convulsing rodent between their teeth. “They’re bred for the job. They’re wired for the job. They live for the job,” explained Richard Reynolds, organizer of the Ryders Alley Trencher-fed Society, or R.A.T.S. for short.

New York’s furry rodents are notorious. Legend has it there are as many rats in the city as humans (some eight million), with public-health officials regularly testing new techniques to control the population, including placing dry ice in rat burrows to asphyxiate them. Shortly into the coronavirus crisis, America’s Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warned of “unusual or aggressive rodent behavior” after restaurants and offices closed, disrupting food sources. That hasn’t deterred the men and women volunteers of R.A.T.S. and their dogs. They have been chasing vermin for about 30 years and have maintained their nocturnal meets during the pandemic, albeit slightly less regularly.

Superpowers

Shorter-legged dogs such as Jagdterriers flush out rodents from piles of garbage, construction debris and bushes while faster, longer-legged dogs like Bedlington stand back, ready to pounce. “It’s a bit like X-Men,” says Alex Middleton, a 36-year-old dog trainer. “Each dog has its own superpower.” Reynolds, 77, will sometimes pound trash cans with a metal stick to send rats scurrying, while

Middleton frequently drops Rommel, a Jagdterrier, straight into dumpsters.

“Go on Rommel, get it,” the group shouts, as the dog thrashes around in the rubbish. Moments later, following several squeaks, Rommel, blood dripping from his mouth, appears with the rat, and the hunters cheer. The rat catchers pick up the carcasses by their tails and deposit them in a single-strap fabric bag. Its contents will be emptied and counted at the end of the night.

“The newer members share carrying the bag,” said 28-year-old Sophia Pierce. “It’s heavy—do you want to feel it?” Pierce, a dog groomer who joined the hunts with her wirehaired dachshund Lita a year ago, is unperturbed by the slaughter. “You just kind of get used to it. I think the people that just kind of walk up to it get more squeamish than we do,” she said.

Reynolds, a dog-show judge, was in a park in New Jersey in the 1990s when his pooches started killing rats during a show there. The park attendant asked if they would come back to help, and R.A.T.S. was born. R.A.T.S. answers calls and Facebook messages from rat-troubled residents who are usually most grateful for the group’s swift and effective response. The city government doesn’t recommend the practice, citing a risk of dogs catching a serious disease known as leptospirosis. But city officials don’t stop the group, because the catchers are not violating its health code. “The occasional beer can has been thrown at us for making too much noise, but we’ve got a warm welcome most places we go,” said Reynolds.

‘Different world’

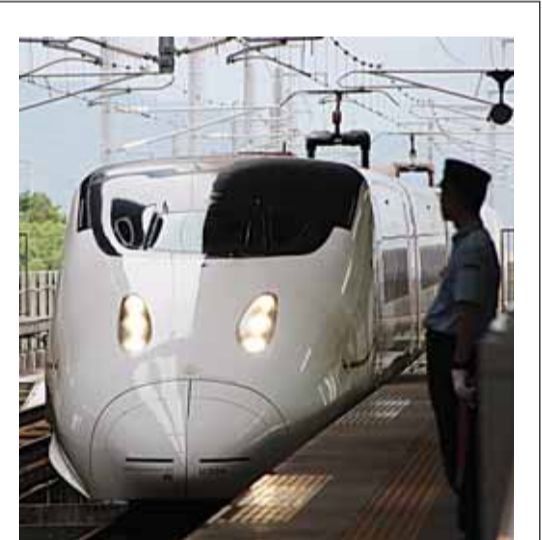
Kayla Callender said she was “hyped” earlier this

month when she saw the hunters in her Manhattan neighborhood near the Williamsburg bridge. “They make a big difference, for sure. I appreciate it,” she told AFP. Not everyone feels the same.

Animal rights group PETA’s senior director Stephanie Bell described the hunts as “archaic, depraved and illegal.” But for Reynolds, death-by-terrier is no crueler than by rat poison or sticky traps. Michael Parsons, a rat expert at Fordham University, likens the hunts to putting “a Band-Aid on cancer.” Reducing food waste and refuse is more effective for controlling the rat population, he said.

But while saying that the group doesn’t make a “heavy impression” on New York’s rodent population, he added that it does “contribute something to the community.” The group sends DNA samples to universities conducting research and provides frozen rats for falcons to eat at a nearby avian rehabilitation center. The volunteers say their enjoyment comes from seeing their dogs have fun developing predatory skills.

“We do rat control but that’s not really why we’re here,” said Reynolds. “We’re here for the dogs, to work the dogs.” Kim McCormick, a 58-year-old paramedic who makes six-hour round trips from Connecticut to take part, also enjoys the camaraderie among owners. “It’s a whole different world, a whole different way of meeting people. We work together, and the dogs are phenomenal together,” she said. After three hours of stalking, Greg Conception, 54, lines up the night’s haul on the ground. He counts 26 in total. “Usually we get about 40. This is a little light. We’re obviously coming here too often,” he said. —AFP



Japan bullet train driver left controls for high-speed toilet dash

The driver of a speeding Japanese bullet train handed over the controls to an unqualified conductor so he could answer an urgent call... of nature, a rail operator has revealed. The unfortunate driver’s toilet trip might have gone unnoticed, except for the fact that his train was subsequently one minute late, which prompted an investigation in a country famous for punctuality. The driver confessed that he had left his post after experiencing abdominal pain, and turned over controls of the train with 160 passengers on board to a conductor so he could run to the toilet. He was away for three minutes as the train ran at 150 kilometers (93 miles) an hour.

Bullet trains are tightly controlled by computerized central command systems, but human drivers are required to stay in place to deal with any unexpected situation, a spokesman told AFP. They also need to manually brake or accelerate as necessary to ensure safety and keep trains on schedule. The driver’s brief absence apparently resulted in the minute delay that flagged his secret to superiors. Drivers who experience an emergency while operating a train are supposed to coordinate with the command center to turn over the controls to a qualified conductor, or stop on the tracks or at the nearest station. In a news conference on Thursday, company executives apologized for the incident and said the red-faced driver would be dealt with “appropriately”. The driver explained he “didn’t want to cause a delay by stopping the train”. “I didn’t report it because it was embarrassing,” he added. —AFP

Sports

Middleton winner lifts Bucks over Heat, Nets rally to beat Celtics

Doncic leads Mavs over Clippers; Blazers overcome Nuggets

LOS ANGELES: Khris Middleton nailed a clutch two-pointer with less than one second remaining as the Milwaukee Bucks snatched a thrilling 109-107 overtime victory against the Miami Heat in their NBA Eastern Conference playoff opener on Saturday. Middleton kept his composure superbly to drain the decisive jump shot from 18 feet with just 0.5 seconds on the clock, handing the Bucks a 1-0 lead in the best-of-seven first round series.

In other series openers, the Brooklyn Nets rallied from a 12-point second-quarter deficit to beat the Boston Celtics 104-93. In the West, the fifth seeded Dallas Mavericks rallied late in the fourth quarter to down the fourth-seeded Los Angeles Clippers 113-103 at the Staples Center.

Middleton's dramatic winner marked the final act of a pulsating battle between the two Eastern Conference rivals, who also met in last year's playoffs with the Heat winning that series 4-1.

Heat talisman Jimmy Butler had taken the game to overtime at the end of the fourth quarter, driving to the basket to make it 99-99 as time ran out at Milwaukee's Fiserv Forum.

But Middleton's late winner settled the game in overtime and gives the Bucks the chance to take a grip on the series with game two at home on Monday.

Middleton led the Bucks scorers with 27 points, six rebounds and six assists, with Giannis Antetokounmpo, who appeared to be struggling with a sore left arm, adding 26 points with 18 rebounds and five assists.

The Bucks were almost left to rue another shaky performance from the free throw line from reigning NBA MVP Antetokounmpo, who made only six of 13 free throw attempts for a 46.2% completion percentage. Jrue Holiday added 20 points for Milwaukee while Brook Lopez finished with 18 points as the Bucks scraped home.

"It's a good start," Middleton said. "A lot of mistakes, a lot of missed free throws, a lot of threes from

them, and we missed threes. But it's a great start to what we want to do and where we want to be."

Middleton meanwhile praised Antetokounmpo for battling through an uneven personal performance.

"I don't think he had his night the way he wanted to," Middleton said. "But he battled, and defended well and that's what he's supposed to do — when it's not your night, do other things."

Goran Dragic led the Miami scorers with 25 points, while shooting guard Duncan Robinson finished with 24 points. Butler, the star of Miami's run to the NBA Finals last season, finished with 17 points.

In Brooklyn, Kevin Durant scored a game-high 32 points and pulled down 12 rebounds to lead the Nets, who had 29 points from Kyrie Irving and 21 from James Harden.

It was just the ninth time all season that the Nets' "Big Three" played together, and Durant acknowledged it took them awhile to settle in before a crowd of 14,391 at the Barclays Center.

"Most of it was settling down," he said of the Nets' struggles in the first half, in which they made just one of 13 from three-point range. "I think we rushed a lot of shots early. Our fans were in the stands for the first time at this capacity, I think there was a lot of adrenalin out there.

"We calmed down a little bit in the second half," Durant added, "and we were able to be smart with our defensive principles and we made some shots." Consecutive three-pointers from Harden, Irving and Durant in the opening minutes of the third quarter saw the Nets gain a lead they wouldn't relinquish.

Doncic propels Mavs

They led by as many as 17 in the fourth quarter. "It was one of those games where we stayed with it when our shot wasn't there and our defense was there for us," Durant said. Jayson Tatum led the Celtics with 22 points. Marcus Smart added 17 and Kemba Walker had 15 for a Boston team that will try to fight back in game two in Brooklyn on Tuesday.



MILWAUKEE: Khris Middleton #22 of the Milwaukee Bucks reacts after scoring in overtime against Duncan Robinson #55 of the Miami Heat during Game 1 of their Eastern Conference first-round playoff series between the Milwaukee Bucks and the Miami Heat at Fiserv Forum on Saturday in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. — AFP

Mavs star Luka Doncic scored a 31-point triple double with 10 rebounds and 11 assists as Dallas pulled away to win after trailing by three points with five minutes remaining. Tim Hardaway Jr had 21 points while Dorian Finney-Smith added 18 as the Mavs took a 1-0 series lead against the Clippers, who beat Dallas in six games at the same stage of the playoffs last season. "I hope it's going to be different this time, I hope it's not going to be the same story," Doncic said afterwards. "I forgot how much fun it was to play in the playoffs."

Kawhi Leonard led the Clippers scorers with 26

points, with Paul George adding 23. In the late game, Damian Lillard scored 34 points to power the Portland Trail Blazers to a 123-109 win over the Denver Nuggets in the opener series.

Lillard finished with five threes as the Blazers hit 19 of 40 shots from three point range. Carmelo Anthony and Anfernee Simons added four each as the Blazers outscored Denver by two dozen points in three point shooting. CJ McCollum added 21 points and Anthony scored 18. Nikola Jokic, who is in the running for league MVP, led Denver with 34 points, and Michael Porter chipped in 25. — AFP



NEW DELHI: India's Olympic wrestling medalist Sushil Kumar sits inside a vehicle after he was arrested by police over alleged involvement in the murder of a fellow wrestler yesterday. — AFP

India Olympic medalist arrested over murder case

NEW DELHI: Two-time Olympic wrestling medalist Sushil Kumar was arrested yesterday, Indian police said, after a week-long manhunt over the alleged murder of a fellow athlete. Kumar went into hiding after 24-year-old Sagar Dhankad was badly beaten during a brawl between two groups of wrestlers at a stadium in the capital New Delhi on May 4. Dhankad, a former junior champion who was training as a senior wrestler, later died in hospital.

Kumar was arrested early yesterday in northwest Delhi with another suspect, Delhi police said. "They were switching their location when they were arrested," the police officer told AFP. Police had offered a reward of 100,000 rupees (\$1,370) for information leading to the arrest of the 37-year-old star after two of Dhankad's associates injured in the fight named Kumar as one of the attackers.

But Kumar, via his lawyers, had said he was innocent and accused police of a biased investigation. Kumar is viewed as one of India's finest sportsmen and the only to win two individual Olympic medals — a freestyle wrestling silver at the 2012 London Games and a bronze at the Beijing Olympics four years earlier. He represented India in international competitions and won three Commonwealth Games golds and one gold at the World Wrestling Championships in Moscow in 2010. He was awarded India's highest honor for athletes in 2009.

Just weeks from the scheduled start of the Tokyo Olympics, the Wrestling Federation of India admitted that the sport's reputation has been tarnished by the case. "I must say that the image of Indian wrestling has been hurt badly by this," WFI secretary Vinod Tomar told reporters. Tomar said wrestling had been battling to improve its name as "for long wrestlers were known only as a bunch of goons". The case is the second in months to hit Indian wrestling. A coach Sukhwinder Mor is awaiting trial for the murder of five people, including a rival coach, in February. Kumar was the first Indian to win two individual Olympic medals and also the first in more than five decades to get a wrestling medal. His success inspired a generation of Indian wrestlers, including Yogeshwar Dutt and the Phogat sisters. — AFP

Mickelson clings to lead at PGA in quest of historic win

KIAWAH ISLAND: Fifty-year-old Phil Mickelson clung to a one-stroke lead after Saturday's third round of the PGA Championship as he tries to become golf's oldest major winner. The US left-hander built and squandered a five-stroke lead at windy Kiawah Island, but holed a clutch par putt from inside five feet at the 18th, the ball rolling around the cup rim, to stay in front.

Mickelson fired a two-under-par 70 to stand on seven-under-par 209 after 54 holes, one ahead of four-time major winner Brooks Koepka. "I'm playing better than the score is showing," Mickelson said. "I was executing. Even though it slipped a couple times, it's significantly better than it has been. I'm making progress."

With a victory, Mickelson would break the major tournament age mark set by American Julius Boros, who was 48 when he won the 1968 PGA Championship. Mickelson, who hasn't managed a top-10 major finish since 2016, birdied five of the first 10 holes to seize a five-stroke edge, then stumbled back with a bogey at

12 and double bogey at 13.

Koepka, playing with pain after right knee surgery in March, birdied the par-5 16th to match Mickelson for the lead but closed with a bogey to fall back while "Lefty" saved par after going over the 18th green to keep his lead. "I'm playing really well," Mickelson said. "I'm able to keep my focus and stay in the moment."

Koepka, who shot 70, seeks his third PGA title in four years. Not since Tom Watson captured the 1980, 1982 and 1983 British Opens has a player won the same major three times in four years. "Struggled really nicely," Koepka said. "I think that's probably the worst putting performance I've ever had," Koepka said. "It can't get any worse... the speed was so off."

South African Louis Oosthuizen, the 2010 British Open winner, shot 72 to stand third on 211 with American Kevin Streelman fourth on 212 and South Africans Branden Grace and Christiaan Bezuidenhout on 213.

Major drought

Mickelson, a three-time Masters champion who won his lone PGA in 2005, has not won a major since the 2013 British Open. His 44th and most recent US PGA Tour victory came in 2019 at Pebble Beach, although he won twice in 2020 on the 50-and-over Champions Tour. Wind direction switched Saturday on the punishing Ocean Course, the longest layout in major history at 7,876 yards. After blowing from the



KIAWAH ISLAND: Phil Mickelson catches his ball on the 18th green during the third round of the 2021 PGA Championship at Kiawah Island Resort's Ocean Course on Saturday in Kiawah Island, South Carolina. — AFP

east all week, breezes were from the south on Saturday, creating tricky crosswinds. Mickelson, who shared the lead with 2010 British Open winner Oosthuizen at 5-under when the day began, took the lead alone when the South African missed a six-foot par putt at the opening hole. Mickelson had back-to-back birdies at the par-5 second and the third and again at the sixth, on a 17-foot putt, and par-5 seventh. — AFP

Scotland's Taylor drops Ramirez twice to unify four titles

LAS VEGAS: Scotland's Josh Taylor used a relentless attack and two knockdowns to become the undisputed junior welterweight champion with a unanimous decision victory over Jose Ramirez on Saturday in Las Vegas.

Both former Olympic boxers came into the fight unbeaten and holding two belts but Taylor made sure he was the one to leave with all four 140-pound straps. The 30-year old Taylor defended his World Boxing Association and International Boxing Federation titles and captured Ramirez's World Boxing Council and World Boxing Organization belts at the Virgin Hotel. "I've trained for this all my life," Taylor said.

Taylor won by 114-112 scores on all three judges' cards to improve to 18-0 with 13 KOs. Ramirez suffered the first loss of his long career, with the Mexi-

can-American falling to 26-1 with 17 KOs. Taylor floored Ramirez in back-to-back rounds in the middle of the fight. He landed a left on the chin in the sixth to knock Ramirez down and then did it again in the seventh with a short uppercut.

Taylor is now just the sixth four-belt champion in boxing history and Scotland's first undisputed champ since the great Ken Buchanan unified the lightweight division by winning the WBA, WBC and lineal championships in the 1970s. "I am so determined to win. My will to win is second to none," said Taylor. Taylor beat Ivan Baranchyk to win the IBF title in May 2019 before beating Regis Prograis to win the WBA belt.

Ramirez actually got the better of Taylor in the opening rounds and was the busier of the two in the 12th, but he couldn't overcome the two knockdowns which seemed to sap him of his power and allowed Taylor to compile extra points on the scorecards. Ramirez hurt Taylor in the third round using a combination of head and body shots. Taylor tried to clinch but Ramirez swarmed him for much of the round, trying not to let his opponent catch his breath.

In the fourth, Ramirez kept up the attack and was able to easily break through Taylor's defense and land some hard body shots. But the fight turned early in the sixth round when southpaw Taylor displayed not only his power but his relentless attack, hitting Ramirez with a brutal left counterpunch directly on the chin that sent the American to the canvas.

The second knockdown came one round later as Taylor unleashed a short uppercut from in tight that Ramirez never saw coming. Ramirez hung on and was saved by the bell. The two knockdowns took a heavy toll on Ramirez, who has never scored a knockdown over an opponent past the sixth round in his career. At that point Ramirez's corner became concerned and tried to motivate the fighter by saying "this is for all of Mexico. Do this for your family."

Both fighters landed good punches in the tenth round. Taylor, figuring he had done enough earlier in the fight to win it on the scorecards, was content to backpedal and clinch in the final round. Ramirez, an American citizen, has long been an advocate for Latino farm workers in California's Central Valley. He started his title run in 2018, beating Amir Imam to win the WBC title. He became a unified champion in 2019 when he stopped Maurice Hooker in Texas to win the WBO belt. — AFP



LAS VEGAS: Josh Taylor poses with his title belts after his win by unanimous decision over Jose Ramirez in their junior welterweight world unification title fight at Virgin Hotels Las Vegas on Saturday in Las Vegas, Nevada. — AFP



Nike, Adidas launch their new sportswear season with Boutiqaat

KUWAIT: Nike, Adidas and Adidas Originals kick-start the summer by launching their new sportswear season at Boutiqaat. With hundreds of different products in its arsenal accommodating the needs of both genders, many globally leading companies, utilize Boutiqaat as an essential platform to launch new products in the Middle East. Founded in 2015 by a Kuwaiti entrepreneur, Boutiqaat follows many marketing strategies and is renowned for collaborating with social media celebrities to endorse products of top international brands, marketing them directly to customers. Boutiqaat showcases a line-up of over 700 celebrities offering personal advice, recommendations and tips concerning products to the clients. Boutiqaat continues its commitment to bolstering digital channels, especially during the current situation with COVID-19 to minimize direct interaction wherever possible by offering ease and convenience of purchasing products from the comfort of the home. The launch is another example of the Kuwaiti e-commerce's efforts to increase its penetration in new categories.

Sports

Thousands of Atletico fans defy pandemic by celebrating title triumph in Madrid

Hundreds watched match on their phones outside stadium

MADRID: Thousands of Atletico Madrid fans defied the authorities by taking to the streets of the Spanish capital to celebrate on Saturday night after victory over Real Valladolid secured their team an 11th league title.

As soon as the full-time whistle blew in Valladolid to confirm a 2-1 win, Atleti supporters flocked to the Neptune fountain in the center of Madrid, in line with tradition but defying COVID-19 rules regarding the wearing of masks and social distancing. "I was confident Atletico would win. It was like a final and being against Valladolid, I knew we were going to win," Federico Gonzalez, 46, and among the crowds, told AFP.

A large police presence surrounded the fountain, with several vans also present to prevent people from approaching the fountain, which had been lit up in Atletico's red and white colors. Fans waved flags and scarves while others set off flares as darkness fell, the celebrations going on into the night after Atletico's second La Liga title in seven years.

"It is a joy. From the beginning of the game I was overcome with nerves because Atleti plays each game in its own way and you just never know," said Carlota Maestro, 20, who came to the city center with three friends.

Amid shouts of "Atleti, Atleti" and "Campeones", the rojiblancos fans danced, jumped and hugged each other. Cars and motorbikes drove by honking their horns, some with red and white flags poking out of the windows.

The COVID-19 pandemic has meant Atletico's fans have not been allowed to attend matches this season and their celebrations defied the recommendations of the authorities. Fans ignored rules on social distancing and many were not wearing masks.

"Please, I ask the Atletico fans not to go to Neptune," wrote the mayor of Madrid, Jose Luis Martinez-Almeida, himself an Atletico supporter, on Twitter. "I am the first to understand the desire to celebrate but this is not the time."

"It is a strange celebration, because we have not been able to do it like normal, on the field, surrounded by other fans," said Pablo Diaz, a 22-year-old fan. "We celebrate it but with a little fear, being careful, and wearing a mask."

Hundreds of other fans had accompanied the team to Valladolid, where they watched the game on their phones in the car park outside the stadium. After the match, Atletico's ran out of the stadium to celebrate with the supporters they had not seen all season. —AFP



MADRID: Supporters and policemen gather at Neptune square in Madrid on Saturday after Atletico Madrid won the Spanish Liga Championship title. —AFP

Biles returns to competition with historic vault

LOS ANGELES: US gymnastics superstar Simone Biles returned to competition with a bang Saturday, completing an historic vault to launch her final run to the Tokyo Olympics. The five-time Olympic gold medalist, who hadn't competed since winning five golds, including a fifth all-around title, at the 2019 World Championships, delivered on the vault she's been preparing — a Yurchenko double pike — at the US Classic in Indianapolis, Indiana.

The vault, featuring a roundoff onto the springboard and back handspring into a piked double backflip, had never before been done in women's competition. Biles sailed through it with so much power that she over-rotated slightly and stepped back on the landing.

"I was just thinking, do it like training," she said of her mindset as she took off down the runway. "Don't try to overdo anything, because I have a tendency as soon as I raise my hand to kind of over-power things. I did a little bit, but at least I still was on my feet and it's a new vault."

Posts of Biles completing the vault in practice had set social media sites buzzing. NBA superstar LeBron James had retweeted a video of Biles landing it. "It's nice to see all the support," Biles said, adding that she was "feeling confident" heading into the US championships June 3-6. They'll be followed by the



INDIANAPOLIS: Simone Biles warms up on the beam prior to the 2021 GK US Classic gymnastics competition at the Indiana Convention Center on Saturday in Indianapolis, Indiana. —AFP

US Olympic Trials June 24-27, where the top two finishers will book Tokyo berths, along with two other gymnasts named by USA Gymnastics selectors.

Biles wasn't perfect on Saturday. In addition to her step back on the vault landing she had a bobble on her floor routine and on the asymmetrical bars.

But she won the all-around competition with a score of 58.400, with Jordan Chiles second on 57.100 points and Kayla DiCello third on 56.100. "I'm just happy to be back out here on the competition floor in an arena with all of the girls, especially after the long year and time off we've had," Biles said. —AFP

Pilato sets record

BUDAPEST: Italian teenager Benedetta Pilato set a new world record for the 50m breaststroke in the semi-finals of the European Swimming Championships on Saturday.

The 16-year-old clocked 29.30 seconds to better the previous best of 29.40sec set by American Lilly King in 2017. "I didn't think I was capable of this now."

"I thought maybe I would beat the European record, but not the world record at all," said Pilato. However, in an effort to dampen expectations, she added: "No, I'm not the (Olympic champion) Adam Peaty of the women's breaststroke." —AFP

Ranieri exits Sampdoria with win over Parma

MILAN: Claudio Ranieri brought the curtain down on his coaching career with Sampdoria on Saturday with a 3-0 win over Parma. Italian forward Fabio Quagliarella marked his 500th Serie A appearance with the opening goal against relegated Parma who will finish the season bottom of the table.

Ranieri, 69, announced on Friday he would not coach the Genoa club next season with his contract due to expire in June, after just under two seasons. "I wanted the team to fight until the last game," said Ranieri, who led outsiders Leicester City to the 2016 English Premier League title, and took over the Genoa side in October 2019. "The lads were happy tonight. I was sorry not to have been able to greet the fans tonight. And now? We'll see, I still

really want to work."

Ranieri's vast coaching experience spanning 35 years includes spells at Chelsea, Valencia, Monaco, Atletico Madrid, Inter Milan, Juventus, Roma and Napoli. In Genoa, Quagliarella broke through after 20 minutes finishing off an Antonio Candreva cross, with Omar Colley sending in a rebound before the break. Candreva again set up Manolo Gabbiadini to curl in the third after an hour to seal the three points and move his team up to ninth. Quagliarella has scored 177 top flight goals and 99 for Sampdoria, including 13 this season.

The Italian international has played over 200 times for Sampdoria, and was the Serie A top scorer in the 2018-2019 season with 26 goals. Quagliarella made his top flight debut in Torino in 2000. He has also played for Udinese, Napoli and Juventus, winning three Serie A trophies with the Turin club. Genoa beat Cagliari 1-0 with Eldor Shomurodov scoring the only goal after quarter of an hour in Sardinia. Fiorentina were held to a goalless draw at relegated Crotone. —AFP

News in brief

Teen fan dies

MADRID: A 14-year-old boy died on Saturday during celebrations of Atletico Madrid's La Liga title victory in the Spanish capital, emergency services told AFP. The incident happened as the teenager was in a van with friends. He is believed to have suffered a brain injury after hitting his head against the wall of an underground car park. Emergency services workers attempted to resuscitate the teenager for an hour. At the time of the accident, more than 2,000 Atletico supporters were celebrating their side's 11th league title win around Neptune Fountain. —AFP

Timbers rout Galaxy

LOS ANGELES: Ireland international Derrick Williams was sent off for a horror tackle as the Los Angeles Galaxy crashed to a 3-0 defeat against the Portland Timbers in Major League Soccer on Saturday. Galaxy center-back Williams saw red after a brutal lunge on the Timbers' Andy Polo in the 44th minute, which left the Peruvian international writhing in agony at Portland's Providence Park. The victory lifted Portland to sixth in the Western Conference standings with nine points from six games. The Galaxy are second in the table with 12 points from six matches. —AFP

PAOK clinch cup

ATHENS: Czech forward Michael Krmencik scored in the 90th minute to lift PAOK to a 2-1 Greek Cup final victory over Olympiakos on Saturday. The winning goal by Krmencik, on loan to PAOK from Club Brugge, enabled the Thessaloniki side to wrap up only their eighth cup success. Olympiakos, who recently won a record 46th Super League title, missed out on the double as a result of Saturday's loss. —AFP

'Badminton' board elected

KUWAIT: The Ordinary General Assembly of the Badminton World Federation was held online, during which Paul-Erik Hoyer Larson was elected President by acclamation, as well as Khuning Patama Vice President and Paul Kutzo Vice President, para-badminton. The assembly also elected the 20-member BWF executive council, including Dr Sawsan Taqawi as a member from Bahrain. Kuwait participated in the meeting, represented by President of Kuwait Badminton Club Mohammad Abdelhadi.

Classifieds

HOSPITALS

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300

Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9
Clinics	
Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
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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EMERGENCY 112

Liverpool, Chelsea seal Champions League spots

Leicester blow chance as Kane signs off with Golden Boot

LONDON: Liverpool and Chelsea seized the final two Champions League places in a dramatic end to the Premier League season yesterday, leaving Leicester heartbroken for the second consecutive campaign. With Manchester City already guaranteed a third title in four years and Manchester United certain to finish second, the focus was on the battle for the final two places in the top four.

Heading into the 38th and last round of fixtures, just one point separated Chelsea in third place from Leicester in fifth. Two Sadio Mane goals gave Liverpool a 2-0 win at home to Crystal Palace while Thomas Tuchel's side were indebted to a late Leicester collapse against Tottenham at the King Power Stadium. Chelsea lost 2-1 at Aston Villa but were saved by the 4-2 defeat for Brendan Rodgers' FA Cup winners.

Jamie Vardy ramped up the pressure on deposed champions Liverpool and Chelsea early on a see-saw afternoon, putting Leicester ahead from the penalty spot. That meant, as it stood, Liverpool, playing in front of the biggest crowd at Anfield since they became English champions last season, dropped out of the Champions League qualification places.

But after an uncertain start, Mane calmed nerves in the 36th minute and minutes later Harry Kane, possibly playing his final game for Spurs, levelled for the visitors at the King Power. Chelsea were rocked when Bertrand Traore fired Villa ahead just before the break when he met Matt Targett's corner and his shot looped over Edouard

Mendy and in off the bar.

Vardy then scored again from the penalty spot shortly after half time and minutes later Villa doubled their lead when Anwar El Ghazi beat substitute goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga from the penalty spot. At that stage it looked as though Chelsea, playing Manchester City in next week's Champions League final, would miss out on the top four.

Leicester pain

They pulled a goal back but the key action took place at the King Power, where a Kasper Schmeichel own goal and two late Gareth Bale strikes turned the game around. Kane is keen to move on from his boyhood club after Tottenham also missed out on the Champions League for a second straight year. But the England captain secured the consolation prize of winning the Golden Boot as he slammed home his 23rd Premier League goal of the campaign four minutes before half-time.

Liverpool, hit by a string of injuries and dogged by inconsistent form earlier this season, have been impressive down the home stretch, winning eight out of their last 10 games to seal their spot in Europe's premier club competition.

Chelsea, last week's beaten FA Cup finalists, will be hugely relieved that Tottenham did them a favor, with their season threatening to unravel in the final weeks. They can now face Manchester City in the Champions League final without the added pressure of needing to win to qualify for next season's competition. Leicester, forced to settle for a



LIVERPOOL: Liverpool's English defender Nathaniel Phillips (left) vies with Crystal Palace's Ivorian striker Wilfried Zaha during an English Premier League football match at Anfield yesterday. — AFP

Europa League spot, also missed out on the top four on the final day of last season when they were beaten by Manchester United.

West Ham also secured a Europa

League spot by beating Southampton 3-0 while Fulham, West Brom and Sheffield United had already been relegated. Sergio Aguero scored two goals in his final appearance for Manchester City in

their 5-0 romp against Everton. The Argentine, City's all-time record goal scorer, returned to the squad for his farewell and came on as a second-half substitute. —AFP






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