



3 Kuwait taxi drivers can barely make ends meet



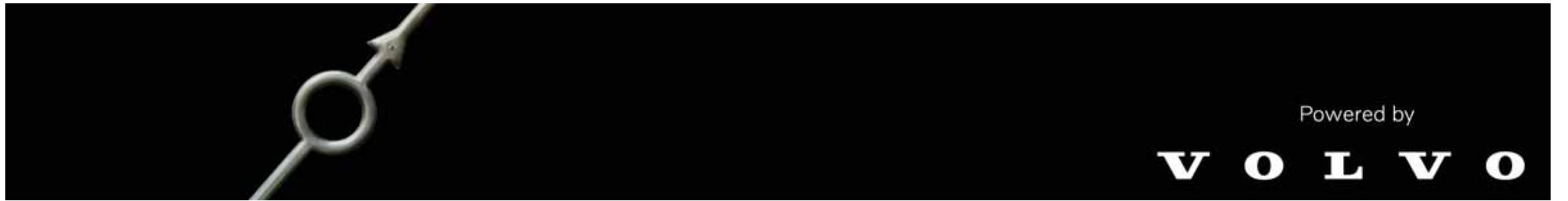
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Govt boycotts Assembly again, sessions canceled

Opposition MPs occupy ministers' seats, file motion to remove speaker



By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Opposition MPs occupied seats reserved for Cabinet ministers for the second time yesterday, prompting the government to boycott the session and leading Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem to cancel the sessions. Ahead of the start of the regular session yesterday, the first in around a month, a group of opposition MPs sat in the front row of the Assembly chamber, normally reserved for the prime minister and other Cabinet members.

Ghanem then told some 40 MPs assembled in the chamber that he was informed by the government that they will not attend the session because MPs had taken their seats. He said yesterday's and today's sessions are cancelled and the next regular Assembly meeting will convene on June 8. Assembly sessions were suspended for about a month late last month after MPs also sat in Cabinet members' seats.

The speaker later said that a special session will be held on Thursday to debate the developments in Jerusalem, financial rewards to frontline workers and the education ministry decision to hold written exams for higher secondary students. Opposition MPs sat in the Cabinet's seats to prevent the session from taking

place in a bid to force HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah to accept to face grillings.

The dispute is over a decision taken by the Assembly on March 30 to postpone grillings against the prime minister until the end of 2022. The opposition is insisting the decision is unconstitutional. MP Obaid Al-Wasmi, who was elected on Saturday in an impressive fashion, said canceling the session in the presence of 40 lawmakers under the pretext of the government's absence is a constitutional violation, adding that parliament is not a committee of the Council of Ministers.

MP Marzouq Al-Khalifa said the situation is headed for a bitter standoff amid popular anger against the government. MP Saleh Al-Mutairi said sitting in the place of Cabinet members is not a cause of chaos but a political response, calling on the prime minister to quit.

Meanwhile, 25 MPs filed a motion calling for the dismissal of Ghanem, holding him responsible for obstructing the work of the Assembly. The motion calls for amending the internal charter of the Assembly to add a clause that would allow the removal of the speaker. A similar attempt was not allowed to be debated in the Assembly earlier because it is not mentioned in the law.

News in brief

WhatsApp blocks Palestinian journos

GAZA CITY: Messaging app WhatsApp has blocked the accounts of dozens of Palestinian journalists following this month's fighting between the Zionist entity and Gaza's Islamist rulers Hamas. The vice president of the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate, Tahseen Al-Astall, said "around 100 journalists" in Gaza had seen their accounts blocked. The Arab Center for the Development of Social Media said the group documented 500 cases in which Palestinian "digital rights" had been violated between May 6 and May 19. "Content and accounts were removed, reduced and restricted, hashtags were hidden, and archived content deleted," the report said. — AFP

EU embraces COVID pass

BRUSSELS: EU leaders yesterday welcomed the introduction of a bloc-wide COVID-19 pass that they hope will unlock a tourist surge this summer. The 27 member states would like the EU Digital COVID Certificate, to be launched July 1 for citizens and residents, to turn the page on restrictions that have crimped Europeans' freedom of movement. Coupled with a separate plan to let in fully vaccinated travelers from outside the EU, Europe believes its vital tourist industry could claw back some of its losses. The certificate will show the bearer's vaccination status, or whether they have immunity from a COVID infection they have recovered from, or the result of a COVID test. — AFP

Tiny number of 'breakthrough' cases

WASHINGTON: About 0.01 percent of people became infected with COVID-19 between January and April despite being fully vaccinated, a US government study confirming the shots' high efficacy showed yesterday. The report published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention documented so-called "breakthrough" cases among 101 million people fully vaccinated in the US. A total of 10,262 infections were documented at 14 days or more after the final dose of a vaccine provisionally authorized by the Food and Drug Administration. Of these cases, 6,446 or 63 percent occurred in females, and the median patient age was 58 years. — AFP

Miss Universe's dress copied from Kuwait-based designer

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The design of a shimmering red fringe gown worn by Miss Universe 2020 Andrea Meza from Mexico while being crowned on May 16, 2021 was allegedly copied from a gown designed by Nadim Soudaiha, a Lebanese designer based in Kuwait.

Pictures of Soudaiha's gown - though gold-colored - were posted in 2017 on his personal account on Instagram, as well as on the account of the La Bourjoisie atelier with a

detailed video. He also participated with this design in a fashion show held in Kuwait in the same year. "It took me around 10 days to design this dress that was made from tulle with Swarovski crystals and fringe beads," Soudaiha said.

According to Soudaiha, this story gets more interesting as he has Mexican roots. "The designer of the stolen dress is Mexican, the Miss Universe winner is also Mexican and my grandmother is Mexican as well." (See Page 13)



HOLLYWOOD, Florida: Miss Mexico Andrea Meza is crowned Miss Universe 2020 onstage at the 69th Miss Universe competition at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino on May 16, 2021. — AFP

Islamophobia a 'problem' in UK ruling party

LONDON: Islamophobia within Britain's ruling Conservative Party is a problem both at an individual level and beyond but falls short of "institutional racism", an independent investigation concluded yesterday. The center-right party has been dogged for years by accusations of anti-Muslim sentiment that have been levelled against members, including Prime

Minister Boris Johnson. The former journalist's comments comparing Muslim women in veils to letterboxes and bank robbers, in a newspaper column in 2018, contributed to a "widespread" perception that the Tories have a "Muslim problem", the report said. "Anti-Muslim sentiment remains a problem within the party. This is damaging to the party, and alienates a significant section of society," the investigation led by Swaran Singh, a former commissioner at the Equality and Human Rights Commission, found.

Singh said he believed the report was "going to be very uncomfortable for the party", and hoped it would "spur them into action". The investigation said since 2015 the "bulk" of discrimination complaints had been made over anti-Muslim allegations. Of 1,418

complaints relating to 727 incidents of alleged discrimination, more than two-thirds of the incidents - 496 cases - related to Islam.

But while the report found "there were examples of anti-Muslim discrimination by individuals and groups at local association level", it said those problems fell short of claims of "institutional racism". The report said there was no evidence that complaints related to Islam are treated differently from those related to other forms of discrimination. Johnson told Singh's probe he was "sorry for any offence taken" over his 2018 column and added he would not use "some of the offending language from my past writings" now that he was prime minister.

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Conflict forged unity among Palestinians

RAMALLAH: The latest escalation in the Middle East conflict served to unite the geographically fragmented Palestinian community in a way not seen in years, analysts say. From the blockaded Gaza Strip to the occupied West Bank and annexed east Jerusalem to Arabs living inside the Zionist entity, scattered people pulled closer together.

A sea of Palestinian flags flew in solidarity rallies, especially during

"Day of Rage" protests and a general strike on May 18 that cut across separate areas. Administrative offices, schools and businesses closed across the West Bank to protest the bombardment of Gaza but also against expanding Jewish settlements in the occupied territories.

In a rare move, the shutters also came down in east Jerusalem, the part of the Holy City annexed by the Zionist entity, and in Arab population centers such as Nazareth and Acre. "To see every single Palestinian community rise up together, this is extremely rare," said Salem Barahmeh, director of the Palestine Institute for Public Diplomacy. "To go on a national strike and protest and to have the

Continued on Page 2



RAMALLAH: Palestinian demonstrators carry mock coffins of children who were killed in Gaza as they protest the visit of the US Secretary of State in the occupied West Bank yesterday. — AFP

Local

Amir, Crown Prince receive Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad



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

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

Mohammad at Bayan Palace.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of condolences yesterday to Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud over the demise of Princess Al-Jawhara Bint Mohammad bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud. His



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah

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.

Also yesterday, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of

condolences to Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi over the victims of the erupted volcano in the City of Goma. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables. — KUNA

Foreign Minister receives outgoing ambassadors

KUWAIT: Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah received yesterday South Korean Ambassador to Kuwait Dr Hong Young-ki on the occasion of ending his tenure in Kuwait. The Foreign Minister thanked him for the efforts and contributions to boost bilateral ties between both nations. Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Nasser also received Ambassador of Bhutan to Kuwait Tshering Gyaltsen Penjor on the occasion of ending his tenure in Kuwait.

Separately, Sheikh Dr Ahmad held talks with British Foreign Office Minister for the Middle East and North Africa James Cleverly, which centered on bilateral relations. The talks also touched on global happenings and the latest regional developments. In the meantime, Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Majdi Al-Dhafiri met yesterday with Cleverly, who



KUWAIT: Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets South Korean Ambassador to Kuwait Dr Hong Young-ki. — KUNA photos

was on a visit to the country along with an accompanying delegation. The Deputy Foreign Minister and the British official discussed the historic relations



Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets Ambassador of Bhutan to Kuwait Tshering Gyaltsen Penjor.

between the two countries and expressed satisfaction at accomplishments of the Joint Guidance Committee. The Kuwaiti British commission was set up in 2012

with aim of cementing the bilateral relations. Moreover, the two sides discussed developments on the regional and international arenas. — KUNA

Kuwait's Cabinet applauds Gaza truce accord

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Government on Monday acclaimed the Gaza cease-fire agreement that had been worked out between the Zionist entity and Palestinians. In a statement declared after the weekly session, the Cabinet lauded the good-will efforts that had been exerted by Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi resulting in the truce accord. The Cabinet affirmed the State of Kuwait's unwavering stance on the side of the brotherly Palestinian people so they may be able to establish the independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital according to the international legitimacy resolutions and the Arab peace initiative.

The Cabinet held its weekly session at Seif Palace under the chairmanship of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. Following the session, Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah stated that he briefed the ministers about his participation in the 75th session of the United Nations General Assembly, during which participants discussed events in the occupied Palestinian territories. During the UNGA session, the foreign minister, head of the State of Kuwaiti delegation, affirmed full support for Arab, Islamic and international efforts to halt the Zionist aggression, revive the peace process and negotiations in line with international references in a manner that would enable the Palestinian people attain their full legitimate rights.

Keen on executing the state strategy of tackling the housing issue, in addition to the funding offered by the Kuwait Credit Bank and local banks for supporting the sector as well as ensuring relevant legal insurances, the government approved a bill with respect to funding private housing, and submitted it to His Highness the Amir pending referral to the National Assembly. Later during the session, the executives listened to statements by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Integrity (Nazaha) Enhancement Abdullah Al-Roumi and Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah about the by-election that ended with Dr Obaid Al-Wasmi winning the vacant seat in parliament. The ministers expressed satisfaction at the efforts exerted by the ministries of justice, interior, information, education and health for ensuring a sound election. — KUNA

KFH teams up with Kuwaiti youth to execute social initiatives

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has succeeded in taking social initiatives to a new level of innovation utilizing technology and modern applications in cooperation with innovative Kuwaiti youth. In assuming social responsibility initiatives, KFH has ensured that these initiatives comply with health conditions, available to all and accommodate all public participations, by using modern techniques and highly developed digital tools.

To reflect the success of the social responsibility strategy, Assistant Manager Public Relations at KFH, Fahad Al-Saad said that the virtual walk challenge initiative organized by KFH, in cooperation with V-Thru, has achieved more than 60 thousand subscriptions from various society categories in less than one month.

He added that this virtual event has witnessed a large interaction by the public who have participated in the walking challenge. This initiative has witnessed great public interest in more than 50 areas in Kuwait as part of the program "Better health for a better life".

He noted that the "Walk challenge" comprised daily prizes for participants, enabling them to score points on the "V-Thru" application, which can be



Fahad Al-Saad



Mohammed Al-Awadhi

used in purchase orders or donation for charity works inside Kuwait at the rate of KD 1 for every 1km walk.

Saad added: "In addition to the daily walk challenge, KFH has organized other side challenges by encouraging customers to activate their digital wallets to be compatible with the fitness watches. Once the daily challenge is over the activity is recorded to obtain an additional bonus of KD 2. Free coffee is also served to participants in cooperation with the owners of Kuwaiti youth projects.

He said that the V-Thru application suites all types of modern life. The application has various advantages e.g., V-Fit and the nourishing value calculator to enhance health model in addition to "Walk-Thru" facility as well as other continuous developments to make customers' life easy. KFH has rewarded the top 10 contestants on the V-Fit platform with prizes like smart watches from Samsung, Fitbit and Garmin, providing the most modern and

secured e-pay methods.

Meanwhile, Public Relations Specialist at KFH, Mohammed Al-Awadhi said that KFH is keen on teaming up with and supporting the innovative Kuwaiti Youth to execute virtual events that would add value to society and support entrepreneurs, thus affirming KFH tendency to support national youth and enhance innovation and entrepreneurship.

Awadhi added that KFH is keen on organizing events that aim to encourage youth and sporting activities as part of its social responsibility. "Holding such events reflects KFH distinction in social innovation by using technology and virtual activities to participate in creating solutions to add value to society and to enhance interaction between KFH and the public.

KFH enjoys a long record of support to the Kuwaiti youth initiatives. KFH encouraged them to use digital applications and solutions. Collaboration with Kuwaiti entrepreneurs includes partnership with Cofe App, various digital platforms e.g. "Entrepreneur" and partnership with "Brilliant Lab" for emerging e-projects. KFH has also supported CODED program for the development of electronic innovation and sponsored the LI3IB application as well as the virtual bicycle marathon event in cooperation with Suffix in addition to many other digital solution initiatives for national talents. KFH's support to the various categories of SME owners reflects its pioneering role in encouraging Kuwaiti youth and enhancing the concept of entrepreneurship and youth initiatives.

Islamophobia a 'problem'...

Continued from Page 1

The report also considered accusations made by the campaign of 2016 Conservative mayoral candidate Zac Goldsmith claiming his Muslim Labour rival Sadiq Khan associated with extremists. Goldsmith told the investigation the accusations showed "poor judgement in the way his campaign was conducted" and he denied "harboring anti-Muslim sentiments or using such sentiments for political advantage".

MP and former Conservative finance minister Sajid Javid, the son of Muslim Pakistani immigrants, highlighted "distressing examples of anti-Muslim sentiment" listed in the report. "Stamping out discrimination, whether against Muslims or any other minority group, is an issue where our country's political parties have a responsibility," he said.

Former Conservative chairwoman Sayeeda Warsi, a member of the House of Lords and a longtime critic of her party's handling of Islamophobia,

tweeted the report revealed a party that was "at best unable and at worst unwilling to deal with the issue of racism".

In response to the investigation, the Conservative Party said it accepted the report's recommendations and would work harder to counter discrimination in all its forms. "On behalf of the Conservative Party I would like to apologize to anyone who has been hurt by discriminatory behavior of others or failed by our system," party co-chairwoman Amanda Milling said. She added the party would "continue to take a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination" and "take immediate action to improve our handling of complaints".

The opposition Labour party has meanwhile been dogged for years by incidents of anti-Semitism, blamed particularly on far-left followers of former leader Jeremy Corbyn. In October, the Equality and Human Rights Commission said Corbyn's office had broken the law in its handling of complaints by Jewish members. His successor Keir Starmer has apologized profusely and suspended Corbyn from the party. — AFP

Conflict forged unity among...

Continued from Page 1

Palestinian diaspora also involved, that's pretty historic," he said, referring to rallies by Palestinians abroad.

Palestinians have long demanded their own state, with east Jerusalem as its capital, but for now the community is fragmented, with each part facing a different reality. In the latest confrontation, Zionist bombs rained down on Gaza, the blockaded coastal enclave of two million ruled by Islamist group Hamas.

The escalation was sparked by clashes between Zionist police and Palestinians at east Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque compound, one of Islam's holiest sites that is also sacred to Jews. The ensuing violence also spread to the West Bank, where Zionist forces are largely in charge but the Palestinian Authority led by the secular Fatah movement has limited control. More than 25 Palestinians were killed in West Bank clashes.

Inter-communal violence also flared in Zionist areas where Jews and Arabs usually live side by side. An Arab, Mussa Hassuna, was killed in a confrontation

between Jewish nationalists and young Arabs in Lod, in the central part of the Zionist entity. These Arabs are the descendants of Palestinians who stayed on their land after the creation of the Zionist entity in 1948.

The fragmentation has long served to "ensure that there is no full Palestinian engagement geographically, socially and politically," said Barahme, who is based in Ramallah in the West Bank. While Gaza is mired in poverty, the West Bank after successive intifadas (uprisings) has seen liberal economic policies and the emergence of a middle class that at times seems less politically engaged, he said.

Gaza's rulers Hamas, unlike Fatah, do not recognize the Zionist entity and the group is considered a "terrorist" organization by the US and EU. Arabs citizens of the Zionist entity, a minority of about 20 percent, meanwhile face their own unique challenges, said Amal Jamal, political science professor at Tel Aviv University. "Palestinians in (the Zionist entity) are realistic, they have been living with Jews for decades, they understand the Zionist psyche, politics, culture, they speak Hebrew fluently," he said. "Palestinians in (the Zionist entity) are fighting for their legitimacy, to be part of the political system, part of the decision making, in order to lead to a solution to the Palestinian problem." — AFP

Local

Kuwait taxi drivers still can barely make ends meet

One of the sectors hit the hardest by the pandemic

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Several taxi drivers in Kuwait are yet to recover from a hiatus of almost five months without work last year due to the coronavirus pandemic. The government banned taxis from operating from March to July 2020 to stop the spread of COVID-19 in the country during the early months of pandemic.

According to some taxi drivers, they can barely make ends meet even now. Their everyday challenge is how to find passengers. Most passengers using the services of taxis are expats; but Kuwait reported the exodus of more than 134,000 expatriates last year amid coronavirus-related restrictions, reducing the total number of foreigners in the country by 4 percent to reach 3.2 million, based on official figures from Jan to Dec 2020 as per the Public Authority for Civil Information.

"We are trying to survive like many others. We are doing our job daily, and thankfully I can still pay the house rent and eat," said Safi, a Bangladeshi taxi driver for over 10 years in Kuwait. "In this time of the pandemic, to survive is the best gift and a big favor from Allah. We just need to work hard and do what is right. At least I can still send some money to my family in Bangladesh, not as much as before COVID, but at least we can survive," he said.

Safi complained of low passenger numbers, since many are still hesitant to venture out. "We are still at war with COVID-19. Before I used to have regular

passengers, who vanished, maybe because they are no longer employed, while others left the country," he assumed. "Before COVID, aside from my regular monthly transport of workers, I had regular student passengers. Now all of them are gone," Safi rued.

Some taxi drivers are now delivering food or groceries. "If you are not working hard enough, you won't get anything," said James, a Filipino taxi driver since 2016. To earn a regular income, he offered his services to become a 'marketer' and deliver prod-



To survive is the best gift

ucts to the doorsteps of his customers. "I buy whatever they need from the market. I am paid to buy their groceries plus get a delivery charge depending on the distance," he said.

Glenn, another cabbie, carries an icebox with multivitamins and food supplements to sell to passengers. "If we don't go the extra mile to add to our daily income, we will end up destitute. As long as I



KUWAIT: Taxis stop at a traffic light in Salmiya in this file photo. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

am earning extra legally, it won't hurt me," he said. Glenn also helps sell houses back in the Philippines through a real estate office here in Kuwait in exchange for a commission of 2 percent. "People who are buying homes now in the Philippines are mostly housemaids, as real estate developers are selling their properties at low prices," he said.

Asked about the challenges taxi drivers face daily, Glenn said picking up random passengers and interacting with them is a huge challenge, but they risk their lives for their families. "We fight daily for our families and our survival, sad to say," he said. "Besides, there are some customers who do not wear masks."

More aid ships from Kuwait arrive in India: Envoy

NEW DELHI: Kuwait's Ambassador to India Jassem Al-Najem said yesterday another shipload of relief supplies has arrived in Indian port as part of the sea bridge and that more ships are arriving in Indian ports loaded with medical oxygen to fight the spread of the coronavirus. Ambassador Najem said on arrival of the Indian navy ship carrying 210 tons of oxygen and 1,200 oxygen cylinders that the second stage of aid supply from Kuwait is to fill the deficit in shortage of medical supplies in India in wake of the second wave of COVID-19 pandemic and to help lessen the suffering of the friendly Indian people. In the first stage of the sea bridge, three military ships and a merchant ship had set off from the Shuwaikh and the Shuaiba ports with 215 metric tons of liquid oxygen and 2,600 metric tons of aid.

Kuwait is in the forefront of world countries providing large quantities of oxygen to India. Najem added that the sea and air bridge that carries the



NEW DELHI: Oxygen containers donated by Kuwait seen after their arrival to India. — KUNA

huge empty oxygen tanks to Kuwait aims to transport a total of 1,400 metric tons of liquid medical oxygen, making Kuwait one of the countries in the world supplying highest quantity of oxygen to India. A Kuwait Air Force plane had landed at Indira Gandhi Interna-

tional Airport in the New Delhi loaded with 40 tons of relief materials provided by the Kuwait Red Crescent Society, including oxygen concentrators, ventilators, oxygen cylinders, medicines and other medical supplies and various relief materials. — KUNA

Interior Ministry discusses crimes during pandemic

KUWAIT: Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah affirmed the security establishment's keenness to deal with the new conditions imposed by the coronavirus pandemic and the consequent rise in crime rates around the world. The Kuwaiti minister made his remarks in a speech at the international scientific conference held yesterday evening via Zoom entitled 'The phenomenon of the spread of crimes in the time of the coronavirus pandemic'. The conference was organized by the Kuwaiti Journalists Syndicate under the auspices of the Minister of Interior.

Sheikh Thamer Al-Ali said the Ministry of Interior has monitored and addressed new crimes of various forms, including violent crimes and cyber-crimes, in addition to crimes related to fraud, forgery and spreading rumors. He stressed on importance of spreading prevention and protection methods to avert crime, as well as significance of activating role of the security media to spread awareness and address psychological and social effects of the pandemic. He affirmed the political leadership's keenness to address all crimes related to the pandemic.

The Director General of the General Department of Security Relations and Information at the Ministry of Interior, Brigadier Tawheed Al-Kandari, said in a similar speech that the most prominent thing that was monitored by the security services during the pandemic period was spreading and following rumors, despite the official state agencies' efforts in commenting on these rumors and denying them. Kandari explained that staying at home for long periods during the total or partial curfew has negatively contributed to raising the rates of cyber-crimes and contributed positively to reducing the violent crimes and theft crimes. At the conclusion of its activities, the conference called for a number of recommendations, including the Ministry of Interior to continuously monitor the crimes that occurred during the Corona pandemic, analyzing them and providing executive recommendations to the relevant official bodies in cooperation with specialists in criminology, psychology, sociology, education, and law at Kuwait University.

The recommendations stressed the need for the Ministry of Education to adopt awareness programs to protect students, faculty members, and workers from crimes developed due to the Corona pandemic. It also called for working on spreading and strengthening the concept of social responsibility, implanting the values of citizenship, whether for institutions, individuals or civil society institutions. A group of specialists in the psychological, social, legal, media, cultural, educational and legal fields from various countries of the world participated in the conference. — KUNA

Burgan Bank donates musical instruments to children

KUWAIT: Reiterating its support to the Kuwait Association for Care of Children in Hospital (KACCH) and Bayt Abdullah Children's Hospice (BACCH), Burgan Bank presented the children with different musical instruments. The initiative falls within the Bank's corporate social responsibility framework to help alleviate suffering and provide optimal care to families of children with cancer.

Each year, Burgan Bank attempts to create a positive experience to the children of KACCH and BACCH with new and innovative gifts. The musical instruments will be used to enhance and improve the quality of life of patients and their families and to enjoy lasting memories with each other as they navigate through their complex medical journeys. Each instrument will be part of therapeutic sessions to meet the needs of each child to build self-esteem and explore new ways of communicating with one another.

On this occasion, Hessa Hussain Al-Najadah, Manager - Public Relations said: "For over two decades, Burgan Bank has been a strong supporter for the Kuwait Association for Care of Children in Hospital (KACCH) and Bayt Abdullah Children's Hospice (BACCH). Each year, Burgan Bank seeks to draw a smile on children's faces through many initiatives as part of its social responsibility. To ensure the children's wellbeing, this year's choice of gifts was meant to inspire growth of new talent and develop freedom



KUWAIT: Hessa Al-Najadah, Manager - Public Relations and Leena Al Bassam, Officer - Public Relations at Burgan Bank with Banafsheh Azizi, Chief operating officer at KACCH and BACCH.

of artistic expression to enrich their lives with the gift of music, which has proved its effectiveness in treating many diseases and relieving pain. Burgan Bank's contributions have helped support child life and pediatric psychosocial services in hospitals where Kuwait Association for Care of Children in Hospital (KACCH) is operating as well as Bayt Abdullah's Children Hospice (BACCH) where children with life-limiting and life-threatening conditions are receiving pediatric palliative and psychosocial services.

Commenting on Burgan Bank's donation, Dr Hilal Al-Sayer, President of KACCH and BACCH, said: "International research demonstrates the positive effects of music therapy on children and their families going through difficult healthcare experiences. It helps them to express themselves, builds their self-esteem, provides new ways of communicating with one another, and creates new and lasting memories as a family. We



The musical instruments donated by Burgan Bank.

are privileged to have our own music therapist in KACCH and BACCH who provides opportunities for our children to work with her to explore and create each child's own musical preferences. We greatly appreciate Burgan Bank's recognition of the beneficial outcomes of music therapy by donating all of the musical instruments on our wish list. Many thanks for your continued support for our mission to improve the quality of life of all our children in hospitals and Bayt Abdullah."

Burgan Bank's support of this initiative falls under its full-fledged community program entitled 'ENGAGE' - 'Together to be the change. This program sheds light on important aspects affecting every segment of the society by promoting social welfare through educational, environmental, cultural, social and health initiatives. Burgan Bank's approach to 'ENGAGE' begins with a vital principle that as a Kuwaiti financial institution, its conduct and policies should be aligned with the needs and interests of the society.

Indian ambassador meets oil ministry undersecretary

KUWAIT: Ambassador of India to Kuwait Sibi George met recently with Sheikh Dr Nimr Fahad Al-Malik Al-Sabah, Undersecretary of Kuwait's Ministry of Oil. The two sides discussed opportunities for enhancing collaboration in the hydrocarbons sector, diaspora matters, early return to Kuwait of oil sector employees and their families stranded in India, renewal of residencies of engineers in the oil sector, emergency medical supplies from Kuwait to India, and matters of mutual interest.



KUWAIT: Ambassador of India to Kuwait Sibi George (right) presents a memento to Sheikh Dr Nimr Fahad Al-Malik Al-Sabah, Undersecretary of Kuwait's Ministry of Oil.

Kuwait's COVID recovery rate up to 95.3 percent

KUWAIT: Kuwait's recovery rate of COVID-19 was recorded at up to 95.3 percent along with drop of daily casualties, a senior government official said on Monday. Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Humoud Al-Sabah made that statement while briefing ministers during the Cabinet's weekly meeting on the latest developments related to the coronavirus at the local, regional and global levels. In this vein, the Cabinet urged anew citizens and residents of the country to continue taking precautions, namely averting crowds, seek

to take vaccinations against the virus to pave way for attaining the aspired objectives, stemming spread of the contagion.

Kuwait on Monday tallied 1,240 new cases of coronavirus registered over the previous 24 hours to up the total to 300,455, while seven fatalities pushed its death toll from the outbreak to 1,741, the health ministry said. Some 1,081 more people had recovered from the virus in the same period to raise the total of those to have overcome the respiratory illness to 286,199, which equates to a national recovery rate of 95.26 percent, ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad explained. The number of people hospitalized with the virus stood at 12,515 as of Monday, with 145 of them in intensive care units, he revealed, adding that some 9,386 swab tests were conducted over the same period out of a total 2,535,029. — KUNA

Local

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News in brief

KRCS pays for heart surgeries

BEIRUT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) announced yesterday that it would handle the expenses of open-heart surgeries for 14 children in Lebanon. Deputy chairman of KRCS, Anwar Al-Hasawi said that Lebanese and Syrian refugees children would be the main beneficiaries of the initiative. Head of KRCS's mission in Lebanon Dr Musaed Al-Enizi revealed that the surgeries carried out on children aged between six months and 12 years. Reflecting Lebanon's gratitude, head of Rachaya government hospital Dr Yassir Ammar commended Kuwait's contributions to his country. KRCS had announced Monday that it would provide \$500,000 to the Lebanese Health Ministry to fund for coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccines for the people of Lebanon and the refugee community. —KUNA

Kuwait oil price \$67.68 pb

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil went up by \$3.10 to \$67.68 per barrel on Monday, as oppose to \$64.58 pb the day before, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. The prices of the Brent crude and West Texas Intermediate, globally, went up by \$2.02 to \$68.46 per barrel, while the latter went up by \$2.47 to \$66.05 pb respectively. The OPEC basket of crudes rose \$2.75 per barrel (pb) during Monday's trading sessions to close at \$66.93 pb compared with \$64.18 pb last Friday, the organization said yesterday. The annual price of the OPEC basket last year in 2020 was at \$41.47 pb. OPEC basket consists of Saharan Blend (Algeria), Girassol (Angola), Djeno (Congo), Zafiro (Equatorial Guinea), Rabi Light (Gabon), Iran Heavy (Islamic Republic of Iran), Basra Light (Iraq), Kuwait Export (Kuwait), Es Sider (Libya), Bonny Light (Nigeria), Arab Light (Saudi Arabia), Murban (UAE) and Mercy (Venezuela). —KUNA

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Photo taken on Monday shows lightning bolts over the skyline of Kuwait City. — Xinhua

Reconnaissance Research announces 'US-Kuwaiti' internship program

KUWAIT: Reconnaissance Research announced that in its continuous collaboration with the National Council on US-Arab Relations (NCUSAR), will establish the first US-Kuwaiti think tank internship program. Through this collaboration, Reconnaissance Research aims to bring Americans and Kuwaitis into direct communication to tackle issues including authoritarianism, global refugee crises, women's rights and anti-corruption.

"This extraordinary international collaboration will expose bright young American students to Kuwait to learn about Kuwait's needs, concerns, interests and society," said Dr John Duke Anthony, the Founding President and CEO of the National Council on US-Arab Relations. Founder and CEO of Reconnaissance Research Abdulaziz Al-Anjeri said: "we appreciate the opportunity to partner with one of America's most important scholars of the GCC and Arab region, Dr John Duke Anthony and the National Council on US-Arab Relations to help the next generation of Kuwaiti and

American leaders understand one another through such opportunities."

As part of its collaboration, Reconnaissance Research has welcomed in phase 1 of the program two American interns for the Summer of 2021: Holly Czachura and Marshall Casebeer. Holly Czachura is a senior at Colgate University in Hamilton, New York. She is a double major in International Relations and Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies. Czachura's areas of interest include women's rights and refugees. She participated in the National Council's Youth Leadership Development Program / Model Arab League, sitting on the Council of Palestinian Affairs.

Anjeri said: "Having someone as driven and accomplished as Holly will give us a chance to highlight the views and opinions of many people, especially those pertaining to women. There are currently ongoing threats to women's rights and safety that need to be addressed and tackled professionally, and I have full confidence in her ability to focus on those issues and others with women from Kuwait too."

In a statement, Czachura said: "I look forward to a productive internship with Reconnaissance Research this summer. I hope we can combine our unique perspectives to bring awareness to the struggles of refugees around the world and promote an end to their suffering."

Marshall Casebeer is currently a senior at the University of Puget Sound in Washington, where he is working towards an undergraduate degree in Politics



Holly Czachura



Marshall Casebeer

and Government. He is originally from Colorado, and his academic interests include authoritarianism, and public policy throughout the world. He is a member of the national political science honor society Pi Sigma Alpha and participated in the first ever University of Puget Sound China Field Study program in 2019. Anjeri said: "Marshall is an intelligent and driven young man who will certainly be a very valuable addition to our work."

Casebeer is thrilled to be working with Reconnaissance Research: "This organization is full of incredible people doing incredible work, and I could not be more excited to join them this summer. I know that the remarkable experience and expertise offered by the Reconnaissance Research team affords me an unparalleled opportunity to learn and grow." He aspires to build foreign policy based on mutual respect and nuanced understanding.

Georgia Ambassador marks his country's independence day

KUWAIT: Konstantin Zhgenti, Ambassador of Georgia to the State of Kuwait, released a statement yesterday to mark his country's independence day, which falls today. "The year 2021 marks 103 years of the Democratic Republic of Georgia as well as 30th anniversary of the restoration of independence from the Soviet Union," he said in the statement. "On 26 May, 1918 Georgia's independence was declared by the First Meeting of the National Council of Georgia."

"The diplomatic relations between Georgia and Kuwait, was established in 1992 and the Embassy of Georgia to the State of Kuwait was opened in 2007," he pointed out. "Beginning from that period friendly and prosperous Political cooperation is being developed on a bilateral basis in addition to being promoted in the framework of international organizations."

"In the economic field, Georgia and Kuwait have been preparing favorable conditions for investment. This includes the strengthening of the legal basis, in particular relating to issues of double taxation and investment protection as well as the enhancing of commercial relations based on a free trade agreement."

"The Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED), the Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) and the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce are main partners

and counterparts in the development of Georgian-Kuwaiti economic relations. Among the successful projects initiated in recent years is the Tbilisi Road rehabilitation scheme, financed by KFAED, as well as other infrastructure development projects like the upgrading of highways and the Namahvanhydro-electric station. In addition, projects targeting the tourism infrastructure have been launched.

"Since 2007 a simplified visa regime has been in force between Georgia and Kuwait, allowing citizens of both countries to receive entry permits upon arrival as opposed to requiring the issuing of visas prior to traveling. In 2017, the direct flights began from Kuwait to Tbilisi. The flights are conducted by Jazeera Airways and Kuwait Airways. This helped to develop further the relations between the two countries. From the beginning of flights, more than 30,000 people from Kuwait visited Georgia. "We are sure, that the two sides believe - after the overcoming the problems connected with the spread of COVID-19, friendly and prosperous relations between our countries will develop. We wish the State and the people of Kuwait further progress and prosperity under the wise leadership of His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Amir of the State of Kuwait, and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.



Konstantin Zhgenti

AUB volunteers celebrate Eid with children

KUWAIT: On the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr, Ahli United Bank (AUB) was keen to bring joy and pleasure to the children of social care homes and provide them with psychological and moral support by presenting them vouchers, and accompanying them on a trip to a store to buy their favorite toys.

Commenting on this new initiative, Sahar Dashti, General Manager of Customers' Protection and Head of the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Team at Ahli United Bank, said in press release that AUB has allocated financial support in order to provide gift vouchers for children of care homes so that they can buy their favorite toys by themselves, pointing out that AUB participates in all religious and national ceremonies within the community's framework to bring pleasure and joy and spread positive spirit in them.

Dashti said that Eid Al-Fitr is a



KUWAIT: Easa Karam from AUB social responsibility team with one of the children at a toy store.

special ceremony full of happiness, social interaction, family ties, bringing happiness to children and visiting where a team from AUB accompanied a number of the children of care homes to a store to buy the toys of their choice and shared with them the joy of Eid to make them feel that there is someone who cares about their affairs, and is keen to present gifts to them.

Dashti said that AUB is always keen to develop the values of giving, interaction and presenting gifts on

occasions in observance of the Hadith of the Prophet Mohammad, peace and blessings be upon him, "Giving gifts to each other is a declaration of your love for each other," adding that this creates an atmosphere of solidarity among people, and revitalizes social relations among the members of the nation. It is noteworthy that this initiative is a key pillar of CSR program at AUB which is keen to present a distinct concept for meaningful community and humanitarian initiatives.

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BAMAKO: Members of Mali's National Guard are seen at the Independence square in Bamako yesterday. — AFP

Mali in turmoil as junta ousts leaders

Strongman Goita strips president and premier of their powers

BAMAKO, Mali: Political turmoil in Mali deepened yesterday as the country's strongman pushed out transitional leaders who had been tasked with steering the return to civilian rule after a coup last August. Assimi Goita, who headed a junta which seized power less than 10 months ago, said that President Bah N'daw and Prime Minister Moctar Ouane had been stripped of their powers, and he promised elections in 2022. The announcement marks the latest crisis to hit the vast, impoverished West African country, which is already struggling with a brutal jihadist insurgency.

N'daw and Ouane have been heading an interim government that was installed in September under the threat of regional sanctions, with the declared aim of restoring full civilian rule within 18 months.

In a move that sparked widespread diplomatic anger, the pair were detained on Monday by army officers who were disgruntled by a government reshuffle, two senior officials told AFP. In a statement read on public television, Goita said N'daw and Ouane had been stripped of their duties for seeking to "sabotage" the transition, which would "proceed as normally."

"The scheduled elections will be held in 2022," he said. Monday's government reshuffle, designed to respond to growing criticism of the interim government, saw the military keep the strategic portfolios it controlled during the previous administration.

But two other coup leaders—ex-defense minister Sadio Camara and ex-security minister Colonel Modibo Kone—were replaced. Colonel Goita, who holds the rank of vice president in the transitional government, accused N'daw and Ouane of failing to consult him on the reshuffle.

"This kind of step testifies to the clear desire of the transitional president and prime minister to seek to breach the transitional charter," he said, describing this as a "demonstrable intent to sabotage the transition". The transitional charter, a document largely drawn up by the colonels, sets down principles for underpinning Mali's return to civilian rule.

The detention of N'daw and Ouane sparked international condemnation, which included a rare joint statement by the United Nations, African Union (AU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the European Union and the United States. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres tweeted a call for calm, and urged the leaders' "unconditional release". AU head Felix Tshisekedi, who is also the president of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, echoed the call, saying he "strongly condemned any action that aims to destabilise Mali".

Brewing crisis

Young military officers ousted the then president,

Jake Sullivan.

Speaking to reporters in Vilnius where she lives in exile after a disputed election last August, Tikhonovskaya called for "comprehensive" international measures to force the regime to give up power.

"This is the time to act," she said. "Suspension of flights over Belarus doesn't solve the real problem. The problem is the terrorist regime that rigged elections last year."

Call to join G7 summit

She asked for the Belarusian opposition to be invited to next month's G7 summit in Britain, an initiative that sources close to French President Emmanuel Macron said Paris supported. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson joined calls for Protasevich to be released, warning: "Belarus's actions will have consequences."

The UN rights office also demanded the immediate release of Protasevich and his Russian girlfriend Sofia Sapega, who was also arrested after the Athens-to-Vilnius flight landed in Minsk. EU leaders on Monday warned they would adopt further "targeted economic sanctions" against the Belarusian authorities to add to the 88 regime figures and seven companies on a blacklist.

Lukashenko and his allies are already under a series of Western sanctions over a brutal crackdown on opposition protests that followed his disputed reelection to a sixth term last August. Protasevich, 26,

Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, on August 18 after weeks of mass demonstrations over perceived government corruption and his handling of the jihadist insurgency.

ECOWAS, a 15-nation regional bloc, threatened sanctions, prompting the junta to hand power to a caretaker government that pledged to reform the constitution.

Goita was appointed as vice president of the caretaker administration, and the president, N'daw, is a retired army officer. But many have doubted whether the military-dominated government had the will-or the ability—to stage reforms on a short timescale.

Among other problems, the nation faces a major logistical and security challenge as swathes of territory are in the hands of jihadists.

Public discontent

Monday's reshuffle came amid signs of growing public discontent. The opposition M5 movement—which spearheaded protests against Keita in 2020—urged dissolving the interim government and demanded a "more legitimate" body. On May 14, the government said it would appoint a new "broad-based" cabinet. An official at Mali's interim presidency, who requested anonymity, said this reshuffle was designed to send a message that "respect for the transition deadline remains the priority". — AFP

Biden hosts Floyd family on murder anniversary

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden marks the anniversary yesterday of the police murder of George Floyd by hosting the African American man's family—but without being able to celebrate hoped-for national police reform.

Floyd's daughter Gianna, his mother, sister and brothers will be among those attending private talks with Biden at the White House, Press Secretary Jen Psaki said. "The courage and grace of his family, and especially his daughter Gianna, has really stuck with the president," she told reporters. "He's eager to listen to their perspectives."

The choking to death of Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25 last year and subsequent conviction of the officer, Derek Chauvin, who'd knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes, were seen as seminal moments in the long US struggle for racial equality. After the killing during Floyd's arrest outside a store, protests and riots erupted across a country already crackling with tension from the election battle between Biden and then president Donald Trump.

In the wake of the verdict this April against Chauvin, who faces sentencing next month, Biden sought to build on political momentum by urging Congress to pass a far-reaching police reform bill in time for the first anniversary. Americans must confront the "systemic racism" revealed by Floyd's killing "head on," he declared.

However, the ambitious deadline comes with only the House having passed the bill, known as the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, while the Senate continues to wrangle over key details.

The bill seeks to reform what critics say have become ever more violent and unaccountable police forces around the country. Opponents argue that police are being unfairly blamed when they are simply trying to operate in a dangerous and often heavily armed society.

However, Biden and reform proponents say that a culture of impunity and underlying racism have made incidents like Floyd's death increasingly common. — AFP

Belarus isolation grows as air links cut over plane

MINSK, Belarus: Belarus's regime was increasingly isolated yesterday as Europe cut air links and calls grew for more action over its diversion of an airliner and arrest of a dissident on board. After weathering a wave of protests and Western sanctions last year, President Alexander Lukashenko was facing extraordinary new pressure over Sunday's rerouting of the Ryanair flight to Minsk and arrest of opposition journalist Roman Protasevich.

More Western leaders joined calls demanding Protasevich's release, after the European Union agreed at a summit on Monday to ban Belarusian airlines from the bloc and called on EU-based carriers not to fly over its airspace. Air France, Finnair and Singapore Airlines became the latest carriers to suspend flights over Belarus, following Scandinavian airline SAS, Germany's Lufthansa and Latvia-based regional airline airBaltic. Opposition leader Svetlana Tikhonovskaya said the international community needed to go further, urging the United States to take action in a call with US National Security Advisor

very strongly if Hamas violated the truce. Blinken, who said earlier his trip would aim to support "efforts to solidify a ceasefire", had no contacts with Hamas, which is blacklisted as a terror group by Washington and most other Western governments. US President Joe Biden said Blinken would meet "with Jewish leaders about our ironclad commitment to the Jewish state's security", as well as seeking to rebuild ties with the Palestinians.

Blinken on Sunday reaffirmed US support for a two-state solution as the only way to provide hope to Zionists and Palestinians that they can live "with equal measures of security, of peace and dignity". His remarks about "equal measures" for Zionists and Palestinians seemed to shift the tone from Donald Trump's administration, which cut aid to the Palestinian Authority and unveiled a Middle East peace plan with strong Zionist backing but no support from Palestinians.

In Jerusalem, Blinken said Zionists and Palestinians faced an uphill struggle to restore trust, after conflict in Gaza and unrest in the West Bank. "There's lots of hard work ahead to restore hope, respect and some trust across the communities," the US top diplomat said. — AFP

ensure that Hamas does not benefit from the reconstruction assistance," Blinken said.

The Zionist PM warned his regime would respond

US vows support for Gaza truce, no 'benefit' for Hamas

JERUSALEM: US top diplomat Antony Blinken yesterday vowed support to help rebuild the battered Gaza Strip and shore up a truce between Hamas and Zionist entity, but insisted the territory's Islamist rulers would not benefit from any aid.

Blinken's tour, which started in the Zionist state and will also take him to neighboring Egypt and Jordan, comes as unrest still grips parts of annexed east Jerusalem after Friday's ceasefire ended 11 days of fighting in and around the Gaza Strip.

At a joint news conference in Jerusalem with Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ahead of talks with Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas later in the West Bank, Blinken warned that Washington would not allow international aid to rebuild impoverished Gaza to benefit Hamas.

"We'll work with our partners closely, with all, to



RAMALLAH: Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh (left) greets US Secretary of State Antony Blinken yesterday in the West Bank city of Ramallah. — AFP



MINSK: Belarus opposition figure Pavel Severinets waves from the defendant's cage at a courthouse in the town of Mogilev, some 200 km east of Minsk, yesterday. — AFP

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International

Gun homicides surge in US as COVID lockdowns end

A jump in shootings over weekend leaves dozens dead or injured

WASHINGTON: The year-long surge in gun murders across the United States has shown no sign of easing as COVID lockdowns end, with a jump in shootings over the weekend that left dozens dead or injured. Homicides, mostly gun-driven, rocketed by a historic 30 percent last year over 2019, and are currently running an estimated 20-25 percent above a year ago.

Experts say there is no one explanation for the mounting carnage that affects nearly all major cities, and that it cannot be expected to fall sharply as the coronavirus pandemic ebbs. Local media counted 12 dead and at least 43 injured in Chicago alone, while New York had around 30 people shot and one dead, mostly blamed on gang feuds, arguments at bars and parties, with innocent bystanders among the casualties.

A 14-year-old girl, Ronjanae Smith, was killed and 14 others wounded while attending an open-air concert in North Charleston, South Carolina that was attacked by multiple shooters, according to police. "The hurt I have for the loss of Ronjanae can only be described as defeat," her father Ronald Smith wrote in an open letter. "Mass shootings aren't secluded to 'poverty-stricken areas.' Violence and/or ignorance doesn't reside in one area, nor does it reside with a particular race," he said.

Combustible situations

Experts say the country is well on track to top last year's more than 20,000 murders, the highest level since 1995. When the spike in murders became clear last year, many blamed it on the pandemic

lockdown, which saw people shut in homes and millions losing their jobs.

They also blamed the sharp rise in the availability of guns: according to a Washington Post estimate, about 23 million were sold in 2020. But the pandemic, the explosion in anti-police sentiment and nationwide protests over the May 2020 police murder of George Floyd and other African-Americans combined with other factors to contribute to the surge in deaths, according to Jeff Asher, a criminologist and co-founder of AH Datalytics. "There's no simple explanation... It's just a complex soup of combustible situations with the pandemic, with loss of police legitimacy," he said.

"And then all of the economic stressors, combined with the accelerant of historically high levels of firearms possession everywhere."

"Basically, everybody's under stress, everybody's got a gun and police legitimacy went down," said Asher. "You put all that together and you get the worst nine months of murder in recent American history."

The spike in murders is country-wide, he said, hitting cities and states of every political leaning: those that had anti-police protests and those without; those with tougher and those with lighter Covid restrictions. Baltimore, Maryland stands out as not having seen an increase, Asher noted—but Baltimore already had one of the country's highest murder rates.

Memorial Day holiday worries

According to a crime study by the National



Homicides, mostly gun-driven, rocketed by a historic 30 percent last year over 2019, and are currently running an estimated 20-25 percent above a year ago. — AFP

Commission on COVID-19 and Criminal Justice, last year's surge in murders ended several years of falling murder rates. However, they said, the level of murders in 2021 underscores that the pandemic was only one factor. The pandemic, social unrest and other elements combined into a "perfect storm," the study said.

It also said that those same factors might not

be driving the continued climb in murders in the first months of this year. Police departments around the country are girding for the Memorial Day holiday on the coming weekend, historically a period of increased shootings. Even with the pandemic restrictions, last year the number of shooting deaths and injuries rocketed during the long weekend. — AFP

Volcano aftershocks rattle DR Congo city as toll rises

GOMA: Powerful aftershocks from the Mount Nyiragongo volcano rocked the eastern DR Congo city of Goma yesterday as the death toll from the disaster climbed to 32 and thousands were feared homeless. Three days after Africa's most active volcano roared back into life, spewing lava that reached the outskirts of the city of 1.5 million, tremors were shaking the region every 10 to 15 minutes.

And two major cracks, stretching up to several hundred metres (yards) long and dozens of centimetres (roughly two feet) wide in places in some places, opened up near the city's main hospital and on a major highway near the airport, worrying residents who have only just returned home after Saturday's eruption. "We don't know what to do—we're in a quandary, there's no instructions from the authorities, even though everything is moving," said local resident Furaha Nyirere, visibly anxious.

A three-storey building partially collapsed under the repeated strain of the aftershocks, seriously injuring at least seven people, police said.

"We are all living in fear of a fresh eruption," a local official from an international organization told AFP. "The aftershocks are very intense. A lot of people slept outside under mosquito nets, scared that their homes were going to collapse. There are cracks in the walls of our office," the official said.

Across the nearby border, the Rwanda Seismic Monitor said it had detected a 5.3 magnitude earthquake in the region at 0903 GMT, as well as a 4.6 magnitude tremor an hour earlier.



The smoldering lava from the Mount Nyiragongo eruption is seen in Goma. — AFP

Goma, a city on the shores of Lake Kivu, lies just 12 kilometers (about seven miles) from Mount Nyiragongo. Tens of thousands of residents fled in panic, many of them to Rwanda, when the much-dreaded volcano began erupting on Saturday evening. Two rivers of molten rock flowed from the volcano at a height of 1,800 meters (5,900 feet). One headed towards Goma, stopping at the very outskirts of the city.

Fears of fresh eruption

It engulfed homes in its wake, smothering the surrounding area with suffocating gas and cutting off the road between Goma and Butembo, the main highway in North Kivu province. "Thirty-two people died in incidents linked to the eruption, including seven people

killed by lava and five asphyxiated by gases," the UN refugee agency UNHCR said in Geneva. "The lava flow stopped on Sunday, but there have been repeated earthquakes since the eruption and the lava lake in the volcano's crater appears to have refilled, prompting fears of new fissures opening or another eruption."

The previous toll, drawn from NGOs and other sources, was 20. Five people died from suffocation on Monday after they tried to cross the cooling lava some 13 kilometers north of Goma, civil society leader Mambo Kawaya said. A so-called strato-volcano nearly 3,500 meters (11,500 feet) high, Nyiragongo straddles the East African Rift tectonic divide. Its last major eruption, in 2002, claimed around 100 lives. — AFP

Ahmadinejad, Larijani barred from contesting

TEHRAN: Iran yesterday approved seven hopefuls to run in next month's presidential poll, a list dominated by ultraconservatives as key establishment figure Ali Larijani was disqualified in a shock move. That could clear the way for a strong run by ultraconservative judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi in the June 18 poll, which comes as Tehran seeks to salvage its nuclear deal with world powers.

Raisi won 38 percent of the vote in 2017 elections but was defeated by moderate now-President Hassan Rouhani, who is constitutionally barred from running for a third term. The conservative-dominated Guardian Council, which vets election candidates, also barred firebrand former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The list, announced by the interior ministry, had been leaked before the official announcement and sparked criticism from reformists and even conservatives. "I have never seen the Guardian Council criticised and blasted so much from the far right to the far left," said reformist journalist Mostafa Faghihi on Twitter.

The press had widely predicted a showdown between Raisi and former parliament speaker Larijani, a moderate conservative and currently an advisor to the supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Reformists had pinned their hopes on Eshaq Jahangiri, first-vice president to incumbent President Hassan Rouhani, but he was also barred. Kian Abdollahi, editor-in-chief of ultraconservative Tasnim news agency, said the council's disqualification of several key candidates was not "justifiable to the public" and that "a major part" of conservatives opposed it.

Ultraconservative Fars news agency had reported the disqualification of the three heavyweights on Monday night. It described the move as a "no to those who created the status quo", implying that the barred hopefuls were responsible for Iran's deep economic and social woes. — AFP

France hit by mystery campaign to discredit Pfizer

PARIS: French media and social networks were abuzz yesterday with speculation about a mysterious offer to influencers and YouTube personalities asking them to publicly denigrate the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine in return for money. Those targeted by the campaign, who are active in the health and science fields, said they had received an email from an apparently UK-based communications agency offering them "a partnership" on behalf of a client with "a colossal budget" but who wanted to remain anonymous and also to keep any deal secret.

"Strange. I've received a partnership proposal which consists of slamming the Pfizer vaccine in a video," tweeted Leo Grasset, whose popular science channel has nearly 1.2 million subscribers on YouTube. "Colossal budget, client wants to remain incognito, and I'd have to hide the sponsorship."

He added: "Incredible. The address of the London agency that contacted me is fake. They never



A person receives the first dose of the Pfizer vaccine against COVID-19. — AFP

had a presence there, it's a laser surgery center. All staff have weird LinkedIn profiles."

The profiles he found had now disappeared, but not before he noticed that "everybody there has worked in Russia". Sami Ouladitto, a comedian with nearly 400,000 subscribers, reported a similar approach, as did Et Ca Se Dit Medecin (And They Call Themselves Doctors), a hospital intern with 84,000 followers on Instagram.

"This is pathetic, it's dangerous, it's irresponsible and it's not going to work," French Health Minister Olivier Veran told the BFMTV channel yesterday. French people are mostly in favor of getting vaccinated and "I don't think that any attempt to turn them away from vaccines will work," he said, adding he had "no idea" whether the supposed offer might have originated in Russia.

Virgin Islands link?

The authors of the emails, claiming to be a London-based agency called Fazze, are difficult to trace, French media reported. Le Monde newspaper said Fazze had never been registered in the United Kingdom, but may have a legal presence in the Virgin Islands.

But according to the LinkedIn profile of Fazze's CEO, now deleted, the agency operates out of Moscow, Le Monde said. According to tweets by people claiming knowledge of the matter, the agency offered 2,000 euros (\$2,450) to influencers in return for them claiming notably that the Pfizer-BioNTech jab caused more deaths than any other vaccine. The vaccine, usually referred to in France as only Pfizer, has gained in popularity after a rival British-Swedish vaccine by AstraZeneca fell out of favour in much of the European Union because of health concerns and delivery delays. — AFP



APIA: Former Samoan head of state Tui Atua (front left) and his wife Masiofo Filifilia Tamasese (front right) attend the swearing in of Samoa's first woman prime minister, Fiaame Naomi Mata'afa (not pictured), in Apia Monday at an extraordinary makeshift tent ceremony. — AFP

Samoa's PM-elect slams rival 'games' amid vote crisis

APIA, Samoa: A constitutional crisis in the Pacific nation of Samoa headed back to the courts yesterday as Prime Minister-elect Fiaame Naomi Mata'afa dismissed the "electoral games" of her predecessor, who has refused to relinquish power. Mata'afa was sworn in as the country's first female prime minister at an extraordinary ceremony in a tent outside parliament on Monday after the island nation's long-serving ruler refused to cede power and ordered the doors of the building to be locked.

Mata'afa revealed yesterday she was facing a private prosecution over the makeshift ceremony. "It's all part of the electoral game I suppose... I don't think we were terribly surprised," Mata'afa told New Zealand broadcaster TVNZ of the latest legal manoeuvres. She said the legitimacy of the ceremony

was always likely to be challenged as incumbent prime minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi continues to dispute the results of the election on April 9.

Malielegaoi led the South Pacific nation for 22 years but has lost a string of court challenges seeking to overturn the vote and call a new election. He has labeled the swearing-in ceremony "treason" and insists he is still prime minister. While the judiciary has so far sided with Mata'afa, the international community continues to hedge its bets on who will win the political power struggle under way in the nation of 220,000.

Influential players in the region's politics, including Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, have restricted themselves to calls for dialogue and respect for the democratic process.

China has not made its position known, although it enjoyed a close relationship with Malielegaoi's government and Mata'afa has said she will scrap a major Beijing-backed port project in the island nation. The United Nations said Secretary General Antonio Guterres has been following developments and the world body "stands ready to provide support to Samoa if requested by the parties". — AFP

International

Australia to close embassy in Afghanistan over security

Taliban to provide a 'safe environment' to diplomats

KABUL: Australia yesterday abruptly announced it will shutter its embassy in Afghanistan this week, expressing fears over the "increasingly uncertain security environment" in Kabul as foreign troops withdraw. The Taliban, which has ramped up violence across the country in recent weeks, reacted by saying it would provide a "safe environment" to foreign diplomats and humanitarian organizations. The United States and allied forces are in the final stages of pulling out their remaining troops from Afghanistan, ending America's longest-ever war, but heralding an uncertain future for a nation in the tightening grip of Taliban militants.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said the embassy would close in just three days. Around 80 Australian troops are leaving as part of the wider military pull-out, and without that small contingent and the larger US force as back-up, Morrison said there was an "increasingly uncertain security environment". "The government has been advised that security arrangements could not be provided to support our ongoing diplomatic presence," he said in a statement.

The elected government in Kabul and Afghan security services remain fragile despite two decades of foreign capacity building, and their success is far from assured without continued US military support. Western diplomats and military officials have been scrambling to work out how to provide security for their future civilian presence in Afghanistan with fears growing of a Taliban comeback.

The hardline group, which briefly ruled Afghanistan in the 1990s, said yesterday foreign

diplomats can "continue their operations as usual". "(We) will not pose any threats to them," spokesman Mohammad Naeem told AFP. When the Taliban seized control of Kabul in 1996, they entered the United Nations compound and abducted the country's former leader Najibullah Ahmadzai, who they then murdered.

Two years later, the Taliban oversaw the killing of 10 Iranian diplomats at their consulate in the northern Afghan city of Mazar-i-Sharif. "The only incentive for foreign embassies to remain is the humanitarian work that they are involved in, but if their personnel are endangered then there is no point in remaining here," a foreign defense official based in Kabul told AFP. Nishank Motwani, an Afghanistan specialist based in Australia, said the Taliban would interpret Morrison's announcement as a victory.

"The Taliban will see it as... a clear sign that other NATO and non-NATO partner countries are likely to shutter their diplomatic missions because of the US's decision to exit Afghanistan and the security vacuum its departure will inevitably create," he told AFP.

'We are scared'

In recent weeks, violence across Afghanistan has soared and government forces have clashed with Taliban fighters not far from Kabul. President Joe Biden has said all American troops will leave by September 11, the 20th anniversary of the Al-Qaeda attacks that sparked the US-led invasion of Afghanistan that toppled the Taliban.

It was not clear whether there was a specific threat



KABUL: A security personnel guards an entrance near the Australian embassy at the Green Zone in Kabul yesterday, after Australia abruptly announced to shutter its embassy in Afghanistan this week over security fears as foreign troops withdraw. — AFP

against the Australian embassy, which is in the heavily fortified Green Zone, not far from the US mission. Afghanistan's foreign ministry said it hoped Australia would review its decision, while an Afghan employee at the embassy described fear at the mission's withdrawal.

"I put my life in danger protecting the embassy... and now they are leaving us. The Taliban have our names. We are scared," the employee told AFP. The sudden closure of the Australian embassy surprised some ex-

perts. "It is not set in stone that this is going to be a Taliban roll-up in the next few weeks," said John Blaxland, Professor of International Security at the Australian National University. "This is not Saigon 1975," he added, a reference to the dramatic helicopter evacuation from the roof of the US embassy in South Vietnam as the Viet Cong and regular communist military forces seized the city. Australia's two-decade presence in Afghanistan was not without scandal. — AFP

Bangladesh Islamist preacher detained

DHAKA: Bangladesh police have arrested one of the country's most popular Islamist preachers, whose rallies draw tens of thousands of people, on charges of inciting militants, a senior officer said yesterday. Amir Hamza is the latest high-profile Islamist to be held since March, when a visit by India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi sparked protests in which at least 13 people died. Hamza was detained in a raid at his home in the western city of Kushtia and then transferred to Dhaka, police said. A court remanded Hamza for 10 days for questioning, Mohammad Asaduzzaman, head of Dhaka police's counter-terrorism unit, told AFP.

"He is an accused in an anti-terrorism case," Asaduzzaman said, adding that investigators had found videos of Hamza's speeches in the mobile phone of a suspect detained this month over an alleged plot to attack Bangladesh's parliament. Hamza, who is in his 30s, is one of a new generation of Islamist preachers whose firebrand speeches draw huge crowds in the Muslim majority nation.

Hamza's YouTube video speeches get millions of views. In 2019, Mizanur Rahmani Azhari, another prominent preacher, fled the country over fears he would be prosecuted for his remarks. The visit by



DHAKA: Police personnel escort Amir Hamza, one of the country's most popular Islamic preachers, whose rallies draw tens of thousands of people, on charges of inciting militants, following his arrest in Dhaka yesterday. — AFP

India's Hindu nationalist leader was the spark for the new wave of arrests. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was reportedly embarrassed by the protests during a visit by a key ally.

Islamist leaders accuse Modi of pursuing anti-Muslim policies and tens of thousands went on a ram-

page, attacking police stations and government offices. Bangladesh's deputy national police chief, Haider Ali, told AFP that at least 1,230 followers of the Hefazat-e-Islam group had been arrested since the deadly protests on March 26-28. Dozens of Hefazat leaders have been detained. — AFP

2m rushed to shelters as India braces for another cyclone

KOLKATA: A powerful cyclone headed for eastern India yesterday, forcing the evacuation of nearly two million people just a week after another huge storm claimed at least 155 lives on the west coast. Cyclone Yaas in the Bay of Bengal is expected to slam into West Bengal and Odisha states around mid-day today, the India Meteorological Department said, and could bring winds of up to 165 kilometers (100 miles) per hour. Experts say the warming of ocean waters due to climate change has led to an increase in the frequency and intensity of such storms.

Nearly two million people living along India's east coast are being moved to shelters, officials said yesterday, and the storm has also disrupted efforts to combat the country's devastating Covid-19 outbreak. "This cyclone is a terrible blow for many people in coastal districts whose families have been struck down by Covid-19 infec-

tions and deaths," West Bengal Sundarban development minister Bankim Chandra Hazra told AFP.

"Nearly half a million people are being evacuated from their homes in the (West Bengal) coastal region and it's a big challenge to provide them shelter (while) maintaining social distancing." Some vaccination centers in districts under threat as well as the capital Kolkata would suspend operations, officials said, and efforts were under way to ensure the supply of oxygen and medicines to hospitals during the storm.

Some 1.4 million people were moved away from coastal districts in neighboring Odisha, with thousands of disaster and relief personnel deployed, local media reported. The state's special relief commissioner, Pradeep Jena, said arrangements were being made to maintain social distancing in shelters, with face masks and sanitizers supplied. Officials in Bangladesh, which lies to the



DIGHA, India: Villagers rest at a shelter as Cyclone Yaas barrels towards India's eastern coast in the Bay of Bengal, where it is expected to make a landfall tomorrow, in Digha some 190 Km from Kolkata yesterday. — AFP

east of West Bengal, said they did not expect the storm to hit the delta nation.

The Bay of Bengal has conditions favorable to the development of cyclones, including high sea surface temperatures. Some of the deadliest

storms in history have formed there, including one in 1970 that killed half a million people in what is modern-day Bangladesh. Odisha's worst-ever cyclone, in 1999, killed 10,000 people. — AFP

Couple rents jet for lockdown-busting mid-air wedding

NEW DELHI: An Indian couple chartered a passenger jet to stage a mid-air wedding that hijacked coronavirus restrictions by taking more than 160 guests, reports said Monday. India's civil aviation authority has ordered an investigation and suspended the crew of the jet, officials said. Because of a brutal new coronavirus wave—that saw India's death toll pass 300,000 on Monday—most states only allow 50 guests at weddings, but 161 friends and family of the newlyweds were on the jet Sunday. The couple, who have not been named, were married as the Spicejet plane flew over the historic Meenakshi Amman temple on its way from Madurai to Bangalore, the Hindustan Times newspaper said.

Film and photos of the on board celebrations were posted on social media. They show people with flow-

ers around their necks and taking selfies, but could not be immediately verified by AFP. In breach of civil aviation rules, hardly any of them are wearing masks and social distancing rules are blatantly ignored.

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation has told Spicejet to take action against the newlyweds and their guests, reports said. All could be banned from taking passenger flights. "The agent and the guest passengers were briefed in detail, both in writing as well as verbally, on social distancing and safety norms to be followed as per COVID guidelines both at the airport and onboard the aircraft throughout the journey," a Spicejet spokesperson told Indian media. "Despite repeated requests and reminders, the passengers did not follow COVID guidelines and the airline is taking appropriate action as per rules," the official added.

Several states have imposed tough lockdowns over the past six weeks as India suffers a devastating coronavirus wave that has seen more than 120,000 deaths. With more than 26 million cases now recorded, Indian hospitals have been overwhelmed and experts say the toll is certainly much higher. — AFP



News in brief

Lithuania votes against same-sex unions

VILNIUS: Lithuania's parliament yesterday rejected allowing civil unions for same-sex couples, a controversial proposition in the predominantly Catholic Baltic EU member state. Openly gay MP Tomas Vytautas Raskevicius was behind the legislative drive for the "Partnership law". It had won support from Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte, but split her politically fragmented coalition. But the bill was defeated on first reading. "This is not the end. We will continue to work for change, for all people to be equal before the law, for no one to be on the margins of the society," Ausrine Armonaitė, leader of the liberal Freedom party, said after the vote. — AFP

Indonesia arrests 4 for stealing vaccines

MEDAN, Indonesia: Four people have been arrested in Indonesia for allegedly stealing COVID-19 vaccines marked for prisoners and selling them to the public, authorities said yesterday. The suspects took more than 1,000 doses made by China's Sinovac from the prisoners' quota, offering them to buyers in the capital Jakarta and in North Sumatra's Medan city for around 250,000 rupiah (\$17) each. The four arrested included a doctor at a prison in Medan and a local health official, police said. They could face a life sentence if convicted under Indonesia's anti-corruption law. — AFP

NZ halts travel bubble with Australian state

WELLINGTON: New Zealand suspended quarantine-free travel with Australia's Victoria state over a new coronavirus cluster yesterday, the fourth time the trans-Tasman travel bubble has been disrupted since it opened last month. Officials in Wellington said they were taking a cautious approach after Melbourne recorded nine locally acquired cases in the past two days, believed to be related to a leak from a quarantine hotel. New Zealand's COVID-19 response minister Chris Hipkins said the suspension would take effect at 8pm (0800 GMT) yesterday and remain in place for at least 72 hours. — AFP

Brazil captures Italian mob boss

BRASILIA: Italian mob boss Rocco Morabito was arrested Monday in northeast Brazil, police said, almost two years after his escape from a prison in Uruguay where he was awaiting extradition to Italy. Morabito, considered a "capo" or captain of the 'Ndrangheta group, was captured in the city of Joao Pessoa along with another Italian "outlaw" as a result of a joint investigation with Italy, Brazil's federal police said in a statement. Morabito is wanted in Italy on charges of drug trafficking. — AFP

Man dies trapped inside dinosaur statue

MADRID: A 40-year-old man died after becoming trapped inside a large statue of a dinosaur in a Barcelona suburb, Spanish police said yesterday. It is not clear why the man went inside the decorative stegosaurus located outside a disused cinema in Santa Coloma de Gramenet, but there is no suspicion of foul play, said a spokeswoman for the regional police force, the Mossos d'Esquadra. "Everything indicates it was an accidental death," she said. Police were called to the scene on Saturday. Spanish media reported that a father and his son out playing in the area noticed a strange smell coming from the papier-mache figure and alerted the authorities. — AFP

WEDNESDAY, MAY 26, 2021

Business

Zain leverages MENA footprint to relaunch its wholesale business

Significant restructuring an essential part of Zain's '4Sight' strategy

KUWAIT: Zain Group, a leading telecom innovator in seven markets in the Middle East and Africa recently participated in the virtual Capacity Middle East 2021 conference, where Kamil Hilali, the company's Chief Strategy Officer and the newly-appointed CEO of Zain Global Services (Wholesale), announced a significant restructuring and new strategy of Zain Group's wholesale division, an essential part of Zain's '4Sight' strategy.

Hilali was the subject of an engaging fireside discussion during the conference whereby he elaborated on Zain Group's new wholesale business vision and its enormous potential. Zain Global Services consolidates and manages the capacity, voice and roaming businesses across Zain operating companies and will ultimately evolve to become the single interface for all Zain operating company requirements as well as for other international carriers having requirements within Zain's footprint.

The aim of Zain Global Services is to become a truly regional carrier and open up new revenue streams for the Group through local, regional, and international activities. To this goal, the company

has revamped its strategy and vision to create value for Zain operating companies by achieving efficiencies on their cost base. Zain's scale and aggregated demand is also set to allow the business to invest in new assets and better leverage existing ones across its operating footprint.

Looking to transform to become a truly regional carrier and open up new revenue streams, Zain Global Services stands ready to work with regional and international partners to identify and create new opportunities.

During his fireside conversation at Capacity Middle East, Kamil Hilali commented, "Wholesale, and wholesale consolidation, offer a fantastic opportunity to face what has historically been a declining legacy business, and breath new, profitable life into it.



Kamil Hilali

Any telecom group willing to prepare for the future has to overcome underlying infrastructure challenges in order to become global in nature and establish vibrant international infrastructure that blends connectivity with computing power."

Hilali continued, "Zain Global Services can be the perfect partner to any business seeking connectivity or a presence in the Middle East. In the coming months, we look forward to announcing our participation in some exciting global projects that will define the entity's new business paradigm which integrates a distributed mesh architecture made up of subsea and terrestrial infrastructure with a state-of-the-art layer of hyperscale and edge Data Centers".

Moreover, during Capacity Middle East 2021 conference, Hilali participated in keynote panel where leading regional figures in the Wholesale and Carrier arena discussed the future of Regional Connectivity, Innovation, Hyperscale Presence and the Competitive Landscape.

Over the last several years, Zain has been evolving to become a fully integrated service provider and has been focusing on enterprise and B2B seg-

- **Kamil Hilali, Chief Strategy Officer of Zain Group & CEO of Zain Global Services (Wholesale) announces new vision during Capacity Middle East 2021 conference**
- **Restructuring and transforming to unlock lucrative opportunities in wholesale, in cooperation with regional and international partners**

ments for additional synergies and growth. Given that the wholesale industry has at its core the transformation of the infrastructure enabling global connectivity, Zain considers the development of its wholesale business as a key area to the telco's overall transformation.

Huawei to unveil new OS, push into software industry

SHANGHAI: Chinese tech giant Huawei yesterday said it would launch a long-awaited new operating system for smartphones next week, part of an all-out push into the software industry aimed at weathering US sanctions and taking on Google's Android.

Huawei tipped the June 2 launch of its HarmonyOS platform in a short teaser on social media, just as an internal memo came to light in which company founder and CEO Ren Zhengfei outlined plans to go big in software. The 76-year-old assured staff that "in the software domain, the US will have very little control over our future development, and we have much autonomy."

Huawei's plans are the latest signs of a radical transformation at the Shenzhen-based company, which is moving quickly into new product lines seen as less vulnerable to US pressure and a re-focus on its core domestic market. Donald Trump in 2018 launched an aggressive US campaign to isolate Huawei when he was president, saying its networking equipment installed worldwide could be used by China's Communist Party for espionage or sabotage.

The world's largest maker of telecom networking gear was barred from the huge American market and cut off from global component supply chains. Access to Google's Android operating system was also forbidden, and Washington has pressured allies to ban or rip out Huawei gear from their telecom networks. The Android curbs have threatened to torpedo Huawei's smartphone business-once in the global top three along with Samsung and Apple-forcing it to create HarmonyOS.

Analysts warn that creating a successful new mobile operating system is exceedingly difficult in a world where Android and iOS are firmly entrenched, and next Wednesday's launch will be watched closely by the tech world. Huawei gave no further details on the launch other than the timing. A move into software is prudent for Huawei, which remains years



KUWAIT: A customer experiences the Huawei Mate 30 Pro 5G smartphone in Farwaniya. — Xinhua

away from developing chips needed for its own devices, said Marc Einstein, Chief Analyst at IRT Corporation in Tokyo.

The timing is also good because the advent of 5G networks in years to come will radically change the tech landscape, offering major new opportunities in artificial intelligence, wired "smart cities", intelligent vehicles and other tech spheres. "Some of these things are still very, very early days and there's no real gorilla in the market yet," said Einstein. "So it does make sense to go in this direction."

'Ample resources'

Huawei had already announced in April that it would work with Chinese automakers to develop intelligent vehicles, after earlier unveiling moves into enterprise and cloud computing. Saying "the best defense is a good offence", Ren's memo outlined an ambitious plan to develop software that "embraces the world".

"The company has ample resources to support you, so feel free to boldly invest materials and human resources during your work," he said. But he admitted

that the US moves to deprive Huawei of access to semiconductors meant that "objectively speaking, the only domain in which we can extend our roots deep is software". The memo, provided to AFP by the company, summarized discussions in April between Ren and technical staff. It offered few specifics on what software products Huawei could pursue.

Huawei's mobile phone sales, along with overall revenue growth, have sagged since last year as the US sanctions began to bite. The firm sold its Honor budget smartphone brand late last year as it shuffled its product mix, but has vowed to retain its flagship handset brand.

But Einstein warned that while Huawei's size and expertise will make it formidable, success is not assured. It will need to compete against domestic tech giants such as Alibaba, Tencent and Baidu, which have all pushed into software and cloud computing, and the US-imposed hurdles overseas could curb its appeal in foreign markets, he said. China and Huawei fiercely reject the US security allegations, saying no evidence has ever been provided. — AFP

based think-tank. Despite all of them, the issue "has not been given sufficient priority," she said.

Complacency

The best defenses against cybercrime by individuals and small companies are simple and almost free: deleting suspect emails, updating software regularly, changing passwords, and keeping saved back-ups.

Larger organizations can afford specialized IT security teams and the best-equipped employ outside monitoring services to keep an eye on their networks and check for intrusions round-the-clock that foretell a major attack. But many organizations are complacent, said Spaulding.

"There are two kinds of companies in the world, those who have been hacked and those who haven't detected it yet," she told AFP. Another problem is that many countries are not producing enough trained IT technicians, which drives up wages for the most sought-after skills, putting them beyond the reach of many organizations, particularly in the public sector.

Adam Meyers from cybersecurity firm CrowdStrike says the key to safety is often simply being better protected than the weakest targets. "There's an old adage



Rising cyberattacks in West highlight vulnerabilities

PARIS: A series of high-profile cyberattacks on targets in the West have highlighted the vulnerability of companies and institutions, making the issue a higher public priority but with no easy solution. The latest incident to underline the capacity of cybercriminals to disrupt daily life came in early May when Colonial Pipeline, a US-based operator of a key fuel pipeline, became a victim of ransomware.

The attack saw its computer systems encrypted, putting its operations offline and causing fuel shortages for American drivers. At the end of 2020, US authorities also revealed that hackers had compromised SolarWinds software which was run by large parts of the US government and companies around the country. Russia was blamed.

Other attacks include the hacking of the Democratic Party ahead of the 2016 US election as well as the major global malware outbreaks called WannaCry and NotPetya which paralyzed computers all over the world in 2017. Beyond the major incidents that make the news, cybersecurity firms and experts have been warning for years about the rising tide of online attacks-some state-orchestrated, some criminally motivated.

"It is hard to imagine that we haven't had enough significant cyber incidents for everyone to realise how important it is," said Suzanne Spaulding of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington-

Germany opens antitrust probe into Google

FRANKFURT: Germany's antitrust regulator said yesterday it has opened an investigation into Google over anti-competitive practices, wielding a new law that has already been used to scrutinize other US tech giants.

The Federal Cartel Office will investigate European units of Google in Germany and Ireland, as well as its parent company, Alphabet, in California, it said in a statement. The investigation has an "outstanding cross-market significance" due to the breadth of Google's digital products, Cartel office head Andreas Mundt said.

"Google's business model is very fundamentally built on the processing of its users' data," Mundt said. "Google has a strategic advantage here due to its established access to competitively relevant data."

A key question in the probe was whether consumers "have sufficient choice over the use of their data by Google if they want to use Google services", he said. The investigation follows the application of a new law giving the authorities more power to rein in big tech companies, with similar proceedings launched recently against Amazon and Facebook.

Under the amendment to Germany's competition law passed in January, the watchdog said it now has more power to "intervene earlier and more effectively" against big tech companies, rather than simply punishing them for abuses of their dominant market position. The Federal Cartel Office said last week it is examining whether Amazon has "an almost unchallengeable position of economic power", having already launched two traditional abuse control proceedings.

The watchdog has also employed its new powers to widen the scope of an investigation into Facebook over its integration of virtual reality headsets. The push to tighten legislation comes as big tech companies are facing increasing scrutiny around the globe, including in the United States, where Google and Facebook are facing antitrust suits. — AFP

that you don't have to run faster than the bear to get away. You have to run faster than the person next to you," he said.

State capabilities

One area that has been prioritized by Western governments is building up their own cyber-military powers, which enable states to investigate and deflect attacks, as well as carry out their own spying and operations. "For the last decade, it's been in the toolbox of armies and intelligence services as part of a conflict that is not necessarily open, but is latent," said Julien Nocetti, a researcher at the Geode institute at Paris 8 university. The National Cyber Power Index by the Belfer Centre at Harvard University puts the United States at the top of 30 countries ranked on their ambitions and cyber-capabilities, with China second, and Britain third. The reach and power of the US National Security Agency was laid bare in 2013 following leaks by fugitive contractor Edward Snowden.

"Europe and the United States are sometimes shown as being the victims and the nice guys in this domain ... but that's not how it is. There's a general blindness about our own operations," said Nocetti.

And the rules of engagement are still being defined, with a multilateral attempt to create some sort of framework for states failing to make progress. Some experts worry that one day a state-backed cyberattack will trigger a spiral of reprisals and counter-reprisals that could trigger real-life hostilities.

Countries may have built up enough digital weapons to serve as a deterrent. "One of the reasons why Russia, the US and China don't turn each other's lights off is because they are afraid of what the reaction would be," said Adam Segal, director of the Digital and Cyberspace Policy program at the Council on Foreign Relations, a US think-tank. — AFP

German property giants agree to limit rent hikes

BERLIN: Germany's top property group Vonovia said yesterday it will sell around 20,000 apartments to the city of Berlin and limit rent increases in the capital following a planned 19-billion-euro merger with rival Deutsche Wohnen. "The people of this city are not happy with our companies and the current state of the housing market, so we need a new start," said Vonovia CEO Rolf Buch at a joint press conference with Berlin mayor Michael Mueller.

In a move which Mueller called "hugely significant", Vonovia and Deutsche Wohnen pledged to limit rent hikes until 2026 in Berlin, which has been hit for years by runaway prices and a lack of affordable housing. Vonovia said it had agreed to cap rent increases at one percent per year in the next three years, and also offer the city government 20,000 apartments.

The merger, announced late Monday, comes in the midst of a fierce ideological battle over housing in the German capital. The Berlin government's flagship rent freeze policy was recently thrown out by Germany's highest court, while tens of thousands have signed a petition to expropriate assets from major property companies.

In Germany, where around 85 percent of residents are renters, Deutsche Wohnen and Vonovia play a premier role in the housing sector. Vonovia has 10 percent of its portfolio in Berlin, while Deutsche Wohnen is by far the city's biggest player with 70 percent of its properties in the capital. —AFP

Business

Green groups slam UK bank links to carbon emissions

Law needed to force banks to align their activities with Paris accord goals

LONDON: The UK financial sector's amount of carbon emissions exceeded the net annual output of most countries in 2019 as a result of worldwide investments, green groups claimed yesterday.

A study by Greenpeace and the UK arm of the World Wildlife Fund comes ahead of the COP26 UN climate summit to be held in Glasgow in November. "As the host of this year's pivotal global climate summit, the (British) government can no longer turn a blind eye," said Greenpeace UK's Executive Director John Sauven in comments published alongside the report.

"Rather than relying on self-regulation we need legislation that forces all banks and asset managers to align all financing activities with the goals" of the 2015 Paris accord to keeping the global temperature increase to under two degrees Celsius and ideally closer to 1.5C by 2050. "That would be genuine climate leadership," Sauven added.

The report noted that banks and asset managers in the UK were together responsible for financing 805 million tons of carbon dioxide in 2019. This would have made The City of London—commonly referred to as the UK financial sector—as the ninth biggest emitter of CO2 if it were a country, higher than Europe's biggest economy Germany in tenth place, it added. Responding, the City of London Corporation said that while it "is showing leadership in the fight against climate change", it recognizes "that there is no

room for complacency.

"London is consistently ranked as the leading global center when it comes to green finance, a key part of the solution to tackling climate change," it added in a statement. Sauven said "banks and investors are responsible for more emissions than most nations", claiming that "the UK government is giving them a free pass".

Greenpeace explained it had taken a sample of British and foreign banks and investors listed in the UK, adding that the study excludes insurers.

'Sticking plaster'

The study found that UK financial institutions in 2019 funded projects worldwide that contributed to carbon emissions almost double that of the country's annual net total. "Trying to set a path to net-zero emissions without tackling the UK financial sector is like sticking a plaster when the patient needs open heart surgery," said WWF UK's chief executive Tanya Steele. Also reacting to the report, trade association UK Finance said "lenders take their responsibility to wider society very seriously and, together with the government and Bank of England, are playing a leading role in the shift to net zero finance".

It pointed to the country's six largest UK banking groups last month becoming founding members of the UN's new Net Zero Banking Alliance, committing to net-zero emissions from their portfolios by 2050



LONDON: The UK financial sector's amount of carbon emissions exceeded the net annual output of most countries in 2019 as a result of worldwide investments, green groups claimed yesterday.

or sooner. "The industry will continue work with others to help mobilise capital in a way that takes account of local community and environmental needs," UK Finance added.

The report comes after the Group of Seven wealthy nations on Friday agreed to end state fi-

ancing of coal-fired power plants by the end of this year, and to "mostly decarbonise" electricity supplies in the 2030s. Ahead of a leaders' meeting in Britain next month, G7 countries' climate and environment ministers have reaffirmed their commitment to the Paris accord. — AFP

US stocks higher as German DAX hits all-time high

LONDON: US stocks opened higher yesterday following a strong showing in Europe, lifted by in-demand tech shares and further positive news from Moderna on its coronavirus vaccine's effectiveness in teenagers.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 0.2 percent at the open, outpaced by the tech-heavy Nasdaq and the wider S&P 500. Tech firms are "buoyed by the recent reprieve in the spike in interest rates... as ramped-up inflation worries seem to be cooling a bit," Charles Schwab analysts commented.

"Moreover, with vaccine rollouts chugging on in the US and Europe, optimism of economic recovery appears to be supplying some bullish sustenance," they added. Schwab pointed to Moderna's announcement earlier Tuesday that its mRNA shot against COVID-19 was "highly effective" at preventing the disease in teenagers, and that it would apply for authorization for the age group from US and global regulators "in early June".

In foreign exchange markets, the euro single currency hit a five-month dollar high. Bitcoin gave up some of its gains after another wild day, after a rally following a supportive tweet from

tycoon Elon Musk that offset fresh Chinese warnings of a crackdown on cryptocurrencies. Meanwhile oil prices gained slightly, as talks between Iran, the US and other world powers aimed at reviving their 2015 nuclear agreement remained mired in differences.

Fading inflation fears

Investors had already been buoyed Monday after Federal Reserve officials insisted that an expected spike in prices over the next few months — caused by issues including supply bottlenecks and consumers splurging cash — would be temporary. The gains helped chip away at recent losses in the tech sector, which has taken the brunt of selling on concerns that surging inflation will force central banks to hike interest rates sooner than expected. Tech giants are more susceptible to higher rates owing to the potential effect on their future earnings and cash flow.

German record

In Europe, Germany's DAX index touched a new all-time high of 15,568.60 points in the morning before easing back in the afternoon, while Paris added 0.1 percent and London



LOS ANGELES: This illustration photo taken on Monday shows the Apple stock market ticker symbol AAPL displayed on an iPhone screen and reflected in the logo of an iMac computer in Los Angeles. — AFP

flatlined. Investors in Europe's top economy had been encouraged by "a combination of M&A (merger and acquisition) activity, upbeat business sentiment data and easing US inflation fears," said analyst Sophie Griffiths at trading firm OANDA.

Investors seized on an announcement from Germany's top property group Vonovia of a 19-billion-euro merger with rival Deutsche Wohnen to form a sector giant. Sentiment was also boosted by surging German business confidence. The Ifo institute's monthly barometer based on a survey of 9,000

companies climbed to 99.2 points in May, 2.6 points up from April and its highest value in two years.

Easing inflation concerns also pushed stocks higher, with Asia tracking a healthy rally on Wall Street, as traders eyed the upbeat global economic outlook. In New York on Monday, investors took heart from a number of Federal Reserve officials who insisted that an expected spike in prices over the next few months—caused by issues including supply bottlenecks and just-freed consumers splurging cash—would be temporary. — AFP

Liberty Steel's UK plants have 'viable future': Govt

LONDON: British steelmaker Liberty Steel's UK facilities have a "viable future", the government insisted yesterday, one day after struggling parent group GFG Alliance put some of them up for sale.

Liberty had launched a major restructuring on Monday to sell part of its assets following the collapse of insolvent financier Greensill. GFG, owned by Indian-British billionaire Sanjeev Gupta, wants to sell Liberty's plant in Stockbridge, northern England, and other fa-

cilities which together employ 1,500 staff. "The issue that Liberty had was to do with financial engineering, the opaque bit, if you like, of GFG, the leverage, the finance, the debt they had incurred," Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng told a parliamentary committee investigating the company's plight.

"Without that, I think there is a healthy interest in the assets and I think they have a viable future," he added. The Greensill affair shone a light on Gupta's business practices, with the UK government describing the GFG structure as "very opaque" after declining to rescue it earlier this year.

Kwarteng stressed yesterday that all options were on the table for Liberty's steel plants—but nationalization was the least likely for the government. "I don't rule anything in or out, but I think that nationalization-of all the options-is the least likely," Greensill's dramatic demise



A view of the Liberty Pressing Solutions factory, part of the Liberty Steel group which has been put up for sale yesterday in Coventry, central England. — AFP

sparked fears for the future of GFG's 35,000 staff worldwide—which includes 5,000 at Liberty Steel in Britain. GFG

had been Greensill's biggest customer at the time of the finance giant's high-profile collapse in March. — AFP

Operating in the shadows: US Cyber Command

WASHINGTON: If the Pentagon's Cyber Command launches an online attack and nobody knows about it, does it deter anyone? Many Americans are asking what the country's army of cyber warriors are doing after repeated attacks on US computer systems by Chinese, Russian and other hackers.

The answer may have been in the 780th Military Intelligence Brigade's subtle retweet on May 14 of a security firm's scoop that ransomware extortionist Darkside had been digitally shut down.

No one knows who took control of Darkside's servers, a week after the major US oil pipeline, causing gasoline shortages across the Eastern US.

But suspicions are that the 10-year-old CyberCom may have stepped in, to punish Darkside and to signal the small army of ransomware providers operating out of Eastern Europe that they too are vulnerable.

Even as it remains quiet, CyberCom's role is hotly debated: is it to undertake strategic attacks during war, or to constantly joust online with adversaries' military and intelligence hackers, or to go after non-military hackers like Darkside, normally the purview of law enforcement?

Malware strike on Iran

The first sign that the US Defense Department was playing offense in the online world was in 2010 when it became known that a destructive, US and Zionist-created computer worm Stuxnet had infected and damaged Iran's nuclear enrichment facilities.

Cyberwarfare then was seen as a way of attacking or deterring enemies by wrecking their infrastructure with devastating malware strikes.

Since then, however, the US government and private business have been hit time and time again, by Chinese stealing government databases and corporate secrets, Russia hacking US elections, North Koreans stealing bitcoins, and ransomware operators extorting hundreds of millions of dollars from companies, hospitals, and local authorities.

But without any news about their exploits, it didn't seem like the Pentagon was either punishing or deterring attackers. They are, General Paul Naka-

sone, CyberCom commander, told a recent Congressional hearing.

"When we see elements that are that are operating out of US, we try to impose the largest cost possible," he said. "Imposing costs" meant exposing the hackers, or counterattacking, he said. But he refused to give any examples of their work.

'Persistent engagement'

Jon Lindsay, a University of Toronto assistant professor who researches online military conflict, said the cyberwar strategy had shifted since Stuxnet. At that time, "cyber was looked at as a digital weapon of mass destruction," something that could punish, or threaten to punish adversaries to deter their attacks.

"It was a very high level, presidentially controlled, covert action," to be used strategically and sparingly, Lindsay said. Since then, it has become something else: an ongoing low-level fight that doesn't require top-level approval, called "persistent engagement," that does not focus on deterrence.

"It's very, very difficult, if not impossible, to deter adversarial activities in cyberspace. So what CyberCom needs to be able to do is be constantly engaged, constantly operating forward in the adversaries' networks," said Lindsay. — AFP

Cyberattacks: Bigger, smarter and faster

PARIS: From paralyzing the internet in Estonia to a \$4.4-million ransom being paid last week after the shutdown of a major US pipeline, we take a look back at 15 years of cyberattacks.

Cyberwars begin

The Baltic nation of Estonia was the first state hit by a massive cyberattack in 2007, paralyzing key corporate and government web services for days. Estonia blamed Moscow, with which it was mired in a diplomatic conflict, but the Kremlin denied the charge.

First industrial target

A powerful computer virus called Stuxnet attacked Iran's nuclear facilities in 2010 in an apparent bid to cripple the country's atomic program. Stuxnet hit the functioning of Iranian nuclear sites, infecting several thousand computers and blocking centrifuges used for the enrichment of uranium. Tehran accused Zionist and the US of being at the origin of the cyberattack, the first to target an entire industrial system.

Yahoo hacking

A 2013 hack that affected all three billion accounts at Yahoo is believed to be the biggest cyberattack in history. Another attack on the web services provider, blamed on Russia, affected some 500 million accounts in 2014, with stolen data including usernames, email addresses and birthdates. It was only revealed five years later and resulted in a fine of \$35 million.

Islamic State

A group declaring support for Islamic State jihadists hacked into the social media accounts of US Central Command (CENTCOM) in 2015, an embarrassing setback for Washington in its war against IS in Syria and Iraq. Two months after the attack a group calling itself the "Islamic State Hacking Division" published what they said were the names and addresses of 100 military personnel and urged supporters to kill them.

US vote meddling

In the run-up to the 2016 US presidential election, emails of Democratic Party candidate Hillary Clinton's campaign staff were published online. After Donald Trump was elected to the White House, the US intelligence community alleged that Moscow influenced the outcome of the vote, resulting in a snowballing probe, sanctions and expulsion of diplomats.

US intelligence agencies accused Moscow of being behind hacking entities Fancy Bear and Cozy Bear which carried out cyberattacks on the Democratic Party. — AFP



A French soldier wearing the logo badge of the 807 CTR Cyber Defense attends the cyber defense exercise DEFNET 2021 in Rennes, western France. — AFP

Business

NBK a platinum sponsor of ACK virtual career fair

NBK maintains its role as top national labor employer in private sector

KUWAIT: As part of its continuous support to fresh graduates students to navigate their career, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) participated as a platinum sponsor in the career fair held by the Australian College of Kuwait (ACK) on May 26th and 27th, with the aim of encouraging students to engage in the work market and communicate directly with employers.

Due to the prevailing circumstances posed by the coronavirus pandemic, the fair was organized this year through a digital platform allowing easy communication and interviews with graduates with a view to maximize benefits and enrich graduates and students with an abundance of job opportunities.

On this occasion, Emad Al-Ablani, General Manager of Group Human Resources at National Bank of Kuwait said: "NBK's participation in this event held virtually this year due to the pandemic, is a key oppor-



Emad Al-Ablani

tunity for fresh graduates to get acquainted with suitable job opportunities that satisfy their expectations and ambitions. It also represents an important platform for the bank to closely identify competent and talented national cadres to solicit to its professional system."

NBK is a key supporter of all initiatives and events

stimulating the energies of the national workforce of ambitious Kuwaiti youth, as part of its endeavors to spread the culture of work in the private sector among Kuwaiti youth and attract qualified individuals to the

banking sector, he added. Al-Ablani noted that NBK Group Human Resources employees, through the digital platform, conducted interviews and responded to all inquiries raised by fresh graduates who completed recruitment applications for open vacancies, as part of the bank's care to encourage these graduates to join the banking sector, which plays an instrumental role in developing the national economy.

NBK boasts being the top national labor employer in the private sector by 73.8 percent, indicating that despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the bank maintained its historical role and social responsibility by recruiting and attracting national talents, with over 357 new young Kuwaiti recruits during 2020 and 2021, he added.

Al-Ablani explained that the selection of human cadres for recruitment in the bank's different depart-

ments is based on their qualifications and according to their capabilities, in order to maximize the return and benefit from the energies of those young talents.

NBK is committed to provide training programs for young Kuwaiti fresh graduates and students, to equip them with the expertise, professional knowledge, and on-job training, as professional preparation for them to navigate the labor market, manifesting NBK's role as one of the leading local private sector institutions in supporting the youth.

NBK's efforts in soliciting national talents go in line with its development and training plans aimed to invest in national cadres and prepare a promising banking generation. The bank is also keen to offer a series of training courses and professional academic programs, being one of the leading banking institutions in Kuwait in organizing training programs for youth.

Apollo Tyres is now accredited with ISO 17025 for track tests

KUWAIT: Subsequent to its collaboration with Global Automotive Research Centre (GARC) to pioneer the indigenization of tyre labelling and certification tests in India, Apollo Tyres has now been accredited with ISO/IEC 17025 for the wet grip and coast by noise tyre tests on the track. This testing capability is linked to the Indian Government's plan to implement 'Star Rating' of tyres, in line with the Tyre Labelling regulation in Europe. This is with the objective to ensure safety, economic and environmental efficiency of road transport by promoting fuel-efficient and safe tyres with low noise levels. A new Automotive Industry Standard, AIS 142, in line with UNECE R 117 is prepared. It comprises evaluation of tyres with regards to rolling sound emissions, adhesion on wet surfaces and rolling resistance.

Daniele Lorenzetti, Chief Technology Officer, Apollo Tyres Ltd commented "The new testing capabilities, developed by Apollo Tyres, shows very good level of accuracy and reliability, and the test results are well accepted by European Homologation authorities. This will enable Apollo Tyres to reduce time to market its products, along with the reduction in testing costs." The major impediment to Government's plan of implementing Star Ratings, was the unavailability of adequate NABL accredited testing infrastructure in India. NABL, National



Accreditation Board for Testing & Calibration Laboratories, has now given the certificate of accreditation to Apollo Tyres Test Centre for 'General Requirements for the Competence of Testing & Calibration Laboratories' extended with the track tests of wet grip and coast by noise for C1, C2 and C3 categories of tyres which are covered under the labeling program.

Commenting on this Satish Sharma, President, Asia Pacific, Middle East & Africa (APMEA), Apollo Tyres Ltd said, "Being the leaders in the Indian Tyre Industry, we would like to further the cause of testing the tyres and provide highest quality tyres to our customers across geographies. We are proud to be the first among Indian tyre manufacturers to get the coveted accreditation, meeting UNECE R 117 standards in India, thereby upping India's self-sufficiency in tyre technology. This facility will

not only help us test the tyres for the Indian market, but also the ones that are exported, and need to meet the regulatory and labelling requirements."

Kuwait: Ashish Tandon, General Manager, Federal Trading Company owned by Alshaya Alsagar, expressed "we are glad to be associated with India's leading tyre manufacturer brand Apollo Tyres from the year 2008. We are equally proud on achievement of Apollo tyres getting coveted accreditation, meeting UNECE R 117 standards in India. Our commitment to provide customers in Kuwait with safety, quality & sustainable tyres will continue to the best."

FTC has a door-to-door service in addition to its branches in Ardiya Industrial & Ardiya Oula station. Working hours Saturday-Thursday 8 am to 8 Pm Friday - 4 am - 8 pm.

ABK congratulates 'Experience the Change' winners

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) announced the four winners of the third salary transfer campaign "Experience the Change", for Al-Raed, Prestige and Elite salary account holders. The draw took place on 18th of May, 2021, under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

The winners were:

Omar Abdulaziz Shaker Abdullah Al-Shatti, Mmichael Angelo Espiritu Trinidad, Abubaker Saad Eissa Al-Arbeed and Amro Shawqi Abdul Maqsood Ali

The 4th draw will be held on the 15th June, 2021. Every month four winners can win back their salary (Two Kuwaitis and two expatriates). To be eligible to enter the draw, customers need to have one salary credited into their account in the month prior to the draw date.

Furthermore, upon opening a salary account with ABK, customers can choose one of the following rewards:

- Up to KD 1,000 cash gift for Kuwaitis
- Up to KD 10,000 interest free loan for Kuwaitis
- Up to KD 5,000 interest free loan for expatriates

The offer is open to new salary clients only, with one salary credited into their account a month prior to the draw date.

NBK Economic Report

US growth outlook strong but inflation spike triggers concern

KUWAIT: While expectations for a strong rebound in global economic growth this year remain in place, the underlying picture remains mixed, with a rise in worldwide virus cases in April led by India contrasting with surging optimism and continued reopening measures in the US and Europe as virus incidence falls and vaccination rollouts become more advanced. Indeed, in the US especially, market attention is shifting to inflation, which spiked in April on strong growth and reopening pressures, leading to questions over how long the Fed's current ultra-loose policy stance should be sustained. This risk weakened equity markets in early May and pushed benchmark bond yields higher. Meanwhile, Brent crude oil prices saw strong gains in April on reflation pressures before edging back on news of a possible easing of sanctions on Iran that would boost supply.

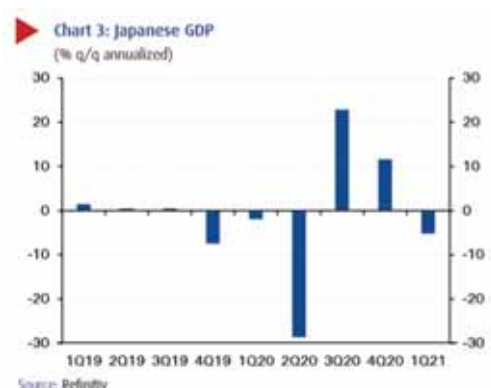
US economic strong

Hopes for a rapid economic recovery in the US are broadly on track, backed up by a robust 6.4 percent annualized rise in GDP in 1Q21, roughly in line with expectations. Key strength was seen in private consumption (+6.3 percent) helped by reopening, stimulus measures, pent-up demand and rising confidence due to vaccine rollout. Private investment was strong too (+10.1 percent), reflecting a booming housing market. The level of GDP is now just 1 percent below pre-pandemic levels, which given the strength of latest survey indicators should easily be reached in Q2 (although GDP is still below its projected pre-virus path). The labor market recovery however continues to lag somewhat behind, with a well-below consensus 266,000 jobs (0.2 percent) created in April amid a suspicion that temporarily more generous welfare benefits are discouraging a return to work for some individuals - a claim rejected by Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen. Jobs growth should accelerate in coming months so long as the recovery remains on track, but it could still be well into 2022 or beyond before the remaining 8 million or so jobs lost to the pandemic are recovered.

The elimination of spare capacity in both output and the labor market will be closely watched for its implications for inflation, concerns about which are gathering pace. CPI inflation surged to a more than 12-year high of 4.2 percent y/y in April from 2.6 percent in March and way above expectations.

The jump was partly driven by base effects - particularly from energy - reflecting falls in prices a year earlier as the pandemic fallout began. However, month-on-month rises are running increasingly hot too and the core rate, which excludes both food and energy, reached its highest since 1996 at 3.0 percent. The Federal Reserve continues to describe these pressures as transitory, reflecting both base effects and temporary demand and supply mismatches that will fade as the economic reopening proceeds. However, the combination of rapid

economic growth, aggressive fiscal and monetary stimulus policies, possible frictions in the labor market and also the Fed's stated tolerance for above-2 percent inflation for a while are clearly pushing up the risk of price pressures becoming more permanently established. This worry is starting to weigh on the US dollar, which has slipped nearly 4 percent since late March on a trade-weighted basis.



Eurozone recession in Q1

GDP in the Eurozone slipped back in 1Q21 by 0.6 percent q/q as countries struggled against a new COVID wave. This confirmed a double-dip recession in the region, following a drop of 0.7 percent in 4Q20. Survey measures point to growth now picking up, though at a somewhat tepid pace, helped also by a vaccination rollout that is finally gathering steam. The composite PMI edged up to 53.8 in April, with manufacturing booming but services only finally creeping back into growth territory though set to benefit further from an easing of COVID restrictions. Like in the US, firms are reporting cost increases and CPI inflation picked up to 1.6 percent y/y in April from negative territory at the end of last year. However, given the less buoyant growth climate versus the US, the fact that inflation is still below the near-2 percent target (core inflation is even lower at 0.7 percent), the strengthening euro and indeed lingering concerns over new virus variants, the European Central Bank is unlikely to start even discussing plans to dial back its ultra-loose policy stance for several months.

Meanwhile in the UK, GDP fell a more modest-than-expected 1.5 percent q/q in 1Q21 amid the re-imposition of tough lockdown measures at the start of the year. With most of these measures since lifted and activity measures now rebounding, growth is set to recover strongly in Q2 perhaps by around 5 percent.

Japanese GDP

Japan's economic growth turned negative in 1Q21, declining by an annualized 5.1 percent (-1.3 percent q/q) from +11.6 percent in 4Q20, as private consumption and investment (both -1.4 percent q/q) weakened markedly amid a state of emergency that has remained in place since January. Export growth (+2.3 percent q/q), though positive, also slowed, due in part to a shortage of semiconductor chips. With the state of emergency recently extended to the end of May and expanded to include two other prefectures as well as Tokyo due to rising infections of new Covid-19 variants, the outlook for 2021

GDP growth is looking weaker than even the downwardly-adjusted consensus annualized figure of 1.7 percent (from 4.7 percent in April).

The services PMI at 49.5 in April edged up from March but continued to point to contraction, with firms citing the negative impact of the emergency measures on consumer demand. In contrast, the manufacturing PMI expanded in April at the fastest pace in more than



three years (53.6 from 52.7 in March). The improvement was due to stronger domestic and overseas orders. Meanwhile, Bank of Japan (BOJ) policymakers agreed to keep interest rates low. Core consumer prices (which exclude fresh food), fell for the eighth month in a row in March, by 0.1 percent y/y (from -0.4 percent in February), with the pace of decline easing slightly due to a rebound in fuel costs. Expectations of a y/y base effect-boost to the CPI in April could be tempered by cuts to mobile phone fees. The BOJ also recently estimated that inflation is unlikely to reach its 2 percent target until after FY2024 as growth is only expected to pick up gradually amid persistent pandemic-linked stresses to the economy.

Chinese growth rebounds

GDP surged by 18.3 percent y/y in 1Q21, helped by the base effect from restrictions implemented early last year, which saw activity drop sharply. However, some leading indicators suggest that demand is still fragile. Industrial output, for example, grew 9.8 percent y/y in April, slower than the 14.1 percent recorded a month earlier, while retail sales growth decelerated to 17.7 percent y/y in April, down from the 34 percent jump seen in March, and much weaker than expected. This softening trend reflects the fading of the favorable base effect, and activity dropping back to its pre-virus trend following the withdrawal of policy support and fiscal stimulus. Still, the composite PMI increased to a four-month high of 54.7 in April from 53.1 in March but remained below the December level of 56.

Meanwhile, inflation in April jumped to its highest since September 2020 at 0.9 percent y/y, up from 0.4 percent in March. The central bank has left its benchmark interest rates for corporate and household loans unchanged (1-year 3.85 percent, 5-year 4.65 percent) since May 2020. However, policymakers are tightening credit by directly targeting some sectors, most notably the property sector, in a bid to balance growth and debt concerns.

Virus could delay India's recovery

The recent severe wave of virus infections across India has led to the imposition of renewed restrictions in select areas of the country, negatively affecting confidence and threatening to hinder the economic recovery that had started to emerge earlier this year. Encouragingly, business activity has remained quite resilient, with the composite PMI edging down only to 55.4 in April from 56 in March, mostly on a slower rise in new orders. However, of concern is the continued decline in employment (falling for 14 consecutive months), albeit at a slower pace, and the rising inflationary pressures stemming from reported supply constraints and higher input prices: wholesale price inflation reached an 11-year high of 10.5 percent in April (though consumer price inflation eased to 4.3 percent from 5.5 percent in March).

Looking ahead, a weak labor market, which continues to undermine sentiment, could delay the recovery in domestic demand, and is therefore a downside risk to the economic outlook. Furthermore, higher food, fuel and other commodity prices could drive inflation to exceed the central bank's target of 4-6 percent, making a potential policy rate cut less likely, while a high level of public debt implies limited room for sizeable fiscal support. In light of these headwinds, the IMF's previous projection of 12.5 percent growth for FY21/22 may be optimistic, especially if the current virus wave in India is prolonged (though there are signs that it may have peaked in mid-May). In this regard, Moody's recently slashed India's FY21/22 growth estimate to 9.3 percent y/y from an earlier estimate of 13.7 percent.

Oil prices gain

Brent futures gained 5.8 percent in April to close at \$67.3/bbl, buoyed by signs that the economic recovery is progressing in the US, Europe and China and despite surging COVID cases in Brazil and, more seriously, in India. Positive momentum carried through into May, with Brent just breaking through \$70 in intraday on the 17th of the month. In the US and Europe, road and air traffic data point to greater consumer mobility after restrictions were eased and vaccination efforts accelerated. In China, meanwhile, crude refining rates in 1Q21 surged 17.8 percent y/y to 14.2 mb/d, following a quarter of strong crude imports. Oil has also benefitted by a broader rally in commodities, with post-pandemic demand for metals and foodstuffs surging amid supply-side constraints.

Both OPEC and the International Energy Agency (IEA), in their monthly oil market reports, forecast substantial supply deficits opening up in 2H21, with demand outpacing supply by more than 1 mb/d in 3Q21 and by as much as 2 mb/d by 4Q21. This is despite more than 2 mb/d of additional OPEC+ supplies returning to the market by end-July and despite COVID-linked oil demand weakness in India. Citing worries over India, along with weaker-than-expected oil consumption in advanced economies in 1Q21, the IEA reduced its 2021 overall oil demand growth forecast slightly to 5.4 mb/d. Prices could see some support at higher levels going into 2H21, though the likelihood of Iranian barrels returning to the market and imparting a bearish spin on proceedings could be strengthening following news that the reconfigured JCPOA nuclear agreement talks were progressing.

Lifestyle | Gossip



Delta Goodrem's tongue paralysis

Delta Goodrem didn't know when she'd get her voice back after suffering from tongue paralysis. The 'Keep Climbing' singer ended up with some nerve damage after a routine operation in 2018 and she feared she would struggle to speak or sing again after the paralysis forced her to "go quiet and listen". She said: "I went through this whole paralysis of my tongue thing and I just

had to go quiet and listen ... I had a very simple routine operation of a gland that was being a bit naughty and got infected, to put it really scientifically, and basically, after the operation, when I woke up, I realized there was nerve damage. "I actually had a flight booked for the UK - this was 2018 - but I ended up having to go to ground and go to speech therapy. I didn't have any idea when it was going to get

back to normal. It could be three months or three years." And the 36-year-old singer was glad she was able to recover in private. Speaking to the Metro newspaper about her recovery, she added: "I believed in my heart. I really didn't want to share that story for a long time and I was thankful that I had kept it quiet. "But when we all went through what we went through with COVID, I realized there's a

silent battle for people right now. I thought, well, a lot of people are going through a reset so I wanted to share mine. I just went back to stories from the very beginning and started writing and this record came from asking, 'How did I get here?'"

Seal wishes daughter wanted different career

Seal isn't happy about his daughter's modeling ambitions. The 'Kiss From a Rose' hitmaker - who has Leni, 17, Henri, 15, Johan, 14, and Lou, 11, with his ex-wife Heidi Klum - admitted seeing his eldest child follow in her mom's footsteps wouldn't have been his first choice of career for her because it "seldom" ends in happiness. He said: "That's a precarious road to take." But his kids are "just not all that impressed" by his own career. He added to Us Weekly magazine: "We never really talk about my music at all." The 'Crazy' singer doesn't think his children have to face many "challenges" in their lives. He said: "[They] don't have challenges in the grand scheme of things. ... They live in a



Union explains why daughter Kaavia, 2, has a \$3,790 Valentino bag

Gabrielle Union has hit back at critics who assumed she bought her two-year-old daughter a \$3,790 Valentino bag. The 48-year-old actress faced a backlash on social media for sharing a video of Kaavia - whom she has with Dwayne Wade - opening the designer accessory on TikTok, and she has now explained how the label sent her little girl a mini-me version of the adult-sized bag and she has been "sleeping with it" ever since. She told 'Entertainment Tonight': "Valentino was kind enough to send us mommy-and-daughter matching bags. So for everyone who thought I bought my child a \$3,000-plus bag when she can't poop in the potty on her own - um, no. She's been literally sleeping with it." Meanwhile, the 'Bring It On' star donned an embellished white Prada dress and Bulgari jewellery for the Billboard Music Awards on Sunday, which received approval from fashionista Kaavia. Gabrielle revealed: "She thought I looked very pretty. She was like, white dress. And I was like, good? And she was

like, 'You look pretty, Mommy.' "It felt so good just to get out of the house. You know, there were a couple tears from Kaav at the door. She's like, 'Have fun, Mom.'" Gabrielle is teaching her daughter and her stepdaughter, Zaya, 13, to be "proud of their Blackness and Afrocentric features" after she felt like the odd one out when she was at school as the only black person in her class. She said: "Some days Kav will hand you her brush and she'll want a little afro puff. And some days she just wants to wake up and go. "And Zaya went from pink hair to blonde. If you want to switch it up every day, great. What you do with your hair is your own personal choice. For me, the focus is on healthy hair, not on what you do with it. "Your hair is a part of you and it's an extension of you, but it has to start with self-love and pride in your Blackness and Afrocentric features, whether that be your hair, your nose, your lips or your body."



nice house. They don't have to worry about food on the table. They have the benefit of a great education." But Seal admitted keeping the kids grounded has been "challenging" because he and Heidi - who he split from in 2012 - don't work together as a team when it comes to raising their brood. He said: "It can be challenging. It requires teamwork. If you are a team, if both parents are a team, then it's really easy and that's not a real challenge at all. ... But you have to be a team. And if you're not a team, then it can all fall to pieces." Asked if he has that with Heidi, 47, he replied: "No. ... I never had that teamwork [with Heidi]. We never had teamwork." These days, the 58-year-old singer has an unknown partner who makes him "extremely happy" and, unlike his relationship with Heidi, their bond is all about "love and teamwork".

Kourtney Kardashian reunites with Scott Disick

Kourtney Kardashian reunited with her ex Scott Disick to mark his 38th birthday. The 'Keeping Up With The Kardashians' star was spotted attending her former partner's celebrations on May 24. Her sisters Kim Kardashian West and Khloe Kardashian, as well as Scott's girlfriend Amelia Hamlin, were at the event too. Scott and Kourtney - who share Mason, 11, Penelope, eight, and Reign, six - were together for nearly a decade until 2015 when they split and Scott had previously urged Kourtney - who has since started dating Travis Barker - to make a "final decision" about their relationship so he could finally "move on". He said: "It's hard. It sucks. I'm OK with you doing whatever you want, if you can just make the final decision that you and I are never going to try to be a family again. Then I could move on, and I could deal with you being with other people." Kourtney felt a "lot of pressure" as she wasn't expecting the subject to arise while on vacation but Scott insisted he wasn't planning to give the 42-year-old beauty an "ultimatum", he was just tired of being left hanging. He added: "I don't want to give you an ultimatum and I don't want to push you. I don't want to make you anxious. But you don't say no, and you leave this door open. So I have expectations in my mind, and they don't seem to ever get met. And I don't want to live in limbo for the rest of my life with you." Kourtney agreed: "I don't want to live in limbo either.

Danielle Lloyd is pregnant with her fifth child

The former glamour model has revealed she is expecting her fifth child - her second with current husband Michael O'Neill - and she is desperate for it to be a little girl this time around. Speaking about the exciting news, she told Closer magazine: "I can't wait to become a family of seven. I know there's a risk it'll be another boy though - having five boys would be totally mad! But, of course, the main thing I want is for the baby to be healthy. And if it's not a girl - we'll just try again after!" Danielle also admitted she and Michael considered going for gender selection treatment abroad before lockdown happened, but in the end, she conceived naturally and is hopeful the baby - who is due in November - will be a little girl. Danielle had previously admitted she was desperate to have a baby girl because she has such a wonderful relationship with her own mother and wanted to be able to experience that herself. Speaking in 2018, she said: "My mum and I are so



close. There's just nothing like a mother-daughter bond. When they grow up, my boys will leave me - but I don't think a girl ever really drifts from her mum." Meanwhile, the 37-year-old model - who has Archie, 10, Harry, nine, and George, seven, from her relationship with Jamie O'Hara, and Ronnie, three, with Michael - previously admitted her head would "explode" if she has another son. She said: "I'm feeling incredibly broody at the moment. Another baby's definitely on the cards and I really want to do gender selection. I just couldn't risk having a fifth boy. "I think my head would explode. The house is already noisy enough! I'll stop at five children, though, once I have my girl - that will be enough. I'll be marching Michael down to the doctors to get the snip!"

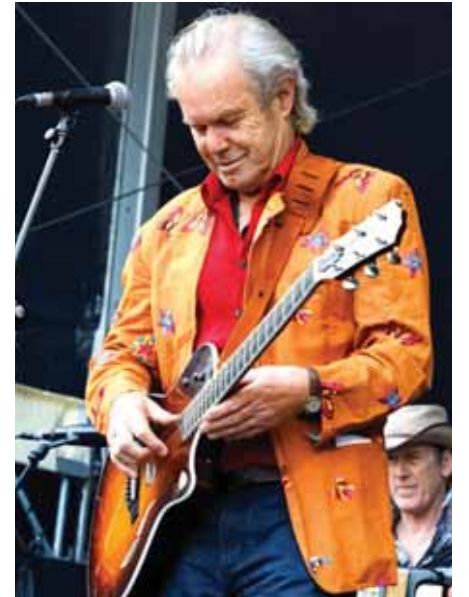
Kim Kardashian West faces legal action from ex-employees

Kim Kardashian West is being sued by seven former members of staff at her Hidden Hills mansion. The 40-year-old star was hit with a lawsuit in Los Angeles on Monday, when she was accused by her former staff members of being late with their pay and

withholding 10 percent of their wages for taxes. Kim has also been accused of refusing to pay them overtime and forcing them to work without food breaks at her \$60 million mansion, according to the New York Post newspaper's Page Six column. One 16-year-old ex-employee has alleged that he was forced to work beyond the 48 maximum allowable hours for an underage summer employee, while another has claimed he was fired as soon as he raised concerns over the tax issue and overtime. The former gardening and maintenance staff - Andrew Ramirez, Christopher Ramirez, Andrew Ramirez Jr, Aron Cabrea, Rene Ernesto Flores, Jesse Fernandez and Robert Araiza - are all now suing for unpaid wages and overtime money. Frank Kim, of law firm Kim Legal, is representing the ex-employees in the case and has suggested that fur-

Sir Mick Jagger's brother Chris writing memoir

Sir Mick Jagger's brother Chris is penning his own memoir. The 73-year-old musician - whose brother is the frontman of the Rolling Stones - has penned his own tome about his life and he admits it was "a lot harder" than he thought it would be. He said: "I wrote it myself - I didn't have a ghost writer - so I had to find my voice. Writing took longer than I anticipated. It was a lot harder than I thought. Writing doesn't have to be all poetry. I've even got some recipes in there." In the new autobiography, Chris will open about his own career as well as his childhood, growing up with Mick. Speaking to the Daily Mail newspaper's Sebastian Shakespeare column, he added: "Mick and I share similar early influences, and our parents were central to that." Whilst Chris has now got his own memoir, Mick previously admitted he "couldn't be bothered" to write his autobiography as he found it a "dull and upsetting" experience, so gave back the advance he'd received from publishers. He explained: "This is not a process you can just do in a week, you know. I must



say that it wasn't the most enjoyable experience, to be honest. I found it ultimately dull and upsetting and there wasn't that many highs out of it. I just said, 'Oh I can't be bothered with this' and gave the money back. I really didn't enjoy it... reliving my life, to the detriment of living in the now. It takes a lot of reliving emotions, reliving friendships, reliving ups and downs."



Prince William teases wife over 'musical skills'

Prince William teased his wife over her musical talents during a royal visit to Scotland. The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge paid a visit to Heavy Sound C.I.C. - a Scottish community interest company which provides music, creative arts and sports activities to people in underprivileged areas - and Catherine tried out some sound mixing. However, Prince William teased her about the music as he joked: "Please turn that off, it's hurting my ears." After pressing buttons on the machine, his wife laughed and covered her own ears as she listened to the results. And as they left, she quipped: "Sorry for leaving such a terrible song. Delete it, delete it!" The same day, William and Catherine had also visited Sikh Sanjog children's group, which is part of a Sikh community group.

There, they met young children and their caregivers as they helped bake some treats at the Palace of Holyroodhouse. The couple's official Twitter account posted: "Cooking up a storm in the café kitchen at the Palace of Holyroodhouse with Sikh Sanjog, where The Duke and Duchess prepared meals to be distributed to vulnerable families across the Edinburgh community." During the visit, the royal couple also heard about the "vital support" that Turning Point Scotland is providing to tackle "cycles of crime and addiction". The account said: "Turning Point Scotland are working to break down cycles of crime and addiction - today The Duke and Duchess visited their center in North Lanarkshire to hear about the vital support that the organization provides to those facing complex and challenging situations." In a post addressing the trip as a whole, they added: "Addiction and violence are among the most challenging social issues we face as a society. "Scotland isn't alone in trying to tackle these challenges but the organizations we saw today showcased that work is being done to reframe this. "It's also a reminder that for many of those affected by addiction and violence, the root causes can be traced back to the earliest years of a person's life."



ther action could soon be taken. He told DailyMail.com: "Wage theft and other workplace violations are a widespread problem in Los Angeles. "My firm is currently investigating other potential viola-

tions against these defendants, as well as other powerful families and businesses on behalf of everyday workers." Meanwhile, a spokesperson for Kim has revealed she hopes the issue can be "amicably resolved soon". The spokesperson said: "These workers were hired and paid through a third-party vendor hired by Kim to provide ongoing services. Kim is not party to the agreement made between the vendor and their workers, therefore she is not responsible for how the vendor manages their business and the agreements they have made directly with their staff. "Kim has never not paid a vendor for their services and hopes that the issue between these workers and the vendor who hired them can be amicably resolved soon."



AfroGames e-sports team members (from left to right) Joao Barbosa, 17, Daniel de Paula, 19, Ronald Nascimento, 19, Yuri Souza, 20, Gabriela Ferreira, 19, and Thiago Pestana, 21, pose for a picture at the Vigario Geral favela, where the NGO AfroReggae headquarters are located, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.



AfroGames e-sports team members Gabriela Ferreira (left), 19, Thiago Pestana (center), 21, and Yuri Souza (right), 20, play a video game called League of Legends (LoL) during a training session at the NGO AfroReggae headquarters of the Vigario Geral favela in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.



Children play a video game called League of Legends (LoL) during a game tactics class at the NGO AfroReggae headquarters. — AFP photos

Brazil's favela gamers dream big

Coming of age in the Brazilian favela of Vigario Geral, Luiz Augusto Jr used to spend his money playing video games. Now, he makes a living as a gamer. Augusto, 23, was working in construction as a stonemason's apprentice three years ago when his life took a turn. An avid gamer, he got involved with AfroGames, a charitable project to give young people in Rio de Janeiro's impoverished favela neighborhoods access to the multi-billion-dollar gaming industry.

The project gave him training and a grant to launch his own channel online, where he posts gaming content under the moniker of "AFG Sr Madrugada" and plays a mean game of "Grand Theft Auto" live for



AfroGames e-sports team members Gabriela Ferreira (left), 19, Ronald Nascimento (center), 19, and Thiago Pestana (right), 21, attend a physical training session at the NGO AfroReggae headquarters.

Augusto is the first live-streaming gamer sponsored by the project, which was launched by AfroReggae, a non-profit organization that runs art and education programs. Around 100 young gamers now participate in AfroGames, whose activities are sponsored by companies including Brazilian airline GOL and media powerhouse Grupo Globo. The project offers programming and English classes, and has set up a gaming center in Vigario Geral, with top-of-the-line computers and mentors to help young gamers learn. It has also launched a professional gaming team-AFG eSports-whose six members earn minimum wage, 1,100 reais (\$210) a month, and prepare for tournaments with the help of a coach, a psychologist and a fitness trainer.

They made their debut at the "League

of Legends" world tournament in 2019. The popular battle game's championships handed out \$2.2 million in prizes that year. Augusto, meanwhile, receives a monthly grant of 600 reais for his webcasts. "It's brought me recognition in the favela. And I want to go even farther. I want to be an influencer and a content producer. I'm learning to do that here," he said.

Bringing diversity to gaming

The global gaming industry will generate estimated revenues of \$180 billion this year, according to specialist firm Newzoo-more than double the \$74 billion forecast for the music and film industry. It is not an easy world to access from the favelas of Brazil, where computers and gaming consoles are far too expensive for poor families' budgets. The idea for AfroGames



Children play a video game called League of Legends (LoL) during a game tactics class at the NGO AfroReggae headquarters of the Vigario Geral favela, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

came from Ricardo Chantilly, a former music executive who is friends with AfroReggae's directors.

"They wanted to do a music project, but I told them eSports was the way to go. We set up a meeting for me to show them my idea," he said. In his presentation, he included pictures from international and Brazilian gaming tournaments, with packed gymnasiums where not a single black or brown face could be seen. "We realized we weren't represented in those pictures. So we said, 'Why don't we put a team together from the favela?'" said AfroReggae co-director William Reis. The project is now planning to expand to another Rio favela, Cantagalo, with an eSports arena to hold what Reis is billing as "the first favela gaming championships." "When I was a kid, friends would

get together and form a rock band," said Chantilly. "Today, they put together an eSports team. Gaming is the new rock-'n-roll."

Up next: Sexism

AFG eSports team members train five days a week, in addition to English classes. In another trailblazing move for the gaming world, which has faced accusations of sexist abuse of female players, the team includes one young woman: 19-year-old Gabriela Evelyn, known by her gamer name, "AFG Haru." "When we're playing, being a woman makes no difference," she said. "But if someone cracks some kind of joke, I just play harder so I can beat them. Then I say, 'See? You just lost to a girl.'" — AFP



AfroGames e-sports team member Gabriela Ferreira, 19, plays a video game called League of Legends (LoL) during a game tactics class.

his fans. "I used to spend a good part of my salary playing at a LAN house (a gaming center or cyber cafe) here in the favela," he said. "When I went to AfroGames, my mom and grandmother thought I could never make money playing video games. But they supported me, and here I am," he told AFP.



Chef Bun Lai prepares to make fried cicada sushi at Fort Totten Park in Washington, DC. — AFP photos



Cicadas are seen in a jar as a charcoal fire is started before they are cooked for a sushi recipe by Chef Bun Lai.



Fried cicadas are rolled into a sushi roll by Chef Bun Lai.



A man eats a fried cicada sushi roll prepared by Chef Bun Lai.

CICADA SUSHI, ANYONE? US CHEF SERVES UP SUSTAINABLE 'BROOD X' DELICACY

After 17 years underground, swarms of cicadas are emerging across the eastern United States—and for one Washington chef, the rare bug invasion was his cue for a cookout, with a side of food ethics. Bun Lai, an advocate for the sustainable food movement, invited locals for an insect hunt in a city park followed by a taste of his fried cicada sushi. "In a world where we're suffering from the biggest pandemic in history—which is not Covid, but diet-related diseases—we're going to have to take a revolutionary approach to how we're used to eating," he said.

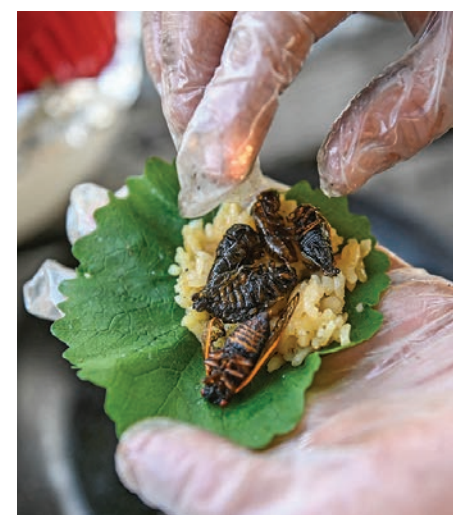
Over the weekend, the Hong Kong-born American chef showed residents how to harvest, cook and prepare cicadas as a

way to talk about alternative methods of farming and eating. Billions of "Brood X" cicadas are appearing in US states including Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Indiana and Tennessee. Using his Instagram and Twitter accounts, Bun announced when he would be catching and cooking a few—and then sharing them free of charge. "Free cicada hunt and cookout," Bun tweeted. "Bring ingredients to cook with and join me in getting creative or just eat!"

For those who answered the call, the culinary adventure began by collecting some of the tastiest-looking bugs. Stella Roque, a 36-year-old who grew up with a fear of insects, was not overly eager, but

she viewed it as a way to overcome her phobia. "I'm here today because Bun Lai invited me to try cooked cicadas, and I thought it was going to be an interesting experience," she said. "I decided to come along, given that I had heard about the whole cicada apocalypse happening in the area." And she's not alone in trying some creepy-crawly cuisine. Cicada tacos are popular menu items in restaurants just now, according to The Washingtonian magazine. However, Bun cautioned against cicadas becoming a "gourmet food," fearing they could even be "eaten away like we have with so many species that we've become obsessed with over time."

The group collected cicadas and edible greens from around the park under Bun's guidance. The cicadas were then placed in a jar near other fresh ingredients beside a charcoal fire. The chef seasoned the cicadas with salt before frying them in a large skillet. Finally, the fried insects were rolled into sushi, getting wrapped in large leaves with rice and vegetables, before being served. Roque, expecting the worst, said she was in fact "delightfully surprised." "I was actually terrified when holding it in my hand," she said. "But... it was actually really tasty." — AFP



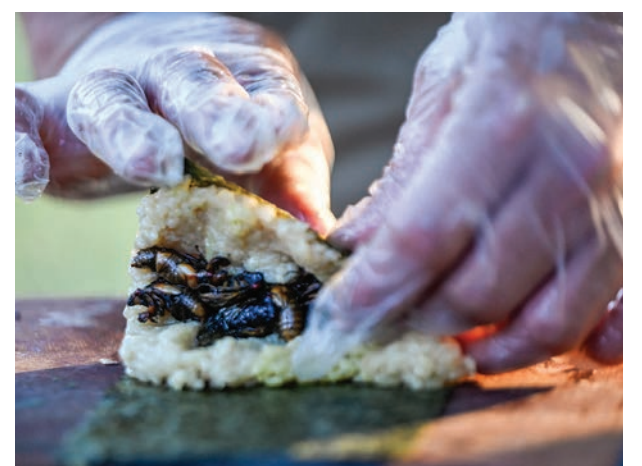
Fried cicadas are rolled into a sushi roll by Chef Bun Lai.



Fried cicadas are rolled into a sushi roll by Chef Bun Lai.



Cicadas are fried as they are prepared for a sushi recipe by Chef Bun Lai.



Fried cicadas are rolled into a sushi roll by Chef Bun Lai.

Lifestyle | Features

MISS UNIVERSE'S DRESS STOLEN FROM KUWAIT-BASED LEBANESE DESIGNER



Lebanese designer Nadim Soudaiha



Miss Universe 2020 Andrea Meza



By Nawara Fattahova

The shimmering red fringe gown worn by Miss Universe 2020 Andrea Meza from Mexico while being crowned on May 16, 2021 was allegedly copied from a gown designed by Nadim Soudaiha, a Lebanese designer based in Kuwait. Soudaiha was surprised by the intellectual theft of one of his gowns, which he designed four years ago. "Actually the international media found out the dress that Miss Universe was wearing during the ceremony was copied from my design, but in a different color," he told Kuwait Times.

Pictures of Soudaiha's golden gown were posted in 2017 on his personal account on Instagram, as well as on the account of La Bourjoisie with a detailed video. He also participated with this design in a fashion show held in Kuwait in the same year. "American singer Carrie Underwood also wore it in 2017 during a popular awards show, where she was the main host," he added.

"It took me around 10 days to design this dress that was made from tulle with

Swarovski crystals and fringe beads. But stylist Jacob de Alba revealed in an Instagram post that Andrea's gown was designed by Ivis Lenin, and that this haute couture dress took almost a year to put together," Soudaiha said.

Soudaiha came to Kuwait 17 years ago and started working for La Bourjoisie. He is saddened that his design appeared at a huge event like Miss Universe but his name was not mentioned. "On the other hand, there is a positive side to the story - that my designs have reached faraway places, and although this design was old, it was copied for such a big occasion. I have mixed feelings towards what happened," he added.

According to Soudaiha, this story gets more interesting as he is originally from Mexico. "The designer of the stolen dress is Mexican, the Miss Universe winner is also Mexican and my grandmother is Mexican as well. I think this information drew media attention, which is why they published the story," he concluded.

Italian Eurovision winner

returns negative test after drug furor

Damiano David, the flamboyant singer for Italy's Eurovision-winning rockers Maneskin, tested negative for drugs, the contest organizers said Monday, following a furor over speculation he snorted cocaine at the final. The red lederhosen-clad vocalist was tested after footage of him leaning over a table in the hospitality area of the competition in Rotterdam went viral. Eurovision, the kitsch annual televised pop music extravaganza watched by hundreds of millions each year, is put together by the

points with their song "Zitti e Buoni". "We wish to congratulate Maneskin once again and wish them huge success," the EBU said. "We look forward to working with our Italian member Rai on producing a spectacular Eurovision Song Contest in Italy next year."

French fury

Such was the furor that even the French government weighed in, seeing grounds for disqualification if David had tested positive. France's Europe minister

president of France's public broadcasting group, however, said Monday that France would not contest its second-place finish, no matter the speculation. David was asked about the footage during a press conference early on Sunday, and said he had been looking down because guitarist Thomas Raggi had broken a glass. "I don't use drugs. Please, guys. Don't say that really, no cocaine. Please, don't say that," said David, who sprayed his band mates with champagne during the conference.

The four-piece, which also features Victoria De Angelis on bass and Ethan Torchio on drums, told fans on Twitter: "We still can't believe what's going on, these last few days have been incredible and this is just the beginning. "Our new album 'Teatro D'Ira' has just gone platinum, and so has 'Le Parole Lontane'. This is all thanks to you." "We can't wait to go on tour all around the world and share our music with all of you."

UK says don't blame Brexit

Italy is one of Eurovision's "Big Five" along with Britain, France, Germany and Spain, who automatically qualify for the finals each year. Meanwhile Britain's crushing "nul points" was down to the poor selection process, not bad blood over Brexit, a senior minister insisted Monday. James Newman scored zero points from both the jury and public vote for his song "Embers"-in only the second time the country has failed to win any points at all.

The last time it happened was in 2003 after an off-key performance by the group Jemini. But Saturday's poor showing was the second year in a row that Britain came in last place. "I think there is a fundamental problem with the way that we are choosing our performances and singers," international trade minister Liz Truss told LBC radio. But she dismissed a suggestion voters passed over the UK entry because of the divisive and tortuous departure from the European Union. "I don't think it's a post-Brexit snub. I think that we need to have more competition to get the right entrant," said Truss.—AFP



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

European Broadcasting Union. The Geneva-based EBU said that following allegations of drug use backstage, it had reviewed the facts, including checking all available footage.

It said David voluntarily underwent a drugs test on Monday "which has returned a negative result seen by the EBU". "No drug use took place in the Green Room and we consider the matter closed. "We are alarmed that inaccurate speculation leading to fake news has overshadowed the spirit and the outcome of the event and unfairly affected the band." Favorites Maneskin fought off stiff competition from France and Switzerland, surging to victory on Saturday on the back of the public vote to win with 524

Clement Beaune had called for "total transparency". "I think there needs to be no doubt here," he told RMC radio. "If there is a problem, there are penalties... Provisions are made for sanctioning measures, including potential disqualification in case of problems," he said. French hopes had been riding high on singer Barbara Pravi, who was a bookmakers' favorite to end France's 44-year Eurovision drought with her moody ballad "Voilà." But she was edged out at the last minute by a surge in public votes for Maneskin.

"I don't want to be a sore loser," Beaune said, but "in terms of image, we can't let people think that such competitions can result in such behavior." The

Fast & Furious star
Cena apologizes
for calling Taiwan
a country

"Fast & Furious 9" star John Cena made a U-turn yesterday, apologizing to Chinese fans after he called Taiwan a "country" and sparked outrage in the world's largest movie market. Beijing sees democratic, self-ruled Taiwan as part of its territory which is to be seized one day, by force if necessary, and rages at any diplomatic attempts to recognize the island as an independent nation.

But American wrestling star turned actor Cena left his diplomatic lane during a trip to Taiwan in early May to promote the franchise of action movies about fast cars, making the "country" comment during a fan meet. Yesterday, as outrage billowed across China's social media, he released an apology on the Weibo platform in conversational-level Mandarin.

"I did many, many interviews for Fast & Furious 9, and I made a mistake during one interview," Cena said in the video, without repeating the controversial term. "I must say, which is very very important, that I love and respect China and Chinese people. I'm very, very sorry for my mistake. I apologize." The video was played 2.4 million times on the strictly-controlled social media site, while Chinese media leapt on the apology. Fast & Furious 9 smashed through the box office during its May 21 release in China last weekend, raking in \$148 million, according to the nationalist Global Times newspaper. But social media users appeared only partially appeased.—AFP

Pacific readies
for 'Super
Blood Moon'
celestial show

Stargazers across the Pacific Rim can cast their eyes skyward tonight and behold a "Super Blood Moon", as the heavens align to bring a rare celestial twin treat. The first total lunar eclipse in two years is happening at the same time as the moon is closest to Earth, in what astronomers say will be a once-in-a-decade show. If the skies are clear, anyone living between Australia and the central United States will be able to see an enormous, bright, orange-red moon. The main event will be between 1111-1125 GMT-late evening in Sydney and pre-dawn in Los Angeles-when the moon will be entirely in the Earth's shadow. The moon will darken and turn red-a



View of the super blood moon in Asuncion. — AFP

result of sunlight refracting off the Earth's rim onto the lunar surface-basking our satellite in a sunrise- or sunset-tinged glow. Unlike a solar eclipse, the phenomenon will be safely visible to the naked eye. This eclipse will be different because it happens during a "super moon", when the moon passes a mere 360,000 kilometers (225,000 miles) from Earth. At that point, it can appear 30 percent brighter and 14 percent larger than at its farthest point-a difference of around 50,000 kilometers (30,000 miles).

"Interest has been high," said Andrew Jacobs curator of astronomy at Sydney Observatory, who is hosting a COVID-safe viewing event with telescopes and expert speakers. "I'm expecting a clear night." The event will also be livestreamed, and 20,000 users have already

registered. For those wanting to see the event in person, Jacobs predicted the best view will be in "Australia, New Zealand, and large parts of the Pacific. New Guinea also gets a good view." "The Americas see it in the early morning, but they don't necessarily see all parts of the eclipse," he said. "Europe and Africa and the Middle East are missing out completely, on this particular one." According to NASA's Bill Cooke, "folks in Hawaii and the Aleutian Islands will get to see the entirety of this eclipse-it will be quite a show for them."

Lunar eclipses have not always been so warmly anticipated throughout history. In many cultures lunar and solar eclipses were seen as harbingers of doom. The Inca believed a lunar eclipse occurred when a jaguar had eaten the moon. Some Aboriginal Australian groups believed it signaled someone on a journey had been hurt or killed. In "King Lear" William Shakespeare warned, "eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us". But so far no apocalyptic consequences have been recorded from these celestial shows and, assuming all goes well today, the next Super Blood Moon is expected to take place in 2033. — AFP



In this file photo taken on March 01, 2005 British journalist Martin Bashir arrives at Santa Barbara County Superior Court in Santa Maria to be the first witness to be called at Michael Jackson's child sex abuse trial. — AFP photos

BBC announces
internal probe
into Diana
interview fiasco

The BBC said Monday it would review its editorial policies and governance after an independent report found one of its journalists used deception to secure a landmark interview with Princess Diana. The British broadcaster's board said the internal probe would be conducted by a group of non-executive directors led by Nick Serota, its senior independent director, and report back by September. "We must not just assume that mistakes of the past cannot be repeated today-we must make sure that this is the case," the board of governors said in a lengthy statement.

"We think it is right that we review the effectiveness of the BBC's editorial policies and governance in detail," it added. An investigation by retired senior judge John Dyson concluded last Thursday that journalist Martin Bashir had tricked Diana's brother Charles Spencer into helping to arrange the 1995 interview, in which she spoke candidly about her troubled marriage to Prince Charles. Bashir commissioned fake bank statements that falsely suggested some of Diana's closest aides were being paid by the security services to keep tabs on her.

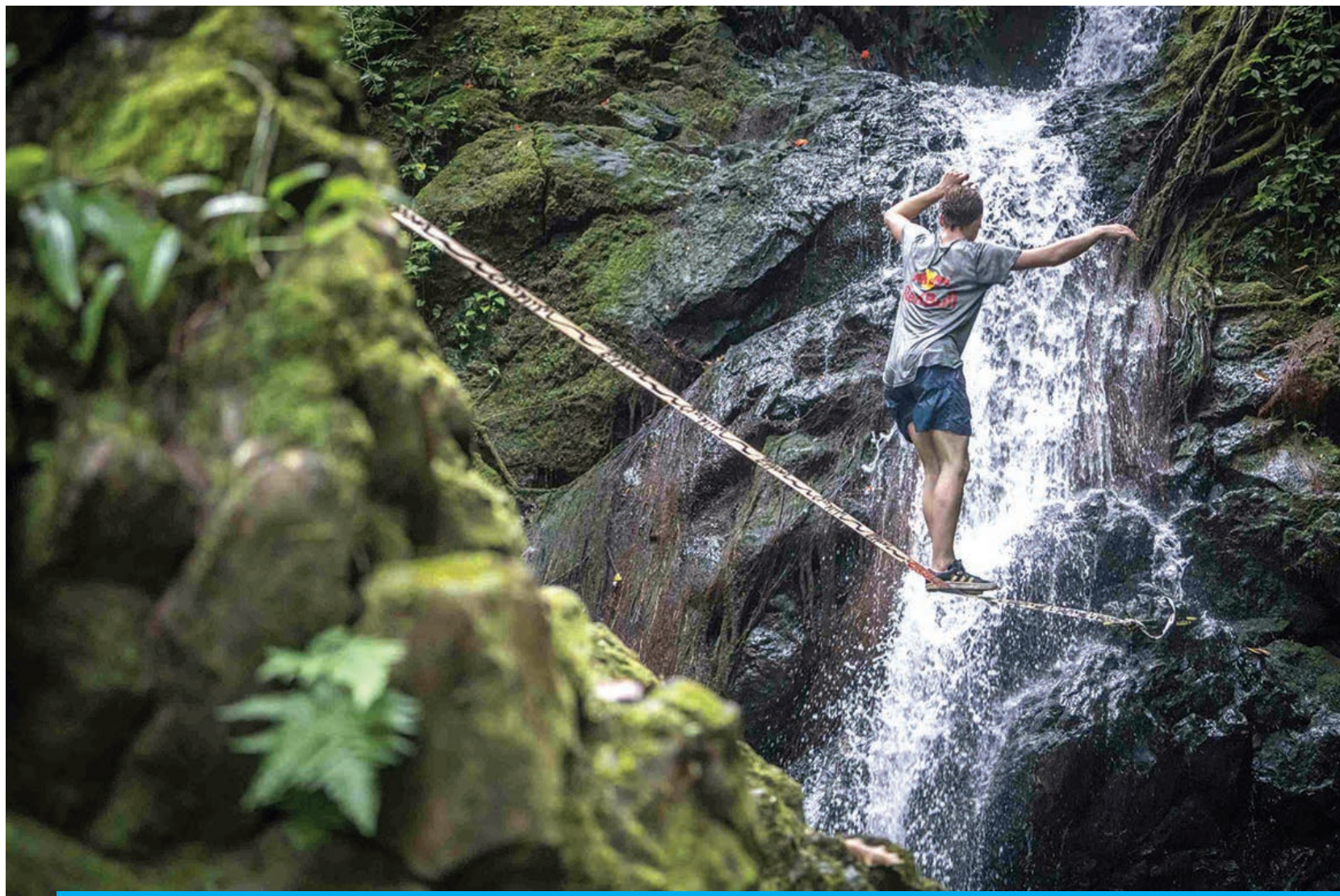
He then showed them to Spencer in a successful bid to earn their trust and land the sensational sit-down. Dyson's report also found the BBC's own internal probes into longstanding allegations of impropri-

ety by Bashir were "woefully ineffective". Princes William and Harry, Diana's two sons, have severely criticized Bashir and the BBC over their conduct, saying his actions contributed to events that led to Diana's death in a car crash nearly two years after the interview.



In this file photo taken on August 19, 1995 Princess Diana (left) and her son Harry (right) watch veterans as they march past a dais on the Mall as part of the commemorations of VJ Day.

Photo of the Day



Alex Mason performs at Red Bull Slackladder in Hawaii. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

'No change' on Olympics, Japan says after US virus travel warning

TOKYO: A new US travel warning for Japan over virus risks will not affect this summer's pandemic-postponed Olympic Games, the Japanese government and Tokyo 2020 organizers said yesterday. The US State Department advisory released Monday urges citizens to avoid travel to Japan, where the borders are already closed to almost all foreigners. It cites government health advice, as well as "secondary factors such as commercial flight availability, restrictions on US citizen entry, and impediments to obtaining COVID test results within three calendar days".

The advisory comes with less than two months until the opening ceremony of the Tokyo Olympics, which were postponed last year as the pandemic took hold. Japan's government said the measure would not affect the Games. "It is our understanding that there is no change to the US position to support Japan's effort to hold the Olympic and Paralympic Games," government spokesman Katsunobu Kato told a regular briefing.

He added that Japan had been told the decision was "not related" to the plans of the US Olympic delegation. Tokyo 2020 chief Seiko Hashimoto said she "didn't think it would impact the Games", adding the organizers would "do their best to prepare for the Olympics whose priority is safety and security".

The US Olympic and Paralympic Committee also said it remained confident that safety measures and frequent testing for athletes and staff "will allow for safe participation of Team USA athletes this summer".

A State Department spokesman said Washington understood "the careful considerations that the Japanese government and the International Olympic Committee are weighing as they prepare for the Tokyo Olympics this summer". "President Biden proudly supports the US athletes who have trained for these Games and will be competing in the best traditions of the Olympic spirit," he said.

Japan has seen a relatively small coronavirus outbreak, with around 12,000 deaths overall. But the



TOKYO: Seiko Hashimoto, President of the Tokyo 2020 Organizing Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, (left) listens to an explanation by Masayuki Kanda, Tokyo 2020 elective director of Transport, during her visit to Tsukiji Depot in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

country has been battling a fourth wave of infections that prompted the government to impose states of emergency in several places including Tokyo.

The measures largely involve closing restaurants early and banning the sale of alcohol at eateries and bars. Infection numbers are now declining in Tokyo and hard-hit Osaka, but reports suggest the emergency restrictions may still be extended for several weeks past their current May 31 expiry.

Japan's inoculation program has rolled out slowly, with just two percent of its population fully vaccinated

man who saved me," the runner, Zhang Xiaotao, wrote on Weibo. "Without him, I would have been left out there."

Zhu has been feted in China for his selfless actions, but the shepherd told state media that he is "just an ordinary person who did a very ordinary thing". Zhu rescued three men and three women, but regrets that he was unable to do more to help others who reportedly succumbed to hypothermia. "There were still

so far. The government aims to finish inoculating the over-65s by late July, when the Olympics begin, but ministers say the Games do not figure in their roll-out schedule, and no date has been announced for other age groups.

Public opinion in the country is still largely opposed to holding the Olympics this summer but organizers say the event can be held safely. The majority of athletes and others staying in the Olympic village will be vaccinated before they enter Japan, even though inoculation is not required to participate. — AFP

some people that could not be saved," he said. "There were two men who were lifeless and I couldn't do anything for them. I'm sorry."

The tragedy has thrown a renewed spotlight on the booming marathon and running industry in China, with authorities ordering sports competitions to improve safety. According to The Paper in Shanghai, five cross-country, marathon or other running races have been cancelled at short notice. — AFP



BAIYIN: This photo taken on Monday shows shepherd Zhu Keming, hailed as a hero in China for rescuing six ultramarathon runners when extreme weather hit the area leaving at least 20 dead, showing the cave dwelling where he sheltered the stricken athletes near the city of Baiyin, in China's northwestern Gansu province. — AFP

Shepherd hailed as hero in deadly China ultramarathon race

SHANGHAI: A shepherd has been hailed as a hero in China after it emerged that he saved six stricken runners during an ultramarathon in which 21 other competitors died. Zhu Keming was trending on the Twitter-like Weibo yesterday, three days after a 100-kilometre (60-mile) cross-country mountain race in the northwestern province of Gansu turned deadly in freezing rain, high winds and hail. The incident triggered outrage and mourning in China, as questions swirled over why organizers apparently ignored warnings about the incoming extreme weather.

Zhu was grazing his sheep on Saturday around lunchtime when the wind picked up, the rain came down and temperatures plunged, he told state media. He sought refuge in a cave where he had stored clothes and food for emergencies but while inside spotted one of the race's 172 competitors and checked to see what was wrong because he was standing still, apparently suffering cramps.

Zhu escorted the man back to the cave, massaged his freezing hands and feet, lit a fire and dried his clothes. Four more distressed runners made it into the cave and told the shepherd others were marooned outside, some unconscious.

Zhu headed outside once more and, braving hail and freezing temperatures, reached a runner lying on the ground. He carried him towards the shelter and wrapped him in blankets, almost certainly saving his life. "I want to say how grateful I am to the

Portugal to allow 16,500 spectators at Champions League final

LAUSANNE: Up to 16,500 spectators will be allowed to attend the Champions League final in Porto on Saturday, UEFA announced yesterday with the opening of ticket sales. The figure permitted by the Portuguese authorities is one-third of the capacity of the Estadio do Dragao which took over hosting the final in mid-May after Istanbul was ruled out by COVID-19 problems. UEFA had already allocated 6,000 tickets each to finalists Chelsea and Manchester City. To this will be added the traditional invitations, as well as "1,700 tickets reserved for the general public" which "will be sold on a first-come, first-served basis". Tickets be cost from 70 euros to 600 euros — against a range of 40 to 130 euros for tonight's Europa League final in Gdansk between Manchester United and Villarreal.

Because of the pandemic, spectators "will require proof of a negative COVID-19 test" to enter the stadium. Fans coming from abroad "will have to comply with border entry restrictions and requirements that will be in force". As Portugal is on the British government "green list" neither the players nor UK-based supporters will have to quarantine on their return home. The switch from Istanbul came after the UK authorities on May 7 put Turkey on their "red list" of the most severe travel conditions. While both finalists are two English, switching the final to the UK was ruled out because entry restrictions meant the media, officials and guests would need to quarantine before the match, which was not practicable. Portugal also hosted the "Final 8" in 2020 which allowed the Champions League to finish in the pandemic. — AFP

Nadal, Djokovic eye history as Roland Garros embraces quiet night

PARIS: Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic will set their sights on more Grand Slam history at Roland Garros as the French Open embraces a new and eerily empty era of night time tennis. A 14th title in Paris for Nadal would take him to a record-setting 21st major, surpassing the mark he shares with Roger Federer who has already written off his hopes of adding to his lone success in the French capital back in 2009.

Djokovic, the champion in 2016, can move to 19 Grand Slam titles with victory. That would make the world number one the first man in over half a century to win all four majors on multiple occasions. Nadal arrives in Paris buoyed by having defeated Djokovic in the Rome Masters final in what was the pair's 57th meeting.

It was Nadal's 10th title in the Italian capital. Not that he was reading too much into the statistics as far as Roland Garros is concerned. "I think I can work on a couple of things that I can do a little bit better," he insisted.

'Work right way'

"I just need to keep going. I know what I need to work on and I'm going to do it. Work, relax mentally, and work the right way." At last year's delayed Roland Garros, Nadal swept past Djokovic in straight sets in the final.

It was Nadal's 100th win at the tournament against just two losses since his 2005 title-winning debut. Giving Djokovic hope, however, is the knowledge that he was responsible for one of those losses, in the 2015 quarter-finals.

He is also a four-time runner-up although three of those defeats in the championship match came against the Spaniard. Only two men have previously managed to win all four of the Slams on more than one occasion — Roy Emerson and Rod Laver of Australia. Laver's achievement came back in 1969.

"I think I have a good chance to go all the way in Paris, but of course it's a long shot," said Djokovic who captured the season's first Grand Slam title in Australia for a ninth time in February. Federer, with his 40th birthday fast approaching, remains the sentimental favorite but his priority will be an assault on Wimbledon where he has been champion eight times.

Chasing pack

"I'm not so sure in the last 50 years of the French Open, somebody just rocks up at nearly 40 years old, being out for a year and a half, and wins everything straight," said Federer after losing his only clay court match this year in Geneva last week. Of the chasing pack, two-time runner-up Dominic Thiem is low on form and confidence. A run to the Madrid semi-finals was followed by a straight sets defeat to Cameron Norrie in his Lyon opener. World number two Daniil Medvedev has yet to win a match at Roland Garros in four attempts.

In Rome, he fell at the first hurdle and half-jokingly pleaded with the referee to disqualify him such is his dislike for clay. World number five Stefanos Tsitsipas is the most likely man to upset the odds of Nadal and Djokovic again making the final.

The 22-year-old Greek won the prestigious Monte Carlo clay court title in April, had match point before losing the Barcelona final to Nadal and then lifted the Lyon trophy. He has beaten Nadal on clay in Madrid in 2019 and stretched Djokovic to five sets at the 2020 French Open semi-finals. This year's Roland Garros will be the second taking place under the shadow of the coronavirus. — AFP

Sports

Solskjaer touts Europa League as start of renewed Man Utd success

GDANSK: Ole Gunnar Solskjaer will attempt to win his first trophy as Manchester United manager in tonight's Europa League final against Villarreal, confident that victory could ignite another sustained run of success at Old Trafford. The Norwegian, now 48, will forever be remembered for his late winner against Bayern Munich in the 1999 Champions League final, and Solskjaer is eager to further embed himself in the club's rich history. Having helped United secure successive top-four finishes for the first time since Alex Ferguson retired after the last of the club's Premier League titles in 2013, Solskjaer hopes to now end their four-year wait for silverware in Gdansk.

"You always feel pressure to win things at Manchester United. Progress in the league shows progress. The next step is to win trophies and challenge in the Premier League as well," he said. "Winning a trophy can give you belief but it can make you hungry for more. When you win things you just want to win more, you want to feel that sensation again of lifting trophies. I know my players will believe they can win it and that we can move on to better things, but when you get that taste of the first one, that's a big step in the right direction."

Solskjaer's first four semi-finals as United boss ended in defeat, including a 2-1 loss to eventual champions Sevilla in last season's remodeled Europa League. United crashed out in the Champions League group stage this term despite winning three of their first four games, heaping pressure on Solskjaer as rumours swirled about a possible move for Mauricio Pochettino.

A return of 10 points from nine matches saw United off to their worst league start since 1986-87, but, remarkably, Solskjaer's side became just the fourth to



WOLVERHAMPTON: Manchester United's Norwegian manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer gestures during the English Premier League football match between Wolverhampton Wanderers and Manchester United at the Molineux stadium in Wolverhampton, central England on May 23, 2021. — AFP

go through an English top-flight campaign undefeated away from home.

'Need to win'

Since replacing Jose Mourinho in December 2018, United's gradual improvement under Solskjaer has resulted in the club finishing sixth, third and, this season, second in the Premier League. "We've worked together two and a half years now and taken a step into the final after the near-misses we've had. To get to

a final is one thing, but when you get to a final you need to win it," said Solskjaer.

"Those nights when you win the trophy it brings everyone together, it's a celebration. When we won in '99 it didn't make me a better player. It didn't make us individually better players, but as a group we believed that we could go on to win more stuff and we comfortably won the league the next couple of seasons."

Only three starters from the 2-0 win over Ajax in the 2017 final remain at the club — Paul Pogba, Marcus Rashford and Juan Mata — with United seeking to end their longest run without a trophy since the 1980s. "This game's important for us. We're so close to being a team that can compete and win trophies every single season. Maybe winning this title, this Europa League, can give us that little push that we need," said Rashford.

Solskjaer will give captain Harry Maguire until Tuesday's final training session to prove his fitness, although the England defender is highly unlikely to play after damaging ankle ligaments two weeks ago. Another obstacle in United's way is Unai Emery, a three-time Europa League champion with Sevilla who has overseen a 14-match unbeaten run in Europe with Villarreal to reach his fifth final.

All four previous meetings between United and Villarreal have finished goalless. A similar outcome is entirely plausible in Poland, but this time there will be a winner and loser regardless. "It's going to be special. You've got to be proud to be able to lead a Manchester United team out to a final," said Solskjaer. "It's been a fantastic journey and, as we say in Norwegian, veien er malet (the goal is the journey). This is just a step on the road to bringing our Man United back." — AFP

City Football Group targets global domination

MONTEVIDEO: Manchester City have at last reached the Champions League final after a decade of Abu Dhabi investment, but the global ambitions of the club's owners stretch far beyond England's northwest. The English champions are the jewel in the crown of the City Football Group (CFG), a network of 10 clubs across five continents from Melbourne to Montevideo.

CFG's stated aim is to become the "first truly global football organisation", putting into place CEO Ferran Soriano's plans for the "Disneyfication" of the football industry. Pep Guardiola's men can complete a treble if they beat Chelsea in Porto with a fourth consecutive League Cup and fifth Premier League title in 10 years already secured. But it is not just in Manchester that CFG's investment and expertise is paying off on the pitch. Formed just seven years ago, Mumbai City became champions of India for the first time this year, while Melbourne City finished top of the regular season table in the A-League.

In Europe, Troyes have been promoted to France's top tier and Girona are on course for a return to La Liga via Spain's second division playoffs. But success for CFG is not measured purely on results. "Every club owned by City Football Group has individual objectives because every team is different," Javi Nolega, Montevideo City Torque's business director, told AFP. "You cannot ask of Montevideo City the same commercial objectives as New York."

The South American clubs, in the Uruguayan capital and Club Bolivar in Bolivia, are used as talent spotters and recruiters. "The point of the infrastructure is to attract the best young talent in Uruguay and the wider region," added Nolega. "We're working on other business models that can help us to achieve our objective, which is to attract young players to our academy, to get to the first team with Montevideo City and then sell them to other clubs within the City Football Group or other clubs." Even if a player never makes the grade to be deemed good enough to grace the Etihad Stadium, player trading can be highly lucrative. The £10 million (\$14 million) sale of former Melbourne City midfielder Aaron Mooy to Huddersfield in 2017 reportedly earned CFG more than they paid to buy their stake in the Australian club.

By merging a global brand with interest in local markets, CFG aim grow City's commercial income to the level where they will not be dependent on Abu Dhabi investment to compete financially with traditional giants such as Manchester United, Real Madrid and Barcelona. After CFG bought a stake in Nissan-controlled Yokohama Marinos in 2014, the Japanese car giant agreed a sponsorship deal with all CFG clubs.—AFP

High stakes for Emery as Villarreal aim for Europa League

MADRID: Unai Emery will add to his already sparkling Europa League record if Villarreal beat Manchester United tonight but victory would also turn an otherwise mediocre first season in charge into a great one. Villarreal had just finished fifth in La Liga when they appointed Emery as coach last summer, with the Spaniard's remit to take the club closer to winning titles and securing Champions League qualification.

He could achieve both in one fell swoop in Gdansk, where an upset against the much-fancied United would not only clinch Villarreal their first ever major trophy but also a place in Europe's premier tournament next season. "We respect United but we think we're capable of winning this trophy," said Emery last week. "We are going to play with the confidence we've shown throughout the whole competition."

The drop-off though with a defeat would be huge, given Villarreal would not only end the season without silverware but shorn of a place even in the next Europa League. Their loss to Real Madrid on Saturday meant Emery's side finished seventh in La Liga, two spots lower and two points fewer than they managed last season, and enough only to qualify for UEFA's new and less lucrative Europa Conference League. There is no real sense yet of Emery being under pressure, in part because so much depends on how Villarreal fare against United, in what is their first European final since winning the Intertoto Cup in 2004.



MADRID: Villarreal's Spanish coach Unai Emery gestures during the Spanish league football match Real Madrid CF against Villarreal CF at the Alfredo Di Stefano stadium in Vallebebas, on the outskirts of Madrid, on May 22, 2021. — AFP

"Villarreal have reached the Europa League semis three times before so if we hadn't got to the final again it would have been hard for us," said the club's former midfielder Marcos Senna, who was in the team that won the Intertoto Cup 17 years ago. "Manchester United are clear favourites because of their history and their budget. We've snuck through the back door a bit but if they play well, I think they can spring a surprise."

Fifth final appearance

Emery knows what it takes to win the Europa League, having triumphed three times in a row with Sevilla between 2014 and 2016, the last time by beating Liverpool 3-1 in the final in Basel. He also reached the final two years ago with Arsenal, only to lose to Chelsea.

"Manchester United were the favorites from the start to win this tournament and they've managed to reach the final," said Emery. "There were other teams who were favorites and haven't done that but we have always seen ourselves as a contender."

Villarreal are also flying the flag for Spain as the one team that denied the English Premier League a clean sweep of European finalists, with Manchester City up against Chelsea in the Champions League final on Saturday.—AFP



BERLIN: Picture taken on July 15, 2014 shows Germany's head coach Joachim Loew (right) and then Germany's assistant coach Hansi Flick celebrating during a victory parade of Germany's football national team at Berlin's landmark Brandenburg Gate to celebrate their FIFA World Cup title. — AFP

Flick to take over as Germany coach after Euro 2020

BERLIN: Outgoing Bayern Munich coach Hansi Flick will succeed his former boss Joachim Loew in the Germany dugout after Euro 2020, the German Football Association (DFB) announced yesterday. "It's all gone surprisingly quickly, but I am very happy to be Germany coach from the autumn," said Flick, 56, after signing a three-year contract to succeed Loew. "I am hugely excited, because I see the class of players, and especially young players, which we have in Germany."

Flick, who was assistant coach to Loew when Germany won the 2014 World Cup, has long been the favorite to take over from Loew, who will leave the job after 15 years in charge later this year, a year before his contract ends. "He was top of my wish list from the very start," said national team director Oliver Bierhoff.

Flick, who also worked as DFB sporting director between 2014 and 2017, has made a name for himself as one of Europe's top coaches in two glittering years at perennial Bundesliga champions Bayern Munich. After taking over from predecessor Niko Kovac with the club in a mid-season crisis, he led Bayern to only

their second ever treble in 2020. The following year, he took the club to a ninth successive Bundesliga title.

Yet after a feud with sporting director Hasan Salihamidzic over recruitment, Flick asked for his contract to be terminated prematurely at the end of the season. He will be succeeded on the Bayern bench by 33-year-old coaching prodigy Julian Nagelsmann, who joins the Bavarians from Bundesliga rivals RB Leipzig next season.

Flick was the obvious choice as the new Germany boss as Jurgen Klopp has made it clear he is happy at Liverpool. Loew has struggled since leading Germany to triumph in Brazil in 2014. The holders crashed out in the group stage four years later in Russia and the squad was riven with divisions.

Veteran players Thomas Mueller and Mats Hummels were told their international careers were over after the debacle but Loew has now recalled the pair for the European Championship after both had impressive seasons for Bayern and Borussia Dortmund respectively.

So the big question for Flick will be how to take forward one of world football's powers — will he dispense with the veterans and start afresh with young stars like Timo Werner and Kai Havertz, who have helped Chelsea reach Saturday's Champions League final? Or will he retain Mueller, who has shone for his Bayern team? Flick's answers are only likely to come once he sees how Germany perform at the Euro in Loew's swansong.—AFP

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EMERGENCY 112

Bucks thrash Heat to go 2-0

Nuggets bounce back to even playoff series with Blazers

LOS ANGELES: The Milwaukee Bucks produced an exhibition of three-point shooting to crush the Miami Heat as the Denver Nuggets bounced back to level their NBA first round playoff series with victory over Portland on Monday.

Bryn Forbes erupted for five threes in the first half and Giannis Antetokounmpo finished with 31 points to give the Bucks a resounding 132-98 win over last year's NBA Finals runners-up. Overall, the Bucks made 22 of 53 three-point attempts, with Antetokounmpo kicking off the rout with a 28-foot pullup from outside the arc for the first points of the game.

After an overtime thriller in game one on Saturday, the Bucks were in no mood to leave anything to chance in game two, erupting for 46 points in the first quarter alone. The Bucks made 15 of 29 three-point attempts in the first half, surging into leads of more than 30 points at various stages of a one-sided encounter.

They maintained a healthy cushion throughout, with the Heat unable to get within 20 points of the Bucks after briefly clawing their way back to a 19-point deficit early in the second quarter. Antetokounmpo added 13 rebounds and six assists, while Forbes finished with 22 points off the bench.

"After game one I didn't look at the stat sheet," Antetokounmpo said. "At the end of the day a win is a win. All I care about is winning the game, putting my teammates in a position to win a game. It feels good when guys are knocking down shots. We were seeing the ball go in, we were making stops, it felt good. We've got to stay locked in for game three."

Khris Middleton added 17 points including three three-pointers as six Bucks players made double-digit totals. Dewayne Dedmon led the Miami scorers with 19 points from the bench, while Goran Dragic added 18. Bam Adebayo was restricted to 16 points, while Jimmy Butler was held to just 10. Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said the team would need to make a big improvement for game three in Miami on Thursday.

"They're a great first quarter team when they get it going and clicking," Spoelstra said of the Bucks. "This game just got out of hand so quickly, but you do have to respect what they did tonight. They were really explosive in those first and third quarters."

Nuggets bounce back

In Denver, Nuggets ace Nikola Jokic served up a 38-point display as the third seeds overpowered the Portland Trail Blazers by 128-109. Jokic made 15 of 20 from the field with eight rebounds and five assists as Denver battled back to level the series at 1-1 after being jolted by the Blazers in Saturday's opener.

Portland talisman Damian Lillard led the scoring with 42 points but it was not enough against a rugged Denver defense. Six Denver players cracked double figures, with Jokic receiving scoring support from Michael Porter with 18 points and Paul Millsap with 15.

Aaron Gordon finished with 13 points while Facundo Campazzo and Monte Morris chipped in with 12 apiece. "The difference tonight was we created open shots," Serbian star Jokic said afterwards.



MILWAUKEE: Giannis Antetokounmpo #34 of the Milwaukee Bucks dunks in the third quarter against the Miami Heat during Game Two of their Eastern Conference first-round playoff series between the Milwaukee Bucks and the Miami Heat at Fiserv Forum on Monday in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. — AFP

"In game one we didn't create open shots. It was a tough night for us. But today our bench was good, everybody contributed. It was a real team effort."

Jokic said Denver will need to produce a stronger defensive effort as the

series moves to Portland for game three on Thursday. "They're a talented team, a dangerous team, but we can fight at least," said Jokic, who was encouraged by Denver's aggressive approach against Portland. "It seems

like we like it," Jokic said. "When they started picking up the aggressiveness, we did it too. We kind of meet their aggressiveness. Maybe we were a little bit higher, but we were still controlling it." — AFP

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