



5 Boris Johnson weds fiancée in 'secret' weekend ceremony



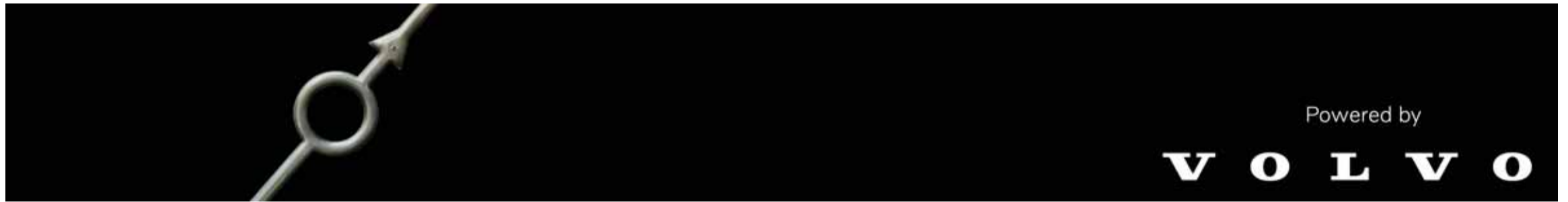
7 Hunger stalks India's poor in pandemic double blow



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Panel reduces fine for not wearing facemask to KD 50

MPs call to scrap Kuwait Mosafer app • Jaber Causeway vaccination center opens



KUWAIT: Motorists visit a COVID-19 vaccination center that opened on Jaber Causeway yesterday. — KUNA

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The National Assembly health committee yesterday agreed to reduce fines for not wearing a facemask and abiding by health conditions amid the coronavirus pandemic from KD 100 to KD 50. The reduction came while the committee was studying a government-sponsored law proposing penalties for those who do not comply with health measures during pandemics. The law must be approved by the Assembly to become effective.

A number of lawmakers yesterday strongly criticized measures applied by the civil aviation obliging travelers to register with the Kuwait Mosafer application and the requirement that travelers must have been vaccinated.

MPs Saad Al-Khanfour, head of the Assembly health committee, and Hisham Al-Saleh called for scrapping the application because of the large number of technical problems associated with the app that people must register with to be able to travel out of Kuwait or return to the country. Khanfour said travelers have encountered a number of problems, especially when abroad, including being unable to update the app, failure to respond to

questions and even downloading the app to their mobiles.

He said linking the return of citizens to their country with an app that has many technical problems is unacceptable, and accordingly this requirement must be cancelled and simply replaced with a PCR test certificate. Saleh said the app must be scrapped and those responsible for it should be held to account, adding that he has submitted a proposal calling to scrap the app.

MP Osama Al-Shaheen asked Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Al-Sabah, who is also chairman of the civil aviation authority, about who designed the app and if an aviation company, which is the contractor and main beneficiary of the app, has any link to its design. MP Mohammad Al-Huwaila called on the government to reverse the decision banning unvaccinated citizens from leaving the country, saying the decision is against the constitution.

Meanwhile, the health ministry announced yesterday the inauguration of a COVID-19 vaccination center for motorists on the southern island of Jaber Causeway. Official health ministry spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said the center is equipped with

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News in brief

Outdoor work ban from June 1

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Manpower announced yesterday it will enforce a ban on working in outdoor areas during afternoon hours (11 am to 4 pm) from June 1 until the end of August. PAM Director General Ahmad Al-Mousa said inspection teams will follow up the implementation of the decision during the next three months. The authority will organize surprise inspection tours at different locations to monitor any violations and take legal action against violators. — KUNA

Toxic liquor kills 25

LUCKNOW: At least 25 people have died after drinking toxic alcohol in northern India, police said yesterday. Police have arrested 10 men for selling the liquor in sprawling Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state. "So far 25 persons have died and a few others are admitted in the hospital and are undergoing treatment. Ten persons have been arrested," Ajab Singh, a police spokesperson, told AFP. Local media reported that the liquor was purchased on Thursday from a shop run by two brothers. — AFP

Envoy dies on beach island

BANGKOK: Ukraine's ambassador to Thailand died early yesterday on the southern beach island of Koh Lipe while on vacation with his son, police said, with the cause of death still undetermined. Andrii Beshta is a 45-year-old career diplomat who was appointed as Ukraine's ambassador in Thailand in 2016. The National Police said yesterday Beshta was found dead around 5:30 am (2230 GMT) in his room at a hotel resort in Koh Lipe, an idyllic beach island popular with travelers for its crystal-blue waters. — AFP

Qatar charges Kenyan guard

DOHA: A Kenyan security guard detained by Qatar has been charged with receiving money from a "foreign agent" to spread disinformation within the Gulf state, officials said yesterday. Malcolm Bidali's case was referred to the public prosecution "following a thorough investigation by the authorities," it said in a statement. Malcolm Bidali, under his pen name Noah, published a series of articles on the plight of foreigners who labor in the gas-rich host of the 2022 World Cup, including on vast construction projects for the football tournament. — AFP

Rally calls for end to US aid to Zionists

WASHINGTON: More than 1,000 rallied Saturday in Washington in support of Palestinians and calling for an end to US aid to the Zionist entity. The demonstration on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial came as a ceasefire that ended 11 days of intense fighting between the Zionist entity and the Islam movement Hamas in the Gaza Strip has so far held.

"We are hoping to send a clear message to the United States govern-

ment that the days of supporting the (Zionist) state without repercussions are over," one of the demonstrators, 39-year-old Washington lawyer Sharif Silmi, said as he stood in the crowd where many protesters held red, white, green and black Palestinian flags. "We will stand against any politician that continues to fund weapons to (the Zionist entity). We will oppose them, we will vote against them, we will fund their opponents, until we vote them out of office," said Silmi.

Lama Alahmad, a resident of neighboring Virginia who is of Palestinian origin, said US public opinion is turning in favor of the Palestinian cause. "There is a huge change" going on in

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WASHINGTON: Supporters of Palestine hold a rally at the Lincoln Memorial yesterday. — AFP

Call for action, inclusion at climate summit

SEOUL: World leaders yesterday called for more action and inclusion of all countries in the global drive towards a cleaner and greener planet at a climate summit hosted virtually by South Korea. Climate change is a major threat to global growth, with perils ranging from declines in crop yields,

extreme weather that devastates tourist economies, disease outbreaks and other catastrophes that would sap productivity.

South Korea - which recently announced plans to cut finance for international coal projects - is seeking a bigger role in the global initiative to go green. "South Korea will play a responsible role as a bridging nation between developing and advanced nations," said President Moon Jae-in as he opened the 2021 Partnering for Green Growth and the Global Goals 2030, or P4G, summit.

The two-day summit is the second of its kind following the inaugural meeting held in Copenhagen in

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SEOUL: South Korean President Moon Jae-in speaks at the opening ceremony of the P4G summit yesterday. — AFP

Dubai property booms as rich flee lockdowns

DUBAI: Dubai's property market is powering out of a six-year malaise as "lockdown dodgers" and wealthy international investors drive a buying frenzy that is breaking records and fueling an economic recovery. Luxury villas are the hottest segment in the market, with European buyers in particular seeking homes on Dubai's signature Palm Jumeirah man-made island, as well as golf course estates.

Dubai's rollercoaster property

market, which had been in steady decline since 2014, went into flatline after COVID-19 hit last year and the emirate slammed shut its borders, said Zhann Zochinke, chief operating officer of consultancy Property Monitor. "Then straight after that lockdown period we started to see transaction volumes increase, and they really haven't stopped since," he told AFP. "We're now seeing record month-on-month gains and transaction volumes."

The Gulf emirate became one of the first destinations to reopen to visitors last July, pairing the open-door policy with strict rules on masking and social distancing, and an energetic vaccination program which has produced some of the highest

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DUBAI: The living room of a luxury villa for sale is seen on the Palm man-made island on May 19, 2021. — AFP

Local

Crown Prince heads to Riyadh on official visit today



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



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem.



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

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah heads to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia today with his accompanying delegation for an official visit. His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah had received His Highness the Crown Prince at Seif Palace yesterday. His Highness Sheikh Nawaf also received Speaker

of the National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah, as well as Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Justice, Minister of State for Integrity Enhancement Abdullah Al-Roumi.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince

received at Seif Palace Ghanem, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled, Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali, Roumi, in addition to Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah as well as Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. Separately, His Highness the Amir addressed

yesterday a congratulatory cable to President Guillermo Lasso for taking oath as the President of Ecuador. In the cable, His Highness the Amir wished the President good health and to his country further prosperity and glory. His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister sent President Lasso similar cables. — KUNA

Kuwait, Saudi Arabia cherish deep-rooted economic ties

KUWAIT: The State of Kuwait and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are tied with distinguished deep-rooted relations, especially in the economic field. The upcoming visit of His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah today to Saudi Arabia comes to boost bilateral ties to wider domains and levels of cooperation, which would positively reflect on the bilateral relations and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries' common interests.

Kuwaiti exports to Saudi Arabia climbed during the COVID-19 pandemic by 11.3 percent, and Saudi ranked first as a commercial partner for Kuwaiti exports during the last quarter of 2020, at a time of closure of international economies. Local exports to Saudi Arabia climbed by 11.3 percent to reach KD 59 million (around \$194.7 million) compared to the same period of 2019 out of total Kuwaiti non-oil exports of a value of KD 358.8 million (around \$1.1 billion), according to the Kuwait's Central Statistical Bureau.

Kuwait's total exports to Saudi in 2020 reached KD 205 million (around \$676.5) compared to KD 197 million (around \$650 million) during 2019,

whereas Saudi exports to Kuwait reached KD 504.5 million (around \$1.6 billion) compared to KD 629.6 million in 2019. Cooperation between the two nations is not only restricted to governmental bodies, but also between the private sectors, as this type of cooperation was set after signing a memorandum of understanding in 2005.

It was signed between the Council for Saudi Chambers of Commerce and Industry and the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry, aiming at boosting both economies and increasing business exchange between Kuwait and Saudi.

In the oil sector, bilateral relations witnessed a new dimension when Saudi Minister of Energy Prince Abdulaziz Bin Salman and Kuwait's Minister of Oil, Minister of Electricity and Water Khaled Al-Fadhel on Dec 25, 2019 allowed the resumption of oil production operations in Al-Khafji joint area. They signed an agreement affiliated to the two agreements of dividing the divided zone and the submerged area adjacent to the divided zone between the two countries. The agreement came upon the instructions of the two wise political leaderships to end this file in order to come out with a stable, sustainable future vision.

Kuwaiti-Saudi coordination played a great role in the stability of international oil prices and markets through the joint work in the so-called OPEC+. In OPEC+, both nations contributed to maintaining stable supplies of energy in a way that protects producers' and consumers' rights equally during the tough circumstances the international economy suffered



during the COVID-19 pandemic, taking into consideration that a large quantity of energy is available in the international markets.

Kuwait, under the leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is working on the development of economic process in the country and boosting commercial relations between Kuwait and the kingdom. The ties between Kuwait and the king-

dom reached high level of cooperation: boosted on various levels to serve the interests of GCC countries.

Kuwait and Saudi possess a developmental vision for their economies reflected by the New Kuwait 2035 and 2030 Saudi vision, which would positively affect the prosperity of the whole region. Since the establishment of GCC in 1981, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia are tied by several cooperation agreements and projects in various sectors. — KUNA

Prime Minister hosts Pakistan's Interior Minister

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received the visiting Pakistani Interior Minister Sheikh Rasheed Ahmad, accompanied by a delegation of senior security officials, at Seif Palace yesterday. The Pakistani Minister of Interior, during the meeting attended by the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, handed a written message from the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan Imran Khan to His Highness the Prime Minister.

The message deals with means of cementing the bilateral relations between Kuwait and Pakistan. Chairperson of the Prime Minister's Diwan Abdulaziz Al-Dekheel attended the meeting. The Pakistani Interior Minister, accompanied by a delegation of ranking officials, has arrived in the country earlier on a two-day official visit. Kuwait Interior Ministry said in a statement earlier yesterday that the visit came as part of bilateral consultations between the two countries on issues of common interest namely in the security sector. In other news, His Highness the Prime Minister received yesterday the outgoing South Korean Ambassador to Kuwait Dr Hong Young-ki. — KUNA



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah receives a letter from his Pakistani counterpart Imran Khan, handed over by the visiting Pakistani Interior Minister Sheikh Rasheed Ahmad. — KUNA photos



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets the outgoing South Korean Ambassador to Kuwait Dr Hong Young-ki.

Call for action, inclusion at...

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2018, and is focused on public-private partnerships, especially in developing countries. Advanced nations have laid out ambitious emissions-cutting goals in recent months, as well as plans to ultimately go carbon neutral by 2050.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel called on the countries to phase out their dependence on fossil fuels, warning climate change is threatening people's lives and the economy as much as the COVID-19 pandemic. Earlier this month Germany tightened its targets to reduce CO2 emissions - including a 65 percent cut in emissions by 2030 - after a landmark ruling by the country's top court declared a flagship climate protection law "insufficient".

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said countries must now deliver on their green pledges. "It's a great start, but let's not pat ourselves on the back just yet because our planet and our people need more," he said. "We need governments that will not just make promises on climate and nature but match those words with deeds."

Panel reduces fine for not wearing...

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all necessary equipment and staffed by a 200-strong team of medics, technicians and administrators. Sanad noted there are 22 vaccination centers

World leaders committed under the 2015 Paris accord to keeping the global temperature increase to under two degrees Celsius - and ideally closer to 1.5C - by 2050. Yet many of the largest emitters have so far failed to keep up their commitments and countries have not even agreed on a unified rule-book governing how the Paris agreement works in practice. The UN says that emissions must fall nearly eight percent annually to keep 1.5C in play - equivalent to the emissions saved during the pandemic every single year through 2030.

World leaders also stressed the importance of making sure that poorer countries are not left out in the global initiative to go green. African countries should not be "locked up" in fossil fuels and be able to advance with the rest of the world, said French President Emmanuel Macron, calling for ways to draw large-scale investments in renewable energy.

"It is not a global partnership if some are left struggling to survive," added UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres. "Tackling climate change head-on will help protect the most vulnerable people from the next crisis while sustaining a job-rich recovery from the pandemic," he said. The World Bank estimates that between 32 million and 132 million additional people could fall into extreme poverty by 2030 due to the effects of climate change. — AFP

in all the country's governorates, in addition to the immunization center at the fairgrounds in Mishref. Vaccines are also being administered to military personnel at the Military Hospital and oil sector employees at Ahmadi Hospital, affiliated to Kuwait Oil Company.

The newly-opened inoculation center at Jaber Causeway is one of the largest centers in the country, with 10 lanes and 20 vaccination cabins. The center, situated on the 30,000-sq-m island, includes clinics and emergency chambers.

Rally calls for end to US aid...

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the US with regard to the Palestinian cause seeking a sovereign homeland, said Alahmad. "We just want the world to recognize that we are human beings. We are not terrorists," said Alahmad, a 43-

Dubai property booms as rich...

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inoculation rates globally. Despite a surge in coronavirus cases in the new year after holidaymakers descended en masse, life has continued largely as normal with restaurants and hotels open, and few of the restrictions that have blighted life elsewhere.

"The lockdown dodgers from other countries? I think we're seeing a lot of that there," Zochinke said, adding that other draws were more relaxed residency rules and a decision to allow full foreign ownership of firms. The flood of arrivals has regenerated the tourism industry, long an economic mainstay of Dubai which has little of the oil wealth that powers its neighbors, and helped business activity recover to pre-COVID levels in April, according to IHS Markit.

"Travel and tourism firms recorded the most notable bounce in performance, amid increasing hopes of a rise in tourism activity later in the year, boosted by the rapid vaccine roll-out," said the

year-old stay at home mother who grew up in the United Arab Emirates before moving to the US around 20 years ago.

Silmi insisted there was now broad opposition in the US to how (the Zionist entity) treats the Palestinians, which he likened to apartheid in South Africa. "People have now woken up, and we're resisting. Whether young Jews, young Muslims, young blacks, young whites, there is a generational shift. And people are working across ethnic groups, racial groups, to work for change and freedom and liberation for Palestinian people," Silmi said. — AFP

research firm's economist David Owen. After years of torpor when homeowners watched their equity drain away, the surge in luxury properties above 10 million dirhams (\$2.7 million) has been striking, with 90 transactions in April compared to around 350-400 on a regular yearly basis, according to Property Monitor.

A mansion on the Palm has sold for 111.25 million dirhams, the highest price reached in years in the precinct which features 16 "fronds" lined with show-stopping houses and supercars parked in the driveways. The highest-priced property now available on the block is a vast Italian-inspired modern villa positioned at the end of one of the fronds, complete with 180-degree beach frontage, which is being offered for 100 million dirhams.

After it languished on the market during the gloomy days at the height of the pandemic, the developers are hoping that one of the new breed of cashed-up Europeans will be tempted by the infinity pool, private cinema, and acres of marble and glass. "I think people have started to realize that Dubai is not just a construction site anymore, which it was maybe 10 years ago when we had the most amount of cranes in the world," said Matthew Bate, CEO of BlackBrick, one of the agencies representing the property. — AFP

Local

Kuwait's expat travel restrictions discriminatory: Rights activists

Rise in suicide rates could be linked to pandemic effects

KUWAIT: Kuwait's recent decision to regulate travel and make it restricted for those who have received two jabs of the COVID-19 vaccine has faced a lot of criticism because it is limited to citizens and ignores expatriates who have complied with health protocols and received the vaccines like others.

Jurists and legal professionals said ignoring expat residents in Kuwait and depriving them of their right to freedom of movement despite receiving the vaccine constitutes a major insult to "Humanitarian Kuwait", which promulgated its constitution more than half a century ago based on equality and guaranteed freedom of travel for all those living in Kuwait, not differentiating between citizens and expats.

President of Kuwait Association for Basic Essentials of Human Rights Dr Yousuf Al-Saqer said in statements published by Al-Qabas Arabic daily yesterday that there is supposed to be equality between all with regards to decisions related to travel for those who have received the vaccine, because they adhered to the protocols laid down by the health ministry, and this is a matter that should not involve any discrimination.

Meanwhile, member of Kuwait Society for Human Rights Hussein Al-Otaibi said there is suspicion of inequality under the current circumstances, because freedom of travel is guaranteed to citizens and expats in the constitution, while the latest decisions ignore expats' right to travel, which is something devoid of fairness.

Lawyer Dr Fawaz Al-Khateeb said the decision

by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation to allow citizens to travel and return without including expats, who will not be able to return even if they have valid residency permits, reflects differential negative treatment and may violate the simplest of constitutional principles pertaining to equality and nondiscrimination. Kuwait had banned expats from entering the country since February 2021 until further notice as part of restrictions placed at the time to curb a rise in COVID-19 cases in the country.

Suicide rate on the rise

Separately, the same newspaper reported yesterday that the suicide rate in Kuwait has jumped lately, as security sources revealed that around 75 cases were recorded during five months from the start of 2021 until Friday, May 28, compared to 90 cases in the whole of 2020.

Sources said the suicide rate during the first five months of 2021 rose by 50 percent compared to the same period in 2020, adding suicides began to rise since the spread of the coronavirus, which could indicate that there is a link between the pandemic and its psychological and economic effects, and the rise in suicide cases, especially among the Asian community.

The sources, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said the majority of suicides are committed by Asians, adding there were nine failed suicide attempts "and the perpetrators were charged accordingly." Police sources said there



were three suicide cases in the past four days before the report was published yesterday. The first was by an Indian expat who worked as a driver in Saad Al-Abdullah, who hanged himself from the ceiling of his room. The second case was of a

laborer, also Indian, who hanged himself from a tree in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh. The third case was of a Bangladeshi who worked at a ranch in the camel-grazing area. He was found hanging from the ceiling of a sheep shed.

Jaber Causeway vaccination center opens



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Health announced yesterday the inauguration of the Kuwait Center for Anti-COVID Vaccination Center for motorists on the southern islet of Jaber Causeway. A 200-strong team of medics, technicians and administrators are staffed at the 30,000 square meter islet that includes 10

lanes for vaccination seekers, and 20 vaccination cabins with a capacity of 80 vehicles per cabinet at a time.

Kuwait had reported on Saturday that 1,134 people tested positive for coronavirus while four related deaths were registered in the previous 24 hours, tak-

ing the total up to 306,717 and 1,764, respectively. Another 1,144 people were cured of the virus during the same period, raising the total of those to have overcome the disease to 291,521, ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said. The number of people hospitalized with the virus stood at 13,432 as of

Saturday, with 148 of them in intensive care units, he added, revealing that some 9,729 swab tests were conducted over the same period out of a total of 2,587,580. He went on to urge the public to abide by health precautions, mainly following social distancing in order to help limit the spread of the virus. —KUNA

Kuwait condemns Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia

KUWAIT: Kuwait strongly condemned on Saturday the Houthi militia's continued targeting of civilians in Saudi Arabia, most recently two attacks involving an explosive drone and bomb-strapped boat. These "terrorist attacks" represent a "threat to the security of Saudi Arabia and the region's stability, and are a challenge to the international community's efforts to put a stop to the conflict in Yemen," read a foreign ministry statement.

These attacks are also "breach of international humanitarian law and international law, which affirms their danger, and the immense need to deter them through swift and decisive global action." The statement went on to underline Kuwait's total support for all measures assumed by Saudi Arabia to ensure its security, stability and sovereignty. —KUNA



KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Roads and Transportation announced yesterday opening parts of the Sixth Ring Road towards Messilah today morning after it was repaired as part of the South Surra roads maintenance project. —KUNA

National Guard Deputy Chief applauds athletes

KUWAIT: Kuwait National Guard (KNG) Deputy Chief Lieutenant General Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has expressed keenness on supporting KNG personnel who practice sports. KNG said in a statement yesterday, that Sheikh Ahmad expressed support for the KNG athletes after honoring the KNG sports teams that won medals in the ministries and public institutions' tournament.

Sheikh Ahmad conveyed to the honorees greetings from His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, the National Guard Chief, urged the sportsmen to seek to remain as much fit as possible, and prayed to His Almighty to bestow upon the country security under leadership of His Highness the Amir and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The honoring ceremony was held at the National Guard General Command headquarters. —KUNA

Local

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Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: People visit an art exhibition on Palestine in Kuwait City on Saturday. —Xinhua

Info Minister chairs digitization meeting

KUWAIT: Minister of Information, Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi headed yesterday the first meeting of the supreme digitization committee at the ministry headquarters.

Official spokesperson of the Ministry of Information Anwar Murad said in a statement after the meeting that the conferees discussed plans and measures for electronic transformation in coordination with the Central Agency for Information Technology (CAIT). Murad said the minister, during the meeting, stressed on the necessity to work out an executive timetable to achieve the aspired transformation. She has re-affirmed the keenness on applying smart technology, particularly at the ministry, to minimize red tape.

The meeting was attended by the Acting Information Undersecretary, Faisal Al-Mutalaqem, Secretary General of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters Kamel Abduljelil and the Acting Director General of the Youth Authority for Sports Sheikh Humoud Mubarak Al-Sabah. Other ranking officials also took part in the session. —KUNA



Information Minister
Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi

Friendship Society honors key supporter

KUWAIT: Chairman of Kuwait Humanitarian Friendship Society Ahmad Al-Sarraf said this society is the first to operate in the charity and humanitarian field without deducting anything from donations, as all donations go towards the goals the society was established to achieve. Sarraf said members of the board of directors were pleased when another society followed the suit by not deducting anything from donations, adding

this move will encourage many societies to do the same. He said this is good for humanitarian projects that seek to help needy and disaster-afflicted people everywhere.

Meanwhile, Sarraf and Director General Khalid bin Sabt visited Yahya Al-Bassam, who is one of the main supporters of the society's mission, and gave him a memento in recognition of his continued donations to the society, as he believes in the humanitarian role of the society. Bin Sabt thanked Bassam in the presence of Suleiman Yahya Al-Bassam, calling on able citizens and expats to contact the society and support it so that it continues its noble march with the help of the largest number of donors.



KUWAIT: Chairman of Kuwait Humanitarian Friendship Society Ahmad Al-Sarraf honors Yahya Al-Bassam.

Kuwait receives new oil tanker

KUWAIT: Kuwait Oil Tanker Company has taken delivery of the giant crude oil tanker "Al-Siddeeq" from China's shipbuilding company Bohai — signaling the first such cooperation between the country and Beijing. By adding Al-Siddeeq, the company's

fleet grew to 32 tankers of various sizes and purposes, KOTC CEO Abdunnasser Al-Fulaij said, affirming keenness on meeting the market's demand for crude oil and derivatives. The new tanker is 333 meters long and 60 meters wide, with a cargo capacity of nearly 323 metric tons of crude — equivalent to 2.25 million barrels. Its cargo can be unloaded in less than 24 hours. Fulaij noted that it is friendly to the environment with equipment for treating diverse types of gases and other pollutants. —KUNA



US educational fair at local mall

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: The US Embassy set up an educational information booth at The Avenues mall over the weekend to provide information and awareness to students interested in studying in the United States. "US schools are open, and I am happy to announce that student visa applications are prioritized," US Ambassador to Kuwait Alina L. Romanowski told reporters.

Later, on her official Twitter account, the US ambassador noted: "I had fun chatting with students and parents today about why they should #ChooseUS. We'll be there all day again on June 11 & 12," she posted. Every year, thousands of citizens and residents travel to the United States to study in colleges and universities there. The US Embassy organizes informational events to help parents and students learn more about study options and how to apply for student visas.



KUWAIT: US Ambassador to Kuwait Alina L. Romanowski speaks to a student at the fair.

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Hunger stalks India's poor in pandemic double blow

California already in throes of drought as summer looms

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HIALEAH, UNITED STATES: Miami-Dade police investigate near shell case evidence markers on the ground where a mass shooting took place outside of a banquet hall yesterday in Hialeah, Florida. —AFP

Florida shooting kills two, wounds 20

Biden brands US gun violence epidemic, an international embarrassment

MIAMI: Two people were killed and at least 20 injured yesterday when three shooters fired indiscriminately into a crowd outside a concert in Miami, Florida, local police said. Gunfire erupted during the early hours outside a billiards hall in a row of businesses near Miami Gardens, northwest of the coastal city's downtown. People crowded the venue, which was "hosting a scheduled event and several patrons were standing outside," Miami-Dade Police Department said in a statement.

When a Nissan Pathfinder SUV approached the scene, it added, "three subjects exited the vehicle and began shooting indiscriminately into the crowd." The trio then got back in the car and fled the scene. When authorities

arrived, they found two people dead, according to the statement. At least 20 people were hospitalized, with at least one in critical condition. In a tweet, the department's director, Alfredo "Freddy" Ramirez III, condemned the "targeted and cowardly act of gun violence." "These are cold-blooded murderers that shot indiscriminately into a crowd, and we will seek justice," he said. Police were seeking help from the community to identify and arrest the shooters.

43,000 gun-related deaths
Florida remains marked by the 2016 shooting at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, in which a gunman killed 49 people and wounded at least 68 others. Gun-related homicides have surged

across the United States over the past year. On Wednesday, a public transit worker shot dead nine people at a California rail yard before turning his gun on himself as police arrived. A search this week of the shooter's home—which was set ablaze shortly before the attack—turned up 12 guns, some 22,000 rounds of ammunition and suspected Molotov cocktails.

The coronavirus pandemic provided a pause in this deadly workplace violence, but the reopening of many companies has brought a return of shootings. Mass shootings have occurred in recent months at a FedEx facility in Indianapolis, an office building in California, a grocery store in Colorado and at several spas in Atlanta. The

United States has a long and painful history of deadly gun violence, with a steady daily toll of shootings as well as high-profile mass killings that have targeted schools, workplaces and shopping centers.

President Joe Biden last month branded US gun violence an "epidemic" and an "international embarrassment." There were more than 43,000 gun-related deaths in the United States last year, including suicides, according to the Gun Violence Archive. In 2017, 458 people died in workplace shootings, according to the latest official statistics, but only 77 of these fatalities were committed by workers. The others were done by burglars, relatives of employees or disgruntled customers. —AFP



LONDON: A handout picture shows Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his wife Carrie Johnson in the garden of 10 Downing Street, London after their wedding on Saturday. —AFP

Horses starve to death as virus hits Bangladesh tourism

COX'S BAZAR, Bangladesh: More than 20 horses have died of starvation in just one month at Bangladesh's most popular resort district, the animals' owners said yesterday as the country's tourism industry reels from the pandemic's economic fallout. The South Asian nation of 168 million people is battling a fresh wave of coronavirus infections that has stretched its healthcare system and triggered a nationwide lockdown. The horses' owners said they were struggling to afford fodder for their animals, which are used for tourist rides at Cox's Bazar beach—one of the world's longest. "Once coronavirus hit, tourist numbers... sharply dropped to a trickle," Farida Begum, spokesperson of the Cox's Bazar Horse Owners Association, told AFP.

"We are struggling to make ends meet. How can we feed the horses?" Tourists had briefly returned to the district from December to February when infections slowed, but visits dried up under the fresh lockdown imposed from April 14. At least 21 horses out of up to 90 used for tourists at the beach died over the past month while others were emaciated, Begum said. During last year's lockdown, 41 horses—including eight of Begum's own—died, she added. Some owners have set their horses free, hoping they can survive by eating grass or foraging for food. The horse owners say they have been struggling to feed their own families, with many taking out loans from microlenders just to make ends meet.

"Officials from the microlender come to my home every week and badger me to pay back the loan in instalments. But unless the tourists start arriving in Cox's Bazar, I can't pay back the money," Begum said, adding that she had borrowed 100,000 taka (\$1,200). Dozens of horse handlers usually hired by the owners



COX'S BAZAR, BANGLADESH: In this picture youths wait for customers to ride on their horses after some 21 horses have starved to death in the last month as COVID-19 coronavirus lockdown brought the country's most visited tourism spot to knee, at a beach in Cox's Bazar. —AFP

to help tourists with the rides have switched to driving rickshaws or construction work.

'No tourists means no income'

The resort town usually attracts more than two million mostly domestic tourists every year. But under the nationwide lockdown, offices and markets are shut and public transport has been halted. Horse owner Sarwar Azam told AFP that one of his animals died last week and the second was also going hungry. The head of a local horse owners' organization, Nishan Ahsan—whose four animals died during last year's lockdown—said his members had received limited aid from the government. "During the peak tourism time, a horse can earn up to 2,000 taka (\$23) a day. We would set

aside a slice of that income for the horses' food, which is expensive," Ahsan told AFP. "But no tourists means no income for us." The government administrator for Cox's Bazar, Sumaiya Akter, said she had only heard of four to five horses dying in the past eight months. She added that the government had given the owners 146 sacks of husks and 20 cans of molasses since May 9. Bangladesh has recorded nearly 800,000 coronavirus infections and more than 12,300 deaths since the start of the pandemic, but experts say the actual numbers are likely to be much higher. Just over six percent of the population has received the first vaccine dose, while the government has said it is running out of jobs as it tries to combat the latest devastating virus wave. —AFP

French detainee awaiting trial in Iran for spying

TEHRAN: Iranian prosecutors have confirmed a French national held in the Islamic republic will be tried for espionage, his lawyer said yesterday, days after the detainee's sister appealed to France's president to intervene. Benjamin Briere, born in 1985, was arrested in Iran in May 2020, allegedly

while flying a drone and taking photographs in a prohibited area.

A conviction of espionage is punishable by death in Iran. Briere has also been charged with "propaganda against the system", which can incur a prison sentence of three months to one year. Lawyer Said Dehghan, who also represents another French national held in the country, told AFP the investigation had been completed and the prosecution had confirmed the charges.

"The prosecutor is preparing the indictment and sending it to the revolutionary court for the continuation of the judicial process," Dehghan said. Briere, who is being held in the city of

Mashhad in northeastern Iran, also faced accusations of "corruption on earth"—one of the most severe charges under Iranian law—and drinking alcohol, punishable by flogging, but they were dismissed after the investigation.

The announcement came days after an open letter from Briere's sister, Blandine Briere, was published by French weekly Le Point, in which she appealed to French President Emmanuel Macron to push for her brother's release. She said the charges were "baseless" and that Briere had become a "negotiating tool". Briere's lawyer in France said in a statement there has yet to be a response from Macron or the foreign ministry. —AFP

UK's Johnson weds in 'secret ceremony'

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson married his fiancée Carrie Symonds in a "secret ceremony" on Saturday, UK media reports said. Known for his colorful love life, 56-year-old Johnson wed Symonds, 33, in Catholic Westminster Cathedral in front of close friends and family, the Mail yesterday and The Sun newspapers reported. He is only the second British prime minister to marry while in office, and the first in nearly two centuries with Robert Jenkinson the last in 1822.

The nuptials are a surprise development, after reports earlier this week said the couple had sent out "save the date" cards for a wedding on July 30 next year. However, they have been waiting months to tie the knot after their original plans to marry last year were delayed by the pandemic. The pair got engaged in December, 2019, and have a one-year-old baby son, Wilfred.

Around 30 guests attended Saturday's service—the maximum currently allowed under coronavirus rules—in central London, after being invited at the last minute, according to the Mail yesterday. A small number of church officials were involved and Downing Street aides were not informed, sources told the paper. However, The Sun tabloid said the couple had been planning the "cloak and dagger operation" for a secret ceremony for up to six months.

Symonds arrived at the lunchtime nuptials in a limousine and wore "a stunning long and flowing white dress" but chose not to wear a veil, it added. There were no descriptions of Johnson's attire, with the mop-haired British leader infamous for his often disheveled appearance. The same priest who baptized the couple's son officiated the wedding, and Wilfred was also in attendance, according to The Sun. Johnson, who has faced several bruising days of scrutiny after his former top aide Dominic Cummings lambasted his government's handling of the coronavirus pandemic in front of a parliamentary committee Wednesday, has been married twice before.

He had four children with his previous wife, lawyer Marina Wheeler, before they split in 2018. The couple only finalized their divorce last November. Johnson also reportedly has a daughter born as the result of an affair. When elected in 2019, he became the first prime minister to live at Downing Street as part of an unmarried couple. Symonds, a former head of communications for the Conservative Party, gave birth to their son just weeks after Johnson left intensive care as he recovered from a severe case of coronavirus. —AFP

International

California already in throes of drought as summer looms

Lake Oroville is at less than half of its average capacity at this time of year

OROVILLE, United States: Summer has not even begun and Lake Oroville, the second-largest reservoir in California that provides drinking water to more than 25 million people, is at less than half of its average capacity at this time of year. It is a worrying indication of the worsening drought conditions in the northern part of the Golden State.

"When we go into a year like this with the reservoir low and with really dry conditions throughout the state, that is concerning," John Yarbrough, the assistant deputy director of the California Department of Water Resources, told AFP. "The reservoir is much lower than we would like to see it, much lower than typical at this time of year. It's about 47 percent of average," he said, pointing to the cracked earth forming the lake wall.

Since May 10, California Governor Gavin Newsom has declared a state of emergency linked to drought in more than 40 counties. Conditions in Butte County, where Lake Oroville is located, are already seen as "extreme," the highest level. And the situation-exacerbated by the effects of climate change across the western United States-is not expected to improve before the rains return in five or six months.

Yarbrough said that in 2019, which he called a "good year," the water level reached the trees on the edge of the dam-meaning it was about 50 meters (165 feet) higher than usual. Residents of the area told AFP they had never seen dry conditions like this before. Many of them recalled how in 2017, they had to evacuate because torrential rains had prompted authorities to fear that the dam would break under the pressure. Not even five years later, the situation has shifted dramatically.

Evaporating snow

Lake Oroville, built in the 1960s at the confluence of three rivers, is the key component of California's State Water Project, a massive net-

work of reservoirs, aqueducts and pipelines bringing water from the northern part of the state to the south, which has a higher population and a far drier climate. "This lake right here provides drinking water for 27 million Californians," Yarbrough said, adding that it also irrigates "up to 750,000 acres" (303,000 hectares) of farmland.

On average, Northern California gets two-thirds of the state's total precipitation, but this year has been particularly bad. On April 1, which traditionally marks the end of snowfall in the state, snow reserves in the Sierra Nevada mountains-source for about a third of the water used in California-stood at only about 60 percent of the average. "One unique thing this year is, as that snow melted, the runoff ended up soaking into dry soils and evaporating," meaning very little runoff ended up in Lake Oroville, Yarbrough explained. The waters contained by Oroville Dam, the tallest in the United States at 770 feet (235 meters), will not dry up that quickly, but at the end of the so-called dry season the lake is expected to be at its lowest level recorded since September 1977.

Fears of forest fires

After two years with very little precipitation, and with no assurances that upcoming seasons will be any better, water restrictions are the next step. The California Department of Water Resources, which runs the State Water Project, has warned that it risks being unable to provide more than five percent of requested supplies this year. The owners of dozens of boats moored on Lake Oroville were forced this week to put the vessels in dry dock, or risk seeing them run aground and be damaged. Another serious consequence of the drought: the increased risk of wildfires, which is particularly worrying for authorities in a region that has been repeatedly devas-



In this aerial image, houseboats are moored as dry land is exposed on the banks of Lake Oroville reservoir due to low water levels during the California drought emergency in Oroville, California. —AFP

tated in recent years by massive forest blazes. The charred trees that dot the landscape around Lake Oroville are a stark reminder: Last year, more than 6,500 square miles (17,000 square kilometers) went up in flames in California alone, and 33 people were killed, including 15 at Berry Creek, not far from Oroville. This year, fires have already consumed five times more vegetation than at the same point in time in 2020.

"I think we're in a long-term trend of drought

conditions. And it's been going on for about six years," said Butte County fire chief John Messina. "We've had a few wet years in between those years, but overall, we're much drier than what we're used to," he said. "It doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand if you don't have precipitation, your fuels don't stay moist-and the drier the fuels are, the more potential there is to have a catastrophic wildfire, or at least an extremely busy summer in California." —AFP

France hails 'gentle' policewoman stabbed in attack

LA CHAPELLE-SUR-ERDRE, France: Residents of a small French town laid cards and flowers Saturday at the spot where a "very kind" and "gentle" policewoman was seriously wounded in a knife attack the day before, the latest in a spate of attacks on officers. The attacker, 39-year-old French citizen Ndiaga Dieye who was known to police and a diagnosed schizophrenic, stabbed the woman in La Chapelle-sur-Erdre near the western city of Nantes on Friday.

He then seized her firearm and fled, holding a young woman hostage for several hours before wounding two police officers during a shootout in which he was shot dead. According to a source close to the matter, the hostage has said that Dieye never expressed "terrorist-type" claims, and a local court is still handling the investigation rather than transferring it to one specialized in terror acts. But Nantes prosecutor Pierre Senes did not rule out handing the case over to the national anti-terrorism authority in Paris however, depending on what elements come to light as the probe progresses. In particular, data on a tablet computer and mobile phone seized by police should be accessible sometime early next week, Senes said.

In La Chapelle-sur-Erdre, Ines said she had often interacted with policewoman Katell Lereec, who had life-threatening injuries but is now out of danger. "I am still very upset. I am very saddened for her, because she does not deserve this," the 77-year-old said. "She is very, very kind, she is gentle, even when she speaks she speaks softly," she added.

"We attack people like that who protect us. Who are we going to be protected by if we attack these people?" Dieye had 19 previous convictions and had spent almost half his life in prison, where he was diagnosed as schizophrenic and had become radicalized. Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said Dieye had been on a watch-list of potential terrorist sympathizers.

Judicial system failure?

Since Dieye finished serving his most recent jail sentence on March 22, he had found work and housing due to an integration association in La Chapelle-sur-Erdre. His lawyer Vincent de la Morandiere said "it was a failure of the judicial system". "He started serving time in prison at 17, he was convicted all the time and it didn't work," he added. "He went back and forth between the concrete of the prison and the concrete of the city." Dieye's most serious conviction was kidnapping and robbery after tying up an elderly couple and covering them with a blanket before searching their house in 2013.

His lawyer said he was "very uncommunicative" despite a family "who sacrificed themselves to try to help him". Lereec, born in 1974, has a grown-up son, the town's mayor said. She was recruited "as a youth worker at the end of the 1990s on social mediation missions," before taking the municipal police exam, mayor Fabrice Roussel said. A hairdresser who runs a salon behind the police station said Lereec is "doing well, we've heard from her colleague, we can't wait to see her again". The latest bloodshed comes after several attacks on police in France, leading officers to demand better protection and harsher punishments for attacks against them. —AFP

West African leaders meet to discuss Mali double coup

ACCRA, Ghana: West African leaders were due to meet in Ghana today to discuss a response to Mali's second coup in nine months, which has sparked warnings of fresh sanctions and deep concerns over stability in the volatile Sahel region. Mali's new president Colonel Assimi Goita arrived in Accra on Saturday for preliminary talks ahead of the extraordinary summit of regional bloc ECOWAS, which was due to start at 1400 GMT.

Presidents Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria, Alassane Ouattara of Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso's Marc Christian Kabore were among those attending the summit, which came as another deadly jihadist attack underscored Mali's chronic instability. Goita led the young army officers who overthrew Mali's elected president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita last August over perceived corruption and his failure to quell a bloody jihadist insurgency.

After the takeover, the military agreed to appoint

Why scientists are concerned about leaks at biolabs

WASHINGTON: The theory that COVID-19 might be the result of scientific experiments has thrown a spotlight on the work of the world's most secure biolabs. While the evidence linking SARS-CoV-2 to the Wuhan Institute of Virology in China is strictly circumstantial, a number of experts want tougher controls on such facilities over fears that accidental leaks could touch off the next pandemic.

Here's what you should know. 59 top facilities

The Wuhan lab belongs to the most secure class, commonly referred to as biosafety level 4, or BSL4. These are built to work safely and securely with the most dangerous bacteria and viruses that can cause serious diseases for which there are no known treatment or vaccines.

"There are HVAC filtration systems, so that the virus can't escape through exhaust; any waste water that leaves the facility is treated with either chemicals or high temperatures to make sure that there's nothing alive," Gregory Koblentz, director of the Biodefense Graduate Program at George Mason University, said.

The researchers themselves are highly trained and wear hazmat suits. There are 59 such facilities across the world, according to a report Koblentz co-authored that was released this week.

"There are no binding international standards for safe, secure, and responsible work on pathogens," the report, called Mapping Maximum Biological Containment Labs Globally, said.

Accidents do happen

Accidents can happen, sometimes at the top tier facilities, and much more frequently at lower rung labs of which there are thousands. Human H1N1 virus-the same flu that caused the 1918 pandemic-leaked in 1977 in the Soviet Union and China and spread worldwide.

civilians as interim president and prime minister under pressure from ECOWAS, which has served as a mediator. But on Monday, soldiers detained transitional president Bah Ndw and prime minister Moctar Ouane, releasing them on Thursday while saying that they had resigned.

The twin arrests triggered a diplomatic uproar and marked Mali's second apparent coup within a year. Mali's constitutional court completed Goita's rise to full power on Friday by naming him transitional president. With the junta going back on its previous commitment to civilian political leaders, doubts have been raised about its other pledges, including holding elections in early 2022. The junta said this week it would continue to respect that timetable, but added that it could be subject to change.

Five dead in fresh attack

Mali's presidency said on its Facebook page that Goita would hold one-on-one talks with Ghana's President Nana Akufo-Addo in Accra "as well as bilateral meetings with partners and friends of Mali". ECOWAS issued sanctions against Mali after the August coup before lifting them when the transitional government was put in place.

The 15-nation bloc has warned of reimposing sanctions on the country, as has the United States

In 2001, a mentally disturbed employee at a US biolab mailed out anthrax spores across the country, killing five people. Two Chinese researchers exposed to SARS in 2004 spread the disease to others, killing one. In 2014, a handful of smallpox vials were uncovered during an Food and Drug Administration office move.

Lynn Klotz, a senior science fellow at the Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, has been sounding the alarm for many years about the public safety threats posed by such facilities. "Human errors constitute over 70 percent of the errors in laboratories," he told AFP, adding that US researchers have to rely on data from Freedom of Information requests to learn of these incidents.

'Gain of function' controversy

There is disagreement between the US government, which funded bat coronavirus research in Wuhan, and some independent scientists, about whether this work was controversial "gain of function" (GOF) research. GOF research entails modifying pathogens to make them more transmissible, deadlier, or better able to evade treatment and vaccines-all to learn how to fight them better.

This field has long been contentious. Debate reached a fever pitch when two research teams in 2011 showed they could make bird flu transmissible between mammals. Harvard epidemiologist Marc Lipsitch told AFP he was concerned "that it would create a strain of virus that if it infected a laboratory worker could not just kill that laboratory worker... but also cause a pandemic."

"The research is not required and does not contribute to the development of drugs or vaccines," added molecular biologist Richard Ebright of Rutgers University, one of the staunchest opponents of this kind of research. In 2014 the US government announced a pause in federal funding for such work, which gave way in 2017 to a framework that would consider each application on a case-by-case basis. But the process has been criticized as lacking transparency and credibility.

As late as last year, a nonprofit received funding from the US on research to "predict spillover potential" of bat coronavirus to humans in Wuhan. Questioned by Congress this week, Francis Collins and Anthony Fauci of the National Institutes of Health denied this amounted to gain of function



BAMAKO: Leader of the coalition M5-RFP (Mouvement du 5 Juin-Rassemblement des Forces Patriotiques) Choguel Kokalla Maiga (center) speaks to the press as the coalition proposed his candidature to the premature after that colonel Assimi Goita led a coup to overthrow the government. —AFP

and former colonial power France. French leader Emmanuel Macron said in an interview with the Journal du Dimanche newspaper published Sunday that Paris "could not stay by the side of a country where there is no longer democratic legitimacy or a transition". —AFP



FILE PHOTO: Security personnel keep watch outside the Wuhan Institute of Virology during the visit by the World Health Organization (WHO) team tasked with investigating the origins of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), in Wuhan, Hubei province, China.

research, but Ebright said it clearly does.

The path ahead

None of this means that Covid-19 definitely leaked from a lab-in fact there is no hard scientific evidence in favor of natural origin or lab accident scenario, said Ebright. But there are certain lines of circumstantial evidence in favor of the latter. For instance, Wuhan is around 1,000 miles north of bat caves that harbor the ancestor virus, well out of the animals' flight range.

Scientists from Wuhan were however known to be carrying out routine trips to those caves to take samples. Alina Chan, a molecular biologist from the Broad Institute, said there were no signs of risky pathogen research dying down in the wake of the pandemic-in fact "it's possibly expanded."

Last year, Chan published research showing that, unlike SARS, SARS-CoV-2 was not evolving fast when it was first detected in humans-another piece of circumstantial evidence that could point to lab origin. Chan considers herself a "fence-sitter" on the competing hypotheses, but does not favor banning risky research, fearing it would then go underground.

One solution "might just be as simple as moving these research institutes out into extremely remote areas...where you have to quarantine for two weeks before we re-enter in human society," she said. —AFP

International

Hunger stalks India's poor in pandemic double blow

COVID killed 160,000 in 8 weeks, overwhelmed hospitals and shut businesses

NEW DELHI: Rasheeda Jaleel lives in fear that she may not be able to feed her seven children as millions of Indian families are forced into poverty by a devastating new coronavirus wave. The 40-year-old, her husband Abdul Jaleel, 65, and the children already survive on just one meal a day. "When we are hungry and thirsty, I feel very helpless and worry, 'How am I going to survive like this?'" Jaleel told AFP as she made roti-flatbread-for the solitary meal in their tiny New Delhi flat. "We manage with whatever my husband is able to earn. If it's not enough, I stay hungry so I can feed my children."

The coronavirus has killed 160,000 in eight weeks, overwhelmed hospitals and shut many businesses in India. Experts warn that another crisis is looming, with rising levels of hunger among poor Indians already reeling from a first lockdown last year. "It's a double crisis that the poor in the country are facing—there is the health crisis and there is also an income economic crisis," Anjali Bhardwaj from the Right to Food Campaign told AFP.

"We have had a huge health crisis unfolding... and many have had to spend their life savings on trying to provide medical aid to their families." About 230 million Indians fell into poverty—defined as living on less than 375 rupees (\$5) per day—in the first year of the pandemic, according to a study by Bangalore's Azim Premji University.

'We have no choice'

More than 7.3 million jobs were lost in April alone, according to the Centre for Monitoring the Indian Economy. That means more pain in a country where 90 percent of the workforce is in the informal sector with no social safety net, and where millions do not qualify for emergency government rations. "A lot of people



AMRITSAR, India: People in need stand in a queue to collect grocery items during a weekend lockdown imposed to curb the spread of the COVID-19. — AFP

went into poverty last year, they went into debt, and... they had to cut back on food consumption," Associate Professor Amit Basole, one of the university study's authors, told AFP. "So the second wave is coming on top of a very precarious, stressed situation."

Abdul Jaleel turned to peddling a rickshaw to feed his family after his construction work dried up during a fresh Delhi lockdown. Previously up to 500 rupees (\$7) a day, his income is now as little as 100 rupees. "And on some days, I don't make anything," he said. "As parents,

we will have to make ends meet somehow, whether we beg, borrow or steal. We have no choice."

'Helpless and hungry'

In last year's lockdown, about 100 million people lost their jobs in India. After restrictions were lifted, around 15 percent failed to find employment by the end of 2020 — including 47 percent of female workers, the Azim Premji University study found. Many who returned to work had to settle for lower pay, leaving them more vulnerable when the second wave hit. Meanwhile an estimated 100 million Indians, including the Jaleels, have no ration cards to give them access to government food aid, Bhardwaj said. The Right to Food organization has been campaigning for emergency food supplies to be given to the needy, even if they do not have ration cards. With the pandemic unraveling years of poverty reduction, experts warn that many could remain trapped in a vicious cycle of hardship even after lockdowns are lifted.

"The fear is that we... get locked into a longish-term depressed economy where there is low aggregate demand because people's jobs and incomes are not coming back. And because they are not coming back, it... perpetuates its own cycle," Basole said. Bhupinder Singh, a micro-financier who has distributed food to the needy during the two lockdowns, has seen desperation rise among hundreds of unemployed men sleeping rough beside a busy Delhi highway. When he arrives with food packets, a cry of excitement goes up and men run to the back of his car and form a long queue. "People are stuck here out of helplessness," Sunil Thakur, 50, who lost his job as a hotel waiter during the lockdown, told AFP. "If they come with food, we get to eat... If they don't come, we'll stay hungry." — AFP

Nearly 300 rescued in Indonesia ferry accident

TERNATE, Indonesia: Search teams are looking for one missing person after rescuing all other passengers from a large ferry that caught fire in Indonesia, an official said yesterday. The KM Karya Indah was heading to Sanana, a remote port in the northeast of the Indonesian archipelago when it was engulfed in flames. Shortly after departing, the ferry caught fire, forcing passengers and crew to jump into the sea to save themselves. There are no reported casualties. "There were 275 people on board, 274 had been evacuated safely," Muhammad Arafah, the head of the local search and rescue team told Kompas TV yesterday. "One person, a 43-year-old man, is still being searched for." He added that at least 35 passengers were children.

Dozens of rescuers are still scouring the area for the missing person. Images shared by the search and rescue agency showed the large ferryboat enveloped in thick, dark smoke while passengers in life jackets were rescued by rafts. More than a dozen crew members have been detained and questioned by the local police to determine the cause of the fire. Maritime accidents are common in Indonesia due to poor safety standards. But passenger ferries are widely used for transport in the archipelago of some 17,000 islands. — AFP

Emergency declared as NZ floods threaten thousands of homes

CHRISTCHURCH: New Zealand authorities declared a state of emergency in the province of Canterbury yesterday, as the region was pounded by heavy rain that could force thousands of people to abandon their homes. Acting Emergency Management Minister Kris Faafoi, who visited the hardest-hit southern parts of the area, said about 3,000 homes were at risk and the army had been mobilized to assist with evacuations if necessary. "The rain is going to stick around until at least tomorrow. It will be heavy and the authorities will be watching those river levels tonight," Faafoi said.

The New Zealand Meteorological Service has issued a rare "red" warning for the area, with up to 300 millimeters (11.8 inches) of rain expected to fall in inland areas. In coastal Christchurch, the main city in Canterbury, forecasters expected about 100 mm to fall, well above the monthly total average for May. Canterbury Civil Defence emergency management group controller Neville Reilly told the New Zealand Herald that the state of emergency was declared because authorities could not afford to take chances. — AFP



WENCHANG, China: A Long March 7 rocket, carrying China's Tianzhou-2 cargo craft, lifts off from the Wenchang Space Launch Center in southern China's Hainan province. — AFP

China cargo craft docks with space station module

BEIJING: A Chinese cargo spacecraft carrying equipment and supplies successfully docked with the core module of the country's future space station yesterday, state media said. A Long March 7 rocket carrying the Tianzhou-2 cargo craft—loaded with essentials such as food, equipment and fuel—blasted off late Saturday from the Wenchang launch site on the tropical southern island of Hainan, the Xinhua news agency reported. The docking with the space station's Tianhe core module was completed at 5:01 am Beijing time (2101 GMT Saturday), the agency said, citing the China Manned Space Agency (CMSA).

China will need to carry out around 10 missions in total to complete assembly of the space station—named Tiangong, meaning "heavenly palace"—in orbit. The station is expected to become fully operational in 2022. Once completed, it is expected to remain in low Earth orbit for up to 15 years. With the possible retirement of the International Space Station after 2028, Tiangong could become the only human outpost in Earth's orbit.

Now that the cargo craft has docked, China plans to begin preparations to send three astronauts up to unpack the goods, which include meals such as shredded

pork with garlic sauce and Kung Pao chicken, the agency said. "We will transport support materials, necessary spare parts and equipment first, and then our crew," Xinhua quoted CMSA director Hao Chun as saying.

Space aspirations

Beijing has pumped billions into its space program in a bid to make up ground on pioneers Russia and the United States, with ambitious projects in Earth orbit and the landing of uncrewed craft on the Moon and Mars. But it was heavily reprimanded by the United States and many experts for a potentially dangerous breach of space etiquette for letting a massive rocket segment free-fall to Earth earlier this month after launching the Tianhe core module.

Although Chinese authorities have said they are open to foreign collaboration on their space station, the scope of that cooperation is as yet unclear. But the European Space Agency has already sent astronauts to China to train for work inside Tiangong when it is ready. Earlier this month, China landed its Zhurong rover on Mars, becoming only the third nation to successfully land a craft on the red planet. The rover has begun roaming to study Martian geology—it is to spend around three months taking photos and harvesting data from a vast northern lava plain.

The United States and Russia are the only other countries to have reached Mars, and only the former has operated a rover on the surface. The launch of the Tianzhou-2 was to have taken place just days after the Mars rover landing, but was postponed for technical reasons. — AFP

6 dead as Taliban fired shell hits Afghan wedding

KABUL: A mortar bomb fired by the Taliban struck a wedding ceremony in a province north of the Afghan capital, killing at least six people including women and children, officials said yesterday. The incident happened late Saturday in Kapisa province when a shell aimed at an army checkpoint hit a house where a crowd had gathered for a wedding, officials said.

"Six civilians were killed and four were wounded when a Taliban terrorist rocket hit a wedding ceremony in Kapisa province," defense ministry spokesman Fawad Aman said on Twitter. The dead included women and children, said Kapisa govern-

News in brief

Pope to meet Lebanon's leaders

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis said yesterday he would invite Lebanon's Christian leaders to the Vatican on July 1 to reflect and pray for "peace and stability" in the stricken Middle Eastern nation. Lebanon is in the throes of a double economic and political crisis. It is experiencing its worst financial downturn since the 1975-1990 civil war, with more than half the population now living below the poverty line. Meanwhile, bickering political leaders have yet to agree on a new government to replace the outgoing cabinet of caretaker prime minister Hassan Diab who resigned in the wake of last summer's deadly port explosion. — AFP

French police hunt for ex-soldier

FRANCE: French police backed by helicopters hunted yesterday for a heavily armed former soldier who had allegedly opened fire on officers responding to a domestic violence dispute in southwestern France. Some 210 police officers and four helicopters were searching for the man, who has an electronic tag due to a prior domestic violence conviction, but who was still at large in the woods of the Dordogne region, authorities said. "The man is heavily armed and around 30 years old. He is athletic and moving quickly," Francine Bourra, the mayor of Lardin-Saint-Lazare village, told AFP. "We have been able to locate him in an area of around four to five kilometers but it's a wooded area, difficult to access," said the mayor. — AFP

Canada extends AstraZeneca validity

MONTREAL: Canadian health authorities announced Saturday they were pushing back the expiration date on nearly 50,000 doses of AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine by one month. Health Canada said in a statement its approval to extend the shelf life of two lots of vaccine from May 31 to July 1 was supported by "scientific evidence." "This change will ensure that provinces and territories are able to use up their existing inventory and provide Canadians access to much needed doses of the vaccine," the agency said. A spokesperson for Health Canada said that as of May 22, there were about 49,000 doses of AstraZeneca in the country with an expiration date of May 31. CBC reported that most were in Ontario province.

Islamist raid in Niger leaves 8 dead

NIAMEY, Niger: At least four members of the security forces and four civilians died in a jihadist raid against the major town in southeast Niger, near the Nigeria border, local authorities said Saturday. Machingun-toting rebels of the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), a breakaway group from Boko Haram, stormed Diffa aboard 15 vehicles, a statement from the authorities said. The ministry of defense gave details of the toll later Saturday on public television. It added that a number of "terrorists" had been "neutralized". The army recovered rocket launchers, a mortar and a large amount of ammunition as well as mobile phones, drugs and syringes, according to an earlier statement. — AFP

14 Nigerian students freed

KANO, Nigeria: Fourteen students from a university in northwestern Nigeria were freed on Saturday, 40 days after being kidnapped, a local police spokesman told AFP. Such seizures have become a frequent way for criminals to collect ransoms, with more than 700 abductions since December. "Fourteen students of Greenfield University were released by their captors this evening," police spokesman Mohammed Jalige told AFP. "They were dumped outside the city along the Kaduna-Abuja expressway" in central Nigeria. Jalige said he did not know if ransoms had been paid for their release. — AFP



BAGRAM, AFGHANISTAN: In this file photo a US soldier of a team protection squad of a PRT (Provincial Reconstruction team) walks along a road under-construction near Bagram, about 60 kms from Kabul. — AFP

nor's spokesman Shayeq Shores, who also blamed the Taliban for the attack. He said the insurgents had aimed the mortar at an army checkpoint but the round missed the target and hit the wedding ceremony.

The insurgents denied they had fired the shell and instead blamed government forces for firing the mortar. Yesterday, the interior ministry further accused the Taliban of killing nearly 250 civilians and wounding more than 500 in roadside bomb blasts and other attacks over the past month. The Taliban deny killing civilians, but roadside bombs planted to target security forces often end up doing just that.

On Saturday, at least four people including two university lecturers were killed and several others were wounded when a roadside bomb struck their bus in the Parwan province, north of Kabul. Violence has soared in recent weeks as government forces and the Taliban clash in near-daily battles across the rugged countryside. Even as violence surges, the US military continues to withdraw its remaining 2,500 troops from Afghanistan. — AFP

MONDAY, MAY 31, 2021

Business

Ivory Coast hopes cashew 'grey gold' can conquer US market

Country boosts capacity by 100,000 tons, shifts from traditional export ties

ABIDJAN: From a "triangular trade" that sees its nuts shelled in Asia before being shipped to the US, top cashew producer Ivory Coast aims to process more of its own crop for sale in the huge American market. Starting from the present yearly average of just 10 percent, producers aim to shell half by 2025, Adama Coulibaly, director of the Cotton-Cashew Council, told AFP.

This year alone the country's capacity should increase by 100,000 tons. But processing more nuts domestically will mean a shift away from traditional export relationships, which currently see most raw nuts sent to Vietnam and India. Until now, "triangular trade" has left the shelling up to workers there before the nuts were shipped to the United States at "an exorbitant price", said Losseni Kone, president of Ivory Cashew, an American firm specializing in cashew certification and trade.

"The American market is worth 40 percent of world capacity, but accounts for just one percent of imports of Ivorian nuts," added the Maryland-based entrepreneur.

Business prospects are promising if the country can get all the steps worked out. "There is no cause for concern about the cashew market in the USA. We love it. Ivorian cashew is the best," Association of Food Industries (AFI) president Bob Bauer told AFP, promising the group would "help" producers.



Safety first

After a week-long visit with a group of US businessmen to processing plants in northern and central Ivory Coast, Ivory Cashew's Kone sealed a deal with the country's Cotton-Cashew Council (CCA) to get Ivorian nuts into US and other global markets. The top priority is to bring local processing into line with US and international standards on food safety. "Certification is still vital to gain access to the

American market. Once you're granted access to the American market you can sell to anyone, because no other international standard matches it," Kone said. A first tranche of 15 processing units is to be certified under the US Food Safety Modernisation Act (FSMA). Staff will be given two weeks of training by US experts on food import regulations and requirements.

Cotton-Cashew Council director Coulibaly believes the country has a shot at becoming the "top

producer of raw cashew nuts among the world leaders," and hopes that food safety improvements will allow for "a 100 percent Ivory Coast certification".

'Grey gold'

Cashew kernels are used in cooking and cosmetics, while resin from the shells has various industrial uses, including as a fluid for aircraft braking systems—earning the nut its nickname of "grey gold". The cashew apple is also used to produce wine, liqueur, syrup, jam and juice. This year's harvest should see Ivory Coast's 250,000 producers—organized into around 20 cooperatives—sell 900,000 tons of raw nuts.

Industry players credit the highest output in five years to buyers upholding fixed prices paid to growers. But even as production has soared, prices fell in the coronavirus pandemic, Coulibaly said.

Higher output must be matched by local processing, he added, "because it is in processing that there is added value." As a whole, Africa provides more than half of the world's cashew harvest but only processes 10 percent of it.

So producing countries "retain only a small share of the value created as the nut travels from the farm to store," UN trade official Miho Shirotori said last month. "African farmers, exporters and workers are missing out on a wealth of opportunities," she noted. —AFP



A view of a Rolls-Royce Boat Tail on show at the company's Goodwood headquarters near Chichester, southwest England Friday. — AFP

World's rich floor it in post-pandemic luxury car rush

PARIS: The global rebound from the coronavirus pandemic is revving luxury carmakers' sales to never-before-seen heights, as order books at the likes of Lamborghini, Ferrari and Rolls-Royce burst with demand from the world's wealthy. Just like regular earners around the world, the richest cut back on consumption during 2020, with "double-digit" falls in sales for makers of the most coveted cars, says Felipe Munoz of market research firm Jato Dynamics.

But "customers for these cars were not as exposed as others" to the crisis' financial fallout, he adds.

For the wealthy, "most of the problem was that they couldn't get out of their houses," Munoz says. "They postponed their purchases." The rebound for exclusive cars was already underway in the final quarter of 2020 as they reached for their platinum credit cards again, cushioning the pandemic blow by comparison to mass-market manufacturers. Annual sales last year at Volkswagen-owned Lamborghini sped past their 2019 record to 7,430 vehicles, driven by the Italian manufacturer's hefty Urus SUV clocking in at around 200,000 euros (\$220,000 in the US).

Closed factories meant sales at Ferrari tumbled 10 percent last year, to 9,119. But bosses say the black-horse brand now has an "order book at record levels", powered by the 450,000-euro SF90 Stradale—the carmaker's first plug-in hybrid—as well as the windscreen-free two-seater Monza, believed to cost around 1.7 million euros.

Ferrari hopes to top the 10,000-unit mark next year, when it becomes the final luxury producer to offer an SUV with the "Purosangue".

'Time to enjoy life'

"The luxury market still has very specific rules and customers," Deloitte car industry analyst Guillaume Crunelle says. "Behavior is much more linked to personal situations, how their wealth is developing, rather than market trends."

After a year with less consumption, "there is quite some money around to be spent," Rolls-Royce chief executive Torsten Muller-Otvos tells AFP. Nevertheless, the BMW subsidiary's boss also sees the aftereffects of the pandemic in people's buying patterns. "Quite a lot of our clients said that COVID taught them that life can end easily tomorrow and now is time to enjoy your life." This week the historic British brand launched a yacht-inspired model, the "Boat Tail", of which it has so far built just three units—and won't reveal the price.

Muller-Otvos says that the new car is "much more refined" than its last custom build, the Sweptail, which cost in the region of \$13 million.—AFP

ilar ones on social media reviewed by AFP. Such behavior is completely illegal and flouts the instructions of the automaker, which says on its website that Tesla's driver-assistance system is "intended for use with a fully attentive driver, who has their hands on the wheel and is prepared to take over at any moment."

Besides Tesla's "Autopilot" system, which matches a vehicle's speed to that of surrounding traffic and assists in steering within a clearly marked lane, Tesla offers what it calls "full self-driving capability."

That program's capabilities include helping park a car, maneuver a vehicle in and out of a tight parking space and guide a car from a highway on-ramp to an off-ramp. Tesla will alert the driver and ultimately disengage the self-driving system if the driver's seatbelt is not buckled, or if the hands of the driver are not detected on the steering wheel.

Fooling the system

However, these protections have proved little match

Meltdown? Turmoil at UK steel empire stokes job fears

LONDON: Sanjeev Gupta's Liberty Steel company—one of the world's largest steel empires—faces an uncertain future after announcing plans to sell three of its UK plants. Liberty employs 3,000 UK workers and parent company Gupta Family Group (GFG) Alliance has 35,000 employees around the world, with metalworks and mines in Europe, the United States and Australia. Gupta was once seen as the saviour of British steelmaking but is now fighting for survival following the collapse of its main lender Greensill Capital and fraud allegations.

The Indian-British billionaire has insisted none of his 12 UK sites will close. Yet this week's decision to sell three plants in northern and central England plunges 1,500 jobs into uncertainty and comes after three of GFG's French auto parts factories sought bankruptcy protection last month.

Clive Royston, who represents the Community trade union at Liberty's Stocksbridge site in northern England, said he wants Liberty to be a "responsible seller" and find a buyer who will "not just strip off assets". "We're worried and don't have any details. It's hard because they (workers) are asking questions and I can't answer," he said.

Liquidity crisis

Supply chain finance firm Greensill contributed to GFG's expansion through short-term corporate loans and avoided the stricter regulations imposed on traditional banks. But its abrupt collapse in March triggered a liquidity crisis at GFG as creditors sought to recall their loans.

It has been reported that Greensill had £3.5 billion (\$5 billion, 4.1 billion euros) of exposure with GFG. Greensill's lawyers claimed its demise could threaten 50,000 jobs worldwide. Liberty has reportedly not repaid an £18-million loan to Metro Bank, which accuses it of breaching "covenants and restrictions". Liberty denies the claims. Negotiations with Swiss banking giant Credit Suisse, which had 10 billion euros of exposure with Greensill, continue.

The UK government rebuffed Liberty's request for a £170-million bailout due to concerns over opaque corporate structure and governance.

'Red Flag'

The risky nature of supporting distressed companies means investors either make huge profits or lose their whole investment, said Dirk Jenter, of the London School of Economics and Political Science. As sustain-

ing firms can be investors' best way to recoup their loans, "they (Liberty) are scrambling for money and trying to sell their most liquid assets. It's an attempt to buy time to keep the company alive," he added.

Gupta was the majority owner of the indebted Wyelands Bank, which was probed by the Bank of England in 2019 and wound down in March amid allegations of favouring Gupta's associates.

This month, the UK's Serious Fraud Office opened an investigation against GFG for alleged fraud, fraudulent trading and money laundering, including its financing activities with Greensill.

Jenter said this investigation and allegations of providing fake invoices would deter potential investors



Liberty Steel launched a major restructuring plan that includes the sale of some British assets following the collapse of its key financier Greensill. — AFP

and compound Liberty's financial woes. "It's a red flag. It would take an extraordinarily courageous investor to rely on the numbers provided by Liberty. It makes risking equity almost impossible," he told AFP.

'A foundational industry'

Union representative Royston said coronavirus "crippled" Stocksbridge, which supplies the hard-hit aerospace sector, and stressed the need to protect jobs that have defined the region despite several ownership changes over the years. "There's not much industry around us. Stocksbridge has been built around the plant. As a lad, you follow your father into the steelworks," he added.

David Bailey, from the University of Birmingham business school, said all British steel manufacturers faced broader challenges, including higher electricity prices and business rates. A longstanding glut in the global steel market and Chinese dumping have also undercut British steelmakers. "You might have a period where companies are successful for a while, then these problems raise their heads again. Liberty ran into issues that are more structural," he said. "They were far too reliant on Greensill when it went under and left themselves too exposed." —AFP

Dangerously trending: Driverless Tesla videos on social media

NEW YORK: It was a boozy joyride captured for TikTok with a soundtrack provided by Justin Bieber and with a Tesla serving as the "Designated Driver" for the night. In the short video, three young men are shown dancing in their seats, drinks nearby, as the vehicle moves down the highway near other cars at 65 miles per hour (105 kilometers per hour), as shown on the speedometer.

Nobody is behind the steering wheel. The video clip, which has been "liked" by nearly two million people and shared 105,000 times, is just one of many sim-

for Tesla motorists determined to misuse their vehicles. The magazine Consumer Reports released a video in which an incredulous tester easily duped a Tesla into driving with no one at the wheel. "Idiots will be idiots, they will find a way to trick the system and that's not Tesla's fault, they can put a bunch of other things here people will just defeat it," a poster calling himself "Dirty Tesla" said in a video on his YouTube page, which has 55,000 subscribers.

("Dirty Tesla" has described himself as the president of a Tesla owner's club in Michigan but declined to give his name.) But Tesla itself has been less than clear, directing users to follow the rules even as it employs confusing terminology for its driver-assistance programs, and as its leader, Elon Musk, makes sweeping statements about the technology.

Musk early this year predicted the company's vehicles would achieve Level 5 autonomy, or full self-driving, in 2021. Yet in 2015, the billionaire had said that goal would be reached within two years.—AFP



BEIJING: A man sits inside of a Tesla car Model 3 as a vendor talks to him at a Tesla shop inside of a shopping Mall in Beijing.— AFP

Business

Kamco GCC projects market update

GCC projects activity shows signs of fresh green shoots

Kuwait expected to roll out larger number of projects in near term

KUWAIT: After witnessing declines over the last several quarters, the GCC project market showed healthy recovery during Q1-2021 with value of projects awarded more than doubling q-o-q to \$26.3 billion. This was mainly led by pending project awards from last year, in addition to efforts by governments in the region to vaccinate the bulk of the population and limit the spread of the COVID-19 that affected economic activity across the globe.

According to Bloomberg, close to 26.5 million doses have been administered with at least the first dose of the vaccine in the GCC out of a total population of 54 million residents. Most of the countries have already announced easing or no restrictions with an eye on providing uninterrupted business activity. Historically, however, the GCC project market has remained under severe pressure ever since the crude oil prices started declining and the onset of COVID-19 was essentially only partly responsible for the slowdown that the sector is witnessing recently. The region has seen a decline in new project awards over the years as even the existing and ongoing projects were thoroughly scrutinized for their viability in a low spending environment. With rising debt levels and record high fiscal deficits as revenues declined, governments in the GCC cancelled numerous projects after the fall in oil prices. This affected the aggregate project market in the region even before the COVID-19 pandemic started and as projects got completed contractors in the region were seeing declining workloads.

Seasonal rebound

In terms of quarterly data on project awards, the GCC region witnessed the normal seasonal spike during Q1-2021 with project awards worth \$26.3 billion, more than double the contract awards during Q4-2020 that stood at \$12.8 billion. However, the growth came mainly on the back of a q-o-q increase in project awards in Qatar and Kuwait while the rest of the GCC countries reported declines. When compared to Q1-2020, only Qatar reported a growth in project awards that resulted in a smaller decline at the aggregate GCC level at 3.5 percent.

Sector performance

The quarterly contract awards for the GCC region shows a spike in project for the Gas sector during Q1-2021, mainly due to the QatarGas award in Qatar. However, sectors like Construction, Power and Transport continue to show promising consistency in awards in the region. According to data from MEED Projects, average project award for the Construction sector stood at \$5.5 billion during the last four quarters while that in the Power and Transport sectors showed averages of \$1.2 billion and \$2.4 billion, respectively. The water sector has also seen regular project awards over the last few years.

Kuwait projects

The need to develop non-oil sectors is very apparent in the project pipeline for the GCC countries. According to MEED Projects, construction projects account for the bulk of the GCC project pipeline at 65 percent or \$1.5 trillion of the total \$2.4 trillion.

Projects in the Transport industry was next at 12.7 percent or \$301.5 billion followed by Power projects at 6.6 percent or \$156.0 billion. Saudi Arabia continues to be the biggest market with \$1.2 trillion worth of projects in pipeline followed by UAE and Kuwait at \$652 billion and \$187 billion.

In terms of the stage of the projects, around \$1.7 Trillion worth of projects are under the design stage followed by \$408 billion in the study phase. Despite being the third biggest market in the region in terms of size of project pipeline, Kuwait is the only market in the GCC for which the size of projects under the study stage is greater than the rest of the stages. This can further be analyzed using the last twelve month (TTM) contract awards to current pipeline of projects in the study phase ratio. This ratio is the lowest in the case of Kuwait at 3.4 percent as compared to the GCC average of 16.3 percent. This indicates the country could potentially announce an increasing number of projects after the projects progress from the study stage to the bid and design stages. One of the key reasons for this was the slowdown in project awards in Kuwait between 2015-2019.

Despite the pandemic, the year 2020 witnessed a growth in project awards in Kuwait from \$3.3 billion in 2019 to \$4.2 billion in 2020. The trends for 2021 also looks promising with \$1.3 billion worth of projects awarded until April-2021. Within Kuwait, Construction accounted for the biggest pie of the pipeline at \$76 billion followed by Transport and Power at \$56.8 billion and \$27.6 billion, respectively.

Contract awards expected to reach 5-year high in 2021 With YTD-21 contract awards at \$33.1 billion, the full year is expected to be promising in terms of project market activity in the GCC. According to MEED projects, \$114 billion worth of contracts are expected to be awarded this year, which is more than three times the size of contract awards in 2020 and double the awards in 2019. The significant increase is expected to come from pending projects from last year as well as an accelerated of diversification efforts in the GCC. The increasing pace of vaccinations in the region and the expected easing of COVID-19 related restrictions are expected to further boost business confidence and encourage investment in new projects. Saudi Arabia is expected to be the biggest market for new contract awards of \$35.0 billion by year end followed by Qatar and UAE at around \$31 billion and \$28 billion, respectively. Oman is expected to award little over \$10 billion worth of projects this year whereas Kuwait's market is expected to see around \$9 billion in new projects.



Sources: MEED Projects, Kamco Invest Research

Construction sector

Being the largest sector in the GCC in terms of contract awards and project activity, the trends in the construction sector are expected to be crucial for the overall project market. The sector is expected to remain under pressure in 2021 as governments remain cautious on the COVID-19 related shocks but is expected to see broad-based growth in the next three years. Stretched balance sheets for most of the countries in the region with record borrowing has limited the government's involvement in the construction sector. However, the recovery in oil prices recently to over \$60/b has lowered the fiscal deficits for most of the countries in the region, including in Kuwait. Moreover, countries are increasingly tapping the public private partnership (PPP) route to finance new projects. For instance, Saudi Arabia is changing laws to attract foreign investments and encourage PPP.

Qatar also passed a law that allows 100 percent ownership of companies. Kuwait has also seen some real progress with awards including the \$1.7 billion Umm al-Hayman wastewater PPP last year and further progress on housing and education schemes.

According to a report from MEED, the Kuwait Authority for Partnership Projects (KAPP) and Kuwait Municipality are expected to tender the South Jahra Labour City using a build, operate and transfer (BOT) model. The Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) has also received up to 15 prequalification applications to develop four private schools as PPPs. Recently, Kuwait's PAHW reported pre-qualified bidders to participate in two PPP projects at the Jaber al-Ahmad city that included a private university and a second project for the development of a private hospital.

Estimates provided by MEED showed mixed y-o-y growth expectations in construction output in the GCC during 2021 with declines expected in Oman and Kuwait and low-single digit growth in the rest of the GCC countries mainly reflecting efforts to manage ris-

ing debt financing in the short term. However, the forecast for 2022 - 2024 showed healthy growth in output across the board.

Diversification

A focus on expanding non-oil economy is one of the key components of near to mid-term strategic plans announced by almost all the countries in the GCC. In terms of progress on this front, the IMF expects GCC non-oil GDP to grow at double the pace of oil GDP during 2021, indicating a much faster recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the IMF's Regional Economic Outlook, non-oil GDP is expected to grow by 3.5 percent in the GCC during 2021 followed by 3.4 percent growth during 2022. Oil GDP, on the other hand is expected to grow by 1.6 percent in 2021 followed by 4.3 percent in 2022. We believe that the faster growth in 2022 shows higher oil production in the region which would depend on OPEC+ production policy.

Higher oil prices

Crude oil prices have remained elevated over the last few months at above the \$60/b mark. This provided the much needed relief for the GCC governments resulting in lower expected fiscal deficits. According to Bloomberg estimates, median Brent crude oil forecast is expected to remain comfortably above the \$60/b mark over the next five years. In addition to elevated prices, stable oil prices recently have also assisted in long-term policy formulation and strategic plans.

On the fiscal front, Qatar is expected to continue to see higher surpluses of 1.4 percent in 2021 and 7.3 percent in 2022. As a result, the country has the lowest fiscal breakeven oil price in the GCC for 2021 at \$43.11/b, according to the IMF. For the overall GCC region, fiscal deficit is expected to contract to 3.0 percent of GDP in 2021 from 9.2 percent in 2020 and further improve to a deficit of 1.4 percent of GDP in 2022.

UK to build new 'national flagship' to host trade events

LONDON: Britain will build what it is calling a new "national flagship" vessel to host trade events and promote its post-Brexit interests around the world, Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced Saturday.

The ship will provide a global platform for high level trade negotiations as well as British businesses' products, his office said, as the United Kingdom seeks new trading ties after leaving the European Union last year. It will also be expected to play a role in delivering the country's foreign and security policies, including by hosting summits and other diplomatic talks.

It will be the first so-called national

flagship in service since 1997, when the Royal Yacht Britannia was decommissioned. However, Johnson insisted the new vessel's role will be "distinct" from those of forerunners, "reflecting the UK's burgeoning status as a great, independent maritime trading nation".

"Every aspect of the ship, from its build to the businesses it showcases on board, will represent and promote the best of British—a clear and powerful symbol of our commitment to be an active player on the world stage," he said in a statement. The ship's construction is expected to begin in 2022 and be completed within four years, with its costs confirmed following a competitive tendering process, according to Johnson's office. The vessel, yet to be named, will be crewed by the Royal Navy and earmarked for around 30 years' service.

The government is likely to face calls to name it after Prince Philip, Queen Elizabeth II's late husband and a former navy commander, who died in April aged 99.



Britain formally left the EU after nearly five decades of membership in January 2020, and quit its single market and customs union at the start of this year. It has replicated or rolled over existing trade agreements with the bloc, Japan and several other

countries, but is yet to strike an entirely new deal with any country.

London is currently in advanced discussions with Australia and has held initial talks with India, New Zealand and the United States about future pacts. —AFP

Go vegan to save planet? UK show looks at eco cost of meat

OXFORD: Science and art collide in a new British exhibition which opened on Friday and hopes to raise awareness about the environmental impact of eating meat, while promising a guilt-free look at the "difficult problem". "Globally we eat too much meat, and we need to reduce it," said Kelly Richards, exhibition officer at Oxford University's Natural History Museum. "It's a very nuanced, very difficult kind of problem to unpick," she told AFP.

Rather than imposing dogma, she hopes the "Meat The Future" exhibition will "give people the information that allows them to make up their own mind about the kind of future that they want". The show uses interactive installations, a virtual supermarket, fake shelves and works from artists including Damien Hirst to highlight the environmental costs of meat consumption, which has tripled worldwide in 50 years. Visitors are met at the entrance by piles of fake burgers on a gingham tablecloth, each pile representing the average daily amount of meat eaten in different countries.

Britons eat on average 223 grams of meat per day, a figure that is "a lot more than the global average", and is "much above the recommended

amounts", said John Lynch, a physicist specializing in the environmental impact of agriculture. Highlighting the urgency of cutting emissions in order to meet global targets for limiting warming, he said: "We probably need to do as much as possible on agriculture." The sector's emissions, he estimated, would be halved if everyone became "flexitarian"—where people still eat meat, but only rarely.

Environmental score

Which type of meat is most polluting and in what way? What are the health risks and benefits of eating meat? These are the questions that 10 University of Oxford researchers have tried to answer in a mathematical but playful attempt to nudge visitors towards a more responsible diet. The show examines how supermarkets and restaurants "can influence our choices... and we talk about the kind of tools that we can use to fight back a little bit," said Richards, in front of fake refrigerated shelves filled with ready meals.

Visitors can also take a virtual shopping trip, with 10,000 products on offer that all come with a score evaluating their ecological impact. The "environmental score" takes into account water pollution, impact on biodiversity and the CO2 emissions produced in its manufacture. "If you go into a supermarket, you often don't see that information," Lynch said. "So one of the parts of the research project is looking at different labeling schemes, so you might have an environmental score or a ranking... for your food product." —AFP

Burgan Bank reveals winners of Yawmi draw

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

The lucky winners are:

1. Hasan Ozkan
2. Suhail Dahham Dhafer
3. Mohammed Abdulla Al-Sumait
4. Sheikha Aishah Al-Sabah
5. Jenan Jamal Eissa

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

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

Al-Tijari announces winners of Al-Najma Account campaign

KUWAIT: Commercial Bank of Kuwait conducted the weekly draws on Al-Najma Account and salary transfer campaign yesterday. The draws were conducted in the presence of Ministry of Commerce and Industry representative Ahmad Al-Basman.

The results of the draws were as follows:

- 1- Al-Najma weekly account - the prize of KD 5,000 went to the winner Samer Mahmoud Yousef Younes
- 2- Salary account campaign - the prize of up to KD 1,000 - went to the winner Hanan Jassim Mohammad Ali Naser Jamal

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

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

Al-Najma Account can be opened by depositing KD 100, and customer should maintain a minimum amount of KD 500 to be eligible to enter all draws on Al-Najma Account prizes. As for the chances of winning, the more balance a customer maintains in Al-Najma Account, the more chances the account holder will get to win, the account also offers additional benefits like the ATM card, a credit card against customer's account and all CBK banking services that customer can enjoy. The bank revealed that Al-Najma account is available to everyone, and anyone can open Al-Najma account through CBK mobile application in simple steps from anywhere and at any time

Al Mulla Group inaugurates new showroom for BRABUS in Kuwait

An exclusive point of sale and service of BRABUS tuning kits and accessories



KUWAIT: Inauguration of a special showroom for BRABUS products and BRABUS modified vehicles in Al-Rai area



KUWAIT: Gulf Trading Group, a subsidiary of Al Mulla Group, has recently signed a partnership agreement with BRABUS GmbH, the leading German company with over 40 years of experience in transforming vehicles of the Mercedes-Benz brand into stylish unique vehicles. In accordance with the terms of this agreement, Gulf Trading Group (GTG), as the sole authorized distributor of the BRABUS brand, and the exclusive point of sale and service of BRABUS tuning kits and accessories in Kuwait, announced the inauguration of a special showroom for BRABUS products, and BRABUS modified vehicles in Al-Rai area in Kuwait.

BRABUS GmbH, the German high-performance automotive aftermarket tuning company founded in 1977 in Bottrop, maintains its regional office BRABUS Middle East L.L.C. in Dubai, UAE, which operates as a separate legal entity and as a technical support hub for the greater GCC region. BRABUS is the largest Mercedes-Benz tuner after Mercedes-AMG and is active in more than 100 countries globally.

Commenting on the partnership agreement and the opening of the showroom, Imad Flayhan, Managing Director, Automotive Division at Al Mulla Group, said: "On behalf of Gulf Trading Group and Al Mulla Group we are delighted to

commence operations as an authorized distributor of BRABUS products and services in Kuwait. BRABUS is one of the world's leading high-performance modification and tuning companies. We are proud to have reached an agreement to represent such an esteemed brand and look forward to providing our clients in Kuwait with the premium level of services and high quality modifications that BRABUS is renowned for."

BRABUS, who has expanded its services to include vintage cars, is dedicated to achieving maximum car performance through the increase of horsepower and movement while modifying it according to the customer's requests. BRABUS

also offers cosmetic modifications including low profile spoilers, body kits, carbon fiber splitters, and multi-piece alloy wheels. Other upgrades include racing Limited Split Differentials (LSDs) open racing exhaust systems, twelve-piston disc brakes, and engine remapping. Customers can also have complete engine overhauls.

The company uses its automotive expertise from more than 40 years to restore classic vehicles of the Mercedes-Benz brand in a very special way - back to new condition. The "Six-Star Restoration" brings many of the classic vehicles to at least the same high quality they once had in their "first life" straight from the factory.

Nespresso reveals deep human care behind every cup of brand's coffee

KUWAIT: Nespresso has always believed that coffee can be a powerful force for good, and this conviction is central to the brand's new communications platform: "Made with Care". Premiering worldwide today, the campaign launches with a spoken word video for TV and social, in which long-standing brand ambassador and Nespresso Sustainability Advisory Board (NSAB) member George Clooney, together with other friends of the brand, explores what is behind every cup of Nespresso coffee: the deep human care invested in every step of the value chain.

Every cup begins with care

The "Made with Care" campaign, spearheaded by Clooney, brings to life Nespresso's fundamental beliefs: that crafting high-quality coffee can be both an art and a catalyst for positive change - if care is instilled in every detail. This ethos is embedded throughout the company's value chain - from the Nespresso AAA Sustainable Quality Program, designed to ensure the selection of only the finest quality beans while improving the livelihoods of farmers and protecting the environment, through to its commitment to reviving endangered coffees and communities with the Reviving Origins program. This same acute sense of care lies behind the company's commitment to make every cup of Nespresso coffee carbon neutral by 2022.

"Care runs deep at Nespresso," says Anna Lundstrom, Nespresso's Chief Brand Officer. "As guardians of one of nature's precious resources, it is a philosophy that's embedded in everything we do. We are committed to offering the most refined coffee experience and to protect the best of our world with human care and creativity. Our approach proves that good taste and good values can go hand in hand, and we are proud to bring together so many like-minded friends of the brand in our latest campaign."

Shared values

Building on a partnership which began in 2006, "Made with Care" also highlights the enduring affinity between the values of the Nespresso brand and George Clooney, demonstrating how brand ambassadorship can evolve into something altogether more meaningful.

"Nespresso and I have always shared a passion for sustainability and farmer welfare. And if the past year has shown anything, it's that care is pivotal to communities' wellbeing and resilience. That's why I feel privileged to stand alongside people with the same values in the "Made with Care" movement - from activists, to celebrities, to some of the most dedicated farmers and coffee experts I have ever met. Together, we are committed to sustainability, fairness and to ensuring we can enjoy

great coffee for generations to come," said Clooney.

In the launch video, Clooney and the diverse group of Nespresso partners answer the question, "What is Care?". They each explain how their personal beliefs bind them with the deep human care which is so central to the Nespresso value chain.

Let's talk about care

At Nespresso quality doesn't happen by chance but results from conscious choices and the great care taken by the company throughout its global operations. Care for coffee farming communities and the pursuit of gender equality are fundamental to the



Nespresso brand. The video features a number of personalities who share the same values with their passionate championing of pressing societal issues. From Colombian Fashion Designer Johanna Ortiz, to Rwandan-French actress and philanthropist Sonia Rolland, digital entrepreneur Chiara Ferragni, Sudanese-American poet and activist Emi Mahmoud, Nespresso is proud to collaborate with such powerful advocates for equity and inclusivity.

The video also includes partners who share Nespresso's long-term commitment to sustainability. From creatives, such as French chef Jean Imbert, who amplify these values through their craft, to individuals who have dedicated their entire careers to taking action on fairness and sustainability - namely Dr. Nyagoy Nyong'o, Global CEO for Fairtrade International, and Tristan Lecomte, Founder of PUR Projet, both of whom are members of the Nespresso Sustainability Advisory Board.

Respect for the artistry involved in crafting quality coffee is paramount to Nespresso. It is also behind the brand's relationships with some of the world's most gifted artists and professionals who use their talents as a platform to help others, including film and television actor Mark Chao, and French violinist, Renaud Capucon.

Finally, the care in every Nespresso cup is perhaps best expressed in the words of the people behind the brand, for whom caring is critical to their everyday job. Care for quality, care for the experience they give coffee lovers, care for each other. The voices we hear in the video include Nespresso's Head of Coffee Development Alexis Rodriguez, and Coffee Specialist James Pergola, as well as Colombian Agronomist Juliana Correa, and Nicaraguan coffee artists Cindy Romero and Anderson Moran.

The "Made with Care" launch film also features global digital entrepreneur, Chiara Ferragni, a true connoisseur of quality coffee and lifelong Nespresso fan. Chiara's high-profile fundraising, disruptive ideas and active support for female empowerment are all key tenets of the Nespresso brand, and make her an excellent addition to this line-up of like-minded advocates for caring.

"Over the past year, I've become convinced more than ever that true care means

doing what we can to support our community. Because together we are stronger. I have always admired Nespresso for its commitment to equitable and sustainable sourcing, and am proud to start collaborating with Nespresso on such an important initiative and I'm excited about what is to come," said Ferragni.

The "Made with Care" launch film also features Mark Chao, a gifted actor, who uses his public profile to champion emotional well-being. Chao believes strongly that people should be helped to enhance their wellness, a philosophy which is reflected in the way Nespresso cares for its employees, the farmers it collaborates with, and the quality of the experience it offers coffee lovers every day.

"Over the past year, I've become convinced more than ever that truly caring means doing what we can to support anyone who may be struggling. I am proud of my long-term relationship with the Nespresso brand and grateful for the opportunity to use this platform to spread positive energy and spark positive change," said Chao. The latest Nespresso campaign will appear on television, in digital, print and social media, as well as in Nespresso boutiques, out-of-home and on the company website.

KIB launches 'Credit Academy' in collaboration with Moody's

KUWAIT: In light of its strategic initiatives and under the umbrella of KIB's New Graduate Development program, Kuwait International Bank (KIB) launched Credit Academy, in collaboration with Moody's - the world's leading company specializing in economic research, financial analysis and credit ratings. This customized development program aims to improve the capabilities and skills of employees in the field of finance and commercial credit in accordance with the highest global standards, in addition to providing them with a Certificate in Commercial Credit (CICC) after completing a comprehensive and integrated training program.

The program, which kicked off this past April and extends over a period of six months, includes three virtual classrooms sessions conducted in three consecutive phases: Phase 1: Accounting for Credit Professional (ACP), Phase 2: Commercial Lending (CL), while Phase 3 will focus on Problem Loans (PL) and Profitability and Credit Risk (PCR). The program also offers participants an enlightening educational journey through a number of virtual classrooms and workshops as well as hands-on training at the workplace.

Commenting on the program, Firas Al-Darmi, Deputy General Manager at the Human Resources Department at the Bank, said: "At KIB, we constantly seek to develop staff skills and offer new talents training courses and professional programs that would drive and uplift commercial performance. This inevitably contributes to the Bank's ambitious strategic plans and raises performance to the highest standards, in addition to enhancing the employment experience and employee satisfaction at the Bank."

On his part, Deputy General Manager of Wholesale Banking -

Head of Domestic Commercial Banking, Hesham Al-Mubarak, further noted that Credit Academy leverages Moody's deep expertise in credit assessment and risk management to certify the achievement of the highest standards of credit analysis and decision-making skills, by targeting

freshly graduated employees from both local and international universities. Al-Mubarak also stressed that the program is aimed at enhancing fundamental skills, such as the understanding and analysis of customer needs, identifying risks and financing solutions, in addition to the understanding and interpretation of financial standards and ultimately the implication of accounting practice for credit analysis. Overall, this program seeks to improve employees' ability to implement the Bank's risk management policy and

adhere to professional standards that inspire trust and confidence. "Acquiring a Certificate in Commercial Credit (CICC) will help employees improve their capabilities and boost performance in the field of operations, in addition to enhancing their knowledge of business aspects and their ability to make decisions and manage and analyze commercial credit in the Bank in accordance with the highest international standards. This is all thanks to the benefit of Moody's long-standing experience in credit assessment and risk management, which will guarantee participants in the program a bright career in the banking sector," added Al-Mubarak. It serves to note that KIB adopts a policy of investing in human capital by attracting young Kuwaiti talent and aspiring new graduates, in addition to providing them with career development opportunities and intensive and comprehensive training courses, which improves their skills and paves the way for a promising career in the financial sector.



Firas Al-Darmi



Hesham Al-Mubarak

Lifestyle | Features



A picture taken on May 28, 2021 shows the moon setting behind Al-Hamra Tower in Kuwait City. — photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kazakhstan sees rare antelope rebound after mass die off

The population of the critically endangered Saiga antelope has more than doubled since 2019, Kazakhstan said Friday, giving conservationists fresh hope for the steppe-dwelling animal's long-term survival. News that the Central Asian country's Saiga population rose from 334,000 to 842,000 since the last time an aerial survey was carried out suggests it is continuing to rebound after a massive die-off in 2015. Kazakhstan's ecology ministry said in a statement the boom was "an indicator of the effectiveness of measures to conserve saiga populations and counteract poaching".

The former Soviet country's vast steppe is home to a majority of the world's Saiga with Russia's Kalmykia region and Mongolia hosting smaller numbers. In 2015, around 200,000 of the antelopes-well over half the total global population at the time-were wiped out by what scientists later determined was a nasal bacterium that spread in unusually warm and humid conditions. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), whose "Red List" is the scientific reference for threatened wildlife, deems the Saiga to be among five critically endangered antelope species. Kazakhstan did not complete an aerial survey in 2020 due to the coronavirus.

Poaching problem

Poaching is a persistent threat to the Saiga, known for its distinctive bulbous

nose, and is fuelled by demand for their horn in traditional Chinese medicine. Kazakhstan's leaders pledged to intensify their crackdown on poaching after two state rangers were killed by poachers in 2019. The murders triggered a national outcry. One of the pair, Yerlan Nurgaliyev, is honoured with a mural on an apartment building in the largest city Almaty, which depicts him cradling one of the animals that are seen as national symbols.

Initiative that works closely with the government and international partners to preserve Saiga, said the project's visits to the region had showed a "positive dynamic". "Not only are the numbers of Saiga increasing, but the number of males relative to the number of females is also growing," said Salemgareev, whose group drove and hiked between saiga populations this month, weighing and marking newborns.

If five years ago demand for the male



In this undated photograph a Saiga antelope walks on a prairie outside Almaty. — AFP

But recent police busts point to the scale of the threat facing the species. In April, the interior ministry said it had detained two men responsible for poaching more than 800 saiga horns, which the ministry said were worth millions of dollars. The detainees had "cut off the horns of the dead Saigas and stored them for sale" since autumn of last year, the release said. During a trip this month to steppe land in central Kazakhstan where the calving season was underway, analysts told AFP they believe the government's drive to enforce anti-poaching laws was yielding fruit.

Albert Salemgareev, an expert with the Kazakhstan-based Altyn Dala Conservation

horn had brought the male to female ratio as low as one to 18, recent visits to one Saiga region in the northwest of Kazakhstan suggested a ratio closer to "one to seven, or one to eight", Salemgareev estimated. Climate change and the expansion of human activity through farming and infrastructure projects are other threats to the Saiga. Earlier this month the ecological ministry estimated that around 350 female saiga antelopes had been killed by lightning amid storms in the west of the country. — AFP

HONG KONG MOUNTAINEER ON A HIGH AFTER FASTEST EVEREST CLIMB BY A WOMAN

Former Hong Kong schoolteacher Tsang Yin-hung said yesterday she always believed in aiming high after setting a new record for the fastest ascent of Everest by a woman. Tsang scaled the 8,848.86-metre (29,031 feet) mountain in 25 hours and 50 minutes, a Nepal government officer who recorded her time told AFP on Thursday. The 44-year-old reached the summit of the world's highest peak on May 23 and arrived back in Kathmandu yesterday. "I am... relaxed and happy because I set this target around four years before," she told AFP. "I have always shared with my students and my friends that if you aim high

and expect high, you can achieve high."

Tsang had tried to reach the summit earlier in May, but was stopped by poor weather conditions when she was at 8,755 meters, her guide Pemba Sherpa said. She had to return to base camp and climb up the mountain again to make her record attempt. Tsang was born in mainland China and her family moved to Hong Kong when she was 10 years old. As a child, Tsang said they lived with "no resources" and sport-which was free to participate in at her school-became her source of joy. "When I was young I used to run on the mountains, play basketball and do other sports," she said.

She started to train as a mountaineer 11 years ago and summited Everest in 2017 — the first woman from Hong Kong to achieve such a feat. In 2018, Nepali climber Phunjo Jhangmu Lama set the fastest ascent of Everest for a woman with a time of 39 hours 6 minutes. Tsang's achievement came after Nepal issued a record 408 Everest permits for this climbing season, after last year's was cancelled due to the pandemic. Several coronavirus cases have been reported at Everest base camp so far as Nepal battles a spike in infections.

Up to 350 people have summited the mountain this spring, the tourism depart-

ment said. Other records broken this season include the most ascents of Everest, by Nepali climber Kami Rita Sherpa, who broke his own record with his 25th summit. Arthur Muir, 75, became the oldest American to climb the world's highest peak when he broke Bill Burke's record set in 2009 at age 67. Four people-two foreign climbers and two Sherpa guides-have died on the mountain so far this year. — AFP



Hong Kong mountaineer Tsang Yin-hung, who recorded the world's fastest ascent of Mount Everest by a woman poses for pictures as she arrives at an airport in Kathmandu.



Hong Kong mountaineer Tsang Yin-hung (center), who recorded the world's fastest ascent of Mount Everest (8,848.86-metre) by a woman in 25 hours and 50 minutes, gestures while posing for pictures along with mountaineers Pemba Dorje Sherpa (second left), Phurba Thiley Sherpa (left), Nima Lhamu Sherpa (second right) and Phurba Tenjing Sherpa (right) as they arrive at an airport in Kathmandu yesterday.



This handout photograph shows Hong Kong mountaineer Tsang Yin-hung (left) posing with Hong Kong's flag at the summit of Mount Everest after she recorded the world's fastest ascent of Mount Everest by a woman. — AFP photos



This handout photograph shows Hong Kong mountaineer Tsang Yin-hung after she recorded the world's fastest ascent of Mount Everest by a woman.

Hunting for mini artworks on New York's streets

Filmmaker Zack Obid trembles with excitement: he has just found a miniature work of art during a treasure hunt that an American artist organizes every week in his Brooklyn neighborhood. Steve Wasterval estimates that in the last three years he has painted and hidden about 80 tiny landscape drawings of Greenpoint, an area with a large Polish community seen as increasingly hip in recent times with young creatives moving in.

"I really wanted to give my art away. I wanted to put it up on walls and out in the street," says Wasterval, 40, at his studio inside a former Faber Castell pencil factory. "I remember thinking they should be tiny paintings so I can hide them and people can find them and I can find as many as I

want," he adds. Typically, every weekend at an unspecified time, Wasterval publishes on his Instagram account a photo of a landscape in front of the spot that inspired the work, always in Greenpoint. Within minutes, a dozen people arrive at the scene and start looking for the work everywhere, from behind a wall to on a fire escape.

Sometimes, Wasterval is close by, sometimes not. If asked for help, he sends the treasure hunters clues through direct messages on Instagram. The paintings are about five centimeters by 3.8 centimeters (2 inches by 1.5 inches). He finishes them in around an hour and says he will never sell them. "Every week people message me that they want to buy one, commission them. No, never, never," insists Wasterval. "You have to find them. They're like little trophies people show off." Wasterval wants to document his neighborhood as it transforms, socialize with his neighbors and have fun.



Fun

It's also a way for him to disseminate his larger artworks, typically 60 x 90 cm and 75 x 100 cm, which sell for \$2,000 and \$3,000 respectively. "The idea is to keep doing it like forever," he said of the hunts. "It's a marketing thing but it is a fun one because it doesn't feel like one. I want to keep it like that." This time, Wasterval had chosen to paint the corner of the popular neighborhood pizzeria Paulie Gee's. In a park, among children playing hide and seek, he hides the small painting under a flower pot.

A couple of minutes later, Obid, a 27-year-old documentary filmmaker who lives a block away, arrives. He frantically searches everywhere as other people start to turn up, some on bicycles. Every few seconds they stop to check their phones for new clues from Wasterval. After about ten minutes, Obid shouts and laughs as he finds the painting-his fifth in three years. "It's a piece of art that means a lot to you," he says, noting that not only is it original but it is also of "home." Lisa Llanes, a 38-year-old graphic designer, recently won two hunts but was too late this time. "They are such cute little pieces of art!" she says. Wasterval hopes to hold an exhibition with all the "minis," as he calls them, on loan from the winners of the hunts. —AFP

Hong Kong tycoons offer \$1 million flat to boost COVID jobs

Hong Kongers reluctant to get the coronavirus jab have been given a million-dollar reason to roll up their sleeves after property tycoons donated a brand new flat to a vaccine lottery. Worth HK\$10.8 million (US\$1.4 million), the one-bedroom apartment will be the lucky draw's grand prize, the property developers announced Friday. They will also offer 20 other prizes worth HK\$100,000 each. Hong Kong is one of the few places in the world to have secured more than enough doses to inoculate all 7.5 million people. But rampant distrust of the government combined with a lack of urgency in a comparatively virus-free city-has led to hesitancy and a dismally lagging inoculation drive.

Seeking to boost uptake, Sino Group, Ng Teng Fong Charitable Foundation and

Chinese Estates Holdings said all Hong Kong residents aged 18 and above who have received both doses of the COVID-19 vaccines will be eligible to register for the lucky draw until September 1. Only permanent residents are eligible for the top prize of an apartment in the world's most unaffordable housing market. "We hope to increase Hong Kong's vaccination rate through the lucky draw," Daryl Ng, the director of the foundation said in a statement.

The groups said further details would be released at a later date. The announcement came three days after the city's Chief Executive Carrie Lam rejected calls for the government to offer cash handouts to encourage inoculations. She suggested local businesses provide the incentives. "To offer cash or something physical to encourage vaccination shouldn't be done by the government," she said. Vaccine lotteries have started catching on in the United States, with California, Colorado, Ohio, New York and Oregon offering a chance to win costly prizes. A rural town in the Philippines announced it will raffie off a cow to motivate people to get the jab. In Hong Kong, less than 20 percent of the population has received the first vaccine dose, while just over 14 percent has received two doses. —AFP



This picture shows a square in central Labin, a hilltop town in the picturesque Istria peninsula known for its hilly hinterland and pristine coastline.



Tourists walk on the waterfront of the resort of Krk, on the northern island of Krk.— AFP photos

‘BEAUTIFUL GIFT’: HOW CROATIA IS LURING DIGITAL NOMADS

Melissa Paul described it as a “beautiful gift” when she became Croatia’s first official digital nomad earlier this year, benefiting from a visa scheme that the country hopes will help promote its pandemic-hit travel industry. “Croatia is gorgeous, it’s beautiful living here, affordable compared to other places, has a great climate, good internet access,” says the American marketing consultant, who lives among cobblestone streets in Labin, a hilltop town overlooking the Adriatic.

Paul got her visa in January, joining a global army of workers plying their trades in foreign countries since the pandemic ushered in an era of working from home for millions. Croatia offers the special visas to digital workers from outside the European Union, allowing them to stay for up to a year and exempting them from income tax. Applicants need to prove they work remotely, have accommodation and health insurance and earn at least 2,200 euros (\$2,700) a month.

Paul is one of about 100 people to

have applied since the scheme started in January, more than half of them Americans and British. The government has so far approved 33 visas and ministers hope the idea will take off once virus-related travel restrictions are lifted. Tourism makes up around one-fifth of the economy in the EU nation of 4.2 million people, but the number of visitors plummeted from 21 million in 2019 to seven million last year. Income more than halved to 4.8 billion euros in 2020 compared with the previous year. The crisis has particularly affected southern areas such as Dubrovnik, where visitors arrive mostly by plane.

‘Very unique’

With the drop-off in tourism, the time was ripe for a fresh idea, and Croatia-based Dutch entrepreneur Jan de Jong was on hand to supply it. He used social media last year to call on Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic to introduce the visas and six months later they became reality. “Croatia overall, especially in the combi-

nation of things, offers a very unique experience,” De Jong says, highlighting the scenery, connections with the rest of Europe and Mediterranean lifestyle.

But to be successful with digital nomads, he said, Croatia needed to act quickly and be competitive. It already had rivals in Europe-Estonia launched its nomad visa program last year and countries including the Czech Republic and Iceland have similar permits. Further afield, Antigua and the Indonesian island of Bali has already become a major hub. Trade groups think the idea is going to take off in many more countries. The tourism ministry, which is backing De Jong’s idea, sees it as a long-term opportunity to boost the industry rather than a quick fix to the pandemic-related crisis. The ministry told AFP the digital workers could become Croatia’s best promoters, spreading the word to their peers.

‘Enjoy your life’

Among the early adopters happy to



American marketing consultant Melissa Paul, who became Croatia’s first official digital nomad in January, poses in the old part of Labin, a hilltop town overlooking the Adriatic known for its cobblestone streets.

promote the benefits of Croatia is content creator Steve Tsentsersensky, who arrived in the country after years of globetrotting. Originally from the United States, he has

spent time in New Zealand, Ukraine, France and Italy as well as working on cruise liners. But he fell in love with the Croatian “pace of life”. “It’s not like everyone is rushing around,” he says. “You work and you can enjoy your life as well.” For Melissa Paul, the visa was her last option. She had been living in Croatia since 2014 and was married to a Croatian, but divorce left her with no legal way to remain.

“It allowed me to stay where I love living,” she says. But Paul also stresses that foreigners will bring expertise and knowledge that could help the wider community. This idea is what motivates entrepreneur De Jong, who hopes the influence of foreign digital workers might help young Croats, many of whom want to leave their own country. “They would be bringing their mindset and experience and can really have a positive impact on the mindset, mostly of the young generation,” says the Dutch father of four. — AFP

US concert offers \$980 ‘discount’ for vaccinated fans

US authorities eager to get people vaccinated against COVID-19 have offered inducements ranging from free beer to million-dollar lottery prizes, and now rock concert promoters have their own twist: whopping ticket discounts. Fans of punk bands Teenage BottleRocket, MakeWar and Rutterkin can get into the June 26 concert in coastal Saint Petersburg, Florida for a “discounted” \$18 if they can produce proof they have been fully vaccinated. For those with no such proof, it’s an even \$999.99.

Paul Williams of Leadfoot Productions in nearby Tampa Bay said that with vaccinations now available to everyone 12 and above, and people clamoring to again attend live concerts, he wanted to offer them a safe experience. “I also wanted it to be a vaccine drive to get the fence-sitters off the fence,” Williams told ABC News. He said the response to his promotion had been “overwhelmingly positive,” but that some angry critics had obtained his phone number and made their views abundantly clear. Williams said the lead band, Teenage BottleRocket, was initially skeptical but had come around.

In a video on Facebook, the band’s singer and guitar player Ray Carlisle tells fans: “We want to set a good example... we’ve been vaccinated. We’d love if you got vaccinated too. Come party with us. Safety first-party second!” An early rush for vaccination in the US has slowed sharply since mid-April, leading to the closing of some clinics and raising concerns among public health officials. The state of Ohio took the unusual step of announcing that any resident who had gotten at least one shot would be eligible to win a lottery prize of \$1 million. —AFP



In this file photo Gavin MacLeod attends a ceremony honoring the “The Love Boat” with the Hollywood Walk Of Fame Honorary Star Plaque on May 10, 2018 in Hollywood, California.— AFP

‘Love Boat’ captain Gavin MacLeod dead at 90

Gavin MacLeod, a veteran supporting actor best known for his role as an ever-smiling cruise ship captain on the 1970s-80s sitcom “The Love Boat,” died Saturday at the age of 90. His death was confirmed to the showbiz publication Variety by his nephew Mark See. No cause of death was given. MacLeod was little known to the public until he landed the role of a wisecracking television news writer on the “Mary Tyler Moore Show” in 1970. The program was a smash hit, lasted seven seasons and is considered a classic of the American sitcom genre.

MacLeod went on to even greater fame playing Captain Stubing on “The Love Boat,” in which passengers, often played by real life stars such as Gene Kelly, came aboard for a cruise and had romantic or humorous adventures. The show was panned from a critical standpoint but proved to be hugely popular and lasted 11 seasons, spawning several spinoff movies. MacLeod landed a job as pitchman for Princess Cruise Lines. “The critics hated it. They called it mindless TV, but we became goodwill ambassadors,” he told The Los Angeles Times in 2013.

MacLeod was remembered Saturday by the actor Edward Asner, who played the grumpy but loveable newsroom chief Lou Grant on the “Mary Tyler Moore Show.” Moore died in 2017. The actress Betty White, who also appeared on the show, is now 99. “My heart is broken. Gavin was my brother, my partner in crime (and food) and my comic conspirator,” Asner, who is 91, tweeted. “I will see you in a bit Gavin. Tell the gang I will see them in a bit. Betty! It’s just you and me now,” Asner wrote. — AFP

FRENCH ROCK GROUP INDOCHINE PLAYS COVID TRIAL GIG IN PARIS

Starved of live music for the past year, fans of veteran French rock band Indochine on Saturday got a chance to see their idols in concert, all in the name of COVID-19 research. Around 5,000 concert goers took part in the experimental event at Paris’s Bercy concert hall. A further 2,500 volunteers who did not attend the concert will serve as a comparison group. The trial to assess the risk of COVID transmission at events has been eagerly awaited by the live music and entertainment sector which has been devastated by COVID-19.



In this file photo French singer Nicolas Sirkis from French rock band Indochine celebrates after receiving the ‘French variety music’ award during the SACEM Grand Prix awards ceremony at the Salle Pleyel de Paris.



In this file photo French band Indochine members (from left) guitarist Boris Jardel, singer Nicola Sirkis and guitarist Oli de Sat pose in Paris, after being awarded by a double platinum disc.— AFP photos

“It’s been so long that we have waited for a reopening of this kind of event. So finding a concert, in addition to it being Indochine, is really great,” said Camille, 26, from the Paris suburbs. Lyrics from one song, “Marilyn”, seemed to express what many music fans have been feeling: “We want to live... even stronger.” Before being admitted, the concert goers, all aged 18-45 with no special risk factors, handed over an envelope containing a saliva test done earlier on Saturday. Each person was also required to have had a negative antigen test in the last three days.

Once inside, no social distancing was required but masks were compulsory. Due to the 9 pm curfew still in place in France, the concert started earlier than usual with Indochine on stage by 6 pm. Similar trials have already taken place elsewhere in Europe and the Bercy concert had been postponed a number of times. It finally

went ahead two days before the extension of France’s vaccination program to all adults, selecting participants from among 20,000 volunteers.

Results from the concertgoers study, organized at the initiative of the AP-HP (Assistance publique-Hopitaux de Paris) and Prodis, the national union for musical and variety shows, with government support, are expected by late June. Previous experimental events in Spain and Britain have not shown any increased risk of transmission. As the French summer music festival season approaches however, several major events have already decided to throw in the towel. They are only authorized to go ahead, if fans are limited to one per four square meters (4.8 square yards).— AFP



People cheer during a concert of French DJ Etienne de Crecy and pop band Indochine.



People arrive to attend a test concert of French rock band Indochine and French DJ Etienne de Crecy, aimed to investigate how such events can take place safely amidst the COVID-19 pandemic at the AccorHotels Arena in Paris.

Sports

Mexican wrestling fans celebrate lucha libre's return

MEXICO CITY: The raucous sounds of roaring applause, lighthearted laughter and derisive whistles are again resounding through the cavernous Arena Mexico in the country's capital, a temple of the colorful "lucha libre" wrestling, as the receding threat of COVID-19 has allowed a return to something closer to normal. Though the stands in the arena in the heart of Mexico City are far from full owing to COVID restrictions, the deafening echo of the voices of hundreds of enthusiastic fans, along with the grunts, taunts and shouts of the wrestlers, seem to make up for the empty seats.

Ivan Martinez, a 47-year-old doctor, admitted to feeling "quite emotional." With his family, he had traveled the 1,700 miles (2,800 kilometers) from his native Tijuana, in the northwest, to see the return of pro wrestling. "It gives me great joy to return to an arena, to the wrestlers I've loved and enjoyed since I was a child — a love I've passed on to my own children," he said.

Colorful masks

In the ring, the colorfully garbed gladiators do their thing. Some of the hulking athletes wear the stern-looking masks that have made Mexican wrestling famous, while others, in dazzlingly colorful outfits, choose to bare their scowling faces. Each leap, punch or hold culminates with a body being slammed to the canvas mat, producing gasps and thunderous applause from appreciative fans. But it is all more circus than true combat.

The return of professional wrestling has been a boon to businesses in the neighborhood, boosting sales of everything from masks and dolls of the more famous wrestlers, to food and drink. "Many people depend on the wrestling," said Samia Garcia, a 40-year-old pharmaceutical biologist who was heading in to the show. "So I'm glad they are starting to open."

The city government has authorized the arena to sell only 500 tickets — barely 3 percent of its normal capacity



MEXICO CITY: Wrestlers fight as part of the Copa Dinastias event of the World Wrestling Council (CMLL), at the Arena Mexico in Mexico City on Friday. — AFP

of 16,500. Everyone has to wear masks and maintain social distance. Still, the sense of joy is almost palpable. "I've loved wrestling since I was little," said Ramses Salas, a 26-year-old mask seller. "I used to run around in here when I was a child... and now I'm more than happy to come back."

All this has been made possible by a sharp improvement in Mexico's COVID situation. With 759 people currently hospitalized with the coronavirus, the hospitals of Mexico City are currently at 9 percent of capacity —

down dramatically from 90 percent in January, and the lowest level since April 2020.

Mexico, with 126 million inhabitants, has registered 2.4 million confirmed cases and 223,072 deaths, making it the fourth hardest-hit country in the world in absolute numbers. Experts say the steady decline in coronavirus cases and rising levels of immunity from vaccination or infection suggest that the worst of the pandemic may be over for Mexico. Wrestling fans hope it won't be long before they can fill all the seats in the arena. — AFP

Giannis delivers triple double as Bucks sweep Heat

WASHINGTON: Giannis Antetokounmpo managed his first NBA playoff triple double Saturday and the Milwaukee Bucks defeated Miami 120-103 to sweep the Heat out of the post-season in the opening round. Greek star Antetokounmpo had 20 points, 12 rebounds and 15 assists to spark the Bucks, who were led by 25 points from center Brook Lopez and 22 more off the bench from Bryn Forbes.

Khris Middleton added 20 as the Bucks rallied from a 12-point first-half deficit to win the best-of-seven Eastern Conference series 4-0. They await the Brooklyn-Boston series winner in the second round. "We've got to focus on ourselves, try to get better," Antetokounmpo said. "We want to get better defensively and whoever we get in the next round, we're going to be ready."

Antetokounmpo became only the third Bucks player with a playoff triple double after Kareem Abdul-Jabbar in 1970, when he was known as Lew Alcindor, and Paul Pressey in 1986. The Heat, who lost to the Los Angeles Lakers in last year's NBA Finals, ousted Milwaukee in five games in the second round of last season's playoffs. "We just tried to focus a game at a time," Antetokounmpo said. "We didn't want to play with our food." Miami had not been swept in a playoff series since falling to Chicago in the first round in 2007. The Heat dominated early, with Antetokounmpo missing his first six shots and Miami grabbing its biggest lead of the series at 58-46.

But Milwaukee opened the third quarter on a 24-6 run and the Heat could never match them after that. "They played us really tough," said Antetokounmpo. "We kept our composure, we kept moving the ball, we kept defending and we were able to get a win."



MIAMI: Giannis Antetokounmpo #34 of the Milwaukee Bucks drives to the basket against the Miami Heat during Round One Game Four of the Eastern Conference Playoffs on Saturday at AmericanAirlines Arena in Miami, Florida. — AFP

Minnesota's Donaldson scores 2,000,000th all-time MLB run

WASHINGTON: Minnesota Twins third baseman Josh Donaldson scored the two-millionth run in Major League Baseball history on Saturday in his club's 6-5 home victory over Kansas City, the league said. The milestone touch of home plate came in the bottom of the first inning after Minnesota's Nelson Cruz hit a ground-rule double down the rightfield line off Royals right-handed pitcher Ervin Santana.

Bam Adebayo led Miami with 20 points and 14 rebounds while Jimmy Butler had a triple double in a losing cause with 12 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists.

It was the first game for the Bucks without guard Donte DiVincenzo, who was knocked out for the remainder of the playoffs by a torn left ankle ligament suffered in Milwaukee's game-three victory at Miami on Thursday. "He's a big part of our game," said Antetokounmpo. "It's going to be tough not having him going forward but a lot of guys are going to step up for us."

Nuggets 'played soft'

Portland's Norman Powell matched a career playoff high with 29 points, hitting 11-of-13 from the floor to power the Trail Blazers over visiting Denver 115-95 to level their Western Conference series at two wins each. CJ McCollum scored 21 points and Bosnian center Jusuf Nurkic added 17 for Portland while Serbian center Nikola Jokic led Denver with 16 points. "The plan was to put a complete 48-minute effort out there," Powell said. "The focus was continue to compete hard."

The Trail Blazers led 57-47 at half-time and dominated the third quarter to pull away for good. "Our starters were awful," said Nuggets coach Michael Malone. "I thought we had some guys that were tentative, that looked a little scared, who played soft."

Elsewhere, Joel Embiid scored a playoff career high 36 points as the Philadelphia 76ers breezed to a 132-103 victory over the Washington Wizards to seize a 3-0 lead in their Eastern Conference series. The 76ers shot 58.6 percent from the floor and 51.5 percent from three-point range and can close out the eighth-seeded Wizards on Monday.

In the late game, Donovan Mitchell scored a game-high 29 points as the top-seeded Utah Jazz held on to beat the Memphis Grizzlies 121-111 in game three of their West series. Mitchell scored 10 of his 29 in the final four minutes as the Jazz went on a 14-2 surge late in the game to take a two-game-to-one series lead. — AFP

'Work in progress' Osaka into French Open second round

PARIS: World number two Naomi Osaka let her racquet do the talking at the French Open yesterday, maintaining her media boycott but briefly telling a TV interviewer that her clay court game is "a work in progress".

Osaka opened the first day of action at Roland Garros with a 6-4, 7-6 (7/4) victory over Romanian world number 63 Patricia Maria Tig. The 23-year-old Japanese star, a four-time Grand Slam title winner, has refused to carry out media obligations at the tournament, claiming news conferences are detrimental to her mental health. She believes traditional post-match inquiries are akin to "kicking people when they're down". French Tennis Federation president Gilles Moretton, however, described Osaka's move as a "phenomenal error".

Yesterday, Osaka only agreed to take part in a cursory on-court television interview but still faces a fine of up to \$20,000 for skipping mandatory news conferences. "For me, playing on clay is a work in progress," said the reigning US and Australian Open champion on a sun-kissed Court Philippe Chatrier. "Hopefully the more I play, the better I will become. It's a beautiful court. I've only played two matches here, one before the roof and one now so hopefully I'll keep it going."



PARIS: Japan's Naomi Osaka returns the ball to Romania's Patricia Maria Tig during their women's singles first round tennis match on Day 1 of The Roland Garros 2021 French Open tennis tournament in Paris yesterday. — AFP

And that was that. Osaka, who has never got past the third round in Paris, fired 39 winners but committed 35 unforced errors against Tig to set up a second round duel against another Romanian player, Ana Bogdan. Three-time major winner Angelique Kerber, the German 26th seed, fell at the first hurdle, losing to Ukrainian qualifier Anhelina Kalinina 6-2, 6-4.

The win was a 14th successive win for the world number 139 Kalinina across all tournaments. While Osaka refuses to speak, Greek men's world number five Stefanos Tsitsipas had plenty to offer at his pre-tournament media conference, even quoting Britain's World War II leader Winston Churchill at one stage.

Tsitsipas, who faced home player Jeremy Chardy yesterday, is widely tipped as a potential champion should 13-time winner Rafael Nadal or world number one Novak Djokovic falter. The 22-year-old took Djokovic to five sets in the 2020 semi-finals. He has already captured the Monte Carlo Masters and Lyon titles on clay this season. He also had a match point to defeat Nadal in the Barcelona final before the Spaniard recovered. Tsitsipas has the advantage of being in the opposite half of the draw to Nadal, Djokovic and Roger Federer and their combined 58 Slams.

This year's French Open is being played just seven months after the delayed 2020 tournament. In total, just over 5,000 spectators a day will be admitted at the Roland Garros site until June 8. That figure will then rise to more than 13,000 a day thanks to the government's decision to raise fan numbers to a 65 percent limit of capacity. The main setback for organizers, however, is that nine of their scheduled 10 evening sessions — an innovation for 2021 — will be played behind closed doors. A government curfew of 9pm will not be lifted until June 9. — AFP



MINNEAPOLIS: Josh Donaldson #20 crosses home plate to score the two millionth run in MLB history off an RBI double by Nelson Cruz of the Minnesota Twins in the first inning of the game against the Kansas City Royals at Target Field on Saturday in Minneapolis, Minnesota. — AFP



CARSON: Nonito Donaire celebrates his fourth round KO win against Nordine Oubaali after their WBC World Bantamweight Championship bout at Dignity Health Sports Park on Saturday in Carson, California. — AFP

Donaire knocks out Oubaali in the fourth to reclaim WBC title

LOS ANGELES: Nonito Donaire used a powerful left hook and three knockdowns to become the oldest fighter to win a bantamweight title with a fourth round knockout of WBC champion Nordine Oubaali on Saturday night in Los Angeles.

The 38-year-old Donaire reach up and turned back the hands of time at the Dignity Sports Health Park venue as he reclaimed the WBC title that he held in 2011. The Filipino fighter is also the oldest, at 38 years and 204 days, to win a bantamweight world title, breaking the mark he set in 2018 when he was 35 and captured the WBA belt.

"Father time is on my side," said Donaire of Bohol, Philippines. "I believe the human body is an incredible machine if we take care of it. Mentally you are only as strong as your mind can be. Being at this age is not the question. It is my ability to grow. It is not what age you are, but how strong you are mentally. I am back. The whole time I was not fighting I was learning. I am ready for the next one."

Donaire knocked the French champion down twice in the third round and then finished him off halfway through the fourth round with a stinging upper cut to raise his record to 41-6 with 27 knockouts. In the third round, Donaire scored his first knockdown with two consecutive left hooks that led to referee Jack Reiss giving Oubaali a standing eight count.

Oubaali got up but was in still in a fog and defenseless when the Filipino dropped him a second time with a devastating left as the bell sounded to end the round. Reiss gave Oubaali another standing count after the bell. Oubaali was on wobbly legs and clearly in trouble as he didn't seem to know which direction his corner was at.

Donaire ended the fight in the fourth by landing a combination followed by an uppercut that sent Oubaali to the canvas for the third time. Donaire showed patience in the opening rounds using them to get a read on what type of combinations Oubaali likes to throw. It was the first career loss for Oubaali who dropped to 17-1, 12 KOs. "I know what his pattern was," said Donaire. "I knew exactly what he was going to do. I was able to counter properly with the left hook."

Donaire also condemned the increased acts of violence against Asians which have been taking place in America during the COVID-19 pandemic. Donaire, nicknamed the "Filipino Flash", came into the ring wearing a shirt with the message "Stop Asian Hate" on the front. "Let us stop Asian hate," he said in the center of the ring referring to the unprovoked attacks. "My elderly father is afraid to go out. Let's stop the hate, any kind of hate." In Las Vegas, American Devin Haney survived the last two rounds and defeated Jorge Linares by unanimous decision to retain his WBC lightweight world title. — AFP

Sports

Fabio Quartararo wins Italian MotoGP shaken by Jason Dupasquier's death

MUGELLO: Fabio Quartararo dominated the Italian MotoGP yesterday at a Mugello circuit shaken by the death hours earlier of Moto3 rider Jason Dupasquier. Quartararo crossed the line with plenty of daylight back to reigning world champion Joan Mir in second, with Portugal's Miguel Oliveira completing the sombre podium. Yamaha's French world championship leader dedicated the win to Dupasquier, 19, who died in hospital of injuries sustained in a multi-bike crash in qualifying on Saturday. Dupasquier died from injuries sustained in a crash in qualifying at the Italian Grand Prix, organizers had announced yesterday. "We're deeply saddened to report the loss of Jason Dupasquier," MotoGP said on Twitter.

"On behalf of the entire MotoGP family, we send our love to his team, his family and loved ones. You will be sorely missed, Jason. Ride in peace," the statement added. The Careggi hospital in Florence treating Dupasquier confirmed to AFP that the teenager had suffered brain injuries "incompatible with life" in the multi-bike accident at Mugello on Saturday.

Dupasquier, in his second season in Moto3, fell and was struck by at least one bike, before sliding along the track, during

qualifying. Doctors rushed to the scene and after attending to him for 40 minutes on the circuit had him airlifted to hospital. He underwent chest surgery overnight "for a vascular lesion" and had suffered "severe brain damage", a hospital spokesman told AFP earlier yesterday.

Motorcycling's governing body the FIM, the team's IRTA umbrella association, and the sport's commercial rights holder DORNA issued a joint statement on the tragic news. "Following a serious incident in the Moto3 Qualifying 2 session at the Gran Premio d'Italia, it is with great sadness that we report the passing of Moto3 rider Jason Dupasquier," it read.

It said after Dupasquier's crash medical officers "arrived at the site immediately and the Swiss rider was attended to on track" before his transfer to hospital. "Despite the best efforts of circuit medical staff and all those subsequently attending to the Swiss rider, the hospital has announced that Dupasquier has sadly succumbed to his injuries," the statement continued.

His team, Pruestel GP, had already pulled out of yesterday's race, posting on Facebook: "PruestelGP decided not to race today in the #ItalianGP. The situation of @jasondupasquier50 is still critical and



MUGELLO: Riders observe a minute of silence in tribute to Swiss Moto3 rider Jason Dupasquier who died aged 19 from injuries sustained in a crash in qualifying at the Italian Grand Prix, before the start of the moto world championship Italian Grand Prix MotoGP race at the Mugello racetrack yesterday. —AFP

all our thoughts are with him." Tom Luthi, a Swiss rider who races in Moto2, also withdrew from yesterday's grand prix to be close to Dupasquier's family at the hospital, his team SAG Racing announced.

Japan's Ayumu Sasaki and Spaniard Jeremy Alcoba were the others involved in the horrific accident. Organizers reported that both were "fine". MotoGP championship leader Fabio Quartararo

had dedicated his pole-clinching qualifying lap to Dupasquier on Saturday.

Dupasquier, whose father Philippe was a former motocross rider, was in his second season in Moto3. Racing for his German team he finished his rookie Moto3 campaign last year pointless in 28th in the overall standings. After five races in 2021 he was placed 10th with 27 points.

The FIM joint statement noted: "Dupasquier had made an impressive start

to his second season in the lightweight class of Grand Prix racing, consistently scoring points and within the top ten in the standings. "The FIM, IRTA, MSMA and Dorna Sports pass on our deepest condolences to Dupasquier's family, friends, team and loved ones." The last fatality in the motorcycling world championship was Spain's Luis Salom, who died in practice at the Catalonia Moto2 Grand Prix in Barcelona in 2016. — AFP

Andersson saves Cologne from Bundesliga drop

BERLIN: Swedish striker Sebastian Andersson struck twice in a chaotic first half to help Cologne avoid relegation from the Bundesliga with a 5-1 win over second-tier side Holstein Kiel on Saturday. Andersson, a marquee signing last summer who had been injured for much of the season, stepped up in the second leg of the promotion play-off tie to spare Cologne a third relegation in 10 years.

Amid a flurry of four goals in the first 15 minutes, the 1.90-metre Swede scored twice with his head to put Cologne on course and bury Kiel's hopes of a first ever promotion to the German top flight. "If Andersson had been available more often, then my predecessor would have won more games," said Cologne coach Friedhelm Funkel, who took over from Markus Gisdol in April with Cologne stuck in the bottom three.

"I'm so happy for the club, the fans and the city of Cologne. I stink terribly, I'll need a change of clothes," the 67-year-old told broadcaster DAZN after his jubilant players showered him in beer on the pitch. German media estimated that relegation would have cost Cologne more than 25 million euros (\$30.5 million) in income from broadcasting rights.

They would have been the third iconic German club to go down this year after Werder Bremen and Schalke. "Cologne belong in the top flight, and



KIEL: Cologne's players celebrate their 1-5 win during the German second leg play-off relegation Bundesliga football match between second division team Holstein Kiel and first division team 1 FC Cologne in Kiel on Saturday. —AFP

we gave everything today to make sure we stayed there," said goalkeeper Timo Horn.

Having avoided automatic relegation with just four minutes to spare on the final day, Cologne had slumped to a surprise 1-0 defeat in the first leg on Wednesday. So second-division underdogs Kiel had high hopes of an upset as they took to the field in front of 2,500 raucous fans in the bright evening sunshine.

Yet they were left shellshocked after an explosive first half which began with three goals in the first six minutes. Kiel's narrow first-leg advantage was cancelled out after just three minutes as Cologne captain Jonas Hector headed his side in

front from a corner. The hosts hit back straight from the kick-off, with South Korea international Lee Jae-sung heading in the equalizer. Yet Andersson immediately restored Cologne's lead at the other end, before making it 3-1 with another headed goal on 12 minutes.

Kiel's promotion hopes seemed dead and buried just a few minutes before half-time when their former player Rafael Czichos sent a sweetly struck half-volley sailing into the top corner. Goalkeeper Ioannis Gelios kept the minnows clinging on with several fine saves in the second half, before Ellyes Skhiri slammed in a fifth to seal survival for Cologne six minutes from time. — AFP

Suspended IPL moved to UAE

NEW DELHI: The Indian Premier League, suspended as a new coronavirus wave hit India, will be finished in the United Arab Emirates in September and October, India's national cricket board said Saturday. The Board of Control for Cricket in India also said it will ask the global governing body for more time to make a decision on whether the Twenty20 World Cup should be held in India in October and November.

The IPL, the world's richest cricket tournament, was half finished when it was halted on May 4 after a number of players and team officials caught coronavirus despite being in bio-secure bubbles. The board has since been in tough negotiations with other countries and the International Cricket Council on when to squeeze the remaining matches into the crowded international calendar.

About 160,000 people have died in India since April 1 in a devastating wave that has seen hospitals overwhelmed. There are fears that the country could be hit by another surge later this year. The BCCI said it was moving the remaining matches to the UAE — which staged all of last year's IPL — because of the monsoon season and did not mention the pandemic. The board said a special general meeting had "unanimously agreed" for the remaining matches to be held in the UAE "considering the monsoon season in India in the months of September-October this year."

The monsoon season is generally considered to run from June to mid-September. The World Cup is due to be held in India from October but it is also at risk from the pandemic threat. The BCCI said the general meeting authorized its leaders "to seek an extension of time from the ICC to take an appropriate call on the hosting of ICC T20 World Cup 2021."

The tournament is due to be discussed by the ICC tomorrow, though no decision is expected to be taken. No deadline to announce whether the tournament will be moved has been publicly set, but cricket officials say a decision will have to be taken in "weeks". The ICC has meanwhile given details of the pandemic precautions that players will take before going to the World Test Championship final against New Zealand starting on June 18 in Southampton, England. The British government has given a special exemption from its coronavirus rules so that the inaugural championship can be held. — AFP



FORT LAUDERDALE: Brendan Hines-Ike #4 of DC United and Ian Fray #24 of Inter Miami vie for the ball at DRV PNK Stadium on Saturday in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. — AFP

Tajouri-Shradi nets winner as NYCFC rally to beat LAFC

LOS ANGELES: Ismael Tajouri-Shradi scored the game-winner in the 90th minute as 10-man New York City FC rallied to beat Los Angeles FC in Major League Soccer on Saturday. Alfredo Morales flicked on a corner by Jesus Medina and Libyan forward Tajouri-Shradi, unmarked at the back, fired home the winner with his left foot.

Four minutes earlier, NYCFC had been reduced to 10 men when Uruguayan midfielder Nicolas Acevedo was sent off after a reckless tackle on Latif Blessing. "It's a game that we should not lose," said LAFC coach Bob Bradley, whose team went up 1-0 in the 56th minute, when Corey Baird slotting home from the near post. NYCFC equalized in the 70th through Medina, who curled in a left-footed shot that eluded goalkeeper Pablo Sisniega. It was LAFC's error that made Medina's goal pos-

sible, as NYCFC's Anton Tinnerholm seized upon an errant pass from the Angelenos and found the Paraguayan striker.

NYCFC coach Ronny Deila called it "by far the biggest win" of his tenure in New York. "Last year when we played Toronto away, Columbus away, I think we haven't been close to winning. We had Orlando last year, we improved. We made it an even game and this year now we beat Philadelphia away and Orlando draw (away). Now win here in LA, that's saying something about the group and that we're coming far now to work together as a group."

It was a deflating defeat for LAFC, who had Mexico international Carlos Vela in action for a full 90 minutes for the first time this season as he returns from a quadriceps injury. Among other matches Saturday, a brace from Ola Kamara fueled DC United to a 3-0 victory over Inter Miami in the Florida club's first match since they were hit by a record \$2 million fine for violating roster and salary rules in the signing of French World Cup-winner Blaise Matuidi. Paul Arriola also scored for DC, who spoiled Inter's first home match with a full-capacity crowd at DRV PNK Stadium. — AFP

Brentford end 74-year wait for promotion to Premier League

LONDON: Brentford were promoted to the Premier League for the first time in 74 years on Saturday as they beat Swansea 2-0 in a Championship play-off final worth around £180 million (\$255 million) to the winners. Thomas Frank's side completed their fairytale rise thanks to first-half goals from Ivan Toney and Emiliano Marcondes at Wembley.

Swansea's Jay Fulton was sent off midway through the second half to put the result beyond doubt in what is widely regarded as football's single most lucrative game, mainly because of the broadcast revenues that Premier League clubs receive. After decades stuck in lower league obscurity, unfashionable Brentford will be one of the smallest clubs ever to play in the top tier.

In just their second season at the new Brentford Community Stadium, the Bees will welcome the likes of Manchester City, Manchester United and Liverpool to west London. The riches earned from the victory will be transformative for Brentford, who have finally erased the painful memories of their wretched play-off past.

Beaten by Fulham in last season's Championship final, Brentford had failed to earn promotion in all nine of their play-off appearances before this term. No team had lost more play-off finals than Brentford's four, but Frank had insisted the bad omens would count for nothing.

The Bees boss was proved right as he became the first Danish coach to win a Football League promotion. "I don't know if I can describe it. It's been such a long journey," Frank said before his players gate-crashed the interview to throw him into the air in celebration.

"This group of players is incredible. Everyone has played a major part," Frank added, once he was back on his feet. "The feeling was calm and relaxed and ready to be ruthless. Right now I want to get drunk and then worry about the Premier League tomorrow!"

Brentford's rise has captured the imagination of neutrals after they spent 59 out of 60 seasons in the third or fourth tiers before reaching the Championship in 2014. They have climbed well above their traditional status thanks to innovative owner Matthew Benham.

Benham has introduced an analytics-influenced approach overseen by two directors of football, ensuring the club make the most of their resources, which are meager in comparison with the Championship's wealthier teams.

Prolific Toney

Fittingly, it was Championship top scorer Toney who put Brentford on course for the top-flight for the first time since 1947. Toney, signed from third tier Peterborough last year, fired Brentford to a third-place finish despite the close-season sales of star forwards Ollie Watkins and Said Benrahma to Aston Villa and West Ham respectively.

Now the 25-year-old, rejected by Newcastle as a youngster, will get the chance to show he can thrive in the Premier League. Six of Brentford's team started last season's final and they quickly seized the initiative in the 10th minute.

Bryan Mbeumo made a clever run behind the Swansea defense to reach Sergi Canos's superb pass into the penalty area, prompting Freddie Woodman to race off his line and crash into the Brentford striker. Referee Chris Kavanagh pointed to the spot and Toney stepped up to slot the penalty past Woodman for his 33rd goal of the season. — AFP

Sports

Tuchel set for new deal and hungry for more after Chelsea Champions League triumph

PORTO: While Manchester City had been building towards what they thought was their moment in the Champions League for five years under Pep Guardiola, Chelsea showed with their victory in Saturday's final in Porto what can be achieved in just four months.

That is how long has elapsed since Thomas Tuchel became coach, replacing Frank Lampard with Chelsea ninth in the Premier League. The German oversaw an immediate transformation in their fortunes, dragging them into the top four, taking them to the FA Cup final which they lost to Leicester City, and now winning the Champions League.

They have beaten Guardiola's City for the third time in six weeks thanks to Kai Havertz's goal, and they are champions of Europe for the second time. Tuchel is set to reap the rewards with a handsome new contract, although whether he will be allowed to put down roots in west London remains to be seen given how managerial cycles tend to go at Stamford Bridge.

Once again a mid-season managerial sacking has worked out perfectly for Chelsea, whose 2012 Champions League triumph came following the decision to sack Andre Villas-Boas and appoint Roberto Di Matteo. This time Chelsea

have struck gold with Tuchel, but the 47-year-old would not have been able to deliver such success without the huge investment in players that came before his arrival, as well as some of the outstanding young talents who were already thriving under Lampard.

Room for improvement

Five of Chelsea's line-up at the Estadio do Dragao were signed at the start of the season, including match-winner Havertz, the 71 million-pound (\$100m) recruit from Bayer Leverkusen. There was also Reece James and Mason Mount, youth academy graduates who are in England's squad for Euro 2020.

This is a team that has already conquered Europe but that appears to be just at the start of its adventure together. "We have a strong bond, a strong group who can really defend and play and have answers on all questions in the game," Tuchel said on Saturday. "Once the celebrations are over and once we digest this experience, it is the moment to grow, to evolve, to learn from it and become better."

There is huge room for improvement in the Premier League after Chelsea finished 19 points behind champions City, and a proper domestic title challenge will

be expected now. "When you play for a club like Chelsea you are always thinking in the future," said veteran skipper Cesar Azpilicueta.

Tuchel knows full well that past success counts for little — Di Matteo was gone within six months of that 2012 victory and Tuchel himself was sacked by Paris Saint-Germain last December despite leading them to their first ever final last season.

'I want the next one'

"When we won the Cup in Dortmund I did not arrive at the next training with less hunger, less desire or ambition," he said. "Of course now is the time to celebrate for some days, to enjoy and let it sink in, for one or two weeks, to talk about it and reflect on it, but then it does surprisingly not a lot to you. I think it's good because nobody wants to rest. I want the next one, the next title. I want to be a part of it and I demand to be a part of it and this is what comes next."

He was initially handed just an 18-month contract but has earned an extended deal after what he has achieved in such a short time. "I am not even 100 percent sure, but maybe I already have a new contract now with that win. My manager said something about that but I



PORTO: Chelsea's German coach Thomas Tuchel celebrates with the trophy after winning the UEFA Champions League final football match at the Dragao stadium in Porto on Saturday. — AFP

didn't know so let's check this first," he told reporters with a smile. "My desire is to go for more victories, to grow as a coach and to push the group on the first day of next season to the limit." The next

Premier League campaign starts on August 14, but Chelsea will play three days before that against Villarreal with an opportunity for another trophy in the UEFA Super Cup. — AFP

Kai's the limit as Chelsea fans revel in glory

LONDON: Chelsea fans piled into the streets surrounding the Stamford Bridge ground of the new kings of European football following their 1-0 defeat of Manchester City in the Champions League final on Saturday in Portugal.

Some lit flares as they sang and cheered the club's triumph earned thanks to Kai Havertz's first-half goal in Porto. The goal from the club's most expensive ever signing gave the Russian-owned club their second European crown nine years after the first in 2012.

Coronavirus restrictions meant far fewer Chelsea supporters were able to attend Saturday's clash compared to the night they beat Bayern Munich. Many of those who could not be there congregated in the fashionable west London neighborhood, near the stadium where the same supporters had gathered for an angry protest against Chelsea's short-lived membership of the European Super League in April. A light show in the club's blue



LONDON: Chelsea supporters celebrate in streets surrounding Chelsea's Stamford Bridge stadium in London, after Chelsea beat Manchester City to win the UEFA Champions League final football match at the Dragao stadium in Porto on Saturday. — AFP

spelled out "Champions for the Fans" as fireworks went off in the distance. The fans' joyous celebrations, standing shoulder to shoulder in the streets, showed a complete disregard for the present social distancing advice in England that groups of no more than 30 can congregate. Some climbed up to balconies of houses raising their

arms in triumph — several whipping off their shirts to celebrate half naked on a warm night. Other Chelsea fans watching the game on giant screens at the Boxpark entertainment complex in Croydon, south of London, erupted in cheers at the final whistle.

"I'm ecstatic. It's amazing, this is something I've felt before, a long time

ago, but to re-live it is mad. I'm really happy, I can't believe it," said landscape gardener Aaron Cheneoy, 36. "Why do we think we've won it? Because we're the best team in Europe! I mean, look what's happened this season, this is the third time we've beaten City," said Bradley Smith, a 25-year-old consultant.

In northwest England, many Manchester City fans congregated in the Townley Pub in the city and experienced a wave of emotions as their team fell short of becoming European champions for the first time. They drowned their sorrows but with the consolation that Pep Guardiola's team ended the season as runaway Premier League champions and retained the League Cup.

The City fans' emotions went from despair when Havertz scored to anger and despair at the early departure of influential midfielder Kevin De Bruyne after a shuddering clash with Chelsea defender Antonio Rudiger.

At the final whistle, the sky blue-clad fans began chanting defiantly. "Well, I'm not impressed, but I'm not going to slate my team because at the end of the day, we win everything," one fan said, and couldn't resist a jibe at their city rivals Manchester United. "Manchester's still blue, if you don't like it oo...oo." — AFP



PORTO: Chelsea's German midfielder Kai Havertz celebrates with his medal after winning the UEFA Champions League final football match between Manchester City and Chelsea FC at the Dragao stadium in Porto on Saturday. — AFP

'I worked 15 years for this,' says Havertz

PORTO: German forward Kai Havertz said he had "worked 15 years" for the moment when he scored the goal that won the Champions League for Chelsea against Manchester City on Saturday. Havertz's 42nd minute strike — his first goal for the club in the Champions League — gave Chelsea their second European crown nine years after they beat Bayern Munich to win their first.

"I don't know what to say, I waited a long time. I've worked 15 years for this moment. I am overwhelmed," 21-year-old Havertz told BT Sport. Chelsea captain Cesar Azpilicueta hailed the young forward. "Havertz's mentality is top, this guy will be a superstar, he ran like crazy, this is why he deserves this. 'I came here in 2012 after that Champions League win. I wanted to repeat that Champions League success. It is amazing. My family are here. It is a special, special day.'" French midfielder N'Golo Kante, who was voted the man of the match for his tireless performance for Chelsea, said he felt "joy and pride". "It's amazing, it's the result of a lot of efforts and difficulties during the season but in the end it is the work of a whole group," Kante told French broadcaster RMC Sport. "Today we suffered, we battled until the end and we were rewarded with the victory."

He credited the arrival of Thomas Tuchel to replace the sacked Frank Lampard in January for the European triumph, which came after Chelsea scraped to a fourth-place finish in the Premier League and lost the FA Cup final to Leicester. "It was the arrival of a new coach, a change of tactics and lots of effort," he said. — AFP

Guardiola the fall guy as City's UCL anguish goes on

PORTO: After a decade of trying, Pep Guardiola and Manchester City's wait to win the Champions League goes on after Chelsea emerged 1-0 victors from an all-English final in Porto. City finished 19 points ahead of Chelsea in romping to this season's Premier League title, but their old demons in Europe reappeared as Guardiola's tinkering with a winning team again backfired.

The Catalan won the Champions League twice in his first three seasons as a senior coach at Barcelona. But he can now add the disappointment of losing in the final for the first time to exits in four semi-finals and three quarter-finals as boss of Barca, Bayern Munich and City over the past 10 years.

City had never even been beyond the last eight in Guardiola's first four seasons in charge, but he appeared to have learned from his mistakes as a settled side comfortably saw off Borussia Dortmund and Paris Saint-Germain to reach the final for the first time in the club's history. However, he dropped a bombshell by omitting captain Fernandinho and Rodrigo from the base of his midfield to make way for Raheem Sterling's return to the starting line-up.

Chelsea seized on the space opened up in the City midfield to enjoy the better of the first half and, but for some characteristic wasteful finishing from Timo Werner, would have been in front long before they scored the only goal. One through ball from Mason Mount sliced the City defense wide open for Kai Havertz to round Ederson and roll the ball into an empty net.

"I tried the best selection to win the game," said Guardiola. "(Ilkay) Gundogan played many years in this position. We tried to have speed on the ball, to find players between the lines on the ball and this was the decision."

Luck was also not on City's side as Kevin De Bruyne was forced off in tears after a sickening head knock when he collided with Antonio Rudiger early in the second half. Without the Belgian, Guardiola's attempts to right the wrongs of his team selection were too little, too late.

Fernandinho was introduced just after the hour mark, while strikers Gabriel Jesus and Sergio Aguero were thrown on in search of a goal. But the vast majority of City's success this season has come in a fluid strikerless system and they never looked comfortable as Chelsea's defence limited them to one shot on target despite losing the experience of Thiago Silva to injury in the first-half.

'We will come back'

Backed by the wealth of Abu Dhabi's Sheikh Mansour, City have become the dominant force in English football, winning five Premier League titles in the past 10 years. But that only makes the pain of three disappointments against English sides in Europe over the past four years all the more acute.

After 10 seasons in the Champions League, City remain without the one trophy they most desire. City will lick their wounds, invest and try again. Guardiola extended his contract at the Etihad earlier this season to 2023. "It is the first time we are here, we will learn, we will come back," Guardiola said. "It was a season with 62 games and we played 61. We are sad, we have to learn from this and we will learn for the future, but the season was exceptional."

Erling Haaland and Harry Kane have both been suggested as a replacement for the departing Aguero



PORTO: Manchester City's Spanish coach Josep Guardiola walks past the trophy after the UEFA Champions League final football match at the Dragao stadium in Porto on Saturday. — AFP

and Guardiola hinted at a "shake-up" this summer to keep his squad hungry. Losing their biggest game of a hitherto glorious campaign will help maintain the motivation for more. In five

seasons in Manchester, Guardiola has already won eight major trophies. But the one he was brought to the club to win the most remains the missing piece. — AFP

De Bruyne faces race to make Euro after facial fractures

PORTO: Kevin De Bruyne is a major doubt for Belgium's Euro 2020 campaign after suffering two facial fractures in Manchester City's Champions League final defeat to Chelsea on Saturday. De Bruyne was helped off the field in tears after colliding with Antonio Rudiger on the hour mark in Porto. The midfielder's left eye immediately appeared swollen.

Without his creativity, Chelsea comfortably held out for a 1-0 win to keep City waiting for Champions League glory. "Just got back from the hospital," De Bruyne posted on his Twitter account yesterday. "My diagnosis is acute nose bone fracture and left orbital fracture. I feel okay now. Still disappointed about yesterday obviously but we will be back."

Belgium's first match of the Euro is in 11 days' time against Russia in Saint Petersburg. Roberto Martinez's team then face Denmark and Finland in what should be a comfortable group for the number one ranked side in the world. — AFP



PORTO: Manchester City's Belgian midfielder Kevin De Bruyne receives treatment on the sidelines during the UEFA Champions League final football match between Manchester City and Chelsea at the Dragao stadium in Porto on Saturday. — AFP

Chelsea shatter dream of Guardiola's Man City to win Champions League

PORTO: Chelsea won the Champions League for the second time as a Kai Havertz goal secured a tense 1-0 victory over Manchester City in Saturday's final in Porto, shattering Pep Guardiola's dream of lifting the trophy for the third time. Havertz rounded Ederson to score three minutes before half-time at the Estadio do Dragao and the Chelsea players ran to celebrate with the German.

Coach Thomas Tuchel, full of energy on the touchline just like his opposite number, punched the air in celebration, and later jumped with joy on the pitch after Chelsea held on for victory in the second half after City lost distraught skipper Kevin De Bruyne to injury.

The London club finished fourth in the Premier League, a huge 19 points behind champions City, but this, remarkably, was their third win over Guardiola's side in six weeks. They ended City's hopes of a domestic treble when they triumphed in the FA Cup semi-finals in April and delayed their title celebrations with victory in Manchester. Now, in a final watched by a limited crowd of just over 14,000 fans who created a raucous atmosphere, they have denied City the first Champions League crown they and Guardiola so crave.

"It was an incredibly tough fight, what a fight. Today they were determined to win this. We wanted to be the stone in their shoe," Tuchel told BT Sport. "The effort was huge. We overcame some difficult moments and had a fantastic attitude to defending."

Second cup

City had to wait 13 years after being taken over by Abu Dhabi's Sheikh Mansour just to get to the Champions League final. They are now the eighth consecutive team to lose in

their first appearance at this stage. The same misfortune befell Qatar-owned Paris Saint-Germain last year as well as Tottenham Hotspur when they were beaten by Liverpool in the last all-English final in 2019.

"It is the first time we're here, we'll learn, we'll come back," Guardiola said. "The players did everything, they wanted to do well, to win this competition, sometimes you perform well, sometimes not."

Chelsea also lost when they first got to the final, on penalties against Manchester United in Moscow in 2008. They overcame the final hurdle by beating Bayern Munich in a shoot-out in 2012 and now they have their second European Cup to move level with Juventus, Benfica and Porto as well as another English side, Nottingham Forest.

Their transformation into one of Europe's super clubs has been down to the riches of Roman Abramovich, their Russian oligarch owner who was in attendance in Portugal. "It's such a special occasion. At this moment in time, we're the best team in the world. You can't take that away from us," said Mason Mount, who has been outstanding for the Stamford Bridge side this season.

Chelsea have been transformed since the appointment as coach in January of Tuchel, but City were still the favorites after their third Premier League title triumph in four seasons. Feeding off the energy of the crowd in a stadium filled to a third of its capacity — all fans required negative COVID-19 tests to gain entry — both teams played with a level of intensity rarely seen in the last year of football in empty grounds.

Marquee moment

City pressed high but struggled to trouble Edouard Mendy in the Chelsea goal, while at the other end Timo Werner should have done



PORTO: Chelsea's Spanish defender Cesar Azpilicueta (center) celebrates with the trophy after winning the UEFA Champions League final football match at the Dragao stadium in Porto on Saturday. — AFP

better than shoot straight at Ederson in the 14th minute. Chelsea then suffered an injury blow as an emotional Thiago Silva was forced off hurt, Andreas Christensen taking the Brazilian's place in central defense.

Yet it was they who opened the scoring in the 42nd minute, Mason Mount's ball splitting the City defense, allowing Havertz — their marquee 71 million-pound (\$100m) signing last summer — to go

around the lunging Ederson and convert into an empty net.

City now needed to break down a Chelsea defense that has been exceptional under Tuchel. But they lost De Bruyne just before the hour mark, the Belgian taken out in a collision with Antonio Ruediger that appeared to leave him concussed.

He came off in tears, and Guardiola instead turned to Sergio Aguerro for the latter

stages, but there was to be no glorious send-off as a City player for the Argentine, as a Riyad Mahrez shot sailed just over in the sixth minute of injury time.

A decade on from his last European Cup triumph, there was to be no third for Guardiola. He remains one adrift of the record for the coaches with most wins in the competition, held jointly by Bob Paisley, Carlo Ancelotti and Zinedine Zidane. — AFP



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