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Kuwait resumes issuance of all categories of visas

Minimum KD 500 salary required for dependent visas

Flights canceled to Philippines without notice

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti employers and workers are complaining that flights to the Philippines have been canceled without notice. The dropped flights create a major problem for domestic helpers and other Filipino workers who show up at the airport, with their residencies already canceled, ready to return home.

Sami, a Kuwaiti employer, took his housemaid this

week to Kuwait airport for a flight to Dubai - the first leg of her journey home. At the airport however, both sponsor and worker were surprised to find that the flight had been canceled without notice. "I received no information or notice about the cancellation. So at 3 am, I took my housemaid to the airport for her scheduled flight, but when we reached there, they said the flight was canceled," Sami said. "This is improper; the only thing I heard from the airline is that this wasn't the only flight that was canceled, and no explanation was given," he said.

Mila, the Filipino domestic helper, said her family expected her to return to Manila, but because of the cancellation, she doesn't know when she will now get a flight home. "Thank God my boss managed to extend my visa, so I am safe. I will go back to my employer's house and wait for the next flight," she said.

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By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The interior ministry and the Public Authority for Manpower announced yesterday the resumption of issuance of all types of visas to foreigners, including dependent, business, tourist and work visas. However, no official statement was issued by the interior ministry until the time of going to press on the actual date when visit visas will be issued.

The two authorities insisted that visas will be issued only to people who have been fully vaccinated with vaccines approved by Kuwait - Pfizer-BioNTech, Oxford-AstraZeneca, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson. People must produce a vaccination certificate with a QR code to officials before the visas are issued, decrees from the two authorities said. People who have received other types of vaccines should get a third dose of one of the four approved vaccines and produce the certificate to officials to get a visa.

The residency affairs department at the interior ministry said in its circular that dependent visas will only be issued to applicants' spouses. Children under 16 will be issued either dependent or tourist visas based on conditions set by the department. Residents applying for dependent visas must draw a minimum monthly salary of KD 500.

The department will issue either dependent or tourist visas to children of Kuwaiti women married to foreigners. The circular allows the issuance of all types of business visas for all activities based on the assessment of officials.

Electronic visas will be issued to citizens of 53 countries and legal residents of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. Hotels and companies linked to the special automated system in the ministry are also allowed to issue electronic visas. The issuance of all types of visas had been suspended over a year ago due to restrictions as a result of the coronavirus

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News in brief

MP files to grill ministers

KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said yesterday that he has officially received MP Hamdan Al-Azmi's motions to grill Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah and Minister of Commerce and Industry Abdullah Al-Salman. Azmi is accusing Sheikh Hamad of "including women in the military", "unjust officer promotions", "wasting public money" and impeding "the rights of DGCA employees". Salman is accused of "damaging Kuwait's reputation by intimidating senior officials and harming public interest". — KUNA (See Page 3)

Iran rejects Western 'concerns'

TEHRAN: Iran repeated yesterday its insistence its nuclear program was peaceful, two days after the US, Britain, France and Germany expressed their "grave" concern on the sidelines of a G20 meeting. Foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh told reporters in Tehran that Western positions were "incompatible with reality and will not bring constructive results". — AFP

Saudi executes man

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia yesterday executed a man convicted of trying to shoot dead security forces and weapons charges, with alleged links to figures accused of terrorist activities, state media reported. He was executed in Dammam in the Eastern Province. The Saudi man who was executed "took part in two shooting operations against security forces with an intent to kill" and "in dealing and possessing weapons," the interior ministry said. — AFP

Moroccans rally against COVID pass

RABAT: Hundreds of people demonstrated Sunday across Morocco to protest against a government-imposed coronavirus health pass, AFP reporters and local media reported. In Rabat, police officers, some in plain clothes, broke up an unauthorized gathering in the center of the capital and detained some participants. Youth from the hundreds of protesters who had staged the sit-in hurled projectiles at security forces. — AFP

Leaders urged to 'save humanity' at climate summit

GLASGOW: World leaders must act to "save humanity", UN chief Antonio Guterres said yesterday as they met for the historic COP26 climate summit with code-red warnings from scientists ringing in their ears. More than 120 heads of state and government are gathering in Glasgow for a two-day summit at the start of the UN's COP26 conference, which organizers say is crucial for charting humanity's path away from catastrophic global warming.

"It's one minute to midnight... and we need to act now," British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said to start proceedings on an at-times chaotic opening day. COP26 is being billed as vital for the continued viability of the Paris Agreement, which countries

Continued on Page 2

Lebanon invites Saudis for talks

BEIRUT: Lebanon yesterday called for talks with Saudi Arabia to ease a spiraling diplomatic row sparked by remarks made by a Lebanese minister on the Yemen war. "Lebanon invites Saudi Arabia to engage in dialogue to solve all outstanding problems and not just the latest spat, so that the same crisis is not repeated every time," Foreign Minister Abdallah Bou Habib, told AFP.

Hopes high as tourists return to Thailand

PHUKET: Overseas tourists poured into Bangkok and the holiday island of Phuket yesterday as Thailand kick-started its tourism industry after 18 months of COVID curbs. The coronavirus pandemic hammered the kingdom's tourism-reliant economy, which last year saw its worst performance

since the 1997 Asian financial crisis as arrivals dwindled more than 80 percent.

Thai authorities have given the green light to vaccinated tourists from over 60 "low-risk" countries to skip hotel quarantine - providing the sector with a much-needed lifeline. Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi airport and Phuket's international terminal were the first yesterday morning to receive visitors, with mostly European tourists greeted by staff dressed in personal protective equipment to process their documents.

Continued on Page 2



GLASGOW: Kuwait's Prime Minister HH Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah arrives for the COP26 UN Climate Summit yesterday. — AFP

On Friday, Saudi Arabia gave Lebanon's ambassador 48 hours to leave the country, recalled its envoy from Beirut and suspended all imports from Lebanon. The Saudi foreign ministry said the measures were taken after "insulting" remarks made by Lebanese Information Minister Georges Kordahi on the Yemen war, but also due to the influence of Lebanon's Iran-backed Shiite movement Hezbollah.

On Sunday, Saudi Arabia said dealing with Beirut was "pointless" due to Hezbollah's dominance. But Bou Habib told AFP yesterday that "problems between friendly and brotherly countries can only be resolved through dialogue, communication and trust, and not through imposition".

The diplomatic crisis with the kingdom and its allies is a fresh blow to Lebanon, a country in financial and political turmoil where a fragile government is struggling to secure international aid, namely from wealthy Arab neighbors.

Saudi Arabia is Lebanon's third largest export market, accounting for six percent of the country's exports in 2020, worth around \$217 million, according to the Lebanese chamber of commerce. "If there is no dialogue or communication with Saudi Arabia, then everything that is happening goes against the values of friendship and fraternity" between both countries, Bou Habib said. — AFP



PHUKET: Tourists walk their dogs on a beach yesterday. — AFP

Local

Three authorities' heads meet at Seif Palace upon Amiri directives



KUWAIT: Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem, President of the Supreme Court and Chairman of the Court of Cassation Justice Ahmad Al-Ajeel, and Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah meet at Seif Palace yesterday. — Amiri Diwan photo

KUWAIT: The heads of the three authorities held a meeting at Seif Palace yesterday, upon His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's directives. The meeting included Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem, President of the Supreme Court and Chairman of the Court of Cassation Justice Ahmad Al-Ajeel, and Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah. — KUNA

Zain shares experience in innovation, entrepreneurship with KIPIC employees

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, hosted a group of employees from the Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIC), a subsidiary of the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation, in Zain Innovation Center (ZINC) at the company's main headquarters in Shuwaikh, during a panel discussion which the company shared its experience in the field of innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship.

The company's hosting of KIPIC employees at its main headquarters in Shuwaikh came in line with its corporate sustainability strategy, which centers around the development of the education and innovation sector, especially about the development of areas of entrepreneurship, ultimately reflecting the role of private sector in supporting oil sector institutions to enhance their contributions to sustainable development plans.

Zain indicated that it held a panel of discussion session on the sidelines of the visit, in which the company reviewed its current experience and future directions in the areas of innovation and entrepreneurship, which comes in line with the plans and the vision of "New Kuwait". And the need to involve technology, cooperation, education, and other eco-

economic and social strategies that contribute to spreading a culture of innovation in the business environment.

The company is one of the leading organizations that actively adopted young entrepreneurs, as Zain believes in the capabilities and potential of the youth, and in the ideas and innovations they have to offer.

Because Zain relies, as part of its strategy, on addressing the youth's issues by investing in the future, the company has launched the Zain Innovation Center (ZINC), which is a leading incubator for entrepreneurs in Kuwait. This center aims at supporting and empowering the youth and their capabilities, as well as opening new horizons for startups.

ZINC represents an incubator for the youth's innovations, and currently encourages exceptional minds to think in an interactive environment, offers a modern and innovative workplace, presents a proper work environment for those who have aspiring ideas and visions, as well as develops and progresses ideas into real projects that can be executed and implemented.

For Zain, ZINC represents the prominent face of this stage. Ideas are always affected by the care they receive, and if global markets look for smart ideas,

then private sector organizations in Kuwait are insistent heading towards these areas as well. For this, Zain believes that launching incubators will help discover new ideas and raise new innovations.

The idea behind launching the Zain Innovation Center (ZINC) came as a continuation of Zain's journey that started with entrepreneurs and remarkable people who own bright ideas, and began with the

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Prime Minister meets UN chief



GLASGOW: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. — KUNA

GLASGOW: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's Representative His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah met United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on the sidelines of the global climate summit (COP26). During the meeting, they tackled cooperation between Kuwait and the UN and its specialized bodies and agencies, coordination about forthcoming events and the latest regional and international developments. The UN chief appreciated Kuwait's key regional and international role and efforts in safeguarding global security and peace. His Highness the Prime Minister's accompanying delegation attended the meeting. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIC) and Zain Innovation Center (ZINC) staff in a group photo at the Zain's main headquarters in Shuwaikh. — KUNA

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Hopes high as tourists return...

Continued from Page 1

"The paperwork was a big effort and a struggle, but it feels good again to travel and get back to normal life," said German tourist Marcel Florian Popp, 25, after he and his friends passed immigration in Bangkok. In Phuket, Lin Turley, 68, said he and his wife were regular visitors to Thailand before the pandemic and were looking forward to a relaxing month of golf and swimming in the island's clear turquoise waters. "We have just come out of a cold Europe so we are looking forward to some warmth," he told AFP. "We want to relax and enjoy being back in the Land of Smiles."

Visitors are required to take a COVID test upon landing and spend a night at a government-approved hotel to await the results before being allowed to travel freely across the kingdom. By late afternoon, about 1,500 foreigners had landed in Suvarnabhumi airport, said director Kittipong Kittikachorn, adding that he expects half of November's estimated 135,400 visitors to be foreign.

Flights canceled without notice...

Continued from Page 1

Earlier in the week, the Philippines' national carrier informed passengers via social media that some of its flights to and from Dubai were cancelled due to government restrictions in Manila. As of Oct 30, the Philippine government has placed 88 countries on a yellow list. The yellow list includes Egypt, Kuwait, Oman, United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, as well as other states in the Middle East. All fully vaccinated Filipinos returning from yellow-list countries must quarantine, free of charge, upon arrival.

They will be released from the quarantine facilities only when they receive a negative result of a test taken on their fifth day in the country. They must then remain in home quarantine for an additional seven days.

Already, inbound passengers are limited to 2,500 per day, according to travel agents who book flights to the Philippines. The quota system limits how many Filipinos can return to their home country and is directly impacting nationals flying in from the Middle East. As a result, airlines are cancelling flights. This week, the Manila-Dubai-Cebu flight on Oct 31 and Manila-Dubai-Manila flights on Nov 1 and 2 were canceled.

"We urgently appeal to the Philippine and Dubai authorities to work towards resolving the situation so that we may again be able to operate our planned schedule of flights to and from Dubai and make use of all our seats onboard each flight, for the best interests of our passengers," the airline said in a Facebook post. The airline said all affected passengers are given the option to rebook their flight, con-

Kuwait resumes issuance of all...

Continued from Page 1

pandemic. Kuwait, which has not seen a single death from COVID-19 for seven days in a row, has been reopening to pre-pandemic status.

The Public Authority for Manpower also announced yesterday the resumption of issuance of work permits for foreign workers outside the country after the interior ministry resumed issuing

stabilizing the climate.

Pressure is on governments to redouble their emissions-cutting commitments to bring them in line with the Paris goals, and to stump up long-promised cash to help developing nations green their grids and protect themselves against future disasters. "It's time to say: Enough," Guterres said. "Enough of brutalizing biodiversity. Enough of killing ourselves with carbon. Enough of treating nature like a toilet. Enough of burning and drilling and mining our way deeper. We are digging our own graves."

Thousands of delegates queued around the block to get into the summit yesterday, negotiating airport-style security in the locked-down city center. On nearby streets, protesters began lively demonstrations to keep up the pressure. Activists from Oxfam communicated their displeasure through music, with a Scottish pipe band, the "COP26 Hot Air Band", wearing masks that caricatured world leaders.

Johnson spoke of the "uncontainable" public anger if the conference falls flat. Echoing 18-year-old climate campaigner Greta Thunberg - who is in Glasgow with thousands of other protesters - he urged the summit against indulging in "blah blah blah". —AFP

Thailand hopes to capitalize on travelers escaping the winter blues in December, with Kuwait, several European countries, the United States and China on the approved list. "The most important thing that the government and I are thinking right now is to make people's livelihoods return to normal," Premier Prayut Chan-O-Cha said Friday. Tourism accounts for nearly a fifth of the economy and the impact of the pandemic has reverberated across sectors from restaurants to transportation.

But authorities expect 10 to 15 million visitors to return next year, with revenues forecast to surpass \$30 billion. Industry insiders are less optimistic, however, especially with regional giant China - the source of the lion's share of tourists - requiring returnees to undergo a strict quarantine program. Thailand is still registering about 10,000 COVID infections a day while only about 40 percent of the population have received two vaccine doses.

Pre-pandemic Thailand saw nearly 40 million visitors arrive annually to stroll its sandy beaches, sample street food and enjoy its nightlife. A pilot reopening scheme dubbed the "sandbox" kicked off in July, with Phuket allowing fully vaccinated visitors to roam the island paradise for two weeks before being allowed to travel to other areas of Thailand. But it drew just 58,685 visitors in four months, a drop in the ocean compared to the numbers Thailand has come to expect. —AFP

Local

MP Hamdan Al-Azmi files to grill two ministers over alleged violations

Women in army violates Kuwait's traditions, lawmaker charges

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Opposition MP Hamdan Al-Azmi yesterday filed to grill the ministers of defense and commerce and industry over allegations that they committed a series of violations including admitting women in the army and a decision regarding residences for over 60 residents.

The lawmaker accused Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah of disregarding Kuwait society traditions and admitting females in the Kuwaiti army, violating rules of promotion among officers and of committing financial irregularities that squandered millions of dinars.

He accused Minister of Commerce and Industry Abdullah Al-Salman of "terrorizing" the head of the Public Authority for Manpower for issuing a decision last year to ban the renewal of residences of residents over 60 years old.

National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-

Ghanem said he received the two grillings and will be listed on the agenda of the next session on November 8. But the grillings are not expected to be debated in the assembly based on speculation



Grillings listed on Nov 8 session

that the cabinet could resign. Under Kuwait law, resigned ministers cannot be grilled unless reappointed in the new cabinet.

MP Azmi said in his first grilling that the defense

minister "shocked" the Kuwaiti people by issuing a decision last month to allow Kuwaiti women to join the army, ignoring advice not to go ahead "with plans to Westernize the Kuwaiti society by admitting women into the military service".

He also accused the minister of violating rules for promotions among army officers by promoting officers who did not fulfill the required conditions and ignoring others who fulfilled the conditions. Azmi also accused the minister of committing financial irregularities that cost public funds several million dinars.



MP Hamdan Al-Azmi

In the second grilling, MP Azmi accused the minister of commerce and industry, who is chairman of the Manpower Authority, of terrorizing senior officials of the state by referring the head of the manpower authority to investigation.

The lawmaker said that last year, the head of the Public Authority for Manpower, after discussions with the board, issued a decision banning residents aged 60 and over and who held secondary certificates or lower, from renewing their residence permits. He said the decision was taken as part of government efforts to reduce the number of residents in the country and it was approved by the previous ministers.

The minister had decided to suspend the decision after it was declared unconstitutional by the government's legal department. Azmi made no reference to this decision. The suspension of the decision was hailed by a majority of MPs, businessmen and Kuwaiti human rights bodies.



KUWAIT: Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah meets Ambassador of the Kyrgyzstan to Kuwait Azamat Karagulov. — KUNA photos



Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah meets Omani Ambassador to Kuwait Dr Saleh bin Amer Al-Kharousi.



Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah meets UAE Ambassador to Kuwait Dr Matar Hamed Al-Neyadi.

Acting Prime Minister meets Kyrgyz, Oman, UAE ambassadors

KUWAIT: Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah received Ambassador of the Kyrgyzstan to Kuwait Azamat Karagulov at Seif Palace yesterday. In a statement, the Ministry of Defense said that the two sides discussed bilateral ties between the two countries. The Acting Prime Minister also welcomed Omani Ambassador to Kuwait Dr Saleh bin Amer Al-Kharousi, where they discussed bilateral cooperation and ways to enhance them. During the meeting, the Omani Ambassador handed an invitation to Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali to visit Shabab Oman II sailing ship 'Oman Youth II' of the Royal Navy of Oman, which will be in the country on November 11. In turn, the Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Defense expressed his thanks and appreciation for this invitation, which reflects the depth of the historical and brotherly relations between the two countries. Meanwhile, the Acting Prime Minister also met UAE Ambassador to Kuwait Dr Matar Hamed Al-Neyadi, where they considered bilateral and historical relations between the two countries and ways of strengthening them. During the meeting, Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali praised UAE's distinction and success in hosting Expo 2020, wishing the Emirates and its people further progress and prosperity.— KUNA



KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem meets German Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office and member of the German Bundestag Niels Annen. — KUNA

Kuwait Assembly Speaker meets German Minister

KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem met yesterday the visiting German Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office and member of the German Bundestag Niels Annen. During the meeting, the two sides discussed latest international and regional developments in addition to cooperation between the two countries. Ambassador of Germany to Kuwait Stefan Mobs also attended

the meeting. Meanwhile, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Ambassador Majdi Al-Dhafiri met with the visiting German Minister and his accompanying delegation. The meeting tackled bilateral relations between the two countries and ways to strengthen them in all fields, in addition to latest regional and international developments. The meeting was also attended by Assistant Foreign Minister for the Deputy Foreign Minister's Office Ambassador Ayham Al-Omar, Assistant Foreign Minister for International Organizations of Kuwait Naser Al-Hayen and Ambassador of Germany to Kuwait Stefan Mobs.— KUNA

Breast cancer makes up 40% of cancers affecting women in Kuwait

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Breast cancer makes up 40 percent of all cancers affecting women in Kuwait, an official said yesterday, noting that around 602 cancer cases are

registered in Kuwait every year. "We work in harmony to achieve the goal of increasing cancer awareness, and the voluntary humanitarian work is the goal of all who participated and supported our efforts in this field," said Dr Khaled Ahmad Al-Saleh Chairman of Cancer Aware Nation (CAN) during an event held to announce the conclusion of the organization's breast cancer awareness month activities. The event took place at the Kuwait Writers Association, and also saw distribution of prizes for the short story contest which was organized by CAN.

"The attendance of our partners of success gives us confidence that we are on the right path of awareness which can achieve our goals of increasing a healthy culture in our society, reduce the cancer percentages and increase recovery by early detection," Dr Saleh said during the ceremony.

The ceremony was sponsored by Sheikha Suad Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, who was represented by Sheikha Fadheela Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah. In a speech during the event, Sheikha Fadheela said humanitarian campaigns deserve respect and stressed the importance of maintaining the art of short stories which she described as the "entertaining art". She thanked the Kuwait Writers Association and CAN for their close partnership. Secretary General of the Kuwait Writers Association Dr Khaled Ramadhan said he was glad to cooperate with CAN in organizing the short story contest which aimed to spread awareness about breast cancer.



KUWAIT: A group photo taken during an event organized by Cancer Aware Nation (CAN) at the Kuwait Writers Association. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait Towers lit up with Kuwait, India national flags



KUWAIT: Kuwait Towers were illuminated on Sunday with the projection of national flags of Kuwait and India marking the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. On this happy occasion, Indian Ambassador Sibi George highlighted the significance of the ongoing milestone year 2021 and the excellent relations between the two countries during the last six decades.

He expressed his commitment to further strengthening bilateral relations between the two countries on mutual trust, understanding and cooperation. The ambassador also said that the display of the national tricolor on the iconic Kuwait Towers was lit on a very special day when India celebrated 'National Unity Day'.



Kuwait launches Estamp app

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Finance announced yesterday the launch of its new 'Estamp' application. The application allows individuals and companies to pay the fees for their transactions at the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training in an easy, fast and safe way.

This app aims to improve the services provided by the Ministry of Finance. The service is provided in cooperation with the Shared Electronic Banking Co (KNET), under the umbrella of the 'Tasdeed' application for electronic government payments.

Aseel Al-Minefi, Undersecretary at the Ministry of Finance, said the launch of the e-stamp service is part of the 2035 New Kuwait vision's goals of digital transformation of various government sectors. The app upgrades the development of the communications and IT infrastructure and improves the services of the public sector.

The Estamp app is currently available for both Android and iOS users. In the next phase, it will also be available on other channels such as web platforms and WhatsApp to meet the needs of all users. The service will also include all public institutions including ministries and public authorities.



Local

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News in brief

Decision on 60+ visas soon?

KUWAIT: A decision is expected soon to renew resident permits of expatriates aged over 60 who do not hold university degrees, Al-Rai Arabic daily reported yesterday. A new format will impose compulsory health insurance on all residents over 60 regardless of their academic qualifications, so that the health sector does not bear any additional costs, according to sources quoted in the report. Commerce and Industry Minister Abdullah Al-Salman asked the head of the Fatwa and Legislation Department to attend the next Public Authority for Manpower meeting, the sources said. The sources expect the board to cancel the decision that was issued by Director General Ahmad Al-Mousa and decide on a new decision to renew work permits for this age group for the same fees paid previously, in addition to mandatory private health insurance.

Kuwait praises OPEC+ strategy

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Minister of Oil and Higher Education Minister Dr Mohammad Al-Fares praised on Monday the agreement of the 19th meeting of the ministers of OPEC and ministers of oil-producing countries outside of OPEC's (OPEC+) strategy of increasing production up to 400,000 barrels per day (bpd) monthly. This came in a statement for KUNA ahead of the minister's participation in the 43rd meeting of the Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee (JMJC), and the 22nd OPEC+ virtual meetings. "Continuing the work of this strategy achieves market balance and stability," said Fares. "There are several challenges in the market of 2022 that justify the increase of production to ensure its needs," he added.

Shooting tourney preparations

KUWAIT: Activities of HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Annual Championship continues at Kuwait Shooting Sport Club's (KSSC) Jahra branch, by holding the air rifle and pistol and Olympic archery preliminaries for juniors. KSSC Assistant Secretary Mohammad Misfer Al-Gharba said the board of directors appreciate the interest HH the Crown Prince is paying to the sport of shooting, and his continued support "which inspire shooters make more achievements in the name of Kuwait." Meanwhile, international referee Hamad Al-Ruwaisan, who heads the shotgun refereeing committee at KSSC, said his committee is getting ready for this tournament, and has held training courses ahead of the tournament. Head of rifle and pistol referees committee Khalid Al-Jurayed also noted that his committee held several meetings to learn the new changes in the international federation's rules and to discuss the schedule. The tournament continues until Saturday.

Disabled club honors team

KUWAIT: Honorary President of Al-Irada Disabled Sports Club Sheikhha Suhaila Al-Sabah honored the national team that participated in the Costa Brava International Championship in Barcelona, Spain in October. Chairman of Kuwait Irada Disabled Sport Club Duaij Al-Hajiri, Chairman of Kuwait Disabled Sport Club Shafi Al-Hajiri and Deputy Chairman of Irada Club Torky Al-Shimmari were also present. Sheikhha Suhaila lauded the achievement of the table tennis team who won one gold and one bronze medals in the team and individuals' competition. Chairman of Irada Club thanked Sheikhha Suhaila for her initiative to support the athletes, saying that the support motivates them ahead of the Asian Paralympic Games to be held from November 28 until December 7.

GCC Games committee meets

KUWAIT: Minister of Information and Culture, and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi chaired a second meeting of the higher organizing committee of the 3rd GCC Games at the Youth Public Authority on Sunday evening. The meeting reviewed the technical preparations for the big event that will bring together athletes from all sisterly members of the GCC, director of the championship and Secretary of Kuwait Olympic Committee Hussein Al-Musallam said. The conferees determined the residence sites of the participating missions and the venues of the 15 competitions of the Games, due in Kuwait between January 9 and 19, 2022. — KUNA

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A bird is seen flying over the sun during sunset in Kuwait yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Burgan Bank strategic sponsor of 1st Kuwait PPP Conference

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced its sponsorship of the 1st Kuwait PPP Conference (PPPKW), which is being held under the umbrella theme of "Partnership journey towards growth and prosperity". Set to take place virtually on November 15 and 16, the conference is being organized by Nouf Expo and is being held under the patronage of the Prime Minister, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. The bank's sponsorship of the event comes in line with its efforts to play an active role in strengthening the partnership between the public and private sectors, which continues to be a vital step towards driving economic development and growth in Kuwait.

The conference is a dedicated platform that brings together prominent figures, leaders and decision makers from the private sector on one hand and various government bodies and public sector institutions on the other. It also aims to facilitate networking opportunities and drive open discussions between both sides, to promote greater cooperation and collaboration; enabling both sectors to explore opportunities and build long-term, sustainable, profitable and mutually partnerships.

Speaking about the bank's participation in the event, Mohammad Mansour Al-Mael - Head of Corporate Banking - AGM - Corporate Banking Group at Burgan Bank, said: "This conference comes at just the right point in time, given the current economic climate, as Kuwait begins to return to a pre-COVID sense of normal and efforts rev up on all sides to stimulate economic growth and investment across the board."



Mohammad Al-Mael

Magdy Sabry

Mael further added: "The recent economic turmoil we have all witnessed, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, has left a major mark on the local, regional and global markets. As economic recovery begins, and the world gradually starts to 'return to normal', we are seeing governments around the globe encourage more comprehensive and integrated economic strategies that allocate a greater role for the private sector - as an active and influential partner for the public sector, driving social and economic development. This greater collaboration between the two sides will inevitably help mitigate economic challenges and drive a bigger investment in economic growth and diversification, which in turn will help create job opportunities for our future generations across all sectors and industries."

Also noted that Burgan Bank continues to operate in accordance with Kuwait's Vision 2035, which

aims to help bring about a "New Kuwait", positioning the country as an attractive financial and commercial hub for investment, with the private sector playing a leading role in driving economic activity. Accordingly, as an established financial institution, Burgan Bank is doing its part in helping promote greater economic diversification on the national scale, in addition to actively contributing to the investment in Kuwait's human capital development by supporting and nurturing young Kuwaiti entrepreneurs and SMEs.

Magdy Sabry, Executive Manager of Nouf Expo, said: "Through this conference, we seek to provide a realistic view of the experiences of Kuwait and neighboring countries when it comes to public-private partnerships and to learn from the successful experiences we have seen so far. The conference also highlights the role of collaboration in achieving development goals and the complementary benefits for the two sectors, by identifying and evaluating appropriate strategies and mechanisms for planning and implementing partnerships and highlighting how to overcome the problems and challenges they often face."

It is worth mentioning that as part of its participation in the conference, Burgan Bank will be taking part in several panel discussions, as well as the accompanying virtual exhibition. Furthermore, and as part of its efforts to promote greater economic awareness, the bank will also be providing the opportunity for its customers to register for and participate in the event for free.

Ooredoo Kuwait honors 'Flying Start Triathlon 2021' winners

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, constantly strives to spread and strengthen health awareness. Thus, after its sponsorship, Ooredoo Kuwait honored all winners of the 'Flying Start Triathlon 2021' which was held last Saturday, October 30th, 2021 in Al-Kout. This step came as a testament to its support of youth, athletes and national talents which also goes in line with its core values and its year-round social responsibility strategy.

Flying Start Triathlon is an annual triathlon based in the State of Kuwait and it's one of the oldest races to take place in the region, the race included swimming, biking and running which is divided into three categories: Super Sprint, Sprint, and Olympic. Hence, the importance of these sporting events lies in encouraging the spirit of friendly competition, instilling sportsmanship and raising the level of health awareness for a better life. The role of Ooredoo in supporting such events targeting the youth category was also highlighted to support and incubate the diverse sports talents.

Commenting on the triathlon, Mijbil Al-Ayoub, Senior Director, Corporate Communications at Ooredoo Kuwait, said: "For the past four years, Ooredoo Kuwait and Suffix walked together step by step, and year after year, to organize this triathlon race that welcomes triathletes of all levels from all over the world. Today and as every year, we take pride in sponsoring this annual social event the 'Flying Start Triathlon 2021' with sporting and health goals. The event witnessed a



KUWAIT: The winners pose for a group photo.

huge turnout and participation from different ages, groups and nationalities. We will continue to support such talents for a better health and better life."

During the event, Ayoub was honored on behalf of Ooredoo Kuwait for their support and sponsorship of the Flying Start Triathlon 2021 by Ahmed Al-Majed, General Manager of Suffix, who said: "The race achieved the desired results and gained the admiration of the participants, triathletes and the public in general. I would like to thank all the supporting companies that had a hand in making it one of the best races in Kuwait and the Middle East, and I would also like to thank Ooredoo Kuwait for its continuous support of our various sports events and local talents."

The Flying Start Triathlon welcomes athletes from various countries within the GCC and the world. Al-Kout served as the host location for the triathlon. It accepts registrations by individuals and teams. Teams can compete only in the Sprint and Olympic categories and must have a minimum of two and a maximum of three athletes.



A competitor competes in the Flying Start Triathlon 2021.



Uzbek traders learn to do business with the Taleban

Denied care, millions of Americans condemned to toothache



SHANGHAI: Medical personnel prepare to test visitors for the COVID-19 coronavirus at Disneyland in Shanghai after a single coronavirus case was detected at the park on the weekend. — AFP

COVID death toll nears 5 million

What is next for coronavirus after five million deaths?

PARIS: With the world poised to hit more than five million people officially dead from the coronavirus, experts tell AFP the pandemic's future path will depend greatly on vaccinations.

How many dead?

The true number of fatalities is believed to be far higher than the five million based on daily reports provided by health authorities in each country. The World Health Organization estimates the overall toll could be two to three times higher than official records due to the excess mortality linked to COVID-19. The Economist magazine looked at excess mortality and concluded around 17 million have died from COVID. "This figure seems more credible to me," Pasteur Institute epidemiologist Professor Arnaud Fontanet told AFP.

Whatever the case the death toll is lower than from other historic pandemics such as Spanish flu - caused by another novel virus - that killed 50-100 million in 1918-1919. AIDS has left more than 36 million people dead over 40 years. Nonetheless, COVID has "caused a lot of deaths in a short period", said Jean-Claude Manuguerra, a virologist at the French institute. "It could have been a lot more dramatic without all the measures taken, particularly restrictions on movement of people and then the vaccinations," according to Fontanet.

Have we hit a plateau?

The emergence of a virus usually happens in two phases, Fontanet explained. First "an explosive epidemic phase" when the virus spreads through a population which had never been in contact with it before. During the second phase it "settles down" as immunity is built up and becomes endemic. With COVID, "it's the first time in the history of pandemics that an effort has been made on a global scale to speed up the transition" between the two phases, Fontanet said. The acceleration has been enabled by vaccinations. "It has allowed the population to acquire immunity artificially against a virus it had not known and thus to do in 18 months what normally takes three to five years with a lot more dead," he said.

That's why the next stages will vary according to the level of vaccination in each country and the efficacy of the vaccines used. "We are probably several months away from the time when there will be a safety net everywhere. The problem is to know if it will be sufficiently strong enough. "This virus will still be circulating. The target today is no longer its elimination but protection against the serious types," Fontanet said. "The idea is that COVID leads neither to hospital or the cemetery," added Manuguerra.

What future awaits different nations?

The face of the pandemic is expected to change with the wave after wave so far witnessed fading in industrial countries where most people are vaccinated. Surges will above all hit the non-vaccinated. "For industrialized countries, I believe we are heading for seasonal COVID epidemics, which will perhaps be a little more severe than the flu epidemic in the first years before settling down," said Fontanet.

Global immunity will be built layer upon layer, he stressed, with vaccines adding to immunity from natural infections. Other countries such as China or India with a strong vaccination capacity could follow a similar path. Nations that adopted a zero COVID strategy to eradicate the disease face failure because of the highly contagious nature of the Delta variant. They are today racing to inoculate everyone, said Fontanet, with the likely result Australia and New Zealand for example will quickly catch up.

More difficult scenarios await regions with limited vaccine capacity, such as much of Africa. The strong resurgence in eastern Europe has confirmed that failure to vaccinate enough people exposes a population to "severe epidemics with an impact on hospitals", according to Fontanet. While the current increase in cases in

western Europe - despite high levels of vaccination - should make us cautious. "You should not take a Europe-centric view: in a pandemic, it's the whole planet that has to be taken into consideration. And for the time being, the pandemic has not stopped," warned Jean-Claude Manuguerra.

What about new variants?

The biggest fear is the emergence of new variants resistant to vaccination. Delta has swept aside previous variants including Alpha and has stopped new strains such as Mu or Lambda from spreading. But more than totally new variants, experts now anticipate that Delta itself will mutate and may become vaccine resistant. "Delta is the main virus. So statistically it's from there that we risk seeing a variant of a variant," said Manuguerra.

The British authorities are monitoring a Delta sub-variant dubbed AY4.2. There is no evidence for now that vaccines are less efficient against it. "It's important to keep up with genomic surveillance," Manuguerra noted, referring to efforts to detect different variants. It allows "the emergence of variants to be identified quickly enough and to know if they are more dangerous, more transmissible and if immunity still works." — AFP

COVID compared with other deadly viruses

PARIS: The global death toll from COVID-19, which is set to pass five million, is already far worse than most other viral epidemics of the 20th and 21st centuries.

But there have been notable exceptions. The post-World War I Spanish Flu wiped out more than 50 million people in 1918-19, according to some estimates. That is far more than the coronavirus pandemic, even if - as the World Health Organization says - COVID's true toll is two to three times higher than official figures suggest. Here are some comparisons:

21st century epidemics

The human toll of COVID-19, officially known as SARS-CoV-2, far outstrips that of other viral epidemics in the 21st century. In 2009, the H1N1 virus, or swine flu, caused a pandemic and left an official death toll of 18,500. The toll was later revised upwards by The Lancet medical journal to between 151,700 and 575,400. In 2002-2003, COVID's predecessor SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) which emerged from China was the first coronavirus to spark global fears, but killed just 774 people.

Flu epidemics

The COVID-19 toll has often been compared to that of seasonal flu, which, without hitting the headlines, accounts for between 290,000 and 650,000 deaths worldwide every year out of around five million serious cases, according to the WHO. In the 20th century, two major non-seasonal flu pandemics - Asian flu in 1957-1958 and Hong Kong flu in 1968-1970 - each killed around one million people, according to counts car-



KOLKATA: Commuters walk along a railway platform after stepping out from a suburban local train in Kolkata yesterday as the train services resumed normalcy after plying with restrictions imposed earlier to curb the spread of COVID-19 coronavirus. — AFP

ried out afterwards. The greatest catastrophe of modern pandemics to date, the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918-1919 was also caused by a new virus. In three successive waves it wiped out 50 million to 100 million people, according to research published in the 2000s. The toll is much higher than the 10 million who died in World War I.

Tropical viruses

The death toll from COVID-19 is far higher than that of the deadly haemorrhagic fever Ebola, which was first identified in 1976. The last major outbreak of Ebola killed nearly 2,300 people in the Democratic Republic of Congo between August 2018 and June 2020. In four decades, periodic Ebola outbreaks have killed some 15,300 people, all in Africa. Ebola has a far higher fatality rate than COVID-19: around 50 percent of people who are infected die from it. But Ebola is less contagious than other viral diseases, largely because it is not airborne but transmitted through direct and close contact. Other tropical viruses like

Dengue fever, whose severe form can be fatal, cause a lower death toll. Dengue, which is passed on by mosquitos, has been on the rise for the past two decades but kills only a few thousand people every year - 4,032 in 2015, according to the latest WHO figure available.

AIDS and hepatitis

AIDS is by far the most deadly modern epidemic: since 1980 almost 36.3 million people around the world have died of the disease, which affects the immune system and cannot be cured. No effective vaccine has been found, but retroviral drugs, when taken regularly, efficiently stop the illness in its tracks and heavily reduce the risk of contamination. This treatment has helped bring down the death toll from its peak in 2004 of 1.7 million deaths to 680,000 in 2020, according to UNAIDS. The hepatitis B and C viruses, mainly transmitted by blood, also have a high death toll, killing more than one million people every year, most often in poor countries. — AFP

Bad job: Pandemic mismanagement under scrutiny

PARIS: As the official death toll of COVID-19 reaches five million, several world leaders and officials are under fire for their management of the pandemic, with some facing charges and legal investigations.

Brazil: Crimes and 'quackery'

In Brazil, one of the hardest-hit countries with more than 600,000 deaths, a Senate commission approved on October 27 a damning report that recommended President Jair Bolsonaro face at least 10 charges over his COVID policies. The far-right leader repeatedly played down the seriousness of the virus, calling it a "little flu", promising treatments scientists said were ineffective, rallying against lockdown measures and vaccinations. Among the charges are crimes against humanity, "quackery", inciting crime and violation of health measures. While the accusations are serious, the process may be just symbolic since Bolsonaro enjoys enough congressional support to avoid the opening of impeachment proceedings.

France ex-health minister charged

Former health minister Agnes Buzyn was charged in September with "endangering the lives of others", over her handling of the pandemic. Buzyn, who resigned from her post in February 2020, weeks after the first cases were confirmed in France, has faced criticism and ridicule over her initial statements about the crisis. Former prime minister Edouard

Philippe and current Health Minister Olivier Veran are also being investigated by magistrates at a special court that has powers to prosecute ministers and has had their offices searched.

COVID-sceptic Trump

Former US president Donald Trump, who himself was infected with COVID, came under fierce criticism for his handling of the pandemic. Under Trump, the number of COVID-19 deaths in the US soared to by far the world's highest toll as he resisted imposing face masks, shutdowns and other measures. "Anyone who's responsible for that many deaths should not remain as president of the United States of America," his successor Joe Biden said during an electoral debate. The US has the world's highest death toll of more than 740,000 deaths.

British government inquiry

With one of the highest death tolls in Europe of more than 140,000, Prime Minister Boris Johnson has pledged an independent inquiry will open in 2022 into his much-criticized management of the pandemic. In a damning assessment mid-October, a cross-party group of lawmakers said the government's response had been "one of the most important public health failures" in the country's history. Leading advisors were guilty of "groupthink" and pushed a "gradual and incremental approach" to social distancing and lockdowns. — AFP

International

Russia warns of strain on doctors as COVID spreads

Sputnik jab proves ineffective against resistant Russians

MOSCOW: Russian authorities said yesterday that doctors were under "extraordinary" strain due to surging coronavirus cases in Europe's worst-hit country, with Moscow shuttered during a nationwide holiday to curb infections. The capital was quiet on the first morning of the working week, with businesses mostly closed and non-essential services in the capital halted from October 28 to November 7.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that doctors working in red zones were facing "extreme physical and emotional stress" with the recent rise in cases. "Of course the situation is not straightforward. Beds are filled to a large extent, and these days the situation is not becoming easier," Peskov said. "This is an excessive and extraordinary burden on our doctors, who are demonstrating heroism with what is happening," he added. Russia is one of the worst-hit countries in the world and a devastating wave this autumn has seen infections and deaths reach new records, with more than 1,000 fatalities per day.

A government tally recorded 40,402 new infections and 1,155 deaths yesterday, figures that in both cases were just shy of records set over recent days. Russia has rolled out several homegrown vaccines including Sputnik V but only about a third of the population is fully inoculated. The Kremlin said last week it hoped the paid holiday period would help stabilize Russia's outbreak and cautioned people against travelling, after surveys showed some 30 percent of Russians intended to travel.

Ex-president and former prime minister Dmitry Medvedev warned in the Rossiiskaya Gazeta daily Monday there was an urgent need to increase vaccination rates. "If we do not find ways to convince people of their irresponsibility, even, to put it bluntly, their anti-social behavior, we will face even more difficult times," he said. Authorities have been accused of downplaying the pandemic and figures from statistics agency Rosstat last week showed nearly twice as many COVID deaths compared with the government

tally. Rosstat said 44,265 people died of coronavirus in September - nearly double the official government figure, bringing the agency's total virus toll to nearly 450,000, the highest in Europe.

Sputnik jab

Some call it "experimental", some don't trust the government, some even buy fake certificates-as their country sees a record coronavirus surge, Russians are proving stubbornly resistant to the country's Sputnik V vaccine. Russia is among the countries worst-hit by the COVID pandemic and a devastating wave this autumn has seen infections and deaths reach new records, with more than 1,000 fatalities per day.



One of the worst-hit nations in the world

But while the country has several locally produced vaccines including Sputnik V, only about a third of its population has been inoculated. With global coronavirus fatalities soon set to top five million, the scepticism of Russians underlines the difficulties that remain in the global fight against COVID. Sputnik V was announced with great fanfare last year by President Vladimir Putin as the first registered coronavirus vaccine and is freely available at clinics and vaccination centers across the country.

Meant as a showcase for Russian science that would quickly turn the page on the pandemic in the country, it has failed to win over the public, with polls showing fewer than half of people planning to get



MOSCOW: Medics wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) work in the intensive care unit for COVID-19 coronavirus patients in the Moscow Sklifosovsky emergency hospital. — AFP

vaccinated. For Russians like Vyacheslav, a 52-year-old businessman, the government has given them no reason to have confidence in the vaccine. "The authorities lie to us on all sorts of subjects. Why should we believe them on vaccination?" he asked, his sports bag on his knees as he prepared for a swim at a Moscow pool. "I have no trust," he said, declining to give his last name.

'It's suspicious'

Even some of those who have contracted COVID, like Svetlana Zheltukhina, are still refusing to get jabbed. "It's an experimental vaccine," said the 54-year-old financial analyst, adding there is not yet enough "scientific data" on Sputnik V. "I am not a monkey." Like elsewhere, Russia has its share of

diehard anti-vaxxers. But beyond those who oppose all vaccines, there are "a big number of Russians who distrust the people who made this vaccine and the Russian government", said anthropologist Alexandra Arkhipova.

"They think that we cannot expect anything good from the government... and that our laboratories are incapable of producing aspirin, let alone a good vaccine," she said. Tamara Alexeyeva, an elegant 67-year-old retiree, said the Kremlin's claims of Sputnik's alleged superiority over Western vaccines have fed her scepticism. "They want us to believe that we have the best scientists in the world, like the USSR," she said, walking briskly towards a Metro station. "But me, I will never accept this so-called vaccine." — AFP

Denied care, millions of Americans condemned to toothache

WASHINGTON: Swollen gums, rotten teeth, patients in excruciating pain, children afraid to smile. This is what Roslyn Kellum and her colleagues see when they crisscross the United States in a trailer van to provide much needed oral care to tens of thousands of patients who cannot afford to go to the dentist. "They choose between getting their teeth treated or paying the bills, or gas in the tank, or food on the table, or paying rent," Kellum, dental director at Mission of Mercy, a Christian charity providing free medical and dental care to low-income Americans in several US states, told AFP.

"So they choose to put gas in the tank or food on the table and neglect their teeth." Health care advocates had been hoping that President Joe Biden's huge social spending plan would finally reverse a decades-old situation where dental benefits were excluded from the national health insurance plan for millions of American seniors. But faced with resistance from both Republicans and members of his own Democratic Party, Biden had to significantly pare back his plan and oral care has been left out of the latest \$1.75 trillion blueprint.

Historically, dental care has been separate from general health care in the United States, and when Medicare, the national health insurance program for the elderly and the disabled, was established in 1965, dental benefits were left out. "Keeping teeth in your mouth as you grow old should not be a luxury in this country," Democratic Senator Bernie Sanders fumed recently. But for many Americans it is. Maria Hernandez, 53, an in-home care provider in Washington, does not have dental insurance and cannot afford to pay out of pocket.

Earlier this week she went to get her teeth examined and treated at a free clinic run by Bread for the City, a charity that provides food and medical care to underserved communities in the US capital. But Hernandez told of her friend, also uninsured but unaware of the clinic, who was in so much pain from an aching tooth that she tried to extract it at home herself. "I think it's really bad. A lot of people southside, they cannot pay, because, you know, dental care is really, really expensive," Hernandez, a heavy-set woman with grey hair, told AFP, referring to an underprivileged area of Washington. "We are low-income, we can't pay."

Twenty-four million American seniors, or nearly half of those enrolled in Medicare, don't have any dental coverage, according to a recent study by the Kaiser Family Foundation, a non-profit focused on health policy. Private insurance plans can be costly. And paying for dental services out of pocket is infamously expensive in the United States, where a routine check-up can cost several hundred dollars, while more serious work such as fillings or root canal treatment can run in the thousands. Nearly half of all Medicare recipients did not visit a dentist over the past year, the Kaiser study found. — AFP

Soaring COVID rate prompts fresh fears in Germany

BERLIN: Germany's COVID-19 incidence rate surged to over 150 for the first time since May yesterday, prompting concerns of a rampant fourth wave as the country wrestles with a change of government. The number of new infections per 100,000 people over the past seven days reached 154.8, according to the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) health agency - up from 110.1 a week ago.

Outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel on Sunday called for swift measures to tackle the "very worrying" trend, stressing that Germany could not afford to wait until a new government is in place. The country recorded 9,658 new COVID-19 cases in the past 24 hours yesterday and 23 deaths, according to the RKI. Merkel is due to step down as German leader after 16 years in power after an election in September narrowly won by the centre-left Social Democrats (SPD).

The SPD is currently in talks with two other parties and aiming to form a ruling coalition by early December, leaving the country in a kind of political limbo as it confronts the surge in new cases. Social Democrat Olaf Scholz, the likely next chancellor, said Sunday that Germany must do what was necessary "to ensure that we keep the pandemic under control". But he also said that in a country where a large number of people have been vaccinated, it is no longer possible to respond with strict measures such as lockdowns.

Queen seen driving, easing health fears

LONDON: Queen Elizabeth II was spotted at the wheel of a car at Windsor Castle yesterday, British media reported, allaying fears for her health after she skipped the UK-hosted COP26 summit on doctors' advice. The 95-year-old was seen alone in a green Jaguar estate she uses to transport her corgis. The Sun tabloid reported, under the headline: "One is OK". The Queen pulled out of the United Nations climate summit, where world leaders gathered in Glasgow yesterday, after a rare public admission of health problems.

Buckingham Palace said in late October that she had attended a London private hospital for undisclosed "preliminary examinations" and stayed overnight. The Queen swiftly resumed official duties and held several audiences via video link. But she

25 bank robbers killed in Brazil

BRASILIA: Twenty-five alleged members of a gang of Brazilian bank robbers were killed Sunday in a vast police operation in Minas Gerais state, a police source said. "There are 25 criminals who have died, and no injuries," a federal highway police source said. The operation by 50 officers, in conjunction with the Military Police, took place near the city of Varginha.

Police raided two farms where "members of a criminal organization specializing in robbing banks and ATMs" were preparing attacks on several local bank branches, the source said. Eighteen of the suspects were killed on the first farm and seven at the



OTOPENI: Medical personnel help transfer a COVID-19 patient onto a German military airplane yesterday in Otopeni, Romania. Six Romanian patients with severe cases of COVID-19 have been transferred to Germany for treatment. — AFP

Vaccine hesitancy

Germany has also so far ruled out compulsory vaccinations, instead focusing on encouraging as many people as possible to get the jab voluntarily. But its vaccination campaign has ground to a halt with just 66.7 percent of the population fully inoculated. In a Forsa survey carried out for the health ministry and published Thursday, 65 percent of unvaccinated respondents declared there was "no way" they would take a COVID jab and 23 percent were "reluctant". At the same time, health professionals have reported a new influx of

infected people into hospital, mostly unvaccinated.

Hospitalisations due to COVID have increased by 40 percent in the past week, according to the German Hospital Society, with intensive care admissions up by 15 percent. Merkel on Sunday admitted being "very saddened" that as many as three million Germans aged over 60 have still not had the jab. She also told the Frankfurter Allgemeine newspaper that increasing hospital admissions "worry me a lot" and "should worry all of us", saying that "a certain recklessness" had taken hold in Germany. — AFP

then pulled out of an expected appearance at an evening reception for COP26 in Glasgow yesterday after "advice to rest", Buckingham Palace said. The Palace later said she would rest for "at least" another two weeks.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson at the weekend said she was on "very good form". She is still set to deliver a pre-recorded video address to COP26 delegates at the evening event. Her eldest son and heir, Prince Charles, was one of the speakers yesterday, along with revered natural history broadcaster David Attenborough, who is also 95. The royal family has spoken out repeatedly about environmental issues in recent weeks and in mid-October the Queen was overheard expressing irritation with world leaders who "talk" but "don't do" enough about climate change.

Britain's longest-reigning monarch will celebrate her Platinum jubilee next year, marking 70 years on the throne. Until her hospital stay this month, she had participated almost daily in official engagements. She was recently seen walking with a cane



BALMORAL: In this file photo, Britain's Queen Elizabeth II is greeted by Britain's Prince Charles, Prince of Wales as she arrives at the Balmoral Cricket Pavilion. — AFP

and has reportedly given up riding horses however. The Queen's husband Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, died on April 9 aged 99, just weeks short of his 100th birthday. — AFP

second farm, police said. There were no casualties among the security forces. The suspects' identities were not revealed.

"It is probably our largest operation against this type of crime in the country. Many suspects were going to rob banks and were surprised by our intelligence service," said Captain Layla Brunnella, of the Military Police. Then, "when we started the operation, we were shot at, so the military had to respond to the unjust attack to protect their lives." Lieutenant Colonel Rodolfo Morotti Fernandes, commander of the Police Special Operations Battalion, told a briefing in Minas Gerais. A large trove of weapons was seized, including rifles and grenades, as well as several stolen vehicles, according to the source.

Police say such gangs often set fire to stolen vehicles to block streets after a robbery and make it

harder for police to pursue them. "By the level of organization, the equipment used, the number of agents, by the number of vehicles, this is a large gang. It is certain that they are beginners who got together," said Morotti Fernandes. Brazil has seen an increase in highly planned bank robberies involving heavy weapons, usually in medium-sized cities where escape routes are carefully planned.

In August, a gang in the city of Aracatuba, in Sao Paulo state, spread terror during a robbery involving drones, explosives and the use of hostages as human shields. Three people died during that attack. Morotti Fernandes said it was possible that the gang from Sunday's raid "is the same gang that operated in Aracatuba," as well as other cities that experienced similar crimes, such as Uberaba in Minas Gerais and Criciuma in southern Santa Catarina state. — AFP

International

Flowers, cheers and tears as Australia's border reopens

Almost 600 days after a pandemic closure

SYDNEY: Australia's international border reopened yesterday almost 600 days after a pandemic closure began, sparking emotional scenes at Sydney airport as loved ones reunited. Shortly after dawn, bleary-eyed passengers began to trickle into the arrivals terminal at Kingsford Smith International and were quickly wrapped up in the tearful embraces of flower-clutching relatives.



The world's toughest border restrictions

On March 20 last year, Australia introduced some of the world's toughest border restrictions in response to the coronavirus pandemic. Almost all travel to the island continent halted, prompting critics to dub the country a "hermit state". Tim Turner, who had not seen his son for more than a year, said it was "pretty brilliant" that they were now able to reunite. Arriving in Sydney was "beautiful, beautiful", he told reporters at the airport.

Julie Choo, who flew back from the UK to visit her sick mother in hospital, said she was trying not to cry as the plane touched down. "I just can't wait to touch my mother's hand when I see her. I can't wait to hold

her," she said. "It's going to be very emotional." For the last 19 months, Australians have been banned from travelling overseas without permission. Families were split across continents, and tens of thousands of nationals were stranded overseas. The few who did gain permission to enter were forced to spend thousands of dollars and agree to spend 14 days locked in a hotel room.

Those conditions have now been dropped for the country's two largest cities - Sydney and Melbourne - which will now allow vaccinated Australians to come and go without quarantine of any kind. But for some, like Lucinda Bottero, the long-awaited reopening comes agonizingly late. "I haven't seen my family for four years, we've been trying to get in for a year and a half," she said. "It's a very mixed feeling. Because I still couldn't see my dad alive. He passed away just a week ago. We're just a week late, but it's still really gratifying that I'll be able to attend his funeral now."

Leaving the island

As some Australians returned home, others stuck in the country took the opportunity to leave. Abhi Bajaj, 35, said it was "too overwhelming" that he could now travel to the United States to celebrate Christmas with family after two years apart. "I was waiting for this day for a long time," he told AFP, before boarding a flight to Los Angeles. Australian airline Qantas had grounded much of its fleet for more than 18 months, with CEO Alan Joyce calling the resumption of regular international flights "a long time coming". "It's wonderful to



SYDNEY: Families walk out of the arrivals hall at Sydney's International Airport yesterday, as Australia's international border reopened almost 600 days after a pandemic closure began. — AFP

see Australians able to reunite with loved ones after such a long time apart," he said.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison said it was a "big day for Australia", posting on Facebook that the country was now "ready for take-off!" Travel is expected to resume slowly after such a protracted shutdown, with low passenger numbers on the first flights to arrive.

More than one million foreign residents remain stuck in Australia unable to see friends or relatives overseas, with the relaxed travel rules applying mainly to citizens. And some Australian states with lower vaccination rates will remain virtually closed to the world, as they still have mandatory and costly 14-day hotel quarantine. —AFP



MARIB: Fighters loyal to Yemen's Saudi-backed government man a position near Al-Jawba frontline, facing Iran-backed Houthi rebels, in the country's northeastern province of Marib yesterday. — AFP

Yemen rebel strike on mosque kills 22

MARIB: At least 22 people were killed in a Houthi rebel missile strike on a mosque south of the strategic Yemeni city of Marib, officials said yesterday. "Twenty-two people, including children, were killed and 19 others were injured in a Houthi missile attack on a mosque... in Al-Jawba district" on Sunday night, a pro-government military official said. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the mosque also had a religious school. Yemen's Information Minister Moammar Al-Eryani said on Twitter that 29 people, including women and children, were killed in the attack.

"This horrific massacre is within a series of systematic killings of civilians by the terrorist Houthi militia," he wrote in English. The Houthis have yet to comment on the attack, which comes as fighting between the Iran-backed rebels and government forces supported by a Saudi-led military coalition

intensifies. On Thursday children were among 13 people killed when a missile fired by the rebels struck a tribal leader's home in Al-Jawba, according to military and medical officials.

Marib, capital of the oil-rich province of the same name, is the internationally recognized government's last bastion in northern Yemen. The Houthis began a major push to seize the city in February and, after a lull, they have renewed their offensive in recent weeks.

They claimed this week to have reached the vicinity of Marib city and to have nearly surrounded it. The Saudi-led coalition has been conducting an aerial bombing campaign since October 11 to prevent the rebels from reaching Marib city.

Since then, more than 2,200 Houthi fighters have been killed in Al-Jawba and two other districts, according to the coalition. The rebels rarely comment on losses, and AFP could not independently verify the toll. Yemen's civil war began in 2014 when the Houthis seized Sanaa, prompting Saudi-led forces to intervene to prop up the government the following year. Tens of thousands of people have died and millions have been displaced in what the United Nations calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis. — AFP

Saifi, a spokesman for the TLP, told AFP. "Our supporters have moved to the nearby park and until 50 percent of terms are fulfilled we will stay here," Saifi added. At least seven policemen were killed and several injured in the latest clashes. The TLP said 14 of its supporters were killed and scores injured.

The government said TLP supporters had shot dead police. As the demonstrators marched from their eastern stronghold of Lahore, several Pakistani cities faced gridlock, with some train services suspended. The government has refused to comment on the details of the talks, which were held over the weekend. Local media reported that the government has agreed to lift a ban on the party and not to create legal hurdles in the release of the TLP leader Saad Rizvi.

In return, the TLP has given up the demand for the French ambassador's expulsion. Mufti Muneeb-ur-Rehman, a prominent Pakistani cleric who facilitated talks between the two sides, told protesters that the ban on the party would soon be lifted. The TLP has waged an anti-France campaign since President Emmanuel Macron defended the right of a satirical magazine to republish cartoons depicting the Prophet (PBUH) - an act deemed blasphemous by many Muslims. Six police officers were killed in April when the TLP staged days of rallies that paralyzed roads. — AFP

Pakistani Islamists call off rally after government talks

ISLAMABAD: A banned Pakistani Islamist party yesterday called off a march to the capital and ended its occupation of a major highway after reaching a deal with the government, following more than a week of clashes that left seven policemen dead. The Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) was protesting over the detention of its leader, arrested in April when the group was outlawed by authorities, and was demanding the expulsion of the French ambassador from Pakistan. The group has been behind major anti-France protests that earlier this year led to the French embassy issuing a warning for all its citizens to leave the country.

Several thousand supporters had begun a stop-start march from the eastern city of Lahore to the capital Islamabad, reaching about one third of the way. "We have called off our march to Islamabad after reaching an agreement with the government," Sajjad



ISLAMABAD: Children play cricket in an empty road blocked by containers (unseen) placed by authorities in Islamabad - and to stop protesters called by the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) demanding the release of their leader Hafiz Saad Hussain Rizvi, son of late Khadim Hussain Rizvi, founder of TLP. — AFP

Uzbek traders learn to do business with the Taliban

TERMEZ: As lorries arrive in bursts of dust at a logistics hub in Uzbekistan's southern city of Termez, squatting drivers share complaints about how trade has suffered since the Taliban seized power next-door. "Before, our journey there and back took three days, now we are there for a week," said Rafik Khujakov, an Uzbek who makes regular deliveries of beans to the Afghan city of Mazar-i-Sharif and brings back potatoes. "Their people don't know how to work the computers!"

Khujakov said the Taliban had cracked down on border corruption, but companies and drivers were losing money because of lengthy delays. "They check and recheck each other. It has become very difficult," he moaned, in a refrain echoed by several other traders at the hub. More than two months after the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan, border traders in southern Uzbekistan are nevertheless discovering that it is possible - if complicated - to do business with the religious hardliners.

Landlocked Uzbekistan, which once hosted US-led coalition forces that toppled the Taliban, has taken a business-first approach to the group, as firms in the ex-Soviet Central Asian republic seek a path to ports in Pakistan and Iran. Central to that effort is the Termez

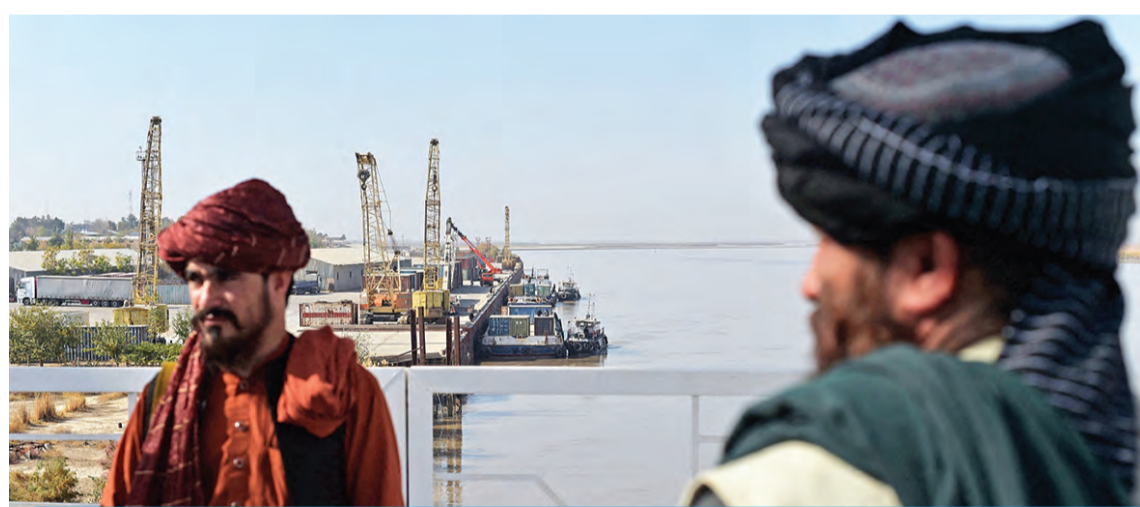
Cargo Centre, a logistics hub opened five years ago to coordinate cross-border trade, mainly to Mazar-i-Sharif 60 kilometers away in northern Afghanistan.

New challenges

Trade with Afghanistan was always difficult, but business owners in Termez said the Taliban takeover has presented a new series of challenges. One company owner told AFP his costs had grown because his drivers - all Afghan nationals with visas for Uzbekistan - refuse to travel beyond the Afghan border crossing at Hairatan, fearing they will not be able to return. This means his company must pay different drivers on the other side for onward journeys, explained the businessman, who gave only his first name Ahmad because of concerns for relatives living in Afghanistan.

"I see nothing good in this group coming to power," said Ahmad, an Afghanistan-born Russian citizen. On the Afghan side of the "Friendship Bridge" that spans the width of the Amu Darya river, the Taliban government's head of customs at Hairatan denied claims of delays. "There is no such thing. All businessmen are satisfied... They are happier than under the previous government. The goods move through customs more quickly," Abdul Saltar Rashid said.

For Afghanistan, Hairatan "is the first or second most important (border crossing) in terms of income," said Rashid, on a morning when AFP correspondents saw several trucks and two trains, each pulling about 30 wagons, going over the bridge. Uzbekistan's bilateral trade with Afghanistan stood at \$776 million in 2020, up a quarter from the year before. Prior to the Taliban takeover, Kabul and Tashkent had plans to increase that to \$2 billion by 2023. —AFP



HAIRATAN: Taliban members stand on the Afghanistan-Uzbekistan Friendship Bridge in Hairatan, about 82 kms north of Mazar-i-Sharif. — AFP

South Africans vote in local polls testing ANC's grip on power

JOHANNESBURG: South Africans voted yesterday in local elections expected to reflect growing discontent with the African National Congress, whose popularity has been waning since long before deadly riots in July. Polls suggest a majority of voters could for the first time turn against the ANC, which has governed nationally since Nelson Mandela's election ended minority white rule in 1994. Senior party members, including ex-president Jacob Zuma, face a slew of corruption investigations - the latest linked to coronavirus spending - and unemployment has hit 34.4 percent.

In July, Zuma's imprisonment sparked riots and looting that left at least 354 dead. But for many voters, daily frustrations are at the forefront. Decades of mismanagement have corroded state utilities, causing water cuts and rolling blackouts that interrupted the ANC's own campaigning. "The apartheid government used to be bad, but at least it delivered services to the people," said Samuel Mahlaule, 55-year-old Uber driver and father of four in Soweto.

Early yesterday, he was in a queue of fewer than 20 people at a polling station near President Cyril Ramaphosa's childhood home. "Our ANC leaders haven't really delivered," he said. "They make too

many empty promises. But we are still hopeful." Farther away in Danville, a predominantly white working-class suburb of Pretoria, Charmaine Barnard, 57, also yearns for change. "The reason why I'm voting is to make change in the country, better life for everyone," she said. Only 65 percent of possible voters actually registered to cast ballots, and turnout is still expected to be low as South Africans choose local councilors in 257 municipalities. "I won't vote because the government has forgotten about the plight of people like me," said Xihluke Mitileni, 27, an unemployed mother of two. "I am a squatter in my own country," she said. "My parents were promised houses by the ANC when I was young, but that promise has never been delivered."

ANC 'clean-up'

Ramaphosa and other top ANC leaders have relentlessly campaigned across the country, with the president himself even stumping in small towns. Their focus this past week has been on the capital Pretoria and financial hub Johannesburg, which the ANC lost for the first time in the last local elections in 2016. That year the party won just under 54 percent of the vote nationally, its worst electoral showing ever.

"We have not realized the aspirations of our people, we are going to do better," Ramaphosa said after casting his ballot in Soweto. He said he expected an "overwhelming victory" for the ANC, but polls predict that the party's popularity will keep sliding. Throughout the campaign Ramaphosa has been trying to convince voters that they are "cleaning up the party". Electoral officials said voting was proceeding smoothly at 99 percent of polling stations. —AFP

Business

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2021

Boursa Kuwait announces net profits of KD 11.7m for period ended 30 Sept 2021

Total operating revenue increased by 67% • Net operating profit grew by almost 88%

KUWAIT: In a meeting of its board members yesterday, Boursa Kuwait announced that total operating revenue reached KD 22.2 million for the nine-month period ended 30 September 2021, an increase of 67.4 percent compared to the same period in 2020. The total operating revenue was approximately KD 13.2 million. Net operating profit also increased, by almost 88 percent from KD 7.1 million to KD 13.4 million. The robust performance was underpinned by the strong operational performance reflected in key performance indicators, including a 45.6 percent increase in value traded and a 65.9 percent increase in volume traded for the nine-month period ended 30 September.

The company also announced net profits of KD 11.7 million for the nine-month period ended 30 September 2021. Due to the conversion of the investment in Kuwait Clearing Company (KCC) from an associate to a subsidiary during the third quarter of 2020, a re-measurement of Boursa Kuwait's existing shareholdings in KCC resulted in a one-time gain on business combination of around KD 13.2 million that contributed to the net profit of KD 21.8 million for the period ended 30 September 2020.

Adjusting for the one-time gain on business combination, net profit shows robust organic growth of approximately 36 percent from KD 8.6 million to KD 11.7 million.

The consolidation of KCC also resulted in a 43.3 percent increase in total operating expenses from KD 6.1 million to KD 8.7 million. This is mainly because KCC's expenses were consolidated for the entire nine-month period in 2021 while expenses were consolidated for the period after 30 June in 2020.

Total assets

Meanwhile, Boursa Kuwait's total assets stood at approximately KD 105.8 million as of 30 September 2021, which is a 6.6 percent increase versus 2020 total of KD 99.3 million as of 30 September 2020. Shareholder equity attributable to the equity hold-



Hamad Al-Humaidhi



Mohammed Al-Osaimi

ers of Boursa Kuwait increased from KD 48.9 million on 30 September 2020 to KD 56.5 million as at 30 September 2021.

Boursa Kuwait Chairman Hamad Meshari Al-Humaidhi commented: "We are pleased to have recorded profits of KD 11.7 million during the nine-month period ended 30 September 2021, with a marked improvement in key performance indicators, exhibiting Boursa Kuwait's financial strength, its

flexible operational model, as well as its innovative and adaptable strategy."

Al-Humaidhi added: "Boursa Kuwait continues to support the national economy, and remains committed to the implementation of environmental, social and governance policies and principles as part of its Corporate Sustainability strategy, which is in line with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the National Development Plan "New Kuwait 2035". I would like to thank my fellow Board members, the Executive Management team, and all Boursa Kuwait employ-

ees for their invaluable efforts to enhance the company and the capital market."

Mohammed Saud Al-Osaimi, Boursa Kuwait's Chief Executive Officer also commented on the company's quarterly financials, saying, "Boursa Kuwait has seen a marked increase in trading value and volume, which is undoubtedly a reflection of the increasing confidence of investors from all over the world. The company has also seen tremendous growth in its operating revenue, a reflection of our ongoing commitment to develop a strong financial market with high liquidity and credibility that enhances the position of the exchange in the region and helps transform Kuwait into a global investment destination."

Boursa Kuwait aims to develop a strong financial market with high liquidity and credibility through the implementation of a range of structural and technical developments and initiatives that will enhance the position of the exchange, regionally and globally. The company continues to

- Adjusted net profit recorded a robust organic growth of approximately 36%. The increase is derived by excluding the one-time "gain on business combination" recorded in Q3 2020.

FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS 30/09		FOR THE PERIOD ENDED/AS OF 2021	
	30/9/2021	30/9/2020	%
TOTAL OPERATING REVENUE	67.4 %		
Total Operating Revenue "KD million"	22.2	13.2	67.4
NET OPERATING PROFIT	88 %		
Net Operating Profit "KD million"	13.4	7.1	88
Net Profit Attributable to Parent Company "KD million"	11.7	21.8	46.4
Total Assets "KD million"	105.8	99.3	6.6
Shareholders' Equity "KD million"	56.5	48.9	15.5

	30/9/2021	30/9/2020
Net Profit Attributable to Parent Company "KD million"	11.7	21.8
Adjusted Net Profit "KD million" (Excluding Non-Recurring Profits)	11.7	8.6
Increase in Adjusted Comparable Net Profit "KD million"		36%

efficiency and transparency, creating a liquid capital market, a progressive exchange platform and developing a comprehensive set of reforms and enhancements that allow it to compete on an international level. Over the past five years, the company has rolled out numerous market reforms and new initiatives as part of its comprehensive multi-phase market development (MID) plans.

Jazeera Airways returns to strong profitability in Q3 2021 with KD 11.8m in net profit

KUWAIT: Jazeera Airways yesterday reported a return to profitability in the third quarter of the year, registering KD 11.8 million in net profit following an ease in travel restrictions and increase in vaccinations in Kuwait and throughout the airline's network.

Number of passengers flown in Q3 increased by 361.8 percent to 302,9,000 while the load factor increased by 26.7 percent to 65.6 percent despite the restrictions that were still imposed on capacity at Kuwait International Airport during the quarter. Revenue stood at KD31.7 million, up 421.7 percent from Q3 2020, and operating profit was KD 12.8 million, up 332.2 percent from Q3 2020 with an operating margin of 40.5 percent.

For the nine months period of 2021, Jazeera returned to profitability during a very difficult year of operations in which Kuwait International Airport had very limited capacity for a period of five months. The company successfully offset previous losses to report a net profit of KD 70.6,000 supported by an increase in revenue by 44.2 percent to reach KD47.3



Marwan Boodai

million during the nine months period.

Commenting on the results, Jazeera Airways Chairman, Marwan Boodai said: "Jazeera is returning to profitability earlier than our previous forecast for Q4, a positive sign for our airline which successfully mitigated the impact of the pandemic by implementing decisive measures to safeguard its financial position and liquidity, as well as to protect shareholders and customers' rights.

"Our strong earnings in Q3 are attributed to an evident appetite for travel, as well as to new destinations launched by Jazeera by end of June, catering to that appetite. Despite continued limitations in the number of returning passengers at Kuwait International Airport until the end of the quarter, our load factor continued to increase as well as yield driven by limited supply."

Commenting on the airline's performance, Jazeera Airways Chief Executive Officer Rohit Ramachandran, said: "Jazeera's flexible business model continues to prove its resilience against challenges and its strength in positively contributing to the business and economic environment by creating new jobs and trade opportunities for Kuwait. When airports around the world closed borders, Jazeera started operating full cargo flights. When aircraft stopped carrying passengers, we flew repatriated citizens back home. We are also supporting new jobs for pilots, engineers, cabin crew and local businesses."

Nine-month review

Jazeera launched eight new routes during the nine-month period of 2021, serving popular tourist and expat destinations that comprised Colombo (Sri Lanka), Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan), Tashkent (Uzbekistan), Yerevan

(Armenia), Antalya (Turkey) and Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina) in addition to London Heathrow airport as the first low-cost carrier (LCC) in the Middle East to operate direct flights to the airport.

The airline also rolled out its summer schedule with favorite destinations for tourists, such as the Lebanese capital, Beirut, and other popular summer destinations including Tbilisi (Georgia), Trabzon and Bodrum (Turkey). Jazeera also took delivery of three Airbus A320neo aircraft during the year as part of an order for four A320neos to be delivered by the end of 2021, which will bring the fleet to 17 aircraft.

Jazeera Terminal T5 also returned to profit in 3Q2021 as more passengers flew during the quarter with a net profit of KD 400.5 thousand compared to a net loss of KD 567.1 thousand in the same quarter last year.

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9M 2021 Highlights

- Revenue: KD 47.3 million, up 44.2 percent
- Operating profit: KD1.6 million, up 113.2 percent
- Net profit: KD70.6,000, up 100.5 percent
- Passengers: 511.1,000 down 15.6 percent
- Yield: KD 89.3, up 72.9 percent
- Load factor: 60.7 percent down 8.1 percent

Q3 2021 Highlights

- Revenue: KD 31.7 million, up 421.7 percent
- Operating profit: KD 12.8 million, up 332.2 percent
- Net profit: KD11.8 million, up 310.2 percent
- Passengers: 302.9,000, up 361.8 percent
- Yield: KD101.5, up 15.5 percent
- Load factor: 65.6 percent, up 26.7 percent

Barclays CEO Staley quits

LONDON: British bank Barclays yesterday said chief executive Jes Staley had quit ahead of contesting the outcome of a UK probe into his historical links with convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. Barclays, which had supported Staley during the ongoing investigation, added in a statement that the preliminary conclusion "makes no findings that Mr Staley saw, or was aware of, any of Mr

Epstein's alleged crimes". Staley last year expressed "deep regret" at having a professional relationship with Epstein prior to becoming Barclays head at the end of 2015.

Epstein's past has caused huge fallout elsewhere, with Queen Elizabeth II's second son, Prince Andrew, recently sued in a New York court for alleged sexual abuse of a woman who says she was "lent out" for underage sex by the late US financier. Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates in August said it was a "huge mistake" to socialize with Epstein, who killed himself in 2019 while awaiting trial on charges of sex trafficking minors.

Barclays revealed that Staley and the bank were

made aware late Friday of the preliminary conclusions from an investigation carried out by British financial watchdogs. "In view of those conclusions, and Mr Staley's intention to contest them, the board and Mr Staley have agreed that he will step down from his role as group chief executive and as a director of Barclays," the bank said. "It should be noted that the investigation makes no findings that Mr Staley saw, or was aware of, any of Mr Epstein's alleged crimes, which was the central question underpinning Barclays' support for Mr Staley following the arrest of Mr Epstein in the summer of 2019," it added. —AFP

Manhattan office workers are coming back, but slowly

NEW YORK: There is still a ways to go, but Robert Byrnes has been heartened by signs that more New Yorkers are getting back to the office after the coronavirus pandemic. "The subway train was absolutely packed this morning," he said. "I'm back to waiting in lines at lunchtime."

Still, Byrnes, who heads the East Midtown Partnership, a trade group whose offices are near Grand Central Station, estimated that only about one third of the neighborhood's workforce has come back to their cubicles. "Quick meal-type restaurants are still suffering a severe financial impact," he said. "It's slowly getting better." Other benchmarks corroborate Byrnes' sense of the lag in New York office employees' return to in-person workdays. In May, 62 percent of large employers surveyed by the Partnership for New York City estimated that their workers would be back in the office by September. But in August, only 41 percent gave that same timeframe.

Building security company Kastle estimates that New York's buildings are currently at 32 percent of their normal levels, putting it behind the 37 percent average of the nation's 10 largest cities. The upshot is that around 30 percent of the stores near Grand Central remain vacant, according to a report published in early October from the Real Estate Board of New York. The casualties include some longtime institutions, such as the Marriott hotel on Lexington Avenue, which opened in 1924.

Lasting change?

Other New York neighborhoods hit hard by lockdowns to combat COVID-19 are coming back more quickly. The catch is they tend not to rely on office workers. This includes Times Square, which has seen more tourists of late as Broadway theaters have reopened. Tom Harris, president of the Times Square Alliance, said the neighborhood now sees about 225,000 people a day, up from 145,000 a day in May.

The hotel occupancy rate of the quarter stood at 82.5 on October 9th, Harris said. "With 12 more Broadway shows opening up in the next couple of months, with the return of international visitors in November and the office workers going to return a little bit more in 2022, we're very optimistic about the way Times Square has been recovering," he said. But a recent report from commercial real estate firm Cushman & Wakefield paints a mixed picture about Manhattan. —AFP

Business

Gulf Bank holds Q3-2021 earnings webcast

Webcast reviews bank's financial performance during the first 9 months of 2021

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank held its investors webcast to review and discuss the bank's financial performance during the first nine months of the year 2021 on October 28, 2021. The conference call was organized by EFG Hermes and presented by Tony Daher, Chief Executive Officer of Gulf Bank, and David Challinor, Chief Financial Officer of Gulf Bank. The discussion was moderated by Dalal Al-Dousari, Head of Investor Relations at Gulf Bank.

Tony Daher commenced the webcast with key updates regarding Gulf Bank's operating environment during the first nine months of the year 2021. Daher commented, "The resumption of economic activities with businesses returning to full capacity and oil prices rising, has in turn improved the confidence and the economic outlook and boosted consumer spending and growth prospects here in Kuwait. The rising consumer spending remains one of the main drivers of Kuwait's economic recovery, supported by a second six-month loan deferral program for Kuwaiti borrowers and a recent pick-up in consumer loans."

Profound strategy

Daher Stated: "We managed to grow our business in both the corporate and consumer segments without hindering the quality of our portfolio which remained resilient. This was broadly achieved by our strategy that focuses on:

1. Promoting selective growth in the corporate banking and SME segment by expanding product range and enhancing services;
2. Growing consumer banking market share, while targeting youth and affluent client segments; and
3. Developing the Bank's digital banking platforms in order to improve services and increase competitiveness."

Sustainability initiatives

Daher also touched on the Bank's ongoing sustainability initiatives, commenting: "Sustainability is an important and integral part of our strategy. We are committed towards our stakeholders, community, and the overall economy. In this respect, we are proud to announce that Gulf Bank will very soon be issuing its first official sustainability report. The baseline report will provide a consolidated view of Gulf Bank's contribution to sustainability development in the financial sector. The report provides a road map on how we plan to take this initiative to the next level. Our approach has been based on several sustainability-related frameworks including Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and Kuwait Boursa sustainability disclosures."

Sound financial performance

Daher summarized Gulf Bank's first nine months results for 2021 with five key messages:

1. Net profit grew by 50 percent for the first nine months of 2021, to reach KD 27.5 million in comparison to KD 18.4 million reported in the same period last year.
2. Reported operating income reached KD 125.5 million for the first nine months of 2021, growing by 8 percent compared to the same period of 2020. The improvement was mainly driven by a 6 percent or 5.8 million increase in net interest income, a 14 percent or 3.4 million improvement in non-interest income and a decline of 24 percent or 12 million in total provisions.
3. Asset quality remained resilient, as our non-performing loan (NPL) ratio in the third quarter of 2021 stood at 1.3 percent, an improvement when compared to same period last year of 1.5 percent. Additionally, we



Tony Daher

- Gulf Bank started the first nine months of 2021 positively, with an increase of 50% in net profit compared to the same period of last year.
- Gulf Bank grew its business in both the corporate and consumer segments without hindering the quality of its portfolio which remained resilient.
- Sustainability is an important and integral part of Gulf Bank's strategy.

have taken ample provisions and now have a coverage ratio of 472 percent.

4. Relaxed capital regulatory minimums that were introduced in 2020 remain in place, allowing the Bank to have additional buffers over the minimums. Our Tier 1 ratio has a buffer of 441 basis points (13.9 percent vs. 9.5 percent) and our capital adequacy ratio has a buffer of 467 basis points (16.2 percent vs. 11.5 percent). These comfortable buffers have allowed the Bank to grow its businesses in line with its strategy.
5. Gulf Bank remains an 'A' rated bank by three major credit rating agencies. Our current position stands as follows:
 - a. Moody's Investors Service maintained the Long-Term Deposits Rating of "A3" with a "Stable" outlook.
 - b. Fitch Ratings affirmed the Bank's Long-term Issuer Default Rating



David Challinor

- c. Capital Intelligence affirmed the Bank's Long-term Foreign Currency Rating of "A+" with a "Stable" outlook.
- d. In addition, S&P Global Ratings has recently changed the Bank Issuer Credit Rating to "BBB+" from "A-" and revised the "Negative outlook to "Stable". This most recent rating action followed the S&P downgrade of Kuwait Sovereign rating from "AA-" to "A+" with a "Negative" outlook.

Increasing profitability

Gulf Bank's CFO, David Challinor, discussed Gulf Bank's Q3 results of 2021 in more detail. He noted three positive factors: "First, net interest income is up KD 5.8 million as a result of loan growth and decline in cost of funds. Second, as economic activity regained momentum so did the Bank's fees and foreign exchange income which improved by 3.7 million, and third, the Bank's total provisions reduced by 12 million, however, these positive drivers were partially offset by a 11.5 million increase in operating expenses." Challinor highlighted that the return on equity improved by 1.8 percentage points over the same period.

On Operating income, Challinor commented: "Operating income grew by 8 percent to 125.5 million compared to 116.4 million in the first nine months of 2020, this was due to the outpace decline in interest expense in comparison to interest income and also, an improvement in the fees and foreign exchange income of 3.7 or 16 percent driven by the full resumption of economic activities." He also added: "Operating expenses have increased by 11.5 or 24 percent year-on-year, however, they decreased by 4 percent compared to

the second quarter of this year. The year-on-year increase is predominantly driven by the continued investment in our digital transformation strategy and low operating expense base reported in the same period last year due to the low economic activity and receiving of government subsidy."

Challinor also pointed out that credit costs declined from 45 in the first nine months of 2020 to 35.3 for the same period in 2021, resulting in a year-to-date Cost of Risk of 104 basis points.

Gulf Bank's financial position

Challinor also presented Gulf Bank's financial position. He also presented the Bank's mix of assets and highlighted its changes over the last 12 months, by saying: "Over the last 12 months, Gulf Bank's assets increased by 395 or 7 percent to 6.3 billion compared to 5.9 billion the year before. This was largely driven by a 147 or 12 percent increase in Liquid Assets, and a 268 or 6 percent



Dalal Al-Dousari

increase in Net Loans. While, on a year-to-date basis, net loans grew 360 or 8 percent and total assets grew by 217 or 4 percent, reflecting a pick-up in overall economic activity." He continued, "In terms of the major components of total assets, the mix is essentially unchanged from a year ago."

As for Gulf Bank's funding, Challinor indicated that nearly all of Gulf Bank's funding comes from Due to Banks, Deposits from Financial Institutions, and Customer Deposits. As a result of growing its customer deposits and attracting more short-term bank funding, Gulf Bank was able to reduce the deposit mix coming from financial institutions. The bank's non-performing loan ratio also reached 1.3 percent at the end of September 2021, down from 1.5 percent at same period of last year and its coverage ratio remains strong reaching 472 percent at the end of September 2021.

Prudent financial management

Challinor also indicated that as of 30 September 2021, Gulf Bank's total provisions reached KD 297 million with IFRS 9 ECL requirements at KD 183 million, allowing the bank KD 114 million in excess provisions, representing 38 percent over and above total provisions.

In addition, Gulf Bank's loan stages are fairly stable with Stage 1 loans are above 90 percent for the three periods, while Stage 2 declined from 7.7 percent at the end of September 2020 to 5.6 percent at the end of September 2021. Stage 3 also improved from 1.6 percent to 1.4 percent for the same period.

As for Gulf Bank's IFRS 9 ECL Stages composition, Challinor indicated that Stage 1 reached 21.8 percent as of 30 September 2021, moving from 17.1 percent a year ago, Stage 2 is in a declining trend moving from 48.4 percent a year ago to 43.9 percent as of 30 September 2021 and Stage 3 reached

34.3 percent moving from 34.4 percent a year ago.

Challinor also highlighted that: "As of 30 September 2021, the IFRS 9 ECL coverage for total credit facilities was: 0.6 percent for Stage 1, 20 percent for Stage 2, and 73.1 percent for Stage 3. Overall coverage, however, is much higher since the Bank has provisions of KD 114 million over the IFRS 9 ECL requirement of KD 183 million."

On Gulf Bank's capital, Challinor said: "Gulf Bank's regulatory capital ratios remain well above both our current minimums and our pre-COVID-19 minimums. Our Tier 1 ratio reached 13.9 percent, which is 441 basis points above our current regulatory minimum of 9.5 percent and 191 basis points above our pre-COVID-19 regulatory minimum of 12 percent. Our Capital Adequacy Ratio of 16.2 percent was 467 basis points above our current regulatory minimum of 11.5 percent and 217 basis points above our pre-COVID 19 regulatory minimum of 14 percent."

He continued: "Our risk weighted assets grew by 4 percent mainly driven by year-on-year growth in the loan book." He continued, "Our leverage ratio as of 30 September 2021 reached 9.4 percent, which was lower than 9.6 percent for the same period of last year, and well above the 3 percent regulatory minimum."

Regarding the Bank's key liquidity ratios, average daily Liquidity Coverage Ratio reached 279 percent as of September 30, 2021, and Net Stable Funding Ratio also reached 106 percent for the same period. Both ratios are still well above their respective new minimums of 80 percent and pre-COVID minimums of 100 percent.

Q&A

Following the management presentation of Gulf Bank's performance during the first nine months of 2021, the webcast was open for participants questions. Dalal Al-Dousari, head of Investor Relations at Gulf Bank, moderated the Q&A session.

Credit cost

When asked about Credit Cost, Challinor commented: "We saw a fall from the Q2 number of 146 basis points which I'd indicated was not going to be indicative of any adverse trend, and it wasn't. When you look year to date, we've got a cost of risk of 104 basis points which is much lower than what we saw for the 2020 and 2019 years, and certainly much lower than the stand-alone number for Q2, so I think things are now trending in the right direction. I said in Q2 that I thought the long-term normalized cost of risk is around 100 basis points. But from quarter to quarter, you can have variations, so I think it's best to look at cost of risk on a year-to-date basis rather than individual quarters. I think also we need to look at recoveries and they are often lumpy and can impact the cost of risk number. I think with recoveries we should expect to see an improvement in the coming quarters. If we have any significant recoveries, we may look to then provide further on other accounts to keep the underlying cost of risk relatively stable, whilst improving coverage elsewhere."

He continued: "Overall, I think asset quality is moving in the right direction. Our NPL ratio came down again this

quarter as we had a new formation of 14 million and write offs of 16 million. The total coverage remained exceptionally strong. When you look at the stage 2 percentage that continues to be very low, its 5.6 percent. And our provision buffer over IFRS9 requirements also increased. It's now 114. So, I'm comfortable where we are at."

Loan growth

Another inquiry was related to loan growth and expectations. Challinor responded: "The growth of our gross loans to customers has been strong this year, were it increased by 7.2 percent year to date. Q2 was a bit slow but we saw a rebound in Q3 as activity recommenced after the summer and the country opened up. We're still tracking ahead of the market which grew 3.9 percent to the end of August so I'm pleased we are maintaining this lead. I think full year we are looking at high single digit growth and we'd look to continue that trajectory into 2022 as well. We're growing well across both retail and corporate so it's a balanced growth. We've got ample liquidity; our capital position is solid, and I think also the recent CBK circular around the capital and liquidity ratios not coming back to the pre-COVID levels until 2023 is definitely a positive for growth."

Margins

When asked about Liquidity and pressures on margins, Challinor commented: "The margin has held up well - we're now on the sixth consecutive quarter where effectively it's been flat. In Q2 it was 209 basis points and the same again in Q3. But yes, there are some pressures. We've seen the loan growth in the system outpace the deposit growth which obviously causes some level of pressure. We've seen our own cost of funds rise slightly, particularly on the KD side, which is most of our book, but we've managed to offset that to keep a stable NIM. I think, as I've said before, there isn't any catalysts in the near future that are going to shift it either way, so best guess is that for the rest of the year and probably for most of next year the NIM will be broadly stable."

Operating expenses

The last question during the discussion was related to the Bank's operating expense, Challinor commented: "The expenses came down again this quarter which I said in Q2 they would. So, we've seen expenses fall each consecutive quarter this year. I said in the first half there were several one offs that were not going to repeat and I think the Q3 number is a better reflection than what we saw in the first two quarters of the year. On a year-on-year basis though, the cost growth is very high, but 2020 was artificially suppressed, not just because of lack of activity but also the government subsidy that was paid to us, we got 2.3 million in Q3 and again in Q4. So, 2020 isn't a useful base. But when we look at the 2019 full year cost of 78, I think this year we aim to be lower than that and would look again to be lower for 2022."

He continued: "When we look at cost to income ratio, I think given the strong loan growth and stable margin and some upside with fees, when you combine this with a further expected drop in costs for 2022, we should expect a meaningful improvement in the cost to income for next year. It might not get to pre-pandemic type levels in 2022 alone, but certainly will move much closer in that direction. I think the other thing is, as a bank we are in the middle of a major digital transformation, and I think also there will be opportunities for extracting cost efficiencies once this is all implemented."

Dalal Al-Dousari concluded the conference by thanking the participants and invited analysts to visit the Investor Relations page on Gulf Bank's website for any further inquiries.

What did the G20 summit agree?

ROME: Meeting in person for the first time in two years, G20 leaders had a full agenda including climate change, the COVID pandemic, a landmark tax deal and global economy worries. Here is a summary of what they agreed.

Climate change

Leaders committed to the key Paris Agreement goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, pledged action against dirty coal plants, but fell short on a target of zero emissions. "Keeping 1.5 degrees within reach will require meaningful and effective actions and commitment by all countries, taking into account different approaches," the G20 said



ROME: Patrick Connell, Charge d'Affaires at the US Embassy to the Holy See (left), watches while US President Joe Biden speaks with Jennifer Harhigh, Charge d'Affaires at the US Mission to the UN Agencies in Rome, before boarding Air Force One at Rome Fiumicino International Airport yesterday in Rome Italy, after the G20 summit of world leaders. — AFP

in their final communique.

They also pledged to reach a target of net zero carbon emissions "by or around mid-century", instead of setting a clear 2050 date, as campaigners and summit host Italy

were hoping for. Elsewhere in the statement, they agreed to stop funding new dirty coal plants abroad by the end of 2021, and reaffirmed the so far unmet commitment to mobilize \$100 billion for developing coun-

tries for climate adaptation costs.

Leaders for the first time acknowledged "the use of carbon pricing mechanisms and incentives" as a possible tool against climate change, just as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is calling on the most polluting countries to go down that path by setting a minimum carbon price.

Taxation

Leaders put their seal of approval on an agreement that will subject multinationals to a minimum 15 percent tax, as part of an effort to build "a more stable and fairer international tax system". US internet giants such as Amazon, Google parent Alphabet, Facebook and Apple — which have benefited from basing themselves in low-tax countries to minimize their tax bills — are particular targets of the new global regulation.

The reform, brokered by the OECD and backed by some 136 countries representing more than 90 percent of world GDP, has long been in the making, and is supposed to come into effect in 2023, but the deadline is at risk

of slipping. Each country taking part in the global deal must first pass national legislation — and US President Joe Biden is among those facing tough domestic opposition to the plan.

Nevertheless, the G20 calls on relevant working groups within the OECD and G20 "to swiftly develop the model rules and multilateral instruments... with a view to ensure that the new rules will come into effect at global level in 2023."

Vaccines

Leaders vowed to support the WHO's goal of vaccinating at least 40 percent of the world's population by 2021 and 70 percent by the middle of next year, by boosting the supply of vaccines in developing countries and removing supply and financing constraints. They also promised to "work together towards the recognition of COVID-19 vaccines deemed safe and efficacious by the WHO," following a complaint during summit talks by Russian President Vladimir Putin about lack of international approval for Moscow's Sputnik V jab.—AFP

Business

NIC offers 'NICTRADE' trading service

New service enables trading in Bursa Kuwait, GCC markets and over 80 global markets

KUWAIT: As part of the company's ongoing efforts to adopt digital solutions, National Investments Company (NIC) announced the launch of its NICTRADE digital service for electronic trading which enables clients to trade in Bursa Kuwait and GCC and global markets and offers them the best experience through the use of state-of-the-art technology whether through the website or smart phones.

The company has launched the new trading service according to the latest international trading techniques to keep up with the clients' increasing needs for digital services through managing and controlling trading with ease, resilience and speed of execution as well as direct linkage to the current market prices.

In this context, the NIC CEO Fahad Al-Mukhaizim said that the NICTRADE service offers the client the possibility of trading in more than 80 local and global financial markets in addition to Bursa Kuwait, as well as trading and investing in professional financial instruments such as ETFs, US options contracts (Options), REITs and several financial instruments listed in global markets in addition to the possibility of activating alerts of price changes or up-to-date news. The service also enables viewing of trading accounts and getting information about market movements.

Al-Mukhaizim explained that NIC has always been at the forefront of offering clients all that is new and qualitative in digital services. He added that in line with the financial market development project and the new directives of the Capital Markets Authority (CMA) and Bursa Kuwait as well as our clients' increasing need for this service, the innovative NICTRADE was developed using the latest technology in order to provide a direct and distinguished interactive experience.

Qualitative move

Al-Mukhaizim pointed out that the new trading service is seen as a pioneering qualitative move offered by NIC to its clients, enabling the trader to gain many advantages and high specifications along with ensuring their receiving competitive and prompt capital markets prices, in addition to immediate following up of trading movements with offers, orders, deals, times and the state of demand in local, GCC, US and global markets. He pointed out that the main advantage of the service is the provision of full

details about companies' and official markets disclosures from their approved sources.

Al-Mukhaizim added that the launch of the trading service through a smart electronic app is considered a new addition to the growing business platform of NIC and a technological leap on account of its easy use with superb levels of accuracy and following up thanks to a specialized team delivering the service in high precision and revealing that the service is presently available to financially solvent clients with some added advantages that meet their needs.

Al-Mukhaizim went on to say that NIC clients would be able to execute various buying and selling orders as well as amendment and cancellation orders in an easy and interactive manner, while reviewing account details and summary and managing trading accounts in different markets, direct follow up of

facilitates the manner of displaying the markets consolidated data through the "market overview" feature which sums the total market in a distinctive and easy manner.

Al-Mukhaizim explained that the NIC trading services offer a unique experience on the level of investment companies in Kuwait and the region through enabling the company clients to access a wide range of financial brokerage services covering Bursa Kuwait, GCC stock markets as well as US and global markets.



Fahad Al-Mukhaizim

from their approved sources, in addition to several other advantages.

Specialized communication platform service

On the other hand, Al-Mukhaizim noted that NIC was keen on providing a specialized communication platform service for trading through client service center on number (1821112) or by SMS. The telephone service is available during the company working hours and would largely help cut down clients' time and effort.

He pointed out that the client service center would help boost clients' satisfaction levels by answering their queries and welcoming any comments by a specialized and proficient work team to help the client to trade and receive several other advantages.

Al-Mukhaizim explained that the modern e-service meets the needs of NIC clients and enables them to trade through a digital platform all the week round and at any time with full, secure and more resilient confidentiality and privacy. Moreover, there will be constant communication with the company work team to answer queries and offer advice.

Registration steps

Concerning registration steps, Al-Mukhaizim said that the trading apps are easy to use, enabling the clients to trade in three steps only: registration, transfer and trade, with ease and security. They also enable the client to follow in real time stock prices and markets news, as part of the company's policy of serving all segments of investors in a manner that reflects professionalism and proficiency with the aim of winning clients' satisfaction, as well as providing a comprehensive and easy display of all basic analysis ratios in order to make right and prudent decisions.

Company team efforts

In conclusion, Al-Mukhaizim stressed NIC constant keenness on launching new digital services and embracing changes that would achieve clients' objectives. He expressed his thanks and appreciation to the company work team for their continuous efforts to achieve technological development and growth in new services that meet the needs of clients and shareholders of the company which spares no effort to remain among the best advanced and developed investment companies locally and regionally.

Fahad Al-Mukhaizim:

- New trading service enables clients to trade in ETFs, US Markets options and REITs
- Service is available in accordance with the highest international standards and innovative techniques via the website or trading apps on smart phones
- Possibility of activating price-change alerts of up-to-date news from their official sources
- Service meets all clients' needs by ease of use, fast execution and direct link with market prices competitively
- Display of markets consolidated data via the "market overview" which sums up the total market distinctively and easily
- Service provides comprehensive and easy display of all basic analysis ratios to make the right and most prudent decisions
- NIC spares no effort to remain one of the best advanced investment companies locally and regionally

analyses, graphics and market data in order to submit requests with extreme speed and ease. They would also be able to keep their personal accounts and trading accounts under one umbrella, which would offer an easy and smooth transfer opportunity through direct transfer to the client. The service

Al-Mukhaizim added that through its smart, state-of-the-art apps, NIC provides an interactive experience rich in information and professionalism about trading in global markets, viewing trading accounts, getting familiar with market movements and full details of companies and official markets disclosures

NBK Economic Report

UAE economy recovering on higher oil output, tourism upturn

KUWAIT: The UAE's highly globally integrated economy took a sizeable hit last year from the weak global oil market, business closures and suspensions to travel and tourism. But it now looks to be on a solid recovery path aided by easing COVID pressures and very high vaccine penetration, energetic government support and reform policies, a real estate upturn, and sharply higher oil prices. The commencement in October of the delayed Expo 2020 is also providing a welcome boost to tourism and commercial activity.

In the oil sector, with OPEC+ easing its supply cuts, UAE crude output is increasing monthly. Oil GDP should expand by 7.6 percent in 2022, and then post more moderate annual gains of around 2 percent on average in 2023-24. From 2024 onwards, the huge expansion projects of Upper Zakum (\$22 billion) and Hail & Ghasha (\$15 billion) will bring additional crude and natural gas volumes, respectively, while the completion of the Ruwais refinery (\$20 billion) should result in a sizeable increase in ADNOC's refining capacity in 2024-25.

On the non-oil side, the PMI activity gauge has trended higher through 2021 and averaged 53.7 in 3Q21, with firms reporting higher demand and greater work backlogs. Non-oil GDP growth of 2.8 percent is expected this year, picking up to 3.2 percent on average in 2022-24 as the recovery strengthens, tourism picks up and the government presses on with reforms in an increasingly competitive regional economic environment. Among the initiatives announced recently are plans to attract \$150 billion in FDI (especially in technology sectors) over 9 years, agreements to boost trade with key global markets and new visa and residency schemes to help businesses and attract skilled foreign labor. Real GDP is forecast to rise by 1.6 percent in 2021 and then by 3.4 percent on average in 2022-24.

Inflation ticking up slowly

After more than two years of deflation, consumer prices are now ticking up (+0.6 percent y/y in August), amid improving domestic demand and higher energy prices. However, the housing component (mostly rents) remains weak, despite signs of recovery in the residential property market. After a forecast decline of 0.2 percent on average in 2021, inflation is expected to rise gradually, reaching 1.6 percent by 2024, with some upside risks if rents recover more quickly. Residential property prices in Dubai have also started to rise (2.1 percent y/y in 2Q21) after a multi-year decline, which could signal a potential turning point for the sector. The turnaround has been supported by government initiatives to regulate supply and boost demand by making it easier to secure financing (e.g. lower mortgage rates, bank lending and developer incentives), as well as more broadly a structural shift in work practices in favor of remote working.

Fiscal position improving

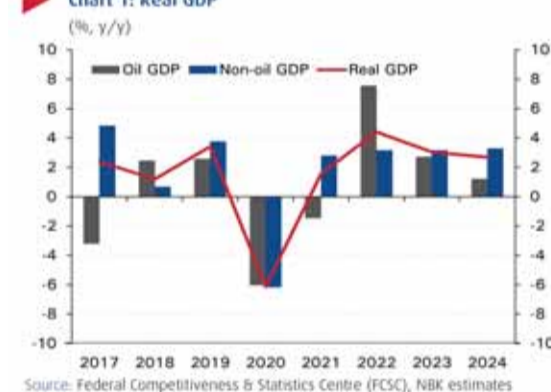
In common with its GCC neighbors, the UAE's

Table 1: Key economic indicators

	2020	2021*	2022*	2023*	2024*
Nominal GDP	359	405	415	425	439
Real GDP	-6.1	1.6	4.4	3.0	2.7
- Oil sector	-6.0	-1.5	7.6	2.7	1.2
- Non-oil sector	-6.2	2.8	3.2	3.2	3.3
Budget balance	-5.0	-2.4	-1.6	-0.8	0.4
Public Debt*	37.8	36.0	36.7	36.7	36.2
Current acct. balance	5.9	12.7	11.4	9.1	8.0
Headline inflation	-1.9	-0.2	0.3	0.9	1.6

Source: Official sources, NBK estimates, * Excluding GREs.

Chart 1: Real GDP



public finances deteriorated in 2020 due to the pandemic, shifting from a 0.6 percent of GDP surplus in 2019 to a 5 percent deficit (including ADNOC profits, SWF investment income and some transfers). Revenues dropped by 23 percent, while spending fell 8.5 percent (despite a rise in subsidies to support growth). In H21, the budget registered a surplus of AED29.4 billion (4 percent of annualized GDP), helped mainly by a sharp reported drop in capital spending and a rise in revenues. However, assuming that capital spending rebounds in H2, a move back into deficit could be expected. For 2021 as a whole, we expect much reduced deficit of 2.4 percent of GDP, improving to a small surplus of 0.4 percent of GDP by 2024 in line with fiscal consolidation efforts. The 5-year federal budget (which covers mostly health, education and some infrastructure) for 2022-26 was set at AED290 billion, up 3.7 percent on allocations for 2017-21.

Funding of the deficit is supported by the government's enormous sovereign wealth fund reserves managed by ADIA and Mubadala and worth an estimated \$1.1 trillion, but also by debt issuance, especially with interest rates low. The federal government issued debut (10-40 year) bonds worth \$4 billion in October 2021, backed by a high AA/Aa2 investment grade rating. Government debt could fall slightly from 38 percent of GDP in 2020 to 35 percent of GDP in 2024, though this excludes GRE-related debt which on some estimates may be up to 30 percent of GDP.

Outlook and risks

The UAE's large hydrocarbon resources, huge SWF assets, strong competitiveness ranking and effective policymaking continue to provide for a very positive overall long-term economic outlook. Main near-term downside risks include resurgent pandemic pressures, weaker oil prices and debt repayment challenges faced by GREs especially if global financial conditions were to tighten abruptly. On the upside, a more rapid global recovery from COVID in 2022 could see UAE trade and tourism improve more quickly.

KFH continues customer awareness efforts with 'Be Aware' campaign

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) continues its awareness efforts to enhance financial culture for customers and the public and shed light on fraud operations which they may be exposed to. These efforts come as part of KFH support to the banking awareness campaign "Be Aware" launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait beginning of 2021 in collaboration with Kuwait Banking Association.

By supporting the campaign objectives, KFH aims to strengthen its pioneering role in the banking awareness field and provide the maximum-security standards to customer when using the bank products and services and serve him in a way that makes him comfortable, secured, and flexible when executing banking transactions. Accordingly, KFH has enhanced all its awareness materials through social media and e-channels to spread awareness on fraud operations which may be performed through text messages, e-mail, or phone calls.

KFH has affirmed in its awareness messages that the bank would not ask for personal information from its customers through e-mail, text messages or phone calls. Accordingly, the customer should avoid replying to any such messages as they are considered as fraud attempts aiming to obtain banking information of the customer to steal his funds. He reiterated that customer should be very careful when dealing with e-links as the mere clicking on the link may expose him to lose his confidential banking information.

He referred also to certain tips which can help the customer to protect his bank account including

refraining from saving any confidential information e.g., ATM, credit card or personal ID No. on mobile. Customer should not write his password on the card or share it with anyone. The same applies to password OTP. Customer shall ensure logging off from the website as soon as the transaction is completed. KFH ensures always to prepare well studied and meaningful publications and materials to enhance financial culture and increase public awareness on banking services and products and cautions against fraud, theft, and high-risk investments.

The awareness initiatives and publications and effective activities launched by KFH through its accounts on social media in light of "Be Aware" campaign, have attracted significant attention and interest from the bank customers and the public. As part of its social responsibility, KFH continues its effective participation in the banking awareness campaign "Be Aware", thus aiming to throw some light on the customers rights and obligations when dealing with banks.

It is worth mentioning here that KFH has always focused on organizing several training courses for its employees to raise their experience level in their fields of specialty and encourage them to transfer this information in a simple and focused manner to customers through direct contact at service centers or through social media and e-channels of the bank.

CBK bonds and related Tawarruq

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the most recent issues of CBK bonds and related Tawarruq at a total value of KD 240 million for three months with a rate of return at 1.125 percent.



AMHERST, US: In this file photo, Coca Cola sign at a store in Amherst, Virginia. —AFP

Coca-Cola acquires BodyArmor sports drink for \$5.6bn

NEW YORK: Coca-Cola announced yesterday that it will acquire full ownership of sports drinks company BodyArmor for \$5.6 billion. The beverage giant bought 15 percent of BodyArmor in 2018, and will continue to operate the firm as a separate business in North America, according to a statement.

The company was partly owned by late basketball great Kobe Bryant, who became a major shareholder in 2013. "BodyArmor has been a great addition to the

system lineup over the last three years, and the company has driven continuous innovation in hydration and health-and-wellness products," said Alfredo Rivera, president of Coca-Cola's North American operating unit.

BodyArmor is currently the second-biggest sports drink company with more than \$1.4 billion in retail sales, the statement said. The company's co-founder and chairman Mike Repole and president Brent Hastie will stay on at the brand, which is looking at "explosive consumer demand" for premium sports drinks. In a tribute to the athlete and shareholder who died in a 2020 helicopter crash, Repole said, "If it wasn't for Kobe Bryant's vision and belief, BodyArmor would not have been able to achieve the success we had. I couldn't be more excited to become part of the Coca-Cola family and set our sights on the future." —AFP



KUWAIT: Deputy Chairman of Al Mulla & Behbehani Talal A Al Mulla, accompanied by Ambassador Alina Romanowski, the US Ambassador to Kuwait, Deputy Chief of Mission at the US Embassy James Holtsnider and Board Member at MBMC Talal Behbehani, inaugurates the all-new showroom by Al Mulla & Behbehani for Chrysler, Dodge and Ram in Al-Rai Area in Kuwait.



KUWAIT: US Ambassador touring the all-new Chrysler, Dodge and Ram showroom in Al-Rai Area accompanied by Talal A Al Mulla and Talal Behbehani.

Al Mulla & Behbehani continues its journey of strategic growth

Continuing its celebration of its 15th anniversary, Al Mulla & Behbehani opens an all-new showroom for Chrysler, Dodge and Ram, and a new standalone Jeep showroom

KUWAIT: In the year that marks its 15th anniversary, Al Mulla & Behbehani Motor Company (MBMC), the sole authorized distributor of Chrysler, Dodge, Ram, Jeep, Alfa Romeo, Fiat, Abarth and the Mopar brands in Kuwait, continues its commitment to strengthening the joint venture that brought together two giant automotive distributors in Kuwait back in 2006. To commemorate the occasion, the company recently celebrated the opening of an all-new showroom for Chrysler, Dodge, and Ram, as well as a new standalone Jeep showroom in Al-Rai Area in Kuwait. Deputy Chairman of Al Mulla & Behbehani Talal A Al Mulla, accompanied by Ambassador Alina Romanowski, the US Ambassador to Kuwait, Deputy Chief of Mission at the US Embassy James Holtsnider, and Board Member at MBMC Talal Behbehani inaugurated the official ceremonies.

Alongside the openings of the two new showrooms, Al Mulla & Behbehani also celebrated the regional launch of the all-new Jeep Grand Cherokee L, with a special regional reveal ceremony held at the MBMC new Jeep showroom earlier that



Grand Cherokee L



Grand Cherokee

produced 4x4 vehicle - and grew over the decades with the constant launch of new products building an enduring reputation that has seen the brand become synonymous with off-road excellence. Constant innovation has seen the legend evolve, with comfort, handling and connectivity now every bit as much of the Jeep DNA

have H E the Ambassador Alina Romanowski, the US Ambassador to the State of Kuwait join our celebrations of the 15th Anniversary of Al Mulla & Behbehani Motor Company, a joint venture partnership between Al Mulla Group and Mohammad Saleh & Reza Yousef Behbehani, and to commemorate the occasion with the opening of these two new showrooms today, which also coincided with the regional launch of the new Jeep Grand Cherokee L, SUV. Al Mulla & Behbehani is a strategic alliance and a journey that will continue for years to come, with significant investments planned in the near future to deliver world-class experiences to our loyal customers in Kuwait." He added, "Al Mulla & Behbehani was built on three pillars; well trained staff, continually improved processes, and state of the art facilities, which are vital to our ongoing commitment to improve the customer experience across all fronts. Today, we are proud to showcase the perfect execution of all these principles in action."

Fifteen years' history of growth and commitment to excellence

Established in April 2006 through a joint venture between Al Mulla Group, a leading diversified privately held business group based in Kuwait and Mohammad Saleh & Reza Yousef Behbehani, Al Mulla & Behbehani Motor Company (MBMC), is the sole authorized distributor of Chrysler, Dodge, Ram, Jeep, Alfa Romeo, Fiat, Abarth and the Mopar brands in Kuwait. This strategic partnership is doubly special since both companies not only brought decades of automotive experience to the table, but it also led to a unification of sales and service operations. The alliance created an extraordinary opportunity to increase market share and enhanced customers' experience at every step of their journey.

Expansion plans

During the next three years, Al Mulla &

Behbehani plans to enhance and develop showrooms and service facilities throughout Kuwait with investments in new facilities and renovation of existing ones valued at around US\$55 million, with the goal of enriching the customers' sales and after sales experiences. Earlier this year, the company initiated a number of digital transformation changes including the launch of the MBMC APP, and utilization of WhatsApp business communication features putting MBMC closer to its customers than ever before; whilst giving our customers more flexibility and the convenience in exploring our offers, products and wide range of services through digital devices.

In 2018, and as part of its continuous development strategy and growth vision, the company announced the opening of its most modern automotive facility in Al Ahmadi in Kuwait, which includes a vehicle showroom, parts retail outlet, general repair facility and, for the first time, a dedicated Express Lane quick service area. In 2019, MBMC also opened a standalone Mopar ExpressLane facility in Shuwaikh, which is the largest facility of its kind in the world. Extending over an area of 3,000 m2, the state of the art Mopar Express Lane facility includes two

dynamic reception lanes, and 32 working bays. Additionally, our after-sales and customer care brand Mopar provides the highest level of care for our customers and their vehicles by using professional technicians who are trained in accordance with the highest international standards established by Stellantis and providing original spare parts and accessories. These investments are a testimony to the ongoing commitment Al Mulla & Behbehani has put in place in providing the essential facilities, processes and people to make sure that a high-quality customer relationship, which only starts with the purchase of a new vehicle, continues for many years.

At Al Mulla & Behbehani, we provide our customers with the priority, transparency, accuracy, and value that they expect when visiting any of our facilities located in different areas in Kuwait. Our globally renowned brands in the automotive industry combine exceptional style with ultimate driving performance. Equipped with the latest technology and safety features. Our vehicles range from small fuel-efficient city cars to legendary muscle cars and iconic off-road vehicles, sophisticated and refined sedans to high performance cars that stir the emotions.



KUWAIT: US Ambassador touring the all-new Chrysler, Dodge and Ram showroom in Al-Rai area accompanied by Talal A Al Mulla and Talal Behbehani.

day. Honored guests and dignitaries experienced firsthand the innovative new design and special features of the new Jeep Grand Cherokee L, a three-row version of the popular award-winning off-road SUV.

The Jeep legend

The Jeep legend began in 1941 with the fabled Willys MB - the first ever mass-

as its off-road prowess. The Jeep brand continues to deliver an open invitation to live life to the fullest by offering a broad line-up of vehicles that give owners the sense of security to handle any journey with confidence.

At the showrooms' opening ceremonies, Deputy Chairman of Al Mulla & Behbehani Motor Company Talal A Al Mulla commented: "We are honored to



KUWAIT: US Ambassador and Deputy Chairman of Al Mulla & Behbehani and Board Members at the unveiling of the all-new Jeep Cherokee L.



KUWAIT: The standalone showroom by Al Mulla & Behbehani for Jeep at Al Rai area.



KUWAIT: US Ambassador touring the all-new Chrysler, Dodge and Ram showroom in Al-Rai area accompanied by Talal A Al Mulla and Talal Behbehani.

Lifestyle | Features

India jumps on NFT craze with Bollywood star Bachchan's auction

Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan became the first Indian celebrity to join the global NFT craze by launching an auction of his digital memorabilia yesterday. Non-fungible tokens-unique digital objects such as drawings or animations-have soared in popularity in recent months. Investors and wealthy collectors have clamoured to get involved in the latest digital craze, which relies on the same blockchain

technology that powers cryptocurrencies and cannot be forged or otherwise manipulated.

On Bachchan's virtual auction block will be audio and art by the star including poetry recitals, movie posters and digital portraits. "The NFTs will offer the audience a chance to own an original piece of rare and cherished moments of my life," the 79-year-old said in a statement. The three-day auction is open to bidders

globally and will close at midday (0630 GMT) Wednesday. Analysts said the auction could give a hint of the potential appetite for digital collectables among India's 1.3 billion people.

"It is still at a very nascent stage but a lot more celebrities, artists and sportsmen are getting into it," said Kashif Raza, founder of crypto-education platform Bitinning. "If Amitabh Bachchan is talking about NFTs on social media and

elsewhere, more people will get to know about it," he told AFP. Several other high-profile Indians, including fellow Bollywood megastar Salman Khan and cricketer Rishabh Pant, are also planning to hold NFT auctions. — AFP



Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan

'Father of tiramisu' dies in Italy aged 93

Ado Campeol, dubbed "the father" of the world-famous tiramisu dessert, died over the weekend, the governor of the Veneto region has announced. He was 93. Campeol was the owner of Le Beccherie restaurant in

the city of Treviso that began first offering the concoction of coffee-soaked biscuits and mascarpone in the 1970s. The dessert, which first came about because of a mistake by Campeol's wife and his chef at the time according to local media reports, quickly took off and is today considered a staple of Italian cuisine beloved by those with a sweet tooth the world over. "With Ado Campeol, gone today at age 93, Treviso loses another one of its gastronomic stars," Luca Zaia, the governor of the Veneto region, wrote on his Facebook page on Saturday. — AFP



Bollywood superstar Nawazuddin Siddiqui to quit streaming shows

Bollywood superstar Nawazuddin Siddiqui said he will stop working in productions made for India's booming streaming market, calling online platforms a "dumping ground for redundant shows". India's population of 1.3 billion people has attracted streaming giants Netflix, Amazon's Prime Video and Disney's Hotstar, all keen to tap into a vast and fast-growing market. Siddiqui, a celebrated film actor, starred in Netflix's first Indian original series "Sacred Games", released in 2018 to international acclaim.

But the 47-year-old told entertainment site Bollywood Hungama in an interview published on the weekend that "quantity has killed quality" on the so-called over-the-top (OTT) web platforms. "The platform has become a dumping ground for redundant shows. We either have shows that don't deserve to be seen in the first place. Or sequels to shows that have nothing more to say," he said. "It's become 'dhandha' (Hindi for racket) for

big production houses and actors... Major film producers in Bollywood have cut lucrative deals with all the big players in the OTT field. Producers get whopping amounts to create unlimited content."

He added that the "excitement and challenge around the digital medium" that he experienced while working on "Sacred Games" was gone. "When I can't bear to watch them how can I bear to be in them?" he added. Siddiqui has been described as one of Hindi cinema's great success stories. He came from humble beginnings in a village in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh and made it big in Bollywood after moving to India's film capital Mumbai in 2000. The Indian entertainment market — valued at \$24 billion by accountancy giant EY—is already one of the world's biggest, while smartphone adoption is forecast to expand further in coming years. — AFP



In this file photo Bollywood actor Nawazuddin Siddiqui poses for photographs during the promotion of his upcoming comedy drama Hindi film 'Motichoor Chaknachoor' in Mumbai. — AFP

Iraq's Babylon arts festival back after almost 20 years

Showcasing traditional dance, music and arts, Iraq's Babylon International Festival has attracted thousands of fans for the first time in two war-scarred decades. "It's a great joy. We haven't seen a festival like this for years," said Shaima, 45, visiting the event at the ancient archaeological site with her two daughters. The last edition of the festival was held in 2002, the year before the US-led invasion that toppled the veteran dictator Saddam Hussein. In the years after, Iraq saw war between US troops and insurgents, sectarian clashes and the battle against the Islamic State group. Tens of thousands died and much of the country and its rich cultural heritage were reduced to rubble.



Artists perform during the launching ceremony of Babel International Festival.

from dozens of countries including Jordan, Serbia and Russia as well as homegrown talent. "It's a fundamental change compared with the terrible ordeals that we suffered," Shaima said.

Rooted in history

The festival, first launched in 1987, was staged at the majestic UNESCO World Heritage site of Babylon, south of Baghdad. Most performances were held in the Babylon theatre which Alexander the Great built around 311 BC. Because history, both ancient and modern, is never far away in Iraq, one of the palaces Saddam built still stands just a few hundred meters (yards) from the Babylonian ruins. In the shadow of a replica of Ishtar Gate, built originally by Nebuchadnezzar II around 575 BC, Iraqi photographer Haider Al-Masalmawi was showing his work to visitors. He voiced hope that the festival would "relaunch art, culture and even the economy of Iraq. It's a show-

case." Egyptian performer Mohammed Fathy said he was happy to be back in Iraq, as melodies from his Al-Ahram group played in the background. "I came here as a dancer in the 1990s and returned today as stage manager," he said.

A Serbian folklore group along with Jordanian and Palestinian practitioners of dabkeh, a Middle Eastern line dance, were rehearsing their show. Yasser Al-Ardawi, head of the Jordanian troupe, while arranging his red and white keffiyeh head covering voiced confidence that the festival's return means that "security and stability have returned to Iraq".

'Free to sing'

Funding for culture is still often an after-thought in Iraq, a corruption-plagued country where millions live in poverty despite the nation's vast oil wealth. The festival was financed privately,



An Egyptian artist performs a traditional 'Tanoora' (skirt) dance during the Babel International Festival.

said its executive director Mohamed Al-Rubaie, adding that the event also faced other challenges. Babylon is located close to the Muslim Shiite shrine cities of Karbala and Najaf, both socially conservative centers of religious study. Two days before the festival's opening, the governor of Babylon province, Hassan Mendil, demanded the cancellation of concerts at the festival in response to calls from "religious students".

But the song and dance shows went ahead. "It's a joyous festival that reflects Iraqi culture," Rubaie said. "Of course there are some fears and we take into account the opinion of others." Those fears were brushed off by festival visitor Ali Saleh from Diwaniyah, south of Babylon. "If I want to sing, I am free to do so," he said. — AFP



Gulf singer Shams Al-Kuwaiti better known as Shams, performs during the launching ceremony of Babel International Festival.

Today there is relative stability, though marred by periodic IS attacks and political tensions, and Iraqis are looking to the future. The five-day festival, which ended Monday, is one of the symbols of this new hope. The arts showcase, staged in what was the capital of the ancient Mesopotamian state of Babylonia, this year drew artists



Audience members attend a performance during the Babel (Babylon) International Festival, about 100 kilometres south of Iraq's capital.



Artists perform during the launching ceremony of Babel International Festival.



A group of Egyptian artists gather during the Babel International Festival.



An aerial picture shows a view of the Iraqi town of Bartalla, with the Bartalla sports club during a training session for the girls team, east of the city of Mosul in the northern province of Nineveh.

Iraqi girls take part in a training session at the Bartalla sports club.

FOOTBALL BRINGS HOPE TO IRAQI GIRLS IN EX-IS TOWN

Spurred on by their coach, Christian girls kick the ball around a field in Iraq's Bartalla, a former jihadist stronghold where football is helping them dream of a better future. In 2014, the Islamic State group seized control of the town in its sweep through the northern province of Nineveh, before subjecting women and girls to a harsh interpretation of Islam. Four years on from IS's defeat the roughly 1,500 families who returned have been trying to restore a semblance of normality to Bartalla, about 12 kilometres (seven miles) east of Mosul, once the jihadists' de facto capital in Iraq.



A football academy opened its doors to girls six months ago equipped with artificial turf, thanks to funding from Lara, an Iraqi Christian non-governmental organization. "Here we do everything to teach young girls the basics of football," said coach Joanne Yusef Chaba. The coach, a 22-year-old physical education graduate, said her dream was "to start a women's team that will compete



in the future" in one of two already established women's leagues in Iraq. Dressed in brightly coloured bibs, the girls do stretching exercises on the freshly laid pitch before Yusef Chaba blows a whistle for the start of practice. After an exchange of passes, one of the players brings a ball under control before dribbling the length of the 40-metre (yard) pitch and unleashing a shot that rattles the post.

'Lack of support'

"Being here allows us to forget hard times," said Yusef Chaba, who fled to Arbil with her family two hours before the jihadists arrived in her hometown. "Today when people see us, it raises their hopes and gives them confidence," added the recent graduate who is looking for a job. "Here we forget about our

daily worries." About 50 girls aged between 10 and 15 are enrolled at the academy where they attend two-hour training sessions twice a week. Miral Jamal was six years old when she fled Bartalla with her family to escape the jihadists. Now aged 13, she is passionate about football. "The players here feel good," said the schoolgirl.

"Football relieves us... there's nothing else to do in the city. I look forward to the training sessions." The families' modest monthly contributions-between 5,000 and 10,000 Iraqi dinars (\$3 and \$7) — go towards renting the field on land owned by a church. For other expenses, the four founders from local families dip into their own pockets. Hala Thomas, who helped to launch the academy, recently travelled to Baghdad to meet with government officials and seek

funding. She received promises, but nothing concrete.

"We don't have enough money to buy more balls, outfits or what we need for training," said the 55-year-old, who opted to stay in her hometown rather than join her sons in the Netherlands. "Despite the lack of support from sports institutions, we are hopeful that we can have a women's football team," she added.

'Breath of fresh air'

During its three-year rule over nearly a third of Iraq, IS subjected hundreds of thousands of women to its rigid interpretation of Islam, using beatings and executions as punishments. In Mosul and its surrounding province, jihadists raped, kidnapped and enslaved thousands of women and adolescent girls. After the IS

onslaught in 2014, tens of thousands of Christians fled northern Nineveh province, some escaping to nearby Iraqi Kurdistan and others going into exile.

That only worsened an exodus since the US-led 2003 invasion, which has seen Iraq's Christian minority shrink from more than 1.5 million to only around 400,000. Across the Nineveh plain, churches and monasteries destroyed and burned by the jihadists have been restored. But the challenges of rebuilding remain daunting in the ravaged province. "Football is a breath of fresh air for any community," said neighborhood leader Bassem Metti. "We needed something that would encourage stability in our daily lives and that would start to be tangible." — AFP



Iraqi girls take part in a training session at the Bartalla sports club.

'Dune' loses spice but stays atop N America box office

Sci-fi thriller "Dune" saw its ticket sales drop in its second weekend out but still held its lead in the North American box office, with an estimated take of \$15.5 million, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported Sunday. The Warner Bros version of the classic Frank Herbert opus lost 62 percent from its debut weekend, a sizable drop but less so than suffered by other recent big releases, as many fans opted to take in the visually spectacular Denis Villeneuve film on big Imax screens. Starring Timothee Chalamet,

Rebecca Ferguson, Zendaya and Oscar Isaac, "Dune" follows a family in the distant future fighting for survival on a desert planet plagued by monstrous sandworms but also a valuable resource called spice. Globally, the film is nearing \$300 million in ticket sales. The Halloween weekend is typically slow for movie going, as people opt for costume parties and trick-or-treating, but Universal's well-timed horror flic "Halloween Kills" retained second place, taking in \$8.5 million for the Friday-through-Sunday period. The follow-on to

2018's "Halloween," it again stars Jamie Lee Curtis as the avenging Laurie Strode.

Sticking in third was United Artists' James Bond installment "No Time to Die," at \$7.8 million. Daniel Craig stars as suave spy 007 — for the last time, the studio says. In what analysts deemed the weekend's biggest surprise, fourth place went to a Japanese anime movie with a head-scratching title: "My Hero Academia: World Heroes Mission," at \$6.4 million. The Funimation film is a sequel to "My Hero Academia: Heroes

Rising." And in fifth was Sony's superhero movie "Venom: Let There Be Carnage," at \$5.8 million. Tom Hardy plays a journalist whose symbiotic link to an alien gives him superpowers. Rounding out the top 10 were: "Antlers" (\$4.2 million) "Last Night in Soho" (\$4.2 million) "Ron's Gone Wrong" (\$3.8 million) "The Addams Family 2" (\$3.3 million) "The French Dispatch" (\$2.8 million)

—AFP



Sports

Jazz hold off NBA champs Bucks, Durant ejected in Nets' win

'Luka Magic' too much for Kings; 'Melo bounces back

LOS ANGELES: Mike Conley scored 20 points in his return to the lineup and Donovan Mitchell tallied a team-high 28 points as the Utah Jazz beat the reigning NBA champion Milwaukee Bucks 107-95 on Sunday.

Mitchell scored 11 of his points in the fourth quarter as the Jazz never trailed in front of a crowd of 17,300 at Fiserv Forum in Milwaukee. "We really executed when we needed to," said Mitchell. "They're NBA champions. They're not going to just go down 15 and call it a day."

Giannis Antetokounmpo finished with 25 points, seven rebounds and six assists for the Bucks, who trailed at one stage by 17 points but rallied to cut the Jazz lead to just four points in the final quarter. Former Jazz player Grayson Allen finished with 18 points for the Bucks, who lost at home for the third time in a three-game homestand. Milwaukee also slipped below .500 at 3-4 with a third straight loss.

The Jazz took a 99-87 lead with just over three minutes left in the fourth thanks to Mitchell's seven points in two minutes of action. But the Bucks clawed their way back as Allen made two three-pointers and Thanasis Antetokounmpo made a dunk to cut the Jazz lead to 99-95 with 99 seconds left.

Mitchell stretched the Jazz's lead to six with a basket, and Royce O'Neale made a clutch defensive play by blocking an Allen three-point attempt to extinguish the Bucks' comeback bid. The victory was the fifth in six games for Utah, which suffered its first loss of the season in Chicago on Saturday.

"You look at tonight and you look at the way last night went, two polar opposite situations," Mitchell said. "I think there were times Chicago really amped up the pressure and we weren't ready for it. (The

Bucks) did it again tonight and we were ready for it."

Durant ejected in win

Elsewhere, James Harden had a triple double and Kevin Durant scored 23 points before being ejected in the third quarter of the Brooklyn Nets 117-91 win over the Detroit Pistons. Durant was thrown out of the game for a flagrant foul with 3:23 remaining in the third quarter.

Officials sent him to the showers after he hit Kelly Olynyk in the face with his right arm. Durant shot 10-of-13 from the field before getting ejected. Harden



Triple double for James Harden

produced his 59th career triple-double with 18 points, 12 assists and 10 rebounds as the Nets led by as many as 30 at one stage. He is now the Nets all-time leader with 13 triple-doubles, and joined Larry Bird for second on the NBA's all-time list with his 59.

It was Durant's second incident in as many games. He was slapped with a technical in Brooklyn's 105-98 win over Indiana Friday for tossing the ball into the stands after a foul was called. He was later fined \$25,000 by the league. "I tried to run through the



MILWAUKEE: Jordan Clarkson #00 of the Utah Jazz goes in for a shot against the Milwaukee Bucks during the first half of a game at Fiserv Forum on Sunday in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. — AFP

screen," Durant said. "That was the result of me trying to blow the screen up."

In Dallas, Luka Doncic capped a team-high 23-point night with a clutch three-pointer as the Dallas Mavericks beat the Sacramento Kings 105-99. Doncic also dished out 10 assists and eight rebounds for the Mavericks, who shot 44.4 percent from the field after having been held to 29.5 percent in a Friday loss to Denver. Richaun Holmes posted a 22-point, 13-rebound double-double for the Kings, who

had a two-game win streak snapped.

LaMelo Ball also scored 27 points and Kelly Oubre came off the bench to score 26 in powering the Charlotte Hornets to a 125-113 victory over the Portland Trail Blazers. Ball also had nine rebounds and seven assists to bounce back from a sub-par performance in his previous outings. Last season's NBA Rookie of the Year had just 13 points on five-of-28 shooting from the floor in a win over Orlando on Wednesday and a Friday loss to Miami. — AFP

Problems mount for faltering India at T20 World Cup

DUBAI: Virat Kohli's India faced a social media onslaught on Monday after their second defeat at the Twenty20 World Cup left them needing a miracle to reach the semi-finals. India started the tournament as one of the favorites but heavy defeats to arch-rivals Pakistan and New Zealand have seen their hopes nosedive. Here AFP Sport looks at where India went wrong and the fallout they are suffering now:

Social media backlash

Angry India fans have slammed the team and national board chiefs while many blamed the cash-rich Indian Premier League (IPL) for the 10-wicket hammering by Pakistan and eight wicket mauling by New Zealand.

#BanIPL became a leading Twitter hashtag on Monday among fans targeting the role played by the world's richest T20 tournament that only finished in Dubai a few days before the World Cup started there.

"It's all about 'money', not 'country' #BanIPL," said Gaurav Goel a state spokesperson for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party on Twitter. Others targeted Board of Control for Cricket in India secretary Jay Shah and captain Kohli.

Batting flop

India's famed batting line-up limped to a modest 110-7 against New Zealand on Sunday, a week after they managed 151-7 against a tough Pakistan attack. Top batters KL Rahul and Rohit Sharma showed little fight and even though Kohli made 57 against Pakistan, the totals proved insufficient.

Against New Zealand, Rahul fell to Tim Southee for 18 and Sharma — who was dropped on naught — was out to Ish Sodhi after making 14. Kohli managed nine off 17 balls before Sodhi claimed his wicket.

"Tentative with the bat, their shot selection was questionable," batting great VVS Laxman wrote on Twitter. "New Zealand bowled superbly, but India made their task easier." India must now beat Afghanistan on Wednesday and hope that New Zealand lose a game to stand a chance of reaching the last four.

Worrying trend

India made two changes from their defeat by Pakistan including bringing in opener Ishan Kishan. However, the left-hander fell to pace bowler Trent Boult while trying to go for a big shot and got caught for just four.

Sodhi took Sharma and then Kohli to put India under pressure in the crucial six overs of powerplay. Tottering at 48-4, the Indian survived their 20 overs, but New Zealand overhauled their modest target with 33 balls to spare. "I don't know if it is a fear of failure but I know that whatever changes they made to the batting order today did not work," said former India captain Sunil Gavaskar.

Pace bowler Jasprit Bumrah said "bubble fatigue, mental fatigue" creeps in after days on the road, but former players were unforgiving. Gautam Gambhir said India lacked "mental toughness". "It's been a trend, it's been happening at most ICC (International Cricket Council) tournaments," he told the ESPNcricinfo website. — AFP

Scrappy Saints beat Brady's Bucs as Jets upset Bengals

LOS ANGELES: PJ Williams made a game-clinching interception off Tom Brady for a touchdown as the New Orleans Saints surprised Tampa Bay 36-27 in an NFL showdown on Sunday. Trevor Siemian tossed a touchdown after replacing injured Saints starting quarterback Jameis Winston, a former Tampa Bay standout who was hurt in the second quarter at New Orleans.

The Saints had to turn to third-string signal caller Siemian because backup Taysom Hill was unavailable while recovering from a possible concussion. Siemian completed 16-of-29 passes for 159 yards and drove the Saints 70 yards to set up Brian Johnson's 23-yard field goal, which New Orleans a 29-27 lead with 1:44 remaining.

Williams then stepped in front of a Brady pass and returned it 40 yards for a touchdown. The Saints improved to 5-2, moving half a game behind NFC South division leader Tampa Bay. Brady completed 28-of-40 passes for 375 yards and four touchdowns with two interceptions for the Bucs, who were off to a club record 6-1 start.

Winston completed 6-of-10 passes for 56 yards, including a 16-yard touchdown to TreQuan Smith. Winston, who ran four times for 40 yards, injured a knee while scrambling and being tackled hard by Tampa Bay linebacker Devin White, who was whistled for a horse-collar tackle penalty. "I think it's significant," Saints coach Sean Payton said. "He felt something and is on crutches right now. When he got up and then had to go back down, you were a little concerned."

Tampa Bay took Winston as the top pick of the 2015 NFL Draft but he struggled with turnovers over five seasons before being dropped last year after Tampa signed Brady, who led them to a NFL

Astros rally to defeat Braves and extend World Series

WASHINGTON: Rallying from a four-run deficit in an elimination game, the Houston Astros kept their World Series title hopes alive on Sunday by defeating the Atlanta Braves 9-5. Martin Maldonado drove in three runs while Carlos Correa went 3-for-5 and drove in two runs as the Astros pulled within 3-2 in Major League Baseball's best-of-seven final, which continues with game six tonight in Houston. "I'm just glad we get to go back to Houston," Astros manager Dusty Baker said. "One game at a time now. Still alive."

Maldonado, a 35-year-old Puerto Rican catcher, became the first player in a World Series game to plate runs with a single, walk and sacrifice fly while Houston pitchers silenced Braves batters, allowing only one run after the first inning. "The bullpen was great for us," said Maldonado. "They got beaten yesterday but came back stronger today. It was a must-win game. Now we're going back to Houston."

Atlanta's Adam Duvall smashed a grand slam home run in the first inning but the host Braves squandered the 4-0

lead as the Astros matched the 1919 Chicago White Sox for the largest deficit overcome to win a World Series game when facing elimination. "I was trying to figure out how we could chip away at that, just trying to figure out how we could keep them from running away on us," Baker said.

Baker had already done what he needed as the Astros, trying to solve their hitting woes, shuffled their batting lineup and it paid off. "We got punched in the mouth and came back to win," Astros slugger Alex Bregman said. "Just wanted to go out and play hard. Nothing to lose."

The Braves, who had won their first seven home games in this year's playoffs, remain one win shy of their first World Series title since 1995. "We're all right," Braves pitcher AJ Minter said. "We're right where we want to be. We're in a really good spot." The Astros are in their third World Series in five seasons, having won the 2017 title and lost to Washington in 2019.

The Braves jumped on Houston starting left-hander Framber Valdez in the first inning when Jorge Soler singled, advanced on a ground out and reached third on Austin Riley's single before Eddie Rosario walked to load the bases. Duvall followed by smashing a grand slam home run into the right-field stands to give Atlanta a 4-0 lead as a sellout crowd roared with delight.

"We celebrated it. We got excited. That's what you do when you hit home



NEW ORLEANS: Chauncey Gardner-Johnson #22 of the New Orleans Saints celebrates with teammates after intercepting a pass by Tom Brady #12 of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers (not pictured) during the second quarter at Caesars Superdome on Sunday in New Orleans, Louisiana. — AFP

title. Chris Godwin caught eight of Brady's passes for 140 yards and a 12-yard touchdown.

Jets stun Bengals

Elsewhere, quarterback Mike White outdueled Joe Burrow in his first NFL start, leading the New York Jets to a thrilling 34-31 upset of Cincinnati. White made the most of his first start, completing 37-of-45 passes for 405 yards and three touchdowns and a trick play for the Jets, who ended a two-game losing skid. White hit Tyler Kroft with a 13-yard, go-ahead touchdown pass with under five minutes remaining in the fourth quarter. White then caught the two-point conversion pass from Jamison Crowder on a trick play and the Jets led 34-31 with 3:50 left.

"Anything is possible," said Jets coach Robert Saleh. "The difference between play A and player Z is an opportunity and reps. That's what professional sports is. That why they come out of nowhere. Someone gets an opportunity. Mike has the world in front of him. He has to take advantage of it."

Shaq Lawson gave the Jets their first interception of the season after deflecting a screen pass and catching the ball with 4:32 to go. Cincinnati punted from its own 40-yard line with 2:19 remaining and never got the ball back.

The Jets improved to 2-5 on the season and beat the Bengals for the first time in their past four meetings. White said Sunday's performance was just "affirmation" of what he believed all along, that he could play in the NFL. "I was confident enough to be able to execute and move the offence," said White. "Today was an affirmation for it."

Burrow completed 21-of-34 for 259 yards with three touchdowns and one interception for the Bengals, who fell to 5-3. Cincinnati running back Joe Mixon scored twice and gained 91 yards on 18 carries. Tee Higgins led all receivers with 97 yards on four catches. At Los Angeles, Adrian Phillips intercepted two passes and Nick Folk kicked four field goals as the New England Patriots rallied for a 27-24 victory over the Los Angeles Chargers. — AFP



ATLANTA: Jose Altuve #27 of the Houston Astros reacts after scoring a run against the Atlanta Braves during the eighth inning in Game Five of the World Series at Truist Park on Sunday in Atlanta, Georgia. — AFP

runs." Duvall said. "But it's a long game. They didn't quit. They kept fighting. We weren't able to get it going again and keep the pressure on. Hats off to their pitchers." It was the first World Series grand slam in an opening inning since Bobby Richardson of the New York Yankees hit one in 1960.

Yuli Gurriel, who moved up in the order, singled and took second when Kyle Tucker walked. Bregman, who moved down in the lineup, doubled off the centerfield wall to score Gurriel and Tucker scored on a sacrifice fly by Maldonado as Houston pulled within 4-2. In the third, Correa doubled to score

one run and another scored on a Gurriel ground out to pull Houston level.

Atlanta's Freddie Freeman answered in the third by smashing a solo homer to give the Braves a 5-4 edge. The 460-foot (140.2m) blast was the longest of this year's playoffs and matched the longest Freeman ever hit. But in the fifth, left-hander Minter walked Maldonado with the bases loaded to tie the game and Marwin Gonzalez followed with a two-run single to give Houston a 7-5 advantage. Maldonado added an RBI single in the seventh and Correa singled in a run in the eighth to create the final margin. — AFP

Sports

Ronaldo: Help or hindrance for Man Utd?

Questionable defense, limiting chances for teammates among issues

LONDON: Manchester United's re-signing of Cristiano Ronaldo appeared to be a no-brainer — the galvanizing return of a club great with the swagger of a proven winner and guaranteed goals. But is it more complicated than that? Is the presence of the Portuguese superstar at the fulcrum of the attack helping or hindering the team, who have made a stuttering start to the season?



MANCHESTER: Manchester United's Portuguese striker Cristiano Ronaldo (center) reacts after Liverpool scored their third goal during the two teams' English Premier League football match at Old Trafford in Manchester, north west England, on October 24, 2021. — AFP

“My role in the club is to win”

United are preparing for tonight's Champions League encounter against Atalanta after a morale-boosting 3-0 win against Tottenham that helped ease the pressure on manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer after their 5-0 hammering by Liverpool.

Ronaldo will go into the match on a high after ending a mini-drought in the league, scoring a superb volley and setting up Edinson Cavani for United's second. His Premier League return so far has been solid rather than spectacular by his own standards — four goals in seven Premier League matches — less than half of Mohamed Salah's haul of 10 for Liverpool.

But he has made the difference in the Champions League, twice scoring dramatic late winners, against Villarreal and Atalanta, to haul United to the top of

Group F. Despite his goals, Ronaldo has been criticized for his lack of defensive work in a team that has kept just two clean sheets all season. There have been hints that some of his teammates at previous club Juventus felt the same way but the former Real Madrid player says he will silence his accusers.

“I know when the team needs my help defensively,” he told Sky Sports. “But my role in the club is to win,

help the team to win and to score goals — (the defensive side) is part of my job. The people who don't want to see that is because they don't like me but to be honest, I'm 36, I win everything so am I going to be worried about the people who say bad things about me? I sleep good at night. I go to my bed with my conscience very good. Keep going with that because I will still close mouths and win things.”

time out. But another victory in the reverse fixture remains crucial, given Barca will finish the group stage at home to Benfica and then away at Bayern Munich, when few would expect them to pick up anything other than a defeat.

If they fail to get out of Group E and come third, Barcelona would have to win the Europa League to make up for the prize money lost. All of which puts a lot of responsibility on Barjuan, the former Barcelona defender who played more than 200 times for the club and was given his debut by Johan Cruyff.

‘Club man’

“We have Sergi, who is a club man and knows the system,” said Laporta. “He was part of the best teams in the history of Barca like the Dream Team and he understands our philosophy. The philosophy is clear: a style of football that has given us the most success. Sergi knows this squad in depth and will be able to work with it.”

Barjuan's coaching career has been largely underwhelming, with his Barca B team sitting 11th, 12 points behind the league leaders in their competition. He picked a starting line-up for the 1-1 draw with Alaves on Saturday that retained many of the ideas of Koeman, with Sergino Dest starting again in the front three, Eric Garcia in central defense and Oscar Mingueza at right back.

There were familiar problems too, including a lack of creativity, confidence and clinical finishing. “It is difficult to change things in a short time,” said Barjuan on Friday. “But the style is non-negotiable. We are finding the formula to be more authoritative and be protagonists with the ball.” Laporta's hope will be removing Koeman, and perhaps even just the prospect of Xavi, could give the players a lift. When he addressed the squad last week, he told the players the onus was on them to spark the revival.—AFP

Barcelona in limbo for pivotal game vs Dynamo Kiev

MADRID: Barcelona go into the biggest game of their season so far against Dynamo Kiev on Tuesday without the previous coach and still waiting for the next one to arrive. Barca president Joan Laporta said on Friday he should have sacked Ronald Koeman sooner, that the club had been “dangerously drifting” and the situation was “unsustainable”.

Xavi Hernandez is expected to be Koeman's successor and the return of one of the club's greatest ever players, from the iconic team of Pep Guardiola, will be hugely popular with both the players and Barcelona supporters. Yet removing Koeman days before the trip to Kiev looks like a gamble, not least because it assumes the team had a worse chance of winning under him than they do now under interim coach Sergi Barjuan. “In principle, Sergi will be on the bench in Kiev,” said Laporta.

After deciding to wait in the summer and then again last month, Laporta might have held off another week until the international break, when a two-week hiatus would have offered more space to appoint a replacement. Instead, Barcelona will have faced Alaves, Dynamo and perhaps Celta Vigo without either Koeman or the new coach, who is expected to be Xavi even if his current club Al-Sadd appear keen to offer some resistance.

After losing both of their opening games 3-0 to Bayern Munich and Benfica, Barcelona gave themselves hope with a scrappy 1-0 win over Dynamo at home last



BARCELONA: Barcelona's interim head coach Sergi Barjuan (center) takes part in a training session with his players, on the eve of the UEFA Champions League first round group E football match against Dynamo Kiev in Barcelona yesterday. — AFP



MUNICH: (From left) Bayern Munich's Tanguy Nianzou, Thomas Mueller, Joshua Kimmich and Marcel Sabitzer warm up during a training session yesterday at the stadium in Munich, southern Germany, on the eve of the UEFA Champions League group E football match against Benfica Lisbon. — AFP

Mueller urges Bayern to answer critics in Europe

BERLIN: Thomas Mueller says Bayern Munich must use the criticism from their shock German Cup disaster to help them secure a spot in the Champions League knockout phase by beating Benfica tonight. “When FC Bayern crashes out of the cup with a 5-0 defeat, it's clear that one or two comments are made that are slightly below the belt,” said Mueller.

The 32-year-old scored and created three assists Saturday as Bayern romped to a 5-2 win at Union Berlin to stay top of the Bundesliga three days after their 5-0 cup thrashing at Borussia Muenchengladbach. In Europe, Bayern are five points clear in Group E and a win over second-placed Benfica would guarantee a spot in the last 16 of the Champions League.

Bayern were hurt by a string of negative headlines amid the fallout of their shock cup defeat which Mueller wants to use as extra motivation. “(The criticism) is okay with me, we're not made of egg shells - you have to be able to take it sometimes, but we must

not forget that we are still out of the cup,” said Mueller.

“We didn't just lose a game, but (are out of) a competition that means a lot to us. We have to deal with that accordingly,” he added. Bayern striker Robert Lewandowski, who netted twice in Berlin on Saturday, is set to make his 100th Champions League appearance. “We showed from the very first minute that we are here to win,” said Lewandowski in Berlin. “Now we can focus on Tuesday.”

The Poland star has already scored five goals in three European games this season. He netted twice in both the 3-0 win at Barcelona and the 5-0 home rout of Dynamo Kiev before scoring again in the 4-0 romp against Benfica in Lisbon two weeks ago.

Bayern head coach Julian Nagelsmann, who missed the win in Portugal after testing positive for COVID-19, is expected to be back on the bench after spending 14 days at home in isolation. Mueller described their listless cup performance at Gladbach as the worst he has witnessed in 13 years playing for Bayern.

But Nagelsmann's assistant, Dino Toppmoller, believes Mueller is playing some of the best football of his distinguished career. The Germany international has scored six times in 16 appearances for Bayern this season, adding 11 assists. “Thomas is a very important player for us with a lot of experience and in games like this, you need leaders like Thomas,” said Toppmoller. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000	Kaifan	24849807
Amiri Hospital	22450005	Shamiya	24848913
Maternity Hospital	24843100	Shuwaikh	24814507
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700	Abdullah Salem	22549134
Chest Hospital	24849400	Nuzha	22526804
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010	Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Adan Hospital	23940620	Qadsiya	22515088
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300		Dasmah
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000	22532265	
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9	Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
		Shaab	22518752
		Qibla	22459381
		Ayoum Al-Qibla	22451082
		Mirqab	22456536
		Sharq	22465401
		Salmiya	25746401

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
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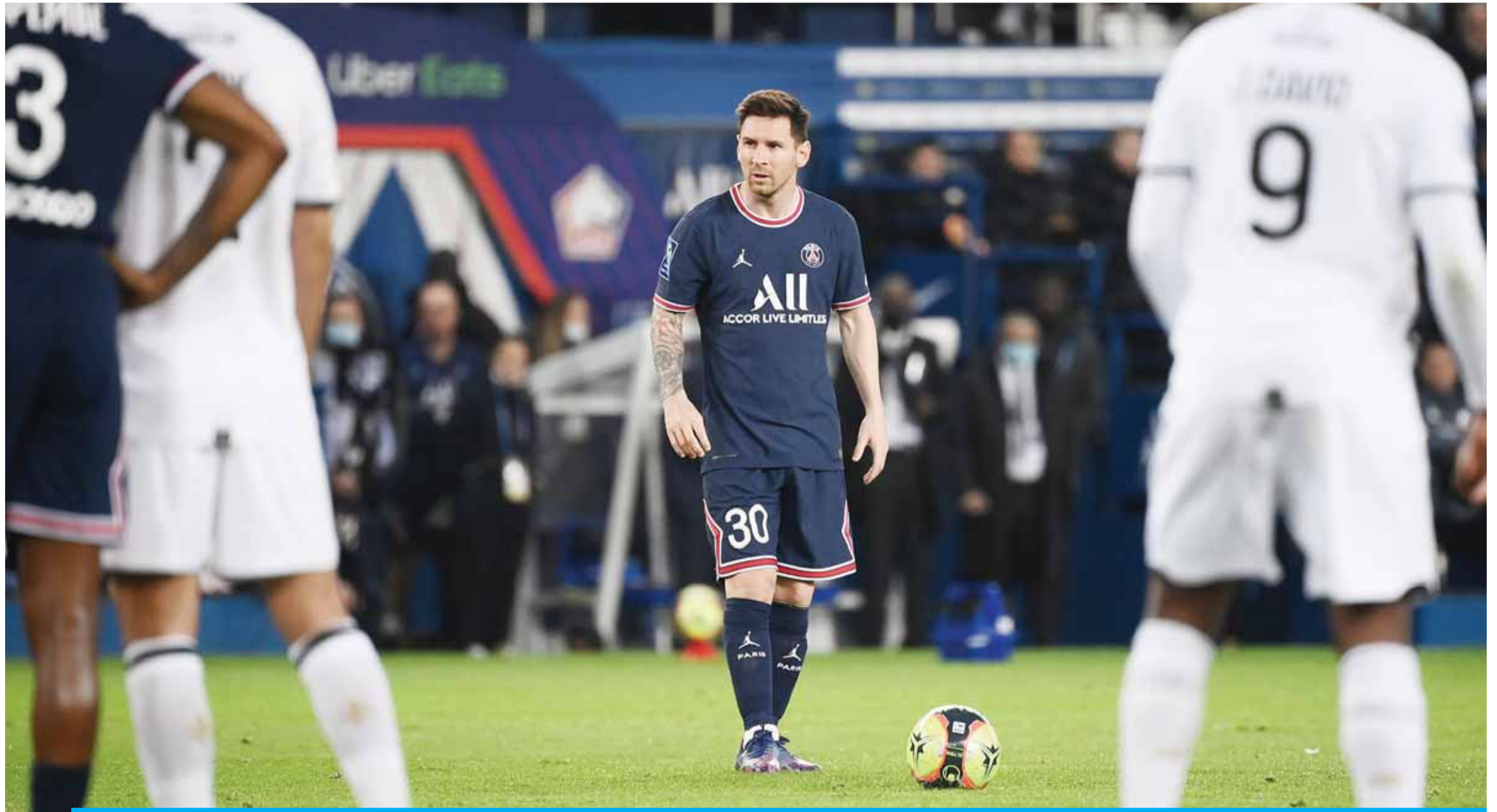
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Retirement never crossed my mind, says Messi

Six-time Ballon D'Or winner would love Barcelona reunion as sporting director



PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain's Argentinian forward Lionel Messi reacts during the French L1 football match against Lille at the Parc des Princes stadium, in Paris, on Friday. — AFP

MADRID: Argentine football superstar Lionel Messi says he has not given any thought about retiring after next year's World Cup adding he would love to be Barcelona sporting director when he does finally hang up his boots. The six-time Ballon D'Or winner will be 35 by the time the World Cup — a trophy that has eluded him through his stellar career — comes round in Qatar next year.

Messi is tied to French Ligue 1 leaders Paris Saint Germain till June 2023 — with the option of an extra year — after leaving his beloved Barcelona in August. He told yesterday's edition of Catalan newspaper Sport retirement was not on his agenda.

"No, truthfully no," he said regarding hanging up his boots. "After all that has happened to me, I just live day to day, year after year. I do not know what is

going to happen at the World Cup or after it. I am not thinking about it. What will be will be at that moment."

Messi added that leaving Barcelona after almost two decades had been a huge wrench but he will return one day to live there and even perhaps be the sporting director of the club.

Xavi, his long-time team-mate during the glory years at Barca — winning amongst other silverware four Champions League trophies — is the favorite to return to the club as head coach following the sacking of Ronald Koeman last week.

"We will return to live in Barcelona, our life will be there, that is for sure," he said. "It is what both my wife and I want. I do not know if it will be straight after the end of my contract with Paris, but we will return to live in Barcelona. I would love to be sporting director at some point. I do

not know if it will be at Barcelona or not, or I will fill another role. But if there is a possibility, I would love to help the club."

Messi has as of yet failed to sparkle at PSG and he told Sport his and his family's greatest desire was to stay at Barca. Messi joined PSG after Barca decided not to renew the Argentinian's contract due to La Liga's strict salary limits. Barcelona president Joan Laporta said in October he hoped Messi would change his mind and play for free.

Messi, though, said that had never been tabled as an option. "I did everything I could to stay there," he said. "Never at any point did they ask me to play for free. They asked me to reduce my salary by 50 percent and I did that no problem. We were willing to help the club. My desire and that of my family was to stay in Barcelona." — AFP

Spurs sack manager Nuno; Conte favorite replacement candidate

LONDON: Tottenham yesterday sacked manager Nuno Espirito Santo after just four months in charge following their fifth defeat in 10 Premier League games. Spurs gave an insipid display in their 3-0 defeat at home by Manchester United on Saturday, with fans booing and chanting "You don't know what you're doing" at the former Wolverhampton Wanderers boss.

Spurs chairman Daniel Levy and managing director of football Fabio Paratici are understood to have met on Sunday to discuss the Portuguese manager's fate. A statement from the club yesterday said Nuno and his coaching staff had been "relieved of their duties".

"I know how much Nuno and his coaching staff wanted to succeed and I regret that we have had to take this decision," Paratici said in the statement. "Nuno is a true gentleman and will always be welcome here. We should like to thank him and his coaching staff and wish them well for the future."

Spurs said a further coaching update would follow in due course. Former Chelsea and Inter Milan boss Antonio Conte, who worked with Paratici at Juventus, is the bookies' favorite to take over, with Sky in Italy reporting Conte is set to fly to London for talks.

Not first choice
Nuno, 47, was announced as the new

manager of the north London club on June 30, replacing Jose Mourinho, who was sacked in April. The ex-Valencia and Porto boss, who was not the first choice for Spurs, was appointed after ex-manager Mauricio Pochettino, Conte, Paulo Fonseca and Gennaro Gattuso were all linked with the job.

Tottenham topped the Premier League table after three 1-0 wins at the start of the season, including a victory over defending champions Manchester City, but results rapidly deteriorated. They have lost five of their past seven Premier League matches and are eighth in the table, 10 points behind leaders Chelsea.

Nuno lost seven of his 17 games in all competitions, with fans who craved attacking football increasingly frustrated by his conservative style. Tottenham did not manage a single shot on target against United, with England captain Harry Kane largely anonymous.

Kane, denied a move to Manchester City in the transfer window, has only managed one Premier League goal so far this campaign after winning his third Golden Boot last season. Former Tottenham star Gary Lineker tweeted: "Nuno has been fired. @SpursOfficial are something of a shambles at present." A statement from Tottenham Hotspur Supporters' Trust said the organization took no pleasure in Nuno's departure.



Nuno Espirito Santo

"Nuno Espirito Santo conducted himself with integrity, good grace and civility throughout his short time at Spurs," it said. "And although clearly not the right fit for Tottenham, we wish him and his coaching staff... well for the future."

Nuno guided Wolves from the second-tier Championship to the Premier League in 2018 and secured consecutive seventh-place finishes in their first two seasons back in the top-flight before a 13th-place finish last term.

Spurs fans are desperate to challenge again for the Champions League places after missing out on European football's premier competition for two consecutive seasons. They were regular top-four finishers under Pochettino, reaching the Champions League final in 2019, but have not won silverware of any description since 2008. — AFP

Djokovic adopts wait-and-see attitude to Australian Open

PARIS: Novak Djokovic says he will make his mind up about whether he defends his Australian Open title when an official decision is made regarding the rules surrounding players and COVID-19 vaccinations. The world number one added he would be making no further comment until then as he does not "want to be part of the story" revolving around assumptions or "what ifs."

There have been mixed messages over who will be allowed to play in the first Grand Slam of next year which runs from January 17-30 in Melbourne. A leaked email last week from the WTA suggested unvaccinated players would be allowed to compete provided they quarantined for 14 days and submitted to regular coronavirus testing.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison then said unvaccinated players would be permitted to enter the country if they received an exemption, which the host state Victoria would need to apply for on behalf of players. But Victoria state Premier Daniel Andrews quickly ruled that out.

Nine-time Australian Open champion Djokovic said despite Andrews's statement he would await official confirmation on the requirements from Tennis Australia. "I am going to decide on whether I go to Australia after I see an official statement from Tennis Australia," Djokovic said at his press conference on Sunday on the eve of the Paris Masters.

"There has been no official announcement or statement and until that is out, I won't be talking about this anymore. I do not want to be part of the stories about the assumptions and what ifs. When the official conditions and requirements to travel and play in Australia are out I will see what I personally do and also the bigger group of

players as obviously the situation is different in Australia to most parts of the world."

"Touched my heart"

Djokovic was keener to focus on ending the season as world number one as he makes his return to the circuit for the first time since Daniil Medvedev ended his hopes of a Grand Slam sweep in September's US Open final.

Medvedev, the defending champion in Paris, is seeking to topple 20-time Grand Slam champion Djokovic from the number one spot. Both of them enjoyed a training session together last week and Djokovic says the 'Octopus' as Medvedev is referred to has really tightened up his game.

"The biggest weapon of his (Medvedev) game is his backhand, he is as strong as a wall from that side, he just does not miss," said 34-year-old Djokovic. "His forehand side has been weaker in previous years but he has improved that a lot and it is not a big weakness. He is very professional and a very smart player on court, he is game savvy."

Djokovic says he has been training well but admits a "lack of match play could be dangerous" although he believes he has not been damaged mentally by dreams of being the first man to sweep a calendar Grand Slam since 1969 dashed.

"Well I have learned over the years to deal with losses in such a way as to treat them as opportunities for growth," he said. "The loss in the US Open final has arrived arguably at the worst or the best time for me! I feel like I was blessed to experience the love from the crowd which I never experienced in my life in New York or in many places round the world. The energy I received from the crowd is a win for life, it touched my heart." — AFP