

Kuwait Times
Established 1961

Friday Times

ISSUE NO: 18588

RABIA ALTHANI 14, 1443 AH | FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2021

60th
1961-2021
ANNIVERSARY

FREE



Kuwait, Saudi, US joint drill to safeguard region's security

See Pages 4-7

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: People walk on a footbridge during sunset in Kuwait. _ Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Suicide: Breaking the silence and helping out



JUST KIDDIN', SERIOUSLY

By Sahar Moussa

sahar@kuwaittimes.net

What are the reasons that make a person commit suicide? Is it depression, debts, addiction, bullying, family violence, physical or sexual abuse, losing a job, emotional pain or lack of faith? People of all genders, ages, and ethnicities can be at risk for suicide; that is why we should never disregard the warning signs. If you hear someone talking about wanting to die or kill themselves, feeling empty or hopeless or having no reason to live, feeling trapped or feeling that there are no solutions, feeling unbearable emotional or physical pain, talking about being a burden to others, talking or thinking about death often, withdrawing from family and friends and saying goodbye to them - know for sure that this person needs help. All thoughts of suicide should be taken seriously and require immediate attention.

We always hear on the news about the number of people who commit suicide and their nationalities, but we never hear the causes behind it. We read the doctors' analyses and reports and also hear various rumors, but what we should do is to deeply investigate the main reasons behind these attempts and highlight them.

I do understand that suicide is considered to be a taboo subject in the Arab world, but it is very important that families share and talk about it in public and spread awareness about the main reasons behind it. Families should reveal secrets in order to help other families that are going through the same situation. Maybe this can help and prevent someone else from committing suicide. Family and friends are often the first to recognize the warning signs of suicide, and they can take the first step towards helping a loved one find treatment for mental health. However, there must also be a platform to discuss these topics openly, to find solutions and save lives. It is also important that we increase mental health awareness in society and end the stigma surrounding it, so people will be more encouraged to seek help. As a community, our duty is to stand by each other and be involved in people's sufferings and pain, so we can ease them and save lives.

The latest suicide cases by citizens and residents raises a red flag, as many of them used various means and methods in

ending their lives. Unfortunately, suicides reached 120 cases from January until November 2021 - around 12 cases per month, according to official statistics. Security sources said a majority of these suicides are committed by Asians, with cases increasing since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic.

If someone tells you that they are going to kill themselves, do not leave them alone. Encourage them to seek help, or if they couldn't, then urge them to tell a trusted friend or family member about their negative thoughts or feelings. If you are feeling suicidal or have serious thoughts of depression and self-harm, you can reach out to professionals at the social development office by calling:

+965/9470-2266
+965/6602-2448
+965/9333-2007
+965/9960-3997 (children and teens)

For adults only:
+965/9967-0675
+965/6622-0282
+965/6507-9596

Phones are answered at various hours depending on staff availability. Please know that you are not alone. Don't give up. Your life matters.

Local

British-Kuwaiti society awards writers on Mideast

LONDON: The British-Kuwait Friendship Society held yesterday a ceremony distributing awards for the best English-language book on studies on the Middle East under the sponsorship of Sheikh Mubarak Abdullah Al-Mubarak Foundation. Names of the winners of Abdullah Al-Mubarak prize were declared during the virtual ceremony and jurors lauded several books on the Middle East history. The top award was divided by the writer Marina Rustow for her book "The Lost Archive: Traces of a Caliphate at a Cairo Synagogue" and Zeina Maasri for her book, "Cosmopolitan Radicalism: The Visual Politics of Beirut's Global Sixties." The first book was published by Princeton University Press and the second one by Cambridge University Press.

Khaled Al-Duwaisan, the State of Kuwait's Ambassador to the UK, lauded in a statement during the gathering the award role in boosting the Arab-British relations, particularly in the cultural and scientific realms. Managing personnel of the award are keen on holding such a contest annually due to its positive impact on the cultural relations between the UK and Kuwait, he said. Representative of the foundation Sheikh Mubarak Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah affirmed in remarks to the press significance of the prize for establishing bridges of understanding and rapprochement among states and promoting the dialogue among civilizations.

He has affirmed that the prize is designed to back up valuable researches in English, also indicating that such valuable books can be quite useful in the efforts to bridge the gulf and tackle misunderstanding between the Western and Arab cultures. The prize, which attracts around 50 nominations from some 20 publishers each year, is granted for the best scholarly work on the Middle East. The British-Kuwaiti Friendship Society, headed by the Kuwaiti ambassador, was established in 1996. Among the honorary heads are Sheikh Dr Suad Al-Sabah, and the British Heir Apparent Prince Charles. — KUNA



Sheikh Mubarak Abdullah Al-Mubarak



Khaled Al-Duwaisan

UAE's anthem, an everyday reality

By Dr Nermin Al-Houti

On October 1st, the Dubai 2020 Expo minaret was lit, making the world's skies bright right out of Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates. The UAE had the honor to be selected as the host country to have expo 2020 on its land. Yet, my column will not be about what I saw in the audio-visual art techniques, in a fully integrated show that had the ingredients to reach the world, and it is true that those who brought it to life made it the story of the world.

When I was watching the opening ceremony on TV, I was drawn by the UAE national anthem and its sublime meaning. Not only that, but the beautiful thing is not only the meaning of words, but rather the anthem is a tangible reality with what we have seen through the opening of the "expo of peace".

When the ceremony was over, I looked up the lyrics of the UAE anthem, and found out that it is a patriotic message the forefathers had instilled in their children who continue the mission towards the building of their country and human being. It is so beautiful to see words transformed into reality.

The lyrics of UAE anthem are:

Long live my country, the unity of our Emirates lives. You have lived for a nation whose religion is Islam and guide is the Quran.

I made you stronger in God's name - Oh, homeland! My country, my country.

Allah has protected you from evils of the time.

We have sworn to build and work - work sincerely!

As long as we live, we will be sincere.

The safety has lasted, and the flag has lived - Oh, our Emirates!

The symbol of Arabism.

We will sacrifice for you and give you our blood.

We sacrifice for you with our souls - Oh, homeland!

On the occasion of the

60th
1961 - 2021
ANNIVERSARY



Subscribe or renew your subscription
KD 20 instead of KD 30 for 1 year

For individuals only

Tel: 24833199 ext.: 163-325-353- 354 or 66500982



kuwaittimes.net

Kuwait, Saudi, US joint drill to safeguard region's security

'Gulf Shooting 2021' military exercise concludes in Adira

By Nawara Fattahova

Kuwait's Defense Ministry held the final training of 'Gulf Shooting 2021' - a joint drill of the Kuwaiti army, units of the royal Saudi forces, and Task Force Spartan of the US Army Central yesterday in Adira.

It was attended by the Minister of Interior and Acting Minister of Defense Sheikh Thamer Ali Al-Sabah, Chief of

the General Staff of Kuwait Army Lt Gen Khaled Al-Sabah, Saudi and US Ambassadors, and other officers of the participating army forces.

During the event, Sheikh Thamer Ali Al-Sabah noted that the Gulf Shooting 2021 training constitutes a deterrent for any evil intentions against Kuwait or Saudi Arabia, highlighting the systematic defense cooperation between the GCC countries, particularly Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

Maj Gen Mohammed Al-Dhafiri, the Commander of the Kuwaiti Land Force, said that this training represents the cooperation and friendship of the participating joint forces. "This training included lectures and field trainings. It aims to unify the meaning of training, planning, and executing joint land operations to reach coherence between the participating units at the tactical and operational levels," he pointed out.



Local

Friday, November 19, 2021



KUWAIT: Minister of Interior and Acting Minister of Defense Sheikh Thamer Ali Al-Sabah greets participants in the 'Gulf Shooting 2021' military exercise. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Lt Gen Fahad Al-Mtair, Commander of the Royal Saudi Land Forces, expressed his gladness to participate in this joint training, which included different military and field operations. "This training aims to raise the readiness and capability of the participating forces to protect the security of the Arabian Gulf and the region in general," he said.

"Such trainings increase the military cooperation of joint military operations to reach proficiency in this field. It also aims to exchange experiences for future military operations.

I am glad that this training was successful, and we thank the Kuwaiti forces for their hospitality," added Mtair.

Colonel Ruppel-Lee, TFS G3 (Duty Force Operations Manager), stated that the participating joint forces spent the last 10 days with lots of training with Bradley tanks, medical training, and other exercise.

"The soldiers came together and learned how to communicate both with simple words, and they started to use operational graphics to draw on the map, and then everybody

understood each other. And when they got inside the tank or the Bradley, they understood each other's jobs and learned different tactic techniques and procedures from each other. And today, we saw the result of their hard work and training," stressed Ruppel-Lee.

The training showed shooting with rocket launchers of the joint forces on their target, Apache helicopter firing, and paratroopers with Kuwaiti, Saudi, and US flags.

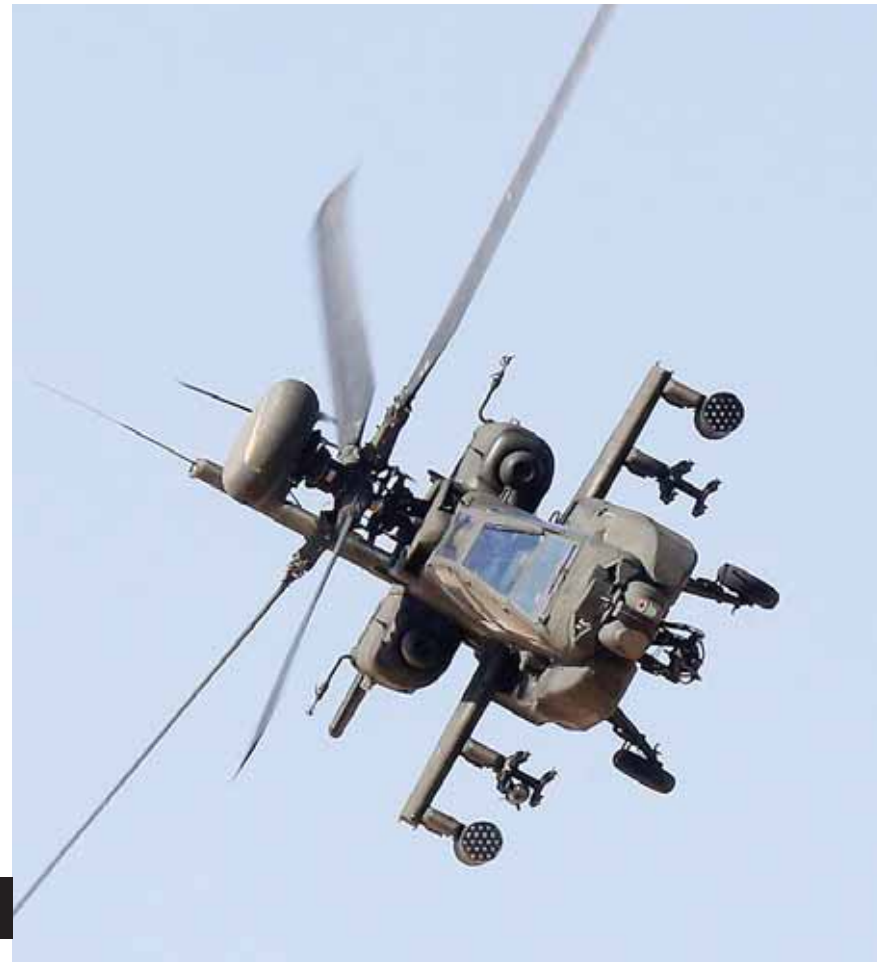




Paratroopers waving (left to right) the Kuwaiti, Saudi and US flags, jump with parachutes during the military exercise.



Kuwaiti Apache helicopters take part in the military exercise.



Local



Scenes from the joint military drill.

Local

US envoy marks int'l education, global entrepreneurship weeks

KUWAIT: The US Embassy in Kuwait marked International Education Week with an event on Wednesday at the creative arts studio Yadawi, located in Kuwait's historic Bayt Al-Othman Museum, to promote international education and exchanges between the United States and Kuwait. The gathering also coincided with Global Entrepreneurship Week, a week-long celebration of innovation and entrepreneurship. US Ambassador to Kuwait Alina L Romanowski gave opening remarks at the event, which included nearly 50 Kuwaiti graduates - entrepreneurs, artists, and more - from various US universities in attendance.

"As someone who did their graduate and undergraduate studies in history and international relations, I know that education and exchanges can play a transformational role in international relations because they help foster cultural understanding. At the end of the day, it's the people-to-people ties and networks that support strong relations between our countries," Ambassador Romanowski said.

"During my time as Ambassador in Kuwait I have met so many successful Kuwaiti men and women of all ages who graduated from US colleges and universities," the Ambassador added. "Kuwait has a long history of sending students to the US for their studies, going as far back as seven decades."

Ambassador Romanowski highlighted the release of the 2020-21 report from the International Institute of Education, a global non-profit that creates and implements international education programs and conducts related research.

"The latest report from the International Institute of Education covering academic year 2020-2021 was just released, and although there was a drop in the number of international students going to the United States due to COVID-19, including from Kuwait, we still



US Ambassador to Kuwait Alina L Romanowski attends the event.



A general view showing people in attendance.

had around 7,000 Kuwaiti students in the US in the last academic year," she said. "As we find ways to live, work, and study during the pandemic, we have found ways to continue to safely bring international students to America."

To inspire more Kuwaiti students to study in the United States, Ambassador Romanowski also announced the continuation of an embassy grant, the Future Creatives Mentorship Program, to Shahad Bishara, founder of Kuwait-based art consultancy Visual Therapy. The program connects high school students in Kuwait with established creative professionals from different industries within the arts community in Kuwait. The program is part of wider efforts to empower and inspire young artists and nurture the creative community.

"Careers in the creative arts are not always as well-understood compared to others, but I believe that they are some of the most entrepreneurial in nature. The US Embassy is proud to partner with Visual Therapy to help fund this unique program," Ambassador Romanowski said.

"By connecting students with successful artists from a variety of fields, all of them graduates from schools in the United States, we hope to inspire the next generation of Kuwaiti artists and entrepreneurs and provide them with mentorship opportunities to succeed both creatively as well as professionally and consider the United States as a destination for future studies," the US Ambassador added.



KUWAIT: A group photo taken during the 'Kimchi Table 2021' event at the Embassy of the Republic of Korea.

Korea embassy hosts 'Kimchi Table 2021'

KUWAIT: The Embassy of the Republic of Korea to the State of Kuwait in association with the Korean Food Promotion Institute organized a Korean food contest under the title 'Kimchi Table 2021' at its premises on Wednesday. The contest was held in Cooperation with the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL), and with sponsorship of Qatar Airways and Safir Hotel.

Delivering welcoming remarks on this occasion, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to the State of Kuwait Chung, Byung-ha attended the event, while Mohammad Redha, Representative of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters also attended. The Embassy invited 10 judges to the contest who have special knowledge and experience in Kimchi to ensure fair and professional assessment of the dishes.

Six contestants, comprising famous hotel chefs and social media cooking influencers, took part in the contest after passing through the preliminary screening process. The con-

testants, who were divided into two groups, prepared several variant fusion dishes using Kimchi. Videos of the contestants were screened after the speeches, adding to the sense of pride and enthusiasm in the contest.

At the end of the contest, the panel of judges selected two winners, one from each group. The winners are Ramu Naidu from the hotel chefs' group and Mimi Murad from the Instagram influencers' group. The winners were offered two round-trip tickets to Korea presented by Qatar Airways in addition to giving them the chance to attend a Korean cooking class organized by Korean Food Promotion Institute.

Kimchi is preserved vegetables seasoned with unique spices and fermented seafood that are stored for a specific period of time before being eaten. According to historical records, Koreans used to make Kimchi and eat it even before 760 AD. Kimchi is a unique Korean food that is deeply related to the identity of Koreans to the extent that UNESCO inscribed Kimjang, an activity of making and sharing Kimchi on its Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2013. Recently, Kimchi is admired as a healthy food across America, Europe and several Asian countries along with expansion of Hallyu wave.

Kuwait, Thailand sign diplomatic visa exemption deal

BANGKOK: Kuwait and Thailand signed an agreement on Wednesday on mutual visa exemption for holders of diplomatic, special and official passports, the Thai embassy in Kuwait announced. Thani Thongphakdi, Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand, and Mohammad Husain Al-Failakawi, Ambassador of the State of Kuwait to Thailand, signed the agreement between the government of the Kingdom of Thailand and the State of Kuwait. The agreement is an important milestone for Thailand and Kuwait relations which will commemorate their 60th anniversary of the diplomatic relations in 2023, the embassy said in a statement to the press yesterday.

On this occasion, the Permanent Secretary reiterated the opportunity to expand and strengthen cooperation between Thailand and Kuwait in various fields, such as hospitality sector, energy, food and agriculture, as well as the new technology such as internet of thing (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI) and cybersecurity.

The Permanent Secretary also pointed out that the Thai private sector has been paying more attention to the potential of Kuwait and is ready to increase its investment in Kuwait. Similarly, Thailand wishes to encourage companies from Kuwait to explore trade and investment opportunities in Thailand. This agreement will, therefore, play a crucial role in facilitating and enhancing cooperation between both countries in order to achieve these goals, he said.



BANGKOK: Thani Thongphakdi, Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand, and Mohammad Husain Al-Failakawi, Ambassador of the State of Kuwait to Thailand, are seen after signing the agreement.

Local

Kuwait identifies 19 remains of POWs, missing persons

Total number of identified POWs reaches 293

KUWAIT: Kuwait identified the remains of 19 Kuwaiti Prisoners of War (POWs) and missing persons upon DNA tests by the General Administration of Criminal Evidence, said head of the Committee of POWs and Missing Persons Affairs at the Foreign Ministry Ambassador Rabie Al-Adsani yesterday. The remains belong to the following martyrs: Bader Mubarak Al-Buraisi, Bader Met'eb Al-Mutairi, Hussein Al-Shimmari, Khaled Duaij Al-Khaledi, Sa'ad Mansour Al-Ajmi, Saud Nayef Al-Dhaihani, Saeed Awaadh Al-Rashidi, Salah Hussin Al-Enizi, Fares Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, Fares Mohammad Al-Enizi, Fawaz Butaihan Al-Mutairi, Mohammad Humoud Al-Hula, Mohammad Abdulatif Al-Kharaz, Mekhled Jubairan Al-Dhaihani, Mousa Sattar Al-Enizi, Nayef Khalaf Al-Enizi, Nayef Awaad Al-Rashidi, Nayef Mehmel Al-Mutairi, and Waleed Mekhled Al-Buraisi.

Adsani said that the prisoners had been arrested during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and their remains were included in the previous batches received in November 2020 as well as January and March of 2021. He also added that the foreign min-

istry informed the martyrs' families of the status of their loved ones. Adsani thanked the Iraqi authorities, the members of the tripartite and technical subcommittee, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) for their efforts through the work of the subcommittee.

'Will not forget'

Meanwhile, the Kuwait Martyr's Office said that the State of Kuwait, including its leadership, government and people, would never forget the prisoners of war, missing persons and martyrs. The office's Director-General Salah Al-Awfan made the press remark immediately following the identification of the remains of 19 Kuwaiti prisoners of war and missing persons. He added that the total number of identified POWs has thus reached 293. He said that

they had sacrificed themselves for the sake of Kuwait and set an awesome example for patriotism, self-sacrifice and valiance.

Awfan noted that this came in collaboration between the Kuwaiti General Administration of Criminal Evidence, the Foreign

“Kuwait will not forget its martyrs”



Ministry's committee on the affairs of POWs and missing persons and reflects that the political leadership, led by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Minister of Amiri Diwan and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Martyr's Office Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, attaches much significance to the issue of Kuwaiti POWs and missing persons. — KUNA

Air travel costs to some destinations from Kuwait drop

KUWAIT: Air travel fares have recently dropped by 50 to 200 percent to some destinations after resuming full-capacity operations at Kuwait International Airport as of October 24. According to tourism and travel experts, Kuwaiti citizens and residents are eager to travel amid receding repercussions of the coronavirus crisis locally and abroad, where many countries have reopened borders. Airfares had soared due to the limited number of offered tickets, the experts said, noting that the pandemic issue had resulted in closing most airports across the globe and impounding aircraft, thus travel companies suffered heavy losses forcing some to shut.

Fayez Al-Enezi, Head of Kuwait Airways' Media and Public Relations Department, said that the corporation increased flights after the cabinet decided to resume full-capacity operations at Kuwait International Airport, effective October 24. He expressed hope that air travel would be restored to the pre-coronavirus levels, affirming that Kuwait Airways is fully ready and prepared to service many passengers at Terminal 4.

Kamal Kabsha, a tourism expert, said that the tickets' prices dropped by more than 200 percent, namely for the departing flights, however, the fares for incoming ones remained high. Airfares are largely affected by demand and offer as well as costs of main operations, he said, also noting that booking increased by 20 percent before the full resumption of the airport operations. The path for full restoration of air aviation is not totally paved yet due to a set of reasons such as health constraints imposed by states, namely obligatory quarantines and PCR tests in addition to peoples' concerns of infection as well as uneasy measures at some airports. Full recovery of the travel and air navigation sectors is forecast late 2022 and early 2023, however, the prediction is conditional to vaccinations' capacity to quell the pandemic

and easing of the health restrictions, Kabsha said.

Meanwhile, Nassib Adnan, the deputy director of a travel agency, said the Kuwaiti Cabinet decision to re-operate the airport fully contributed to cutting the airfares by more than 50 percent to some destinations namely Turkey, Egypt, France, and Germany. The costs for traveling to some destinations such as the UAE, Britain, India, and the Philippines have remained high as compared to the airfares before the contagion outbreak. He predicted a gradual recovery of the sector in the foreseeable future. IATA, the International Air Transport Association, predicted in a recently issued report that the local travel demand would increase in phases and reach the pre-pandemic levels in 2022. It also foresaw a decline of the sector losses to \$51.8 billion in the end of 2021 and to \$12 billion in 2022, compared to \$137.7 billion in 2020, when the coronavirus was widely spread inflicting heavy casualties worldwide and paralyzing many sectors namely the air navigation. — KUNA



Visa trafficking returns: Report

KUWAIT: Following the crackdowns on visa traffickers since the coronavirus pandemic started during which thousands of residency violators were found in Kuwait, the illegal practice returned after related authorities resumed issuance of visas. Al-Qabas Arabic daily reported yesterday that a market for work permits and residency transfer appeared in social media, through which mandoubs offer services to process work permits and commercial visas, in addition to residency transfers, and each transaction has a price. The report notes that brokers noticeably rely on a new aspect to bring in laborers, which is the commercial visas with prices reaching KD 400 for a one-month non-transferable visa, while the price of the transferable visa reaches KD 1,000.

The price of the business visa varies between KD 1,500 and KD 1,700 as the buyers get a residency permit with a job description matching their academic qualification. Other mandoubs also promote services to transfer residencies between companies with government, private or vocational contracts. The transfer price varies between KD 500 to KD 650, while the visa price for a driver's job reaches up to KD 700. An official source at the Public Authority for Manpower said most bogus companies' brokers are active in Egypt and India to bring job seekers to Kuwait.

The source said that bogus companies and visa traffickers will be pursued, adding that the referral of around 2,000 bogus companies to the public prosecution since the start of the pandemic revealed many of those responsible for bringing in random laborers. He said the labor protection sector and inspection department are dealing with tens of complaints daily and investigations are being conducted in each complaint to find whether there is a link with visa trafficking or not.



Canada death toll set to rise; floods ravage Pacific coast

Philippines accuses Chinese vessels of firing water cannon at its boats

Page 18

Page 13



LONDON: A handout photograph released by the UK Parliament shows Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson speaking during Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs) in the House of Commons in London. —AFP

UK's Johnson admits mistake in handling sleaze as MPs grill him

LONDON: UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson defended his botched bid to overhaul parliament's standards system that has prompted a weeks-long sleaze crisis for the ruling Conservatives, as he faced a grilling from lawmakers on Wednesday. With opposition parties on the attack and rank-and-file Tory MPs deeply unhappy, the embattled British leader admitted he had made a "mistake", as senior colleagues quizzed him for two hours at a scrutiny session held three times a year.

That came shortly after angry exchanges with Labor leader Keir Starmer - and, unusually, House of Commons Speaker Lindsay Hoyle - over accusations of improper conduct, and before he met Conservative lawmakers for a separate inquisition. Johnson's grueling day follows several weeks of controversy kickstarted by his failed attempt to overhaul the internal system policing MPs, just as Tory Owen Paterson faced suspension over lobbying ministers for two firms that had him on the payroll.

"It was a total mistake not to see that Owen's breach of the rules... made any discus-

sion about anything else impossible," Johnson told parliament's most senior cross-party watchdog committee. "The intention genuinely was not to exonerate anybody. The intention was to see whether there was some way in which, on a cross-party basis, we could improve the system. "In retrospect, it was obviously mistaken to think that we could conflate the two things," Johnson added, adding that he regretted the move.

Hours earlier, Starmer branded Johnson a "coward" for refusing to apologize for his role in the saga — a remark the Labor leader later withdrew. Johnson also clashed with the normally mild-tempered Hoyle over his behavior during weekly "prime minister's questions", as he tried to turn the tables by demanding answers from Starmer.

"You may be the prime minister of this country, but in this House, I'm in charge!" Hoyle bellowed, ordering the British leader to "sit down". Westminster has been consumed since late October by the row about MPs supplementing their publicly funded salaries with

lucrative second jobs, stoking accusations of conflicts of interest. Paterson's conduct soon became overshadowed by revelations that numerous other MPs had high-paying second jobs, in particular lawyer and former attorney general Geoffrey Cox.

He has been accused of using his parliamentary office for outside legal work, which has netted him more than £6 million (\$8 million, 7 million euros) since becoming an MP in 2005, on top of his annual MP's salary — currently around £82,000. Paterson has since resigned from parliament, while Cox denies breaking the rules. British lawmakers are permitted to hold outside roles, as long as they declare them, but are not allowed to use their parliamentary offices or resources for such work. Paid lobbying is also forbidden, with accusations of wrongdoing probed by parliamentary standards watchdogs.

After a barrage of negative headlines and plummeting poll ratings, Johnson tried to get on the front foot Tuesday by backing proposals to bar lawmakers from acting as paid political

consultants and advisers. The move came as Labour unveiled plans for a Commons vote on banning MPs from such roles as well as being paid directors under a strict timetable, which Starmer said had forced Johnson's hand. The Labor plan lost by 51 votes late Wednesday, with lawmakers instead backing a government amendment calling for a parliamentary committee to propose reforms of a code of conduct for MPs by early next year.

The opposition criticized that as "watered down warm words" and still open to interpretation, and there is also disquiet over its intent in Tory ranks. "Frankly, he just doesn't get it," Starmer said shortly after the vote. "It is unbelievable that after the last few weeks the prime minister has whipped his MPs yet again to vote down a plan of action on standards," he added. At a meeting of his backbench lawmakers Wednesday evening, Johnson reportedly faced discontent. Laura Kuenssberg, the BBC's political editor, said one attendee had texted her afterwards to say he "looked weak and sounded weak... (his) authority is evaporating". — AFP

International

Chile's Pinera: The president defeated by social upheaval

Attempts to calm protests against social injustice were at best clumsy

SANTIAGO: Chile's President Sebastian Pinera modernized the political right to distance it from the Augusto Pinochet dictatorship, but a social crisis that broke out in 2019 will see him leave power with his popularity in tatters. The billionaire leader, 71, who cannot stand for reelection in Sunday's voting, has served two non-consecutive mandates. His second term, which ends in March, has been beset by numerous problems, not least the coronavirus pandemic.

But he has also had to deal with a social uprising, accusations of graft and an impeachment bid that was quashed on Tuesday by the Senate. "The morning after the social outbreak was the end of the Pinera government politically and in terms of influence," elections analyst Axel Callis told AFP. Pinera's early attempts to calm protests against social injustice were at best clumsy. A rich businessman seen as the embodiment of the country's economic, political and institutional injustices, Pinera's martial tone and early decision to deploy the military proved disastrous.

Not long beforehand, he had described Chile as an "oasis" in Latin America due to its robust economy and political stability. Two weeks later, two million Chileans took to the streets demanding change to the country's neo-liberal model. The unprecedented protests convinced parliament to agree to hold a referendum on changing the country's dictatorship-era constitution - and a year later the people voted overwhelmingly (78 percent) in favor of change.

Pinera, who failed to either propose or support the move, again appeared out of touch with the people he governed. "What happened was a change in the axis of power," said Callis. "In one way or another, a parliamentary system was installed, without the corresponding institutionality - Chile is a presidential system - and everything in terms of relevant politics started happening in parliament." The executive found itself confined to the back benches and Pinera "ceased to be a valued, strategic or significant actor."

Popularity plunge

The pandemic could not have hit at a worse time. While Chile can pride itself on its rapid vaccine roll-out - 90 percent of those eligible amongst the 19 million population are fully immunized - the government's procrastination in distributing aid prevented Pinera from regaining the people's trust. Even less so his implication in the Pandora Papers, suspected of a conflict of interests over the sale of a mine by members of his family to a close friend, and completed in a tax haven.

While the Senate blocked opposition attempts to impeach Pinera, he remains the subject of a graft investigation. With five months left of his term, Pinera's popularity has plunged to its lowest level at 12 percent, compared to 50 percent when he ended his first term in 2014. In 2010, the Harvard-educated economist con-



SANTIAGO: Chilean President Sebastian Pinera and his wife Cecilia Morel arrive for a press conference at La Moneda presidential palace in Santiago on November 17, 2021. — AFP

vinced the electorate that his personal success in business - according to Forbes in 2018, Pineras was worth \$2.8 billion - could be transferred to the benefit of society.

He managed to bring back to power a revamped right-wing that had rid itself of the baggage of being associated with Pinochet's dictatorship. During his first term he branded

civilian defenders of the dictatorship as "passive accomplices" and closed a special jail set up for human rights abusers. "Pinera wanted to represent a modern, democratic right-wing," Claudia Heiss, a professor of political sciences at the University of Chile said. "He wanted to definitively end the transition" to democracy and "end the divisions that came from the dictatorship." — AFP

US, Gulf accuse Iran of causing 'nuclear crisis'

WASHINGTON: The United States and its Arab allies in the Gulf accused Iran Wednesday of causing a nuclear crisis and destabilizing the Middle East with ballistic missiles and drones. The warning came in a joint statement issued after a meeting of the US and Gulf Cooperation Council working group on Iran, which was held in Saudi Arabia.

"All participants urged the new Iranian administration to seize the current diplomatic opportunity" stemming from the resumption of talks in Vienna aimed at salvaging the Iranian nuclear accord, and "prevent conflict and crisis," the statement said. These indirect talks between the US and Iran were suspended after Iran elected a new president in June and are now scheduled to resume late this month.

They are aimed at resurrecting the 2015 multinational accord aimed at preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons. The US under then president Donald Trump pulled out of the accord in 2018, and in response

Iran has abandoned many of the commitments it made under that agreement to curb its nuclear program. "Iran has taken steps for which it has no civilian need but that would be important to a nuclear weapons program," said the statement from representatives of the US, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman and Kuwait.

These countries also condemned what they called "a range of aggressive and dangerous Iranian policies including the proliferation and direct use of advanced ballistic missiles" and drones. "Iran's support to armed militias across the region and its ballistic missile program pose a clear threat to regional security and stability," the statement said. Some Gulf countries such as Qatar and Oman are often seen as channels for the US to communicate with Iran.

Saudi Arabia, a Sunni monarchy fiercely opposed to Shiite Iran, has also recently undertaken a quiet but noticeable dialogue with its neighbor under the auspices of Iraq. These Gulf countries "briefed" Washington on "their efforts to build effective diplomatic channels with Iran" in order to ease tensions, albeit with the support of American military dissuasion. "The US and GCC member states stressed that these diplomatic efforts will not succeed if Iran continues to provoke a nuclear crisis," the statement concluded. — AFP

US cars mandated to spot drunk drivers and stop them

WASHINGTON: Breath-sniffing sensors and finger-scanning detectors are central to a landmark US safety mandate to fight drunk driving that is spurring tough questions about what technology can be trusted to do. The federal law, which will require new cars to spot intoxicated drivers in coming years, could save thousands of lives annually with the potential to expand abroad, advocates say. Yet the legislation signed into law this week by President Joe Biden has also left skeptics to question whether vehicles could refuse to operate due to a false positive or effectively become witnesses against their owners in criminal cases.

Ultimately it is up to American regulators to decide what could become international precedent-setting rules. They have not said much so far, but have a potentially extendable three years to work with. The initial reaction though was euphoria for people who battle against alcohol-related crashes in the United States, which permits drivers to have a higher level of booze in their blood than many other developed nations and consistently records a death toll over 10,000 per year. "I'm crying tears of joy today," said Alex Otte, national president of

anti-drunk-driving advocacy group MADD.

"This is the beginning of the end of drunk driving," she wrote in a statement after Biden's law signing ceremony Monday at the White House. The devil is in the details of course, and one of the best options for fielding functional technology to meet the mandate has been under development since 2008 in a collaboration between carmakers and regulators. As part of the Driver Alcohol Detection System for Safety (DADSS), researchers have developed tiny vent-like sensors that draw in a driver's exhaled breath and test it.

Or the driver pushes the ignition button, which measures blood alcohol levels under the skin's surface by shining an infrared-light through the person's fingertip. Anti-cheat functions are built into the system, which could prevent the car from starting or keep it from moving for drivers over the .08 percent blood alcohol limit in most US states, said Robert Strassburger, president of the Automotive Coalition for Traffic Safety (ACTS), which is supported by carmakers.

The DADSS initiative is a partnership between ACTS and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, which did not respond to a request for comment. "We all emit carbon dioxide as we exhale and as long as you are in a range of CO2, then we know that sample was coming from the driver and nowhere else," Strassburger told AFP. As for the touch system, by pressing the ignition button the driver would complete what is effectively a circuit between their seat and the system. — AFP

International

In Ukraine, the latest COVID surge is attacking more kids

Ukraine hit hard by the latest wave of infections

KIEV: Three-month-old Misha has spent 10 days in a Kiev paediatric hospital - including three in intensive care - due to pneumonia triggered by COVID-19. He is one of an influx of young patients to the infectious diseases hospital in Ukraine's capital, which has seen the coronavirus pandemic hit children much harder in recent months. "It's difficult when your baby suffocates, it's very scary," says Misha's mother Katya Verbina. Fixing an oxygen mask on her son, the 29-year-old adds that she has lost seven kilograms due to anxiety since he fell ill.

The Kiev Paediatric Infectious Disease Hospital, a 100-bed facility reserved for children suffering from COVID, began seeing more patients with serious respiratory disorders when Ukraine's latest surge of infections began this autumn. "In the spring, each patient needed 10 liters of oxygen per minute on average", but now "it's 60 liters per minute", says Alina Riazanskykh, the 32-year-old head of the intensive care unit. The latest wave has already brought the first Covid deaths in the hospital since Ukraine's outbreak began in spring 2020: two babies and a disabled eight-year-old boy.

"The treatment didn't work," laments Riazanskykh. One of Europe's poorest countries, ex-Soviet Ukraine has been hit hard by the latest wave of coronavirus infections driven by the Delta variant, which is more contagious and dangerous for children. Yesterday, the country of around 40 million people recorded 752 new deaths from the virus over 24 hours - the third-highest toll in the world after the United States and Russia.

Vaccine hesitancy

A low vaccination rate has worsened the outbreak in Ukraine, where people are hesitant to get a jab despite repeated calls from the authorities and four available vaccines - Pfizer, Moderna, As-



KIEV: A woman holds an oxygen mask over the face of her baby suffering from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in a ward of a children's hospital in Kiev. — AFP

traZeneca and Chinese-made Coronavac. While the vaccination drive has accelerated in recent weeks after authorities imposed restrictions on the unvaccinated entering public places, less than a third of adult Ukrainians were fully vaccinated as of today.

Faced with a jab-sceptic population, President Volodymyr Zelensky announced this week payments of around 35 euros (\$40) to everyone who is fully vaccinated. The initiative has been denounced as "populist" by Zelensky's opponents, but 49-year-old infectious

disease doctor Vitaliy Yevtushenko sees it as "a normal practice" and pleads for children to be vaccinated as well.

Ukraine last month authorized minors aged from 12 to 17 to be able to get the Pfizer jab. So far only some 30,000 young people have received at least one dose, the health ministry told AFP. Out of nearly 3.2 million total coronavirus infections, almost 180,000 cases, including 288 fatalities, have involved minors. Like many other mothers of hospitalized children, Sasha Voytenko, 23, plans to be vaccinated "quickly" after she leaves the hospital with her one-month-old daughter.

Schools closed

But many Ukrainians are against doing so - sometimes even those whose children are infected with the virus. Oksana Potapchuk - who herself is vaccinated - has spent three days in hospital with her 8-year-old son Roman, who is fed up with wearing his oxygen mask and taking endless blood tests. But Potapchuk is against her 12-year-old daughter getting the jab.

"I have not seen reliable studies on these vaccines," the 32-year-old manicurist says. Liliya Gorodskykh, whose 2-year-old son is in intensive care suffering from pleurisy, is among the few who plan to vaccinate their children. "We will likely vaccinate him" if he becomes eligible, said the 27-year-old teacher, comforting her crying boy.

To curb the spread of the virus among children, Kiev authorities ordered the closure of schools in early November, in a move that angered many parents. Medical workers, however, support the decision. "We feel the effect," says doctor Riazanskykh, whose unit now has only one patient out of six beds - all of which were occupied just last week. But with schools reopening Monday, the break may have been limited. "We'll see what happens in a week," Tetyana Kaminska said. "There will most likely be another outbreak." — AFP

Down in a hole: Bosnia miners fear green revolution

BREZA: For years, life in Bosnia's Breza revolved around its coal mine, but the global shift from fossil fuels to renewables threatens the industry that was once the pride of communist Yugoslavia. Armel Jekalovic and other miners, once hailed as local heroes who brought home steady incomes, now fear theirs could be the last generation to earn a living from Bosnia's coalfields. "This situation around the energy transition worries us," says Jekalovic, 36, who oversees the operations at the mine northwest of Sarajevo. "Production is constantly decreasing, as are the number of employees. People don't feel safe and are looking for an alternative."

The recent COP26 agreement in Glasgow saw nations agree a pledge to "phase down" the use of coal, one of the world's leading sources of pollution. Experts anticipate that none of Bosnia's remaining 11 coal mines will remain operational in the coming decades as eco pressure grows and the country seeks to clean up as it courts EU membership. The Breza mine employs 1,100 people, supporting more than 70 percent of the 14,000 inhabitants living in this area of central Bosnia, according to Jekalovic.

But the spectre of green reforms is not the only challenge facing the industry's workforce. Miners often struggle to move on and retire due to their employers' years-long failure to contribute to their pensions. The unpaid contributions alone account for half of the industry's 500 million euros debt pile, leading to protests that have done little to improve the situation. "The miner was once respected, he was an icon," explains Jekalovic, whose father and grandfather were both miners. — AFP

Trump ally in Congress publicly shamed over violent video

WASHINGTON: US lawmakers censured a Trump loyalist on Wednesday for posting an animated video depicting the legislator killing a colleague and attacking President Joe Biden, in a rare move underlining the enmity between opposing sides of Congress. Far right congressman Paul Gosar was forced to endure a public shaming by the House of Representatives as he was called to present himself in the "well" of the lower chamber for the "pronouncement of the censure."

The Arizona Republican was made to listen in silence as Democrats spent more than an hour rebuking him for what they called workplace harassment and encouraging violence against women. "We cannot have members joking about murdering each other or threatening the president of the United States," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said before the censure.

"This is both an endangerment of our elected officials and an insult to the institution of the House of Representatives." A censure resolution is the most severe form of punishment in the House and just a handful of members have faced the sanction over the last century - most recently 11 years ago. Gosar also joined fellow Trumpist agitator Marjorie Taylor Greene as the second House Republican to lose their position on House committees this year.

Gosar removed the video - which received millions of views - after a backlash but has not expressed any regret in

public or apologized to his targets. In a defiant speech before lawmakers, Gosar argued that he was the victim of censorship, absurdly comparing himself to Founding Father Alexander Hamilton, who was the target of a failed censure vote in the late 18th century.

'Inflammatory language'

He denied that the video represented a threat of violence, arguing that he was trying to start a conversation about illegal immigration. He did not explain why a video about undocumented migrants would single out Ocasio-Cortez, a third generation New Yorker and a lifelong American citizen with roots in Puerto Rico, a US territory. Opposition lawmakers have complained that there should have been an ethics investigation before any punishment was meted out, and only two out of 213 voted to hold Gosar to account. House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy downplayed the conspiracy theorist's behavior, and suggested Democrats should be concentrating on addressing inflation rather than bringing Gosar to account. He accused the majority party of double standards over their softer handling of congresswomen Maxine Waters and Ilhan Omar, who have both been criticized for inflammatory language.

"They're destroying this institution, silencing the minority, and therefore silencing millions of Americans," he said. Ocasio-Cortez accused McCarthy of displaying a nihilistic contempt for the work of the House. "It is a sad day in which a member who leads a political party in the United States of America cannot bring themselves to say that issuing a depiction of murdering a member of Congress is wrong and instead decides to venture off into a tangent about gas prices and inflation," she said. "What is so hard what is so hard about saying that this is wrong?" —AFP

International

Two found guilty of Malcolm X murder 'to be exonerated'

An admission of a historic miscarriage of justice

NEW YORK: Two men found guilty of the 1965 assassination of civil rights leader Malcolm X are to have their convictions thrown out, one of them posthumously, in an admission by US authorities of a historic miscarriage of justice. Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance will hold a press conference to announce the exoneration of Muhammad A. Aziz and Khalil Islam, his office said Wednesday. Aziz, 83, was sentenced to life in prison in 1966 but was released in 1985. Also sentenced to life, Islam was released in 1987 and died in 2009. "These men did not get the justice that they deserved," Vance said in an interview with The New York Times. "What we can do is acknowledge the error, the severity of the error."

The newspaper said that a 22-month investigation conducted jointly by the Manhattan district attorney's office and lawyers for the two men found that prosecutors, the FBI and the

New York Police Department withheld evidence that would likely have led to the acquittal of the two men. A third man, Mujahid Abdul Halim, 80, confessed to Malcolm X's murder and was released from prison in 2010. Halim claimed during their 1966 trial that Aziz and Islam were innocent.

All three were members of the Black nationalist group Nation of Islam, which Malcolm X had recently renounced. Malcolm X was shot dead by three gunmen on February 21, 1965 as he prepared to deliver a speech in a Manhattan ballroom. Halim was taken into custody at the scene with a bullet wound to the leg. Aziz and Islam were arrested several days later. Both denied involvement in the assassination and provided alibis for where they were at the time of the shooting.

Aziz said in a statement Wednesday that "the

events that brought us here should never have occurred; those events were and are the result of a process that was corrupt to its core — one that is all too familiar — even in 2021." "While I do not need a court, prosecutors, or a piece of paper to tell me I am innocent, I am glad that my family, my friends, and the attorneys who have worked and supported me all these years are finally seeing the truth we have all known, officially recognized," he added.

Innocence Project

According to the Manhattan district attorney's office, the press conference will also be attended by civil rights attorney David Shanie and Barry Scheck, co-director of the Innocence Project. Shanie and the Innocence Project, a nonprofit which has secured the exoneration of hundreds of wrongfully convicted prisoners in

the United States, collaborated with Vance's office in re-investigating the case. The review of the case followed the release of a Netflix docuseries "Who Killed Malcolm X?" The Times said the re-investigation did not identify "who prosecutors now believe really killed Malcolm X, and those who were previously implicated but never arrested are dead."

"Nor did it uncover a police or government conspiracy to murder him," the newspaper said. "It also left unanswered questions about how and why the police and the federal government failed to prevent the assassination." Considered one of the most influential African Americans of the 20th century along with Martin Luther King Jr, Malcolm X was an outspoken advocate of Black rights. Born Malcolm Little in 1925, he fell into petty crime as a young man and became a devout follower of Islam while in prison. — AFP

Convicted murderer executed in Mississippi

MISSISSIPPI: A 50-year-old man convicted of murdering his estranged wife and sexually assaulting his step-daughter was executed on Wednesday in the southern US state of Mississippi, local media said. David Cox, a former truck driver, was put to death by lethal injection at the Mississippi State Penitentiary in Parchman. "I want my children to know that I love them very much and that I was a good man at one time," Cox said in his last words,

according to state department of corrections commissioner Burl Cain, the Clarion Ledger newspaper reported. "Don't ever read anything but the King James bible. I want to thank the commissioner for being so very kind to me. And that's all I got to say," Cox reportedly said.

In 2009, Cox's wife Kim Cox told police that Cox had sexually assaulted her daughter from a previous relationship. Cox spent nine months in prison before being released on bond. After his release, he bought a handgun and broke

into a home where Kim Cox was staying with their two young sons and her daughter. After shooting his estranged wife, Cox sexually assaulted his then 12-year-old step-daughter in front of her dying mother.

Cox was sentenced to death in 2012 after pleading guilty to murder, sexual assault and other charges. Three years ago, Cox began writing to the courts to ask that his lawyers, who were seeking to halt his execution, be fired and that his execution be allowed to go ahead. In one letter, he described himself as a "guilty man worthy of death." In another, he asked a judge to set a date to "execute my body for crimes of in which I did committ (sic) in premeditation, anger and joy." — AFP



David Cox



ABBOTSFORD, BC: A view of flooding in the Sumas Prairie area of Abbotsford British Columbia, Canada, on November 17, 2021. — AFP

Canada death toll set to rise; floods ravage Pacific coast

ABBOTSFORD: Canada is sending the military to help evacuate and support communities hit by "catastrophic" flooding, with the death toll expected to rise after record rainfall on the Pacific coast triggered a state of emergency Wednesday. Officials said downpours in British Columbia this week trapped motorists in mudslides that left at least one dead and four missing, forced thousands of people to flee their homes, and cut off Vancouver and its port. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, in Washington ahead of meeting with his US and Mexican counterparts, said the heavy rains caused "historical and terrible flooding that has disrupted the lives and taken lives of people across BC."

"I can confirm there are hundreds of Canadian Armed Forces members currently headed to British Columbia to help with every-

thing from supplies to evacuation to whatever is needed," he said. British Columbia Premier John Horgan declared a state of emergency and imposed a travel ban, telling reporters "catastrophic" rains, winds and flooding "have devastated entire communities of our province."

"We expect to confirm even more fatalities in the coming days," he added. This week's extreme weather comes after British Columbia suffered record-high summer temperatures that killed more than 500 people, as well as wildfires that destroyed a town. "These events are increasing in regularity because of the effects of human-caused climate change," Horgan commented, just days after world leaders met in Glasgow for the COP26 climate conference.

By Tuesday afternoon the torrential rains had let up. An estimated 300 motorists trapped on highways by mudslides have been airlifted to safety and a few evacuation orders have been rescinded. But Henry Braun, mayor of hard-hit Abbotsford east of Vancouver, told a briefing: "We're not out of this yet." "If we have another weather event like we just went through, we are in deep doo doo," he said. Meanwhile, searches continue for more possible victims, after a woman's body was recovered from a mudslide near Lillooet, 250 kilometers northeast of Vancouver. — AFP

Virtual visas: Barbados says to open first 'metaverse' embassy

Clients to get consular services virtually

BRIDGETOWN: Tiny Caribbean nation Barbados has laid claim to establishing what it says will be the first diplomatic embassy in the metaverse - a virtual reality version of the internet. The announcement was sparse on details, but Barbados said this week that clients would be able to get consular services virtually once the project is up and running. Authorities on the island of just under 300,000 people did not offer a start date, but noted they have signed a deal with metaverse platform Decentraland and are finalizing agreements with two others.

Metaverse has become a buzzword for the future of the internet, especially since social media giant Facebook has made a multi-billion-dollar push to build the digital world where people feel as if they are face-to-face using virtual reality technology. "Barbados looks forward to welcoming the world in its metaverse embassy," said Senator Jerome Walcott, the nation's foreign minister. Barbados, which has moved to become a republic and withdraw Britain's Queen Elizabeth II as head of state, said it would maintain physical embassies as well.

"In some ways, it's super cutting edge and innovative. In other ways, they just happen to be the first movers, and good for them, but everyone's going in this direction," said Rabindra Ratan, a Michigan State University associate professor of media and information. "It's kind of like having a new type of website, except this website exists in a three-dimensional space that feels a bit embodied and you can access it through a virtual reality headset," he added. Barbados' announcement and its enthusiasm for the trendy technology is also a tool for the small nation to have a voice in the diplomatic arena, its political leaders noted.

In a similar tech-embracing vein, the Central American country of El Salvador adopted bitcoin as its official currency alongside the dollar in October. As for the metaverse, it already exists in some forms, like the virtual worlds linked to video game platforms, such as Roblox. But the world's largest social network, which renamed its parent company "Meta," is betting big on the idea and has announced plans to hire 10,000 people in Europe to work on building it. —AFP



BRIDGETOWN: The Barbados flag flies above the Barbados Parliament Buildings yesterday in Bridgetown, Barbados. —AFP

France bans wild animals in circuses

PARIS: French lawmakers voted yesterday to end wild animals being used in live circus shows, spelling an end to performing tigers, lions or bears. Performances of wild animals will be prohibited in two years and owning them outlawed in seven years, under the wide-ranging animal rights legislation that has been under debate since 2020.

The law, once signed by President Emmanuel Macron, will also ban live dolphin shows in the next five years and immediately end mink farming, meaning the country's last operator will close. Macron's centrist Republic on the Move (LREM) party called the legislation "a historic step in the animal rights combat".

Circus owners denounced it, while some environmentalists said it did not go far enough. The foundation of France's most famous animal advocate, veteran actress Brigitte Bardot, welcomed "a major advance for the animal rights cause in France".

As well as the measures targeting circuses, the new law will raise the maximum penalty for mistreating animals to up to five years in prison and a fine of 75,000 euros (\$85,000), and will tighten restrictions on

the sale of pets. Loic Dombrevail, the LREM co-sponsor of the law, conceded that other controversial issues had not been included within the scope of the legislation, which won cross-party support in both houses of parliament.

"There will inevitably come a day when... we will debate sensitive issues such as hunting, such as bull-fighting, or some animal-rearing practices," said the lawmaker, who is also a veterinarian.

'Arbitrary law'

Environmentalists had called for measures to improve the conditions inside industrialised animal farms, which will require "a change in our agricultural model", Senator Daniel Salmon said yesterday. Issues such as hunting and bull-fighting are especially sensitive because they are staunchly defended by supporters in rural areas as long-standing cultural practices.

Farms that make foie gras pate in France—which force-feed birds such as geese and ducks to artificially bloat their livers—have also long been targeted by campaigners. The 120 circus owners in France are likely to protest against the restrictions placed on their livelihoods and have warned that some animals might end up abandoned.

"It's an arbitrary law because there are not mistreated animals in our circuses," William Kerwich, head of the circus animal trainers' union, told AFP. He said there would be a reaction from his members on Monday, and a legal appeal. —AFP

Migrants fear ruse behind Mexican residency offer

JESUS CARRANZA: Immigration agents lined a highway in southern Mexico offering hundreds of migrants temporary residency if they abandoned their march. Exhausted, some accepted, while others kept going, afraid of being deported. The offer of residency cards has split opinion and sowed suspicion within the caravan that set out three weeks ago from near the border with Guatemala to demand refugee status.

Promises of food, water and an airconditioned bus to take them to a shelter while awaiting a one-year permit on humanitarian grounds were enough to persuade several migrants. But many others were unconvinced, despite suggestions that the card could smooth their passage to the United States. "Lies—they're going to deport us!" men and women shouted angrily at the dusty checkpoint in the southeastern state of Veracruz, where immigration agents worked hard to try to persuade them to stop marching.

Elena Raudales, a migrant from Honduras, showed AFP a document called a "visitor's card for humanitarian reasons" with her name and photograph that she was given earlier this year. "Even so they detained me two months ago and sent me back" to near the border with Guatemala, she said. "We're not going to believe anything anymore," she added. According to officials, around 1,500 people have accepted the temporary residency offer, re-

ducing the caravan's size considerably since it left the southern city of Tapachula on October 23. Around 800 people remain in the group, mostly Central Americans fleeing violence and poverty.

'Lied to us'

Many migrants are reluctant to accept the residency offer because they fear being tricked and deported, said Christian Joel, a 22-year-old Honduran. "They lied to us already," he said, complaining of a lack of assistance from the immigration authorities since he arrived in Mexico a year ago. He is making a second attempt to return to the United States, where he lived for 18 years from the age of two with his family until he was deported for driving without a license, he said. But some other migrants went willingly with the authorities in the hope of getting legal documents.

"We're going to try.... We've already come a long way and we're very tired," said 30-year-old Salvadoran Walter Ceron as he prepared to board a waiting bus. The offer was also tempting for Vilma Escobar, 26, who was getting ready for another day pushing her two-year-old son's stroller along the highway under the beating sun. Sometimes she thinks "I would like that card, but it means taking a risk," said the 26-year-old Guatemalan, unsure if going with immigration would take her closer or further from her goal of reaching the United States.

US President Joe Biden's arrival in the White House has led to increased flows of undocumented foreigners arriving in Mexico hoping to be allowed into the United States. More than 190,000 irregular migrants were detected by Mexican authorities between January and September this year, three times more than in 2020. Some 74,300 have been deported. —AFP

International

Political row snags German bid to tame COVID-19 surge

Authorities plan to impose tougher curbs on unvaccinated

BERLIN: German leaders were debating yesterday plans to impose tougher curbs on the unvaccinated, but a political row threatened to torpedo the country's bid to fight a ferocious wave of the coronavirus pandemic. New infections over the last 24 hours soared to another record of 65,371, data from the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) showed, part of a spike Chancellor Angela Merkel has called "dramatic".

The outgoing chancellor is due to meet leaders of Germany's 16 states later to decide new measures to tame the surge. On the table is tough action including requirements on those not immunised to provide negative tests in order to use public transport or go to the office. But hours ahead of the crunch talks, a heated row broke out in the lower house of parliament, where MPs were to vote on a bill providing the legal framework for Merkel and regional leaders to deploy those measures.

The three political parties in talks to form Germany's next government drew up a new draft law to replace ongoing legislation set to expire on November 25. But Merkel's conservative CDU-CSU bloc says the new bill is weaker than the incumbent law, and has threatened to defeat it on Friday at the upper house of parliament. Germany's likely next coalition of Social Democrats, Greens and liberal FDP "is making their first decision today and also their first mistake," accused Stephan Stracke of Merkel's conservatives. "They have no plan for this pandemic and

how one can counter it."

The three parties in turn hit back at Merkel's conservatives for failing to do enough while in government. The political tangle threatens to hold up the fight against the pandemic at a time when hospital intensive care beds are filling up rapidly. It also marks a huge setback for the next likely government, known as the "traffic light" coalition after their party colors. The gridlock could be a harbinger for an increasingly hamstrung Germany in the coming years with the two parliamentary houses pitted against each other.

'Very bad Christmas'

Accused of inaction in the last weeks as Germany's infections rebounded sharply, the incoming likely coalition scrambled to come up with new proposals to fight the virus. It wants to shut out the unimmunized from indoor cultural events, sport activities as well as restaurants and bars.

But critics say its strategy removes the possibility for far-reaching shutdowns including school closures which Germany deployed a year ago. Merkel's conservatives say such measures may well be necessary in states like Saxony or Bavaria, where infection rates are among the highest in the country. Health Minister Jens Spahn, himself from the CDU, admitted that he "wished that the states had more possibilities to react" to the surge. RKI chief Robert Wieler, one of the country's top immunologists, said rapid



BERLIN: German Chancellor Angela Merkel walks into the Reichstag building to attend a session at the Bundestag, the lower house of parliament, yesterday in Berlin, where the parliament is to examine proposed new COVID-related restrictions. — AFP

action was essential.

Voicing frustration at the political stalemate, he said: "We don't have to keep inventing something new. All the ideas and prescriptions we need are available. "After 21 months, I simply can't stand it that what I'm saying and what other colleagues are saying is still not being ac-

cepted," he said. Wieler warned that the actual number of infections may be up to three times higher than official data indicate as many infections go undetected or untested. "We are currently in a serious emergency. We will really have a very bad Christmas if we don't change course now," he said. — AFP

Clashes rock Sudan capital after deadliest day since coup

KHARTOUM, Sudan: Street clashes again shook Sudan's capital yesterday a day after security forces shot dead 15 protesters in the bloodiest day since the military's October 25 takeover. Police fired tear gas to disperse dozens of anti-coup protesters who had stayed on the streets of north Khartoum overnight, braving an intensifying crackdown that has drawn international condemnation, witnesses said.

Police tore down makeshift barricades the protesters had erected the previous day. Later in the day, dozens of protesters returned to rebuild them and police again fired tear gas in a bid to clear the streets, witnesses said.

"Protesters responded by hurling stones at the police," one witness said. On October 25, top general Abdel Fattah al-Burhan-Sudan's de facto leader since the April 2019 ouster of longtime president Omar al-Bashir-detained the civilian leadership and declared a state of emergency.

The move upended Sudan's fragile transition to full civilian rule, drawing international condemnation and a flurry of punitive measures and aid cuts. "We condemn violence towards peaceful protesters and call for the respect and protection of human rights in Sudan," the US State Department's Bureau of African Affairs said on Twitter.

UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Association Clement

Voule said he had "received alarming reports of increased use of lethal force by the military against peaceful protesters". He called on the international community to "put pressure on Sudan to immediately stop the repression against civilians and respect their rights". Burhan insists the military's move "was not a coup" but a step to "rectify the course of the transition" to civilian rule. Thousands took to the streets on Wednesday in Khartoum and other cities but were met by the deadliest crackdown since the coup.

At least 15 people were killed, most of them in north Khartoum, medics said, raising the toll since the coup to 39. Police said they had recorded only one death among protesters in north Khartoum. Another 30 had suffered breathing difficulties from tear gas inhalation. They said they had fired no live rounds and used only "minimum force", even as 89 officers were wounded, some of them critically.

Phones, internet cut

The latest demonstrations were organised despite a near-total shutdown of internet services and the disruption of telephone lines across Sudan. By yesterday morning, phone lines had been restored but internet services remained largely cut.

Bridges connecting Khartoum with its neighbouring cities reopened and traffic returned to many of the capital's streets. AFP correspondents saw security forces removing barricades from some streets in north and east Khartoum.

Last week, Burhan formed a new Sovereign Council, the highest transitional authority, with himself as chief and military figures and ex-rebel leaders keeping their posts. He replaced members from the Forces for Freedom and Change, Sudan's main civilian bloc, with little-known figures. — AFP

Death toll from Nigeria attacks rises to 43

ABUJA: The death toll from separate attacks this week by heavily armed gunmen on two towns in northwest Nigeria has risen to 43, the local state government said.

Criminal gangs known locally as bandits have plagued northwest and central Nigeria for years, raiding and looting villages, but attacks have intensified in recent months along with a spate of mass kidnappings. Dozens of gunmen stormed into Sokoto's Illela and Goronyo towns early Monday, with the initial reports saying 15 residents had been killed.

Sokoto State Governor Aminu Waziri Tambuwal's office said in statement late Wednesday that toll had risen to 43. "This is not a small occurrence. It is upsetting," the governor said on a visit to Illela, according to the statement. "This incident really touched us." Since September, Nigerian troops have been carrying out offensives on bandit camps in neighbouring Zamfara state.

To disrupt communication between gang members, telecom services were shut down in Zamfara and parts of Kaduna, Katsina and Sokoto states. Bandits escaping military operations in Zamfara have set up camps near the border with Niger, including in Sokoto, from where they launch attacks on local villages and towns. Last month bandits opened fire on a market in Goronyo, killing 43 traders. — AFP

International

US throws support behind treaty to curb plastic

NAIROBI: The United States yesterday threw its support behind negotiations on a treaty to curb plastic pollution, ending a key holdup in international efforts to clean up the planet's oceans and save marine life. On a visit to the United Nations Environment Programme in Nairobi, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the United States would back talks in the Kenyan capital in February on a treaty to address plastic.

"Our goal is to create a tool that we can use to protect our oceans and all the life that they sustain from growing global harms of plastic pollution," Blinken said. "As we know, our health—our survival—is bound up in the health of our oceans. We have to do more to protect them," he said.

About eight million tonnes of plastic end up in the oceans each year, killing or injuring one million birds and more than 100,000 marine mammals, according to UN figures. Blinken's statement is the latest US effort to ramp up environmental protection under President Joe Biden, who has made the fight against climate change a key domestic priority. Likely mindful of political realities in divided Washington, where treaties need ratification by the Senate, Blinken called for a plastic treaty in which countries would come up with their own plans of action.

The United States has seen bipartisan calls to clean up oceans with former president Donald Trump signing an act aimed at curbing plastic pollution in the oceans. But environmentalists say that the previous administration stymied international efforts by opposing a treaty and blaming the problem squarely on China—a major source of plastic processing but of material often coming from the West.

An investigation last year by environmentalist campaigners Greenpeace said that industry groups were lobbying the Trump administration to press Kenya in trade negotiations to reverse its rules and take in plastic trash. The idea appears dead, with the Biden administration not pursuing trade talks.

Blinken, who is promoting climate action on a three-nation trip to Africa, praised Kenya as an en-

vironmental leader including for its ban on single-use plastic bags. The United States is one of the only nations not party to the Basel Convention, a UN treaty reached in 1989 that regulates the movement of hazardous waste.

Plastic pollution has soared over the past half century with the advent of cheap, single-use bags and other "disposable" plastic that can stay in the environment for thousands of years. In the Pacific, an accumulation dubbed the Great Pacific Plastic Patch is around three times the size of France.

A growing number of nations have moved to curb plastic pollution but environmental experts say that a binding, international approach is vital to coordinating efforts. A study last year backed by the Pew Charitable Trusts said that plastic pollution

in the oceans can be decreased by 80 percent in 20 years using existing technologies if there is ambitious and concerted action.

Blinken's support for the plastic effort comes on the heels of the COP 26 summit in Glasgow where the United States and China said they would work together on climate, a rare example of cooperation amid tense relations between the world's two largest economic powers.

In Nairobi, Blinken pressed China to join another climate initiative—an alliance led by the United States and the European Union to cut back on methane. Methane, emitted by oil and gas production and agriculture, spends less time in the atmosphere than carbon dioxide but is far more potent and is seen as a key area where the world can take action.—AFP



NAIROBI: A trash barrel with a painting of plastic trash in the ocean is displayed as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken attends an oceans plastics event at the United Nations Environment Programme headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya, yesterday. — AFP

The EU-Belarus migrant crisis

MOSCOW: The European Union and Belarus are locked in a stand-off over migrants that has come against a backdrop of tensions between the West and Minsk's backer Moscow. Here is what you need to know about the crisis that has seen thousands of migrants trapped in dire conditions on the Belarus-Poland border.

Crisis setting in

Since the summer, thousands of migrants, mostly from the Middle East, have flocked to Belarus to try to enter Europe through neighbouring EU member states Poland, Latvia or Lithuania. The West accuses Minsk of having lured the migrants with the promise of an easy crossing into the EU and then forcing them to stay at the border as retaliation for sanctions im-

posed over the regime's suppression of dissent in the ex-Soviet country.

Anxious not to repeat the migration crisis of 2015, the EU has backed Poland, Latvia and Lithuania, who have barricaded their borders despite the deaths of nearly a dozen migrants. On Tuesday, Warsaw forces fired tear gas and water cannon in freezing temperatures on a crowd of hundreds of people who advanced on a border post after a week of living in a makeshift camp.

Polish Defense Minister Mariusz Blaszczak warned on Wednesday that the crisis could last "for months or even years". Around 4,000 people are believed to be currently stranded along the Polish border, where the majority of the migrants are concentrated. In a sign that the crisis is becoming entrenched, the Belarusian authorities put up some 1,000 migrants in a "logistical centre" this week — a move that could make the camp a semi-permanent presence on the borders of the EU.

What the sides are saying

The EU accuses Belarusian President Alexan-

der Lukashenko of engineering the crisis to force the Europeans to restart dialogue, which the West cut off after his regime launched a crackdown on the opposition in the wake of a presidential election last year. The strongman who has ruled Belarus with an iron fist for nearly three decades denies the claims. This week he spoke twice by telephone with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in his first call with a Western leader since last year.

On Wednesday, his office said that direct talks between Belarus and the EU are imminent. Germany, however, has not confirmed direct talks. Berlin instead outlined a process of providing humanitarian aid and returning migrants involving the United Nations refugee agency UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration in cooperation with the European Commission. Still, Merkel's spokesman Steffen Seibert said Wednesday that it is "useful" to speak with Minsk "to improve this humanitarian situation" even if the talks are with a leader whose legitimacy Europe and Germany do not recognize.—AFP

Death toll from Burkina Faso attack rises to 53

OUAGADOUGOU, Burkina Faso: The death toll from a weekend attack by suspected jihadists on a gendarmerie in northern Burkina Faso has risen to 53, the government said Wednesday. The attack was one of the deadliest to hit the West African country's defence and security forces since jihadist violence erupted six years ago.

Gunmen travelling on pick-up trucks and motorcycles attacked the Inata gendarmerie near the Malian border before dawn on Sunday, leading to drawn-out clashes, a security source on the same day said.

On Monday the death toll was reported as 32. But government spokesman Ouseni Tamboura said Wednesday that a total of 53 people were killed, 49 gendarmes and four civilians. "Fortunately, we have found 46 gendarmes" alive, he said after a cabinet meeting.

However local sources said that around 150 gendarmes were stationed at the facility in Inata, meaning the toll could yet rise further. Hundreds of people protested in several cities across the country on Tuesday to demand resignations over the "inability to stop the terrorist attacks".

President Roch Marc Christian Kabore on Wednesday criticised "substantial dysfunction" within the army, including in food provision. "It's unacceptable, and that's why I really do understand the... angry reactions," he said as he left the cabinet meeting.

Tamboura said earlier that the head of the armed forces in the north of the country had been removed from his post following Sunday's attack. The country has been declared in mourning from Tuesday until Thursday.

Burkina Faso has been hit by jihadist attacks since 2015, mostly in the northern and eastern regions close to Mali and Niger-countries facing their own struggles against jihadists. Jihadist attacks in Burkina Faso, often coupled with ambushes and attributed to movements affiliated to the Islamic State group and Al-Qaeda, have killed more than 2,000 people and forced more than 1.4 million to flee their homes. — AFP "He is disappointed that the police and prosecutors are not able to understand the facts," he told news agency TT. Lundin Energy spokesman Robert Eriksson meanwhile told AFP "the investigation is both unfounded and fundamentally flawed." "We know that Lundin did nothing wrong. There is no evidence linking any representatives of Lundin to the alleged primary crimes in this case." — AFP

International

India orders probe into shooting of two 'civilians' in Kashmir

JAMMU: Authorities in Indian-administered Kashmir ordered a probe yesterday into the killing of two men during a security operation, after police violently broke up a protest demanding the bodies be returned to their families.

Police said the men died in "crossfire" on Monday during a shootout inside a commercial complex in Srinagar, the disputed region's main city. Their families said they were civilians and accused security forces of murdering the pair in "cold blood", denying police claims that the pair were associated with militants.

Manoj Sinha, a New Delhi appointee serving as Indian Kashmir's top administrator, said the government would take "suitable action" as soon as a report into Monday's incident was completed. The deaths of Mohammad Altaf Bhat and Mudasir Ahmed Gul sparked outrage in the territory, where around three dozen civilians have been killed this year.

Bhat owned the building where Monday's incident took place, while Gul was a tenant in the complex running a real estate business. Two suspected militants also died in the encounter. Police raided a candlelight vigil in Srinagar staged by family members demanding the pair's bodies be returned for a proper Islamic burial.

The sit-in protest had been underway since Wednesday morning, despite biting winter cold,

but electricity was cut in the area around mid-night and several people were bundled into an armoured vehicle. "They harassed and beat us up and took us into a police station," Abdul Majeed, Bhat's brother, told AFP.

"All I am saying is that please return my innocent brother's body so we can give him a decent burial." Those detained were later sent home.

'Never punished'

After Bhat and Gul were killed, they were hurriedly buried in the middle of the night by police in a remote graveyard without their families present. Since last year police in Kashmir have refused families access to the bodies of slain militants or their "associates", saying it helps stop "glorification" of anti-India rebels, whose funerals were usually attended by thousands of people.

Pervez Imroz, a prominent human rights lawyer who has monitored violence in the restive territory for over three decades, said the probe was meant to "deflate public anger". "We have seen numerous executive probes ordered here in the past, but perpetrators were never punished despite many indictments," Imroz told AFP.

A faction of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference separatist group called on people in Kashmir to shutter their shops and businesses on



SRINAGAR: Former chief minister Omar Abdullah sits during a protest to demand justice for the recent killings of two civilians who died during a security operation by government forces, in Srinagar yesterday. — AFP

Friday to protest the deaths. Kashmir has been divided between India and Pakistan since their independence in 1947.

The South Asian arch-rivals separately administer parts of the Himalayan region and each claim the territory in full. Tens of thousands of

people, mostly civilians, have been killed since an armed rebellion against Indian rule erupted more than three decades ago.

Tensions have festered since 2019 when New Delhi cancelled the region's partial autonomy and brought it under direct rule. — AFP

Clearing Afghan's landmines one careful step at a time

NAD-E-ALI, Afghanistan: Weeks after the Taliban took over Afghanistan, families who fled the fighting in one southern village returned home to find something strange: The cricket ground had been circled in rocks painted red and white. White, it turned out, meant it was safe for children to play. But red signalled buried landmines and other ordnance — the explosive remnants of war that have killed or maimed tens of thousands of Afghans over the past four decades.

The village of Nad-e-Ali in Helmand province became a front line in the final days of the war between the Taliban and Western-backed government forces in Kabul. It was besieged for two months until the Islamists took control of the country in mid-August.

When its residents returned in September they found the village school riddled with gunfire, its roof blackened by smoke, and the children's swings reduced to just a metal frame. They also found that the area had been "totally mined" in the fighting, according to Juma Khan, the local coordinator for the HALO Trust, the main mine-clearing NGO operating in Afghanistan.

Newly laid mines and other booby traps were buried beneath doors of buildings and beside



NAD-E-ALI, Afghanistan: This picture taken on November 9, 2021 shows a teacher from the HALO (Hazardous Area Life-Support Organization) Trust talking about mine risks in Nad-e-Ali village in Helmand province. — AFP

windows. "The rooms inside had mines and there were mines on the main street," Khan told AFP during a visit to Nad-e-Ali this month.

About 41,000 Afghan civilians have been killed or wounded by landmines and unexploded ordnance since 1988, according to the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS). More than two-thirds of the victims were children, many of whom spotted the deadly devices while playing and picked them up.

The HALO (Hazardous Area Life-Support

Organization) Trust was founded in 1988 specifically to tackle ordnance left behind during the Soviet occupation of the country. The country was so badly contaminated, however, that the clearance work never stopped — even after an international treaty banning the use of landmines was signed in 1997, with Afghanistan ratifying the convention in 2002.

More than 30 years later, in the battles leading up to the Taliban's return to power, mines and improvised explosive devices were again

laid and left behind — this time by both the Islamists and their now ousted adversaries.

'Screaming and crying'

HALO — one of the favourite charities of Princess Diana — struck an agreement with the new Taliban authorities in September to have its more than 2,500 Afghan employees return to work. In Nad-e-Ali, Taliban fighters are now guiding HALO's deminers to find the deadly traps they themselves set up.

Because they live in the village and do not want to be blamed for civilian deaths, Taliban fighters "used to take them out with their own hands, but we stopped them to avoid any further detonations", said Khan. But even as demining efforts persist, explosions have already caused casualties among villagers.

Two months ago the wife of a village teacher lost both her legs when an explosive device detonated the moment she opened the door of her house. "This incident was very painful. I saw it happen with my own eyes," said the teacher, Bismillah. "I saw my children screaming and crying... I'm alone and the stress is too much, too much." Since then, the village and its school have been classified as a "high priority" demining zone.

It was HALO that set up the red and white rocks to mark out safe corridors for their 10 teams of eight deminers as they carefully inspect the ground using metal detectors. "When it detects metal, battery or anything it rings an alarm. Then we mark the area, and start to dig very carefully," said supervisor Bahramudin Ahmadi. — AFP

International

Philippines accuses Chinese vessels of firing water cannon at its boats

MANILA: The Philippines yesterday accused Chinese Coast Guard vessels of firing water cannon at boats delivering supplies to Filipino marines in the disputed South China Sea, and ordered Beijing to “back off”. Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin said he had expressed “outrage, condemnation and protest” to Beijing over the incident, which he said happened Tuesday as the Philippine boats were travelling to Second Thomas Shoal in the contested Spratly Islands.

“Fortunately, no one was hurt; but our boats had to abort their resupply mission,” Locsin said in a statement on Twitter, describing the three Chinese vessels’ actions as “illegal”. Locsin described the Philippine boats as “public”, suggesting they were civilian vessels, and said they were covered by a mutual defence pact with the United States. “China has no law enforcement rights in and around these areas,” he added. “They must take heed and back off.”

China’s foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said two Filipino supply boats entered waters near the shoal “without China’s consent” and its coast guard acted lawfully to “safeguard China’s sovereignty”. “Currently, the area around the Second Thomas Shoal is generally peaceful, and China and the Philippines are maintaining communication on this,” Zhao said, without confirming if water cannons had been used.

Tensions over the resource-rich seas spiked this year after hundreds of Chinese vessels were detected at Whitsun Reef, which is also in the Spratly archipelago. China claims almost all of

the sea, through which trillions of dollars in trade passes annually, with competing claims from Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam. The contested waters also have valuable fishing grounds and are believed to sit atop vast oil and gas deposits. Beijing has ignored a 2016 ruling by The Hague-based Permanent Court of Arbitration that its historical claim over most of the sea to be without basis.

‘We do not ask permission’

China controls several reefs in the South China Sea including Scarborough Shoal—which Beijing seized from Manila in 2012 — and is just 240 kilometres (150 miles) west of the main Philippine island of Luzon. It has asserted its stance by building up small shoals and reefs into military bases with airstrips and port facilities.

After China occupied Mischief Reef in the mid-1990s, the Philippines marooned a derelict navy vessel atop the nearby Second Thomas Shoal to assert Manila’s territorial claim. Members of the Philippine Marines are based there.

Locsin said the shoal was within the Philippines’ Exclusive Economic Zone, and warned China’s “failure to exercise self-restraint threatens the special relationship” between the two countries. “We do not ask permission to do what we need to do in our territory,” he said.

Outgoing President Rodrigo Duterte has sought to pivot away from the United States, the Philippines’ former colonial master, towards China since taking power in 2016 and has ap-



AT SEA, PHILIPPINES: File photo shows a China Coast Guard ship (top) and a Philippine supply boat engaging in a stand off as the Philippine boat attempts to reach the Second Thomas Shoal, a remote South China Sea reef claimed by both countries. —AFP

peared reluctant to confront Beijing.

But facing growing domestic pressure to take a harder line, Duterte has insisted Philippine sovereignty over the waters is not negotiable. Cabinet Secretary Karlo Nograles said Thursday: “We will continue to assert our sovereignty... over our territory.”

In July, Duterte walked back on a decision to

axe a key military deal—the Visiting Forces Agreement—with the United States during a visit by Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin. In a joint statement issued this week, the two countries reaffirmed “our treaty commitments” that include “obligations to respond to an armed attack in the Pacific Area on either the United States or the Philippines.” —AFP

Taiwan opens Lithuania representative office using its own name

TAIPEI: Taipei announced yesterday it had formally opened a representative office in Lithuania under the name of Taiwan, a significant diplomatic departure that China had previously condemned. “The Taiwanese Representative Office in Lithuania officially commences its operation in Vilnius on November 18, 2021,” the foreign ministry said, breaking with the island’s tradition of calling such de facto embassies Taipei Economic and Cultural Offices.

Lithuania in July agreed to let Taiwan open a representative office using that title. The move prompted a pressure campaign by China, which seeks to isolate the self-governing democratic island on the international stage.

Beijing withdrew its ambassador to Lithuania and demanded Vilnius do the same, which it eventually did. China also halted freight trains to Lithuania and stopped issuing food export permits. Only 15 countries officially recognise Taipei over Beijing, which claims the self-ruled democratic island as part of its territory and has vowed to one day retake it-by force if needed.

But Taiwan maintains de facto embassies with many nations via its representative offices and several countries have similar arrangements in Taipei. Beijing tries to keep Taipei isolated on the world stage and balks at any official use of the word “Taiwan” lest it lend the island a sense of international legitimacy. — AFP

Taiwan deploys first advanced F-16V fighter squadron

CHIAYI CITY, Taiwan: Taiwan held a ceremony yesterday to commission the first squadron of its most advanced F-16 fighter, a US-made jet that will strengthen the island’s defences against threats by China. President Tsai Ing-wen oversaw the ceremony at an air base in the southern city of Chiayi alongside Sandra Oudkirk, Washington’s de facto ambassador to Taiwan.

“This represents the steadfast promise of the Taiwan-US partnership,” Tsai said. “I trust that in holding fast to democratic values, there will definitely be more countries with similar values who will stand with us on this front.”

The F-16V is an upgraded and much more sophisticated version of Taiwan’s other ageing F-16 fighters which date back to the 1990s. The island also has French-made Mirage jets and its own indigenous warplane. A fourth-generation multi-role fighter, the F-16V boasts more advanced radar systems as well as more sophisticated weaponry, navigation and electronic warfare systems.

It is however less advanced than fifth-generation fighters like China’s J-20, Russia’s Su-57 as well as the US-made F-22 and F-35 warplanes. Taiwan is in the middle of upgrading 141 older F-16s to make them the V version and has also ordered 66 new F-16Vs.

The deployment of the first squadron comes at a time of

soaring tensions between Beijing and Washington over Taiwan’s fate. The self-ruled democracy of 23 million is claimed by Beijing which has vowed to one day take the island, by force if needs.

The ceremony prompted a fiery response from Beijing at a press briefing, with an official saying “China opposes any official contact between the US and Taiwan”. Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian urged the United States not to send “wrong signals to separatist forces”, adding that those supporting Taiwan’s independence “have spared no effort to split the motherland and collude with foreign forces”.

“Their actions are akin to throwing an egg against a rock,” he said. Chinese sabre-rattling has reached new heights under President Xi Jinping with Beijing sending record numbers of warplanes routinely crossing into Taiwan’s air defence zone and state media regularly publicising invasion drills.

In the last decade, China has built up its military to the point where Taiwanese and US military officials have publicly voiced fears it could soon pull off an invasion. Washington diplomatically recognises Beijing over Taiwan.

But it opposes any attempt to change Taiwan’s status by force and is bound by an act of Congress to help the island maintain its own defences. The F-16V deal was approved by the administration of Donald Trump as he feuded with China on a host of issues but his successor Joe Biden has maintained similar support for Taipei.

Maintaining Taiwan’s defences has become a rare bipartisan issue in Washington. China has lambasted military sales to Taiwan and imposed sanctions on US arms giants such as Boeing, Raytheon and Lockheed Martin in response. — AFP

Friday|Times

LIFESTYLE

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2021

www.kuwaittimes.net

**Adele returns with
new ferocity
on '30' album**

Page 23

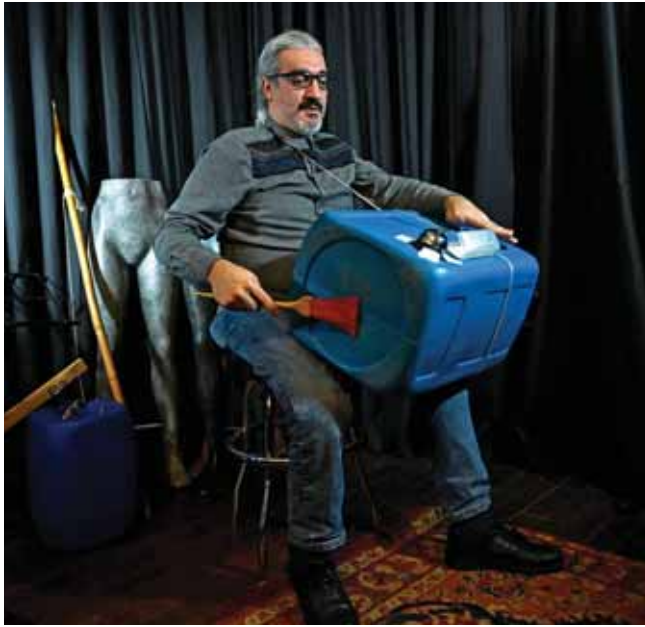
Brazilian artisan
Ana Paula
Guimaraes works on
a super realistic
baby doll at her
studio in Contagem,
Brazil. — AFP



Fungistanbul band member Roni Aran plays one of his instruments made with waste in Istanbul. — AFP photos



Fungistanbul band member Herman Artuc plays one of his instruments made with waste of shop mannequins.



Fungistanbul band member Herman Artuc plays one of his instruments made with waste of canister in Istanbul.

‘Trash music’: Turkish band recycles rubbish into sounds

An empty can, the base of a lamp and string: what sound like rubbish to some are music to the ears of a Turkish band that turns waste into instruments to promote recycling. Fungistanbul, a trio that began experimenting with a sound they call “Trash Oriental” in 2019, have joined a growing global movement of groups that bang, strum and blow into things they find in dustbins. “We had no idea we would come up with this sound when we first started,” band member Roni Aran admitted in the group’s studio, tucked away in a grimy part of Istanbul filled with auto repair shops. “We were all surprised with the result, and so was the audience.”

Fungistanbul’s emergence on the local music scene coincides with a steady rise in the environment’s importance to Turkish voters—especially the young, where it ranks next to the economy in importance in opinion polls. The vast country was ravaged by wildfires, flash floods and other deadly disasters this year, heaping pressure on President Recep Tayyip Erdogan less than two years before the next scheduled election. Aran and his two middle-aged friends, who are all professional musicians, say they are promoting “up-cycling”—the process of adding value to old items that would otherwise have been thrown away. “I found this near a garbage dump,” Aran said, showing off a large plastic can with a grin. “Luckily, it was clean.”

Playing an eclectic mix of melodic folk music, the three friends say it takes thought and effort to turn pieces of scrap into reliable instruments with consistent sounds. They include a “can drum” made from a large plastic

container on to which they attached a glasses case and a bell whose sound is sometimes enhanced using a small brush. “No matter how primitive it may sound, there’s technology behind all these instruments,” Aran said.

Rolling disasters

The focus on garbage is especially poignant in a city that last summer saw a thick layer of muck-dubbed “sea snot”—cover patches of the Sea of Marmara on Istanbul’s southern shores. Scientists blamed the slime on a combination of factors, including years of improper disposal of industrial waste. The muck took months to Hoover up with hoses

placed along the surface of the sea. But while fishermen and beachgoers were complaining about the mess, much of the country’s attention shifted to a rapid series of floods and fires that killed around 100 people across Turkey’s northern and southern coasts.

The conflation of disasters forced Erdogan’s government to end a more than five-year wait and finally force the Paris climate agreement through parliament last month. Now, Turks must hold their government to account and “make sure the agreements it signs up to do not remain on paper alone,” fellow band member Herman Artuc said. “Global warming, marine pollution... all

these catastrophes remind us we urgently need a solution before we reach a point of no return,” Artuc said.

Higher purpose

A percussionist who specializes in Latin jazz, Artuc bangs on discarded plastic mannequins to produce various thumping sounds for Fungistanbul. “They turned into a multi-percussion instrument after adding some artistic flair,” he said of his mannequins. The band have two music videos in their “Trash Oriental” series and are working on a third, this one involving scrap metal. Fungistanbul follow in the steps of groups such as Latin Latas (Latin Cans), formed in Colombia a decade ago who now have an international following and a strong social media presence. The Turkish trio are still novices by comparison.

“We had to question ourselves,” Artuc said. “It took time before we could go on stage and really play these instruments.” The band still suffers an occasional mishap on stage, although their fans usually take it in stride. “The instruments sometimes fall out of tune in the middle of a concert,” Aran said. “But you can lift the mood by saying ‘hold on, I will retune,’ and the audience will tolerate it knowing that the instruments are serving a more important purpose.” — AFP



Fungistanbul band member Roni Aran plays one of his instruments made with waste in Istanbul.



‘Past Tense’ exhibition, journey through accumulated layers of Jerusalem’s history

Jerusalem’s landscape, as we know it today, is merely a surface layer, a slice in a long tumultuous history that has witnessed a succession of takeovers by people and civilizations. In his exhibition ‘Past Tense’, Palestinian artist, Jack Persekian, digs through accumulated layers of history carried

in these photographs, unearthing the details of the city, and the lives of its people and places. In a reverse process, Persekian reconstructs history taking the past as a starting point as he navigates his way to the present. — KUNA



BALDWIN ‘RECKLESS’ IN FATAL FILM SET SHOOTING: NEW LAWSUIT

US actor Alec Baldwin “chose to play Russian roulette” with safety in the minutes leading up to the fatal movie set shooting of a cinematographer, a new lawsuit alleged Wednesday. The suit is the second to be filed in a week over the killing of Halyna Hutchins during rehearsals for low-budget Western “Rust” in New Mexico last month.

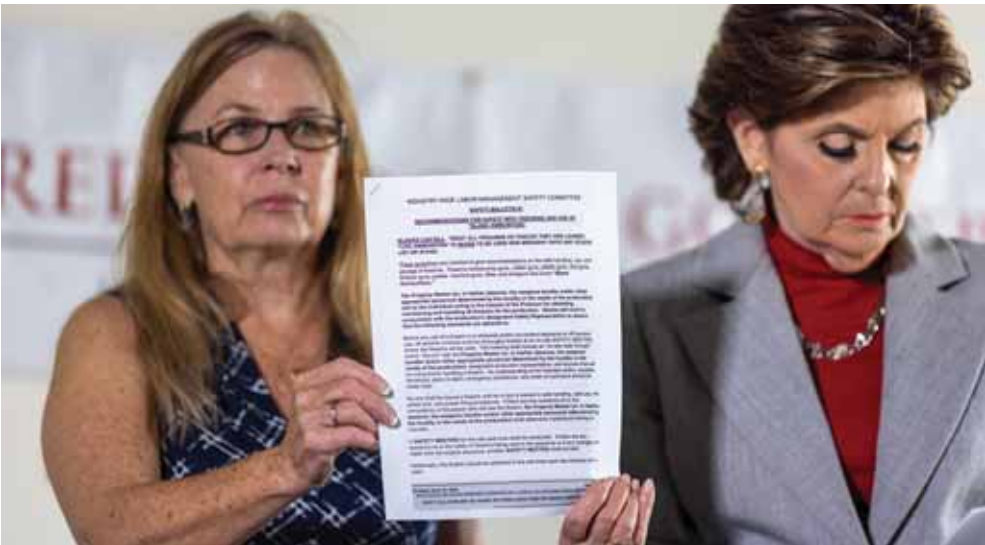


Script supervisor Mamie Mitchell—who made an emotional 911 call moments after the accident—is accusing Baldwin and his fellow producers of assault, intentional infliction of emotional distress and deliberate infliction of harm. “The events that led to the shooting by Mr Baldwin of a loaded gun do not constitute simple negligence,” Mitchell’s attorney Gloria Allred told reporters in Los Angeles. “Instead, in our opinion, Mr Baldwin chose to play

Russian roulette when he fired a gun without checking and without having the armorer do so in his presence. “His behavior and that of the producers on ‘Rust’ was reckless.” Armorer Hannah Gutierrez-Reed and assistant director Dave Halls are also named in the suit. Cinematographer Hutchins, 42, was shot and killed as Baldwin rehearsed a scene in which he fires a gun at the camera. The Emmy-winner was handed the firearm by Halls, who declared it “cold”—industry lingo for an inert weapon. Halls later told investigators he had not fully checked it. The live bullet passed through Hutchins and hit director Joel Souza in the shoulder. “Mr Baldwin, and industry veterans knew that the gun in question should never have been given to him by the assistant director. And then he could not rely upon any statement by the assistant director as to whether or not the gun was safe to use,” said Allred. Industry practice is for the armorer to demonstrate the gun is safe and for that person to hand it directly to the actor, she said. “Mr Baldwin knew that this was the norm and that it was not followed. And he did not check the gun himself.” Last week chief lighting technician Serge Svetnoy sued Baldwin and others alleging negligence. Experts say a rash of civil legal action is expected in con-

nection with the tragedy. Adan Mendoza, sheriff of Santa Fe County, where the incident happened, has spoken of “complacency” on the set. Mendoza said previously his officers seized more than 500 rounds of ammunition from the set, which they believed to be a mix of blanks, dummy

rounds and some suspected live ammunition. District Attorney Mary Carmack-Altwies has previously refused to rule out criminal charges over the incident, which has sparked calls for the banning of functional weapons on Hollywood sets. — AFP



Mamie Mitchell (left), script supervisor on the film “Rust”, and attorney Gloria Allred hold a copy of safety recommendations for the use of live ammunition at a press conference.— AFP

Quentin Tarantino sued over ‘Pulp Fiction’ NFT plan

Quentin Tarantino is being sued by Miramax Studios over his plan to sell digital rights to parts of cult hit “Pulp Fiction” in the form of NFTs. The visionary director is auctioning script pages from seven scenes that did not make the final cut of the 1994 movie, along with audio commentary, he said this month. But Miramax, which produced the film, say Tarantino is overstepping, and impinging on its own plans to sell NFTs, so is suing him for breach of contract.



Quentin Tarantino

According to the complaint filed Tuesday in Los Angeles, seen by AFP, Miramax wrote to Tarantino to ask him to give up his NFT projects, claiming to hold all the rights on the script of “Pulp Fiction,” including sections that did not make the final cut. He refused, claiming he owns the rights to the film script in written form. “Tarantino’s conduct has forced Miramax to bring this lawsuit against a valued collaborator in order to enforce, preserve, and protect its contractual and intellectual property rights relating to one of Miramax’s most iconic and valuable film properties,” the company wrote in its lawsuit. “Left unchecked, Tarantino’s conduct could mislead others into believing Miramax is involved in his venture. “And it could also mislead others into believing they have the rights to pursue similar deals or offerings, when in fact Miramax holds the rights needed to develop, market, and sell NFTs relating to its deep film library.” Miramax was founded in 1979 by now-disgraced mogul Harvey Weinstein and his brother Robert. It is now owned by BeIN Media and Viacom CBS. NFTs or Non-Fungible Tokens, are unique digital objects that confer ownership. While their content may be copyable, the NFT is “the original”, in much the same way that there are innumerable prints of Leonardo da Vinci’s “Mona Lisa”, but only the Louvre museum has the original. Investors and wealthy collectors have clamored in recent months 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.—AFP

Police guard Indian actor after hit film sparks caste furore

The star of a hit new Indian film tackling the oppression of marginalized communities was under armed police guard yesterday after threats of violence. “Jai Bhim” is a legal drama based on the true story of an activist lawyer fighting for a tribal woman whose husband was wrongly arrested and killed in police custody in 1993. The movie is the latest to highlight the plight of India’s millions of tribal people and low-caste Dalits—“untouchables”—at the bottom of the Hindu caste system. The film, released on Amazon Prime, has received rave reviews and unusually for a Tamil-language

movie has been successful right across the vast country of 22 official languages. “Jai Bhim” was briefly the highest-ranked film on movie database IMDb-owned by Amazon-beating Hollywood classics such as “The Godfather” and “The Shawshank Redemption”. But it has also angered many people in the southern state of Tamil Nadu where it is set, in particular the Vanniyar caste community who say that the film portrays them in a bad light. Vanniyar Sangam, a body representing the community, has issued a legal notice to the filmmakers seeking damages and demanding the removal of certain scenes. A member of a local political party even offered 100,000 rupees (\$1,340) to anyone who physically attacks the main actor Saravanan Sivakumar, better known as Suriya, who is also the film’s co-producer. Police have since opened an investigation into the politician, and Suriya’s home in Chennai is now guarded by five armed officers and the actor—a major star in Tamil cinema—has additional security when he travels. This and other threats to Suriya have prompted an outpouring of support for the actor, with the hashtag #WeStandWithSuriya trending on social media. —AFP



A sanitation worker walks past a poster of actor Suriya Sivakumar from the movie Jai Bhim in Chennai.— AFP

Britney Spears says fans 'saved' her life during conservatorship

Pop star Britney Spears has addressed her fans directly for the first time since a judge ended the controversial guardianship that has controlled her life for the past 13 years. In a video posted to Instagram late Tuesday, Spears, wearing low-rise black shorts and a flowered crop top, thanked fans and the #FreeBritney movement for raising awareness while her "voice was muted and threatened for so long." "You guys rock," she said. "I honestly think you guys saved my life."

Legions of fans had celebrated with cheers and showers of pink confetti last Friday in front of the downtown Los Angeles court house where a judge terminated the guardianship first imposed in 2008. "That's a really long time to be in a situation you don't want to be in," the 39-year-old said in the two-minute video filmed on a sun-drenched patio. Speculation had abounded over the star's future plans. She has not given an interview in years, rarely makes public appearances and last performed in October 2018 — bound as she was to a lifestyle largely governed by her father, Jamie.

Family should be 'in jail'

In her video, she said she was now appre-



Supporters of the FreeBritney movement celebrate following a court decision ending her conservatorship outside the Stanley Mosk courthouse in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

ciating for the "little things," like "seeing cash for the first time, being able to buy candles"—adding she wanted to be "an advocate for people with real disabilities and real illnesses." "I'm just grateful honestly for each day and

being able to have the keys to my car and being able to be independent like a woman and owning an ATM card," she said. With the ruling, the "Baby One More Time" singer regained the majority of control over a multi-

million-dollar estate that had been managed by the conservatorship, which she has described as abusive.

In the caption to her post, Spears hit out at family members and "all the bad things they did to me which they should all be in jail for." "It still blows my mind every day I wake up how my family and the conservatorship were able to do what they did to me... it was demoralizing and degrading!!!!" Most of what the public knows about Spears—who soared to global fame as a teenager before a highly publicized mental breakdown saw her become a paparazzi punch bag—comes from her eccentric Instagram account.

For years, the bubbly star has posted regularly, sometimes uploading videos of herself twirling or doing dance routines, other times waxing poetic on hopes and dreams. Another post on Tuesday hinted at new plans the recently engaged Spears may be harboring "I'm thinking about having another baby!!!" the mother-of-two shared with her 36.4 million Instagram followers, over 1.3 million of whom cheered her on with a "like." — AFP

Adele returns with new ferocity on '30' album

Six years after Adele's last blockbuster exploration of heartache and loss, everyone's favorite ugly-cry balladeer is back, channeling her vocal fireworks to lay bare the emotional torture-and catharsis-of divorce. In line with her three other records the British artist's highly anticipated new studio album "30," out today, digs into romantic pangs with the heart-piercing high notes set to stirring piano arrangements that have made her a household name.

The album's first single "Easy On Me" has reigned over the US and British singles charts since its debut four weeks ago, proving the enduring strength of Adele's prowess as a hit-maker with broad appeal. Her record drops after years without headlines and a stretch of musical silence, defying pop's current standards of stream-friendly quick hits and an urgent social media presence. But Adele's announcement this fall that a new album would soon soundtrack break-ups and wistful contemplation the world round set off a media blitz, including Vogue and Rolling Stone cover

stories along with a primetime Oprah Winfrey interview spliced into a televised concert that drew more than 10 million stateside viewers.

In the years since the 15-time Grammy winner's last album "25"—which included the megahit "Hello"—Adele's relationship of nearly a decade with Simon Konecki, including two years of marriage, dissolved. She sifted through the fallout of that traumatic period for "30," probing its implications for her own life but also for her nine-year-old son with Konecki, Angelo. "There were moments when I was writing the record or I would listen back to something and be like, 'That might be a bit too private, that might be a bit too about myself to put out,'" she told Winfrey. "But nothing is as scary as what I've been through over the last two, three years behind closed doors. So I'm not frightened about what people may or might not know."

'I want to live'

While the 12-track "30" does include textbook Adele-those slow, mournful tales of feeling jilted and alone—she isn't hitting replay on her previous work. The new album sees the now 33-year-old megastar marry her classic, piano-driven pop with new inflections of Motown and reggae, Afrobeats and dance music. But it's Adele's honed writing delivered in her smoky, volcanic range that does the heavy lifting on "30."

"They say to play hard, you work hard, find balance in the sacrifice," she belts in "I Drink Wine," a track that progresses from a 1970s-esque groove to a gospel choir-backed meditation on self-acceptance. "And yet I don't know anybody who's truly satisfied." In "Love In The Dark" she sings that "I want to live and not just survive." "I've definitely felt like that," she told Winfrey. —AFP



Adele and Oprah Winfrey



US rapper Young Dolph

Rapper Young Dolph shot and killed in cookie shop

The American rapper Young Dolph was shot and killed Wednesday while he was in a cookie shop in Memphis, Tennessee, police said. The Chicago-born artist, whose real name was Adolph Robert Thornton, was 36. He was known for hit songs such as "Major," and his 2020 album "Rich Slave" shot to the top of the Billboard 200 list. Thornton was reportedly shopping at Makeda's Homemade Butter Cookies in Memphis when someone drove up and shot him, local press reports said. Police said they have yet to identify a suspect.

The Memphis Police Department released a statement reporting the shooting and said "preliminary information" indicates the victim was Thornton. Thornton was almost killed in a shooting in Los Angeles in 20017. He sustained three gunshot wounds, news reports said. —AFP



Bird watching for peace in Colombia



Birds are seen in Planadas, Tolima department, Colombia.



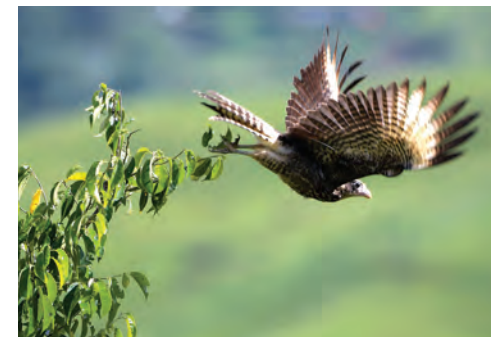
As a bird perches on a telegraph pole, two young girls are deep in consultation—is it “*Tiranus melancholicus*,” or perhaps “*Pyrocephalus rubinus*?” The answer is “*rubinus*,” a sparrow with a bright red breast. In the center of Colombia, among the leafy mountains of Planadas, this ornithological debate by indigenous children might seem surprising. With their eyes scanning the mountain, around 30 people, adults and children, are taking part in a day of bird watching. The initiative aims to promote peace in Tolima, a department ravaged by the war waged by the Marxist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) for a half century against the state.

Five years after an historic peace deal brought that conflict to an end, Planadas has rediscovered calm, although some war scars remain. “The birds are an excuse for us to mix,” said Camilo Enciso, founder of the ASOPEP association for ecological producers in Planadas, which promotes the bird watching project. Among those present are the children of former FARC guerrillas, whose parents live in a “reincorporation” camp helping them adapt back to civilian life. There are also members of the Nasa indigenous community that long served as auxiliaries to the army, and peasant families that suffered the brunt of the conflict’s violence.

At peace with nature

At the start of the day, people greet each other, but mix little. Then the walk begins and everyone’s gaze drifts skywards. Colorful birds perched on branches soon capture every-

one’s attention, sparking discussions and warming hearts. “What happens here is unique,” said Diego Calderon, an ornithologist who has come to support the project. “Being at peace with nature helps us to be at peace with ourselves and others,” added Calderon, a FARC hostage in 2004. “Watching birds allows inhabitants to see their territory differently, all the while promoting its ecological and



A bird is seen in Planadas.

tourist value.”

“Before I killed humming birds with my blowpipe to eat. Now I look at them with my children who learn about the richness of our gardens and forests,” said Justiniano Paya, a Nasa leader. Neira, a 32-year-old mother of two and former FARC member, admits to having “difficulties” adapting to civilian life but says this “experience is very gratifying.” “Birds connect us, they teach us to protect what we have here,” she added. “Reconciliation is being built step by step,” said Mayra Luz Ruiz Nedira, a project manager at ASOPEP.



Birds are seen in Planadas.



Coffee cooperative

ASOPOP is working on another project to bring value to a region that was for a long time inaccessible due to the conflict: coffee. Everywhere in the valley, coffee crops cling to the mountain slopes. The climate-oscillating between sunshine and heavy rain-in this Andean cordillera is ideal. With market prices at record levels, coffee has contributed to bringing prosperity. More than 6,000 families in Planadas live off coffee. A cooperative mod-

el sees ASOPOP buying the high-quality commodity from its 300 members to then resell to 50 clients based in Europe, Asia and the United States.

“The idea is to provide knowledge as much as technical assistance to the producer, so that he can understand the true value of his coffee, in what country it is sold and at what price. And in the end he receives genuine revenues,” said Enciso. The association looks after every part of the process: selection, drying, roasting, and the crucial tasting element that allows them to classify the grains and thus set the right price for the right customer. The association has already trained 25 tasters, including 19-year-old Vanessa Castro, who can now detect flavors, fragrances and even degrees of acidity from a single whiff.

“We understood the importance of processing and valorizing our coffee,” said Enciso, who beams with pride at the eight international certificates the group has received. “Here there is a future. The war has disappeared, there’s work, resources, nature ... We’ve started living and producing together again. We’re united.” — AFP



Coffee beans are seen at the Association of Ecological Producers of Planadas (ASOPEP) headquarters in Planadas.



Indigenous people and children of former FARC guerrillas watch birds at a lookout in Planadas.



A bird is seen in Planadas.

New York auction smashes record for Frida Kahlo work

A rare painting by Frida Kahlo sold in a New York auction house for almost \$35 million, a record price for a work by the iconic Mexican artist. At the same sale, a painting by French artist Pierre Soulages also broke a record for his work by reaching \$20.2 million dollars. As expected, the self-portrait of Kahlo entitled “Diego y yo” (“Diego and me,” 1949), where the face of the painter’s husband Diego Rivera appears on her forehead, smashed the former record of \$8 million set by a Kahlo in 2016.



An art handler adjusts Frida Kahlo’s final “Bust” Self-Portrait “Diego y yo” (Diego and I) at Sotheby’s in New York City. — AFP

That made it the most expensive Latin American work of art in history sold at auction, the previous record having gone to a painting by Diego Rivera himself, whose work “Los Rivaes” (1931) sold for \$9.76 million in 2018. “Diego y yo” is emblematic of Kahlo’s self-portraits, known for their intense and enigmatic gaze that made the Mexican painter, a feminist icon, famous around the world. In the painting, Rivera’s face appears on Frida’s forehead, above her distinctive eyebrows and dark eyes from which a few teardrops fall.

The depiction of Rivera, who at the time was close to Mexican actress Maria Felix, as a third eye symbolizes the extent to which he tormented her thoughts, art experts say. Kahlo and Rivera married each other twice. She died aged just 47 in 1954. “Diego y yo” last sold at Sotheby’s for \$1.4 million in 1990. Soulages’ painting, which had spent more than 30 years in a private collection, corresponds to the red period of the century-old French artist. It sold for \$20.2 million after a heated battle between several bidders, some of them in Sotheby’s auction room and others on the phone, greatly exceeding the previous record reached in 2019 of \$9.6 million euros



This photo shows a replica of a cave painting of a blue Bodhisattva, part of artefacts destroyed by the Taliban in 2001, displayed at the Tokyo University of the Arts in Tokyo. — AFP photos



A replica of a cave painting of a blue Bodhisattva (left), part of artefacts destroyed by the Taliban.

Japan experts craft ‘super clone’ of destroyed Afghan mural

Japanese researchers have crafted a “super clone” of an Afghan mural destroyed by the Taliban, using a mix of traditional and digital techniques that they hope will salvage the work’s “spirit” for future generations. Not a single fragment remains of the seventh-century cave painting demolished in 2001 along with two massive Buddha statues and other artefacts in Afghanistan’s Bamiyan valley, sparking global condemnation.

But a precise replica, the result of three years of state-of-the-art reproduction efforts, went on display at a museum in Tokyo in September and October, just weeks after the Taliban returned to power in Kabul. The mural on the ceiling of a cave near the famous statues depicted a blue Bodhisattva-or someone on the path to becoming a Buddha. At six meters long and three meters high (20 by 10 feet), the intricate full-size copy has been dubbed a “super clone” by the reproduction team at Tokyo University of the Arts.

“We have succeeded in recreating a very precise representation in three dimensions,” from its texture to the type of paint, said the team’s co-leader Takashi Inoue. Japan is a major donor to Afghanistan and has long been involved in heritage protection efforts at Bamiyan, a crossroads of ancient civilizations considered to be one of the birthplaces of Japanese Buddhism.

The team digitally processed more than 100 photographs taken by Japanese archaeologists of the mural before it was desecrated, to create a computerized model of its surface. They then fed this data into a machine, which carved the exact shape into a styrofoam block. To complete the replica, artists applied a traditional paint in a lapis lazuli shade similar to the one used for the original mural. Through this process, “we can reproduce designs that are very close to the real ones again and again, to hand down their spirit to future generations,”

said Inoue, a professor specialized in Eurasian cultural heritage. “Let’s stop vandalism. Let’s preserve priceless culture-the heritage of mankind-together.”

‘Everything can be digitalized’

Days ahead of the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan in August, the Taliban overran Kabul, sparking fears of a return to their brutal reign of 1996 to 2001. The new regime insists it wants to protect archaeological heritage from destruction. For historian Kosaku Maeda, a co-leader of the Tokyo reproduction team, the “massively shocking” images of the giant Buddhas disappearing into clouds of dust are still a vivid memory. “I was worried that such an act would be inflicted on the remains once again,” said the 88-year-old, who has visited the valley repeatedly for more than half a century.

But their work shows that vandalism is “meaningless” in the face of modern technology, as “everything can be digitalized”, he said.

On a recent visit to Bamiyan by AFP journalists, Taliban gunmen stood guarding the rock cavities that once housed the two Buddha statues.

Construction work on a \$20-million UNESCO-backed cultural center and museum was still under way in Bamiyan when the AFP team visited the area in October-although its planned inauguration this year was delayed by the Taliban takeover. Maeda said his dream is to build a separate “peace museum” in the valley and, if possible, display the replica cave painting there. “We can’t put it back in its original place, but I want to bring it to Bamiyan as a historical legacy that local people can inherit,” said Maeda, also a member of UNESCO’s committee for the safeguarding of Afghan cultural heritage. “A nation stays alive when its culture stays alive,” he added, reciting the message written on a banner hung at the entrance of the National Museum of Afghanistan in Kabul. — AFP



Items related to Bamiyan and Afghanistan culture displayed at the Tokyo University of the Arts in Tokyo.

Lifestyle | Feature



This photo shows Thai artist Adisak 'Beam' Jirasakkasem (right) discussing campaign ideas for his newly launched virtual influencer Bangkok Naughty Boo with a representative from Morgan and Preston Models agency at a design studio in Bangkok. — AFP photos



Photo shows a mood board for newly launched virtual influencer Bangkok Naughty Boo at a design studio in Bangkok.

'New world order': Asia's virtual influencers offer metaverse glimpse

Supporting neon hair and flawless skin, Bangkok Naughty Boo is one of a new generation of influencers in Asia promising to stay forever young, on-trend, and scandal-free because they are computer generated. Blurring the lines between fantasy and reality, these stars are hugely popular with teenagers in the region and will yield increasing power as interest grows in the "metaverse", industry experts say. "I'm 17 forever, non-binary, with a dream of becoming a pop star," Bangkok Naughty Boo—who uses they/them pronouns—said in an introductory video sent to AFP.

Created by fashion designer Adisak Jirasakkasem and his friends, who envisioned a gender-fluid persona to hang the ideals of the artist community, the character is one of a tribe of "Made in Thailand" virtual influencers borne from COVID-19 pressures. In September, Ai-Ailynn made her debut—she was created after her agency became frustrated by the "limitations on human influencers" during COVID-19 lockdowns. Virtual influencers "are suitable for the new normal," SIA Bangkok said.

Artificial intelligence creations are establishing a foothold worldwide in the lucrative influencer market, which is expected to be worth \$13.8 billion in 2021, according to data giant Statista. But industry analysts say Asia is where the industry will really boom in the coming decade. "We think Asia will be an area of rapid growth in the sector of virtual influencers. Generation Z is the largest group of internet users in Asia, and it is a digitally adept generation that is highly familiar with social media and all things virtual," explained Nick

Baklanov, a marketing specialist with Hype Auditor.

'First metaverse inhabitants'

The number of virtual influencers has more than tripled to 130 in two years, according to Baklanov, who predicted Facebook's investment in the metaverse—dubbed a VR version of the internet—will mean an industry boom. "Virtual influencers are better suited to the role of the first inhabitants of the metaverse than anyone else," he added. The biggest virtual earner is believed to be Lil Miquela, the LA-based "robot It-Girl" who has worked with



Image shows Thai "digital influencer" Ailynn.

Prada and Calvin Klein, and makes an estimated \$7,000 per post.

The World Health Organization recruited Knox Frost, a 21-year-old AI "universal adapter" from Atlanta, to spread coronavirus safety messages to his 700,000 followers. In Asia, computer-generated pop stars including Japan's Hatsune Miku and Luo Tianyi from China, as well as virtual K-Pop groups Eternity and K/DA, have paved the way for newer "stars" as technology improves. To create Bangkok Naughty Boo, Adisak photographed a model in different locations across the Thai capital before creating the character's face online.

He merged the computer-generated face and the real life model's body to make his virtual idol. Bangkok Naughty Boo has already been signed to a leading Thai-human-modeling agency, while Ai-Ailynn has already secured a deal to be the face of a major mobile operator. "Influencers yield more power in the East and provide more lucrative brand and engagement opportunities, as the idol and fandom concepts are more rooted in culture," Saisangeeth Daswani, a fashion and beauty industry analyst at market intelligence company Stylus, explained.

Scandal-free, controlled lives

With trouble-free pasts, a round-the-clock work ethic, and easily controlled public personas, the fictional avatars are also respite for companies weary of reputational damage. "Some brands enjoy the safety of associating with (virtual) influencers who have a pre-defined backstory and future," commented Christopher Travers, the founder of Virtual

Humans, a website tracking the industry.

And with authorities in some Asian nations policing freedom of expression, businesses may prefer the ability to control everything. "The Chinese government's recent crackdown on exorbitantly paid, 'vulgar' and 'immoral' influencers is likely to further boost the appeal of virtual influencers," explained Chen May Yee, APAC director for Wunderman Thompson Intelligence.

"They won't make impolitic comments or be embroiled in sex scandals," SIA Bangkok say there has been huge interest in Ai-Ailynn with businesses in pandemic-ravaged Asia looking to "innovation and a new world order". A shake-up of the status quo may have some flesh-and-blood content creators worried, but human influencer Mutchima Wachirakomai welcomes the newcomers. "They are freaking cool," exclaimed the 25-year-old, who shares glamour shots alongside "no filter" makeup-free looks to her 21,100 followers on Instagram.

"People still yearn for authenticity, the realness of a real-life influencer," she said as she prepped for a shoot at an avocado-themed cafe. "The characters can't replace the intimate connections humans have with each other." But Bangkok Naughty Boo is prepared to try. Their Instagram is a mix of cheeky ensembles shot against the backdrop of Thailand's concrete jungle capital as well as daily life snippets like getting a first vaccine shot and spilling bubble milk tea. "I hope I can meet you all in person one day. Love you!" they told AFP, signing off with a kiss. — AFP

Word Search

Color It

Forgot your phone?

H	R	W	B	R	U	S	H	S	N	A	E	L	C
A	S	I	H	L	P	H	A	H	A	H	H	P	A
E	L	P	E	S	R	I	N	S	E	E	N	T	O
T	E	E	S	H	T	S	P	B	E	W	C	L	N
S	E	L	C	K	S	W	O	P	L	A	H	P	E
A	E	L	L	O	S	U	I	E	S	E	S	H	
P	H	W	S	T	A	R	L	S	A	H	S	W	S
H	A	L	E	W	O	T	N	F	A	H	U	R	E
T	A	N	P	O	I	T	S	N	E	U	R	H	V
O	C	H	S	O	A	P	O	S	H	T	U	I	A
O	S	E	W	R	W	P	W	I	L	I	U	N	H
T	I	A	O	E	O	T	U	I	L	O	E	A	S
T	N	U	L	S	H	O	W	E	R	E	A	O	N
H	K	A	H	P	L	E	I	E	L	S	T	T	O

—>>> <<<—

towel, shave, wipe, soap, clean, flush, wash
sink, toothpaste, rinse, brush, shower, toilet



Kids Mazes

HELP THE BOY FIND THE MISSING LEAF!

Find the objects



FIND 10 OBJECTS IN THE PICTURE



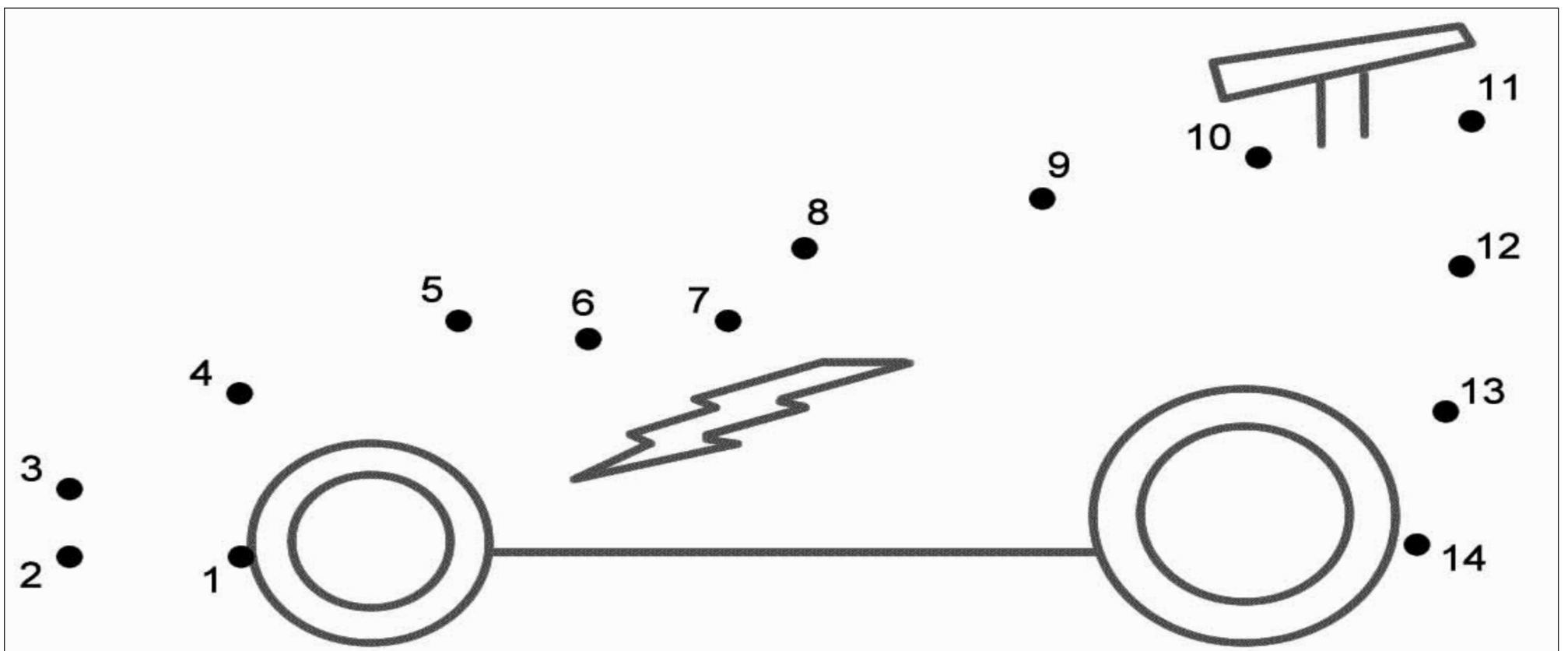
Word Scramble



Fruit of the Spirit Word Scramble

1. EOVL _____
2. OYJ _____
3. CPEEA _____
4. ATCPNEEI _____
5. INSKENSD _____
6. DGSONSEO _____
7. ATEFNUSILHFS _____
8. TEEGLNNS _____
9. FELS RONOCLT _____

Join the dots



Business

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2021

33 In UK, fears grow over spiking winter fuel bills**33** France slams Jersey; fishing tensions rise**34** India biggest-ever IPO Paytm slumps by 27%**34** Google agrees 5-year deal to pay AFP for online content

Bitcoin could 'spoil' young Indians

Modi warns as government prepares to regulate cryptocurrencies

SYDNEY: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday warned that bitcoin presents a risk to younger generations, sounding a hawkish tone as his government prepares to introduce legislation to regulate cryptocurrencies. Speaking at an online cybersecurity forum, Modi framed virtual money - which is highly popular in India and exists beyond state and central bank control - as a domain that needs to be closely policed.

"Take cryptocurrency or bitcoin, for example," he told a forum hosted by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute. "It is important that all democratic nations work together on this and ensure it does not end up in the wrong hands, which can spoil our youths." Critics of cryptocurrencies allege that largely anonymous unregulated transfers make them a perfect tool for drug traffickers, people smugglers or money laundering.

Several countries have begun to legislate to introduce oversight over cryptocurrencies, and exchanges in many jurisdictions are now subject to the same regulations as other financial service providers. India effectively outlawed crypto transactions in 2018, only for the country's top court to strike down the ban two years later. That led to a boom in the sector as the country's vast young population took heed of an advertising blitz by Bollywood and cricket stars.

Today, more than 100 million Indians have embraced virtual currencies, ranking the country behind only the United States, Russia and Nigeria in terms of users, according to a report last month by investment portal BrokerChooser. There have been growing calls for India to issue another ban, but Modi's government appears set to stop



LOS ANGELES: A 'Buy Bitcoin Here' sign is posted at a 7-Eleven store in Los Angeles, California. The price of the cryptocurrency hit a new record high - nearly breaking through \$69,000 as inflation has risen to a level not seen in 30 years. — AFP

short, preferring instead strict legislation that could be passed before the end of the year. Reserve Bank of India chief Shaktikanta Das has been sharply critical, saying last week that cryptocurrencies are a serious threat to the financial system if not properly regulated.

At the same time the central bank is looking at issuing its own official digital currency. More broadly, Modi used his address to tout India as a global technology hub. His "Digital

India" scheme aims to modernize and harness technology across the subcontinent of 1.3 billion people. Modi said emerging technologies like quantum computing offer great opportunities. But, he said, it was "essential for democracies to work together" to "invest together in research and development in future technology".

He added that it was also necessary for democracies to "deepen intelligence and operational cooperation on cyber

security." Critics have accused Modi - who was elected on an often divisive Hindu nationalist platform - of harnessing technology to silence opponents. "The Modi government has been using technology since it came to power in 2014 to curtail rights at home as part of an escalating crackdown on freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly," said Human Rights Watch Australia director Elaine Pearson.— AFP



شركة الصفاة للاستثمار
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

PREMIER MARKET WEEKLY TECHNICAL BULLETIN

WEEK ENDED ON 18 NOVEMBER 2021

No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance											Valuation Multiples *			
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	1057	1036	1057	1024	33	30,561,048	-14	-1.33%	23.33%	1024	1040	25.2	2.23	1.8%	1.27
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	261	264	265	256	9	34,196,393	4	1.54%	20.55%	261	270	24.0	1.25	1.8%	1.13
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	227	225	227	222	5	27,734,590	-1	-0.44%	8.17%	222	228	NM	0.98	0.0%	1.01
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	238	228	238	227	11	5,466,733	-8	-3.39%	7.04%	227	233	20.4	1.05	1.8%	1.05
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	848	846	849	833	16	36,778,706	-1	-0.12%	24.96%	837	847	36.9	3.82	1.1%	1.40
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	824	818	835	805	30	1,080,756	-5	-0.61%	44.01%	803	822	67.2	4.80	0.0%	1.05
204	National Investments	Financial Services	240	238	243	234	9	5,422,268	-4	-1.65%	76.30%	237	244	8.6	1.10	4.2%	1.25
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	141	142	143	140	3	8,878,600	1	0.71%	-10.69%	140	145	NM	1.37	3.5%	0.59
252	Al Imtiaz Investment	Financial Services	129	126	129	123	6	15,947,203	-2	-1.56%	12.50%	123	131	NM	0.77	0.0%	0.98
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	183	184	185	177	8	37,939,677	1	0.55%	68.81%	181	187	35.6	1.35	0.0%	0.97
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	859	838	859	825	34	3,345,766	-19	-2.22%	27.55%	825	841	21.1	1.97	0.7%	1.11
501	National Industries	Financial Services	295	284	295	281	14	30,317,862	-10	-3.40%	61.36%	281	294	7.3	1.06	0.0%	1.44
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	987	982	989	951	38	1,324,386	-13	-1.31%	30.07%	965	990	36.8	1.11	5.1%	0.94
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	920	933	936	915	21	1,185,551	6	0.65%	45.78%	915	935	26.5	2.19	5.7%	0.72
526	Al Qurain	Basic Materials	375	371	377	370	7	3,284,310	-7	-1.85%	9.76%	371	374	29.8	0.98	4.1%	0.75
603	Agility	Industrials	1,080	1043	1,090	1033	57	26,137,773	22	2.15%	54.29%	1042	1053	30.4	1.99	0.8%	1.48
605	Zain	Telecommunications	603	596	603	595	8	10,875,116	-7	-1.16%	-1.65%	596	602	13.8	2.23	3.4%	1.35
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,293	3,280	3,325	3,200	125	1,331,721	-10	-0.30%	-13.66%	3200	3286	6.0	3.78	12.1%	0.49
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	255	247	256	245	11	12,031,499	-7	-2.76%	14.35%	245	249	NM	0.79	0.0%	0.87
818	Ahli United Bank	Banking	294	293	295	286	9	50,554,326	-1	-0.34%	29.07%	287	296	21.7	2.35	1.2%	1.13
821	Warba Bank	Banking	300	318	320	289	31	35,798,261	18	6.00%	34.75%	313	320	18.9	2.53	0.0%	0.99
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	619	615	620	605	15	2,158,146	-3	-0.49%	1.15%	601	618	19.4	1.76	2.8%	0.44
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	377	387	388	375	13	21,433,703	12	3.20%	5.74%	380	388	NM	1.62	0.0%	0.47
826	Shamal Az-Zour	Utilities	244	239	246	237	9	8,598,352	-5	-2.05%	-13.72%	238	243	20.7	5.00	5.0%	0.67
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	2,020	1,949	2,033	1,933	100	1,722,718	-76	-3.75%	77.18%	1925	1983	14.0	7.44	2.1%	0.75

* As of end of week closing

(965) 22 675 140

Al-Safat Tower, Hawalli, Beirut St.

alsafatinvest.com

research@alsafatinvest.com

alsafatinvestment

al-safat-investment-company

Business

French troops hunt illegal gold miners wrecking Amazon region

High gold prices accelerates the scramble for precious metal

SAINT-LAURENT DU MARONI: Deep in the jungle in France's overseas territory of French Guiana, the army is engaged in a battle of attrition with illegal gold miners who have destroyed thousands of hectares of precious Amazon rainforest. French Guiana, about the size of Portugal on the north shore of South America and almost completely covered in forest, has a long history of small-scale gold mining, legal and illegal.

But high gold prices have accelerated the scramble for the precious metal, with thousands of miners from neighboring Brazil pouring across the border to try to cash in. Their activity has left treeless brown gashes in the landscape, dotted with pools of water poisoned with the mercury used to extract gold from the soil. Catching the illegal miners known as "garimpeiros" in the act is a nearly impossible task, but France is determined to try to protect its little corner of the Amazon.

Burying the evidence

On a small tributary of the Maroni river, the main waterway running north through Guiana to the Atlantic Ocean, French

troops carry out a raid on an illegal mining site. But by the time they arrive by canoe, guns at the ready, the miners have melted away into the forest after receiving a tip-off from lookouts. The troops manage to apprehend two undocumented workers at the site but they were not caught in the act, so are freed. Five soldiers in fatigues then scramble down a bank into the water-filled mining pit to search for hidden equipment.

Taking care not to splash their faces with the toxic liquid they fish out an engine and two mechanical pumps, which they destroy. In a sign that the site could be reactivated soon after the troops leave, two men and two women wearing rubber boots linger nearby in the forest. "If we destroy their material and they still come back it shows that this is an important site for them," said Staff Sergeant Olivier, whose full name was withheld for security reasons. A child's shoe and a doll discarded on the ground suggested that this little community of outlaws includes children. But in some places the garimpeiros, who use the gold to buy equipment from Chinese traders on the other side of the Maroni river in Suriname, are accused of bringing prostitution and vio-

lence into the forest. "I've seen a four-poster bed, a mosquito net and condoms strewn everywhere" at one abandoned site, said Laura, a military police officer.

Rivers poisoned

Authorities in French Guiana estimate that 400 hectares of forest are destroyed each year by illegal mining, which threatens biodiversity in this relatively untouched part of the Amazon basin. Arnaud Ancelin, deputy director of the Guiana Amazonian Park, a protected area covering 34,000 square kilometers of rainforest, said the run-off from some mining sites created mercury-laced mud torrents "that block the gills of fish" and threaten the survival of their predators, including the otter. The use of mercury, which has been banned in French Guiana since 2006, also poses major health risks for indigenous Amerindians, who have a fish-rich diet. With 8,000 to 9,000 illegal miners believed to be operating at around 150 sites across the territory-up from 110 a decade ago-the nearly 1,000 French troops deployed to combat the prospectors are struggling to keep up. —AFP

Registration is open for 'TAMAKAN' program, sponsored by NBK

KUWAIT: The online registration for TAMAKAN" training program for fresh Kuwaiti graduates continues until 28th December 2021. For the third year in a row, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) sponsors "TAMAKAN" training program for fresh Kuwaiti graduates, as part of its strategic partnership with "Creative Confidence". The program will start on January 18 until 27th March 2022. TAMAKAN is a full-time commitment program that extends for 10 weeks, 5 days a week, from 8:30 pm-4:00 pm.

The program is a full-time commitment. NBK will be hosting the program and providing a real business challenge that participants will work on into the final stages of the training sessions. Emad Ahmed Al Ablani, NBK General Manager, Group Human Resources, said: "We encourage Kuwaiti nationals who recently graduated from university and are currently unemployed, from all majors to apply".

"The program helps participants gain real, relevant experience and develop their skills", Al Ablani noted. "Participants will get exposed to the latest methods and tools that helps them in designing solutions and shaping ideas in any field. After completing the program, participants can add this experience to their resume." As to the process of joining the program, the applicants should fill an online form needs to be and accordingly if the candidate fits the required profile, they will be contacted via email and for an interview. Following all interviews, the candidates will be notified of the results.



Emad Al Ablani

NBK believes in the youth of Kuwait and is very keen and committed to support youth development. Its partnership in this program reflects the bank's beliefs and effort in offering unique opportunities for the Kuwaiti youth. TAMAKAN Program offers recent graduates a unique development opportunity before starting their first job. TAMAKAN is organized by Creative confidence in collaboration with NBK. "Creative Confidence" is a Kuwaiti based consulting and training company that specializes in creativity, innovation and collaboration.

figures came in at levels not seen since 1990. The data - which mirror big gains in other countries - have ramped up pressure on policymakers to act soon, with some commentators warning of a possible recession if they did not.

And eyes are focused on the Federal Reserve - the central bank of the world's top economy - whose massive bond-buying program has been a key pillar of support to the global recovery and rally in stock markets. Officials have said they will begin winding back the so-called quantitative easing measures gradually from this month and not be in any rush to hike interest rates, saying the inflation surge is only temporary. But an extended period of reports of soaring prices could force them to re-evaluate their plans. "With these most recent inflation readings, there is some concern that the Fed will reduce the amount of purchases - accelerate that tapering," Michael Arone of State Street Global Advisors told Bloomberg Television. "That would be a surprise to markets and could induce some volatility." All three main indexes on Wall Street ended in the red, and Asia followed suit. — AFP

AUB congratulates Al-Hassad winners

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank (AUB) held the weekly draw on Nov 17, 2021 of Al-Hassad Islamic account, the first Islamic prizes account in Kuwait which offers over 750 prizes over a 12 month period and provides numerous features. Such features include the simplest and easiest savings program, highest number of winners, largest prize value, loyalty multipliers, and unique account opening feature online with all ease with instant deposit option.

The Bank announced 20 winners of KD 1,000 as follows: Rafeef Ali Bohamad, Mariam Khaled Al-Abbasi, Rim Ahmed Achrafi, Abdultawab Baker Abdultawab, Fahhad Abdullah Fahhad, Dalal Jamal Al-Ayoubi, Naser Ahmad Al-Ghais, Lamyaa Abdulrazzaq Al-Hunayan, Mousa Mohd Mousa, Bader Saleh Al-Enezi, Ahmad Mohammad Al-Sabti, Hasan Ahmad Hasan, Musaied Mohammad Al-Munayes, Suleiman Jasim Al-Subaie, Said Emadeldin Ali, Zafer Mahmoud Tarboush, Ahmad Ali Al-Hawala, Abdullah Salem Al-Ali, Jamal Ali Al-Kandari and Odai Waleed Rashid.

The draws of Al-Hassad include several cash prizes, such as KD 100,000 each Eid and the grand quarterly draw of KD 250,000 prize which continues to be a key aspiration for customers who are wishing to fulfill their dreams. Al-Hassad offers also 20 weekly prizes of KD 1,000 for each winner. Furthermore, for the first time in Kuwait, the AUB Al-Hassad presents the "Privilege Draw", which is a quarterly draw of KD 25,000 exclusively for Al-Hassad customers who maintained their balances for more than one year and have not won a prize in the past five years.

For all draws, the clients are eligible for one draw chance for each KD 50 deposited in their Al-Hassad account. In addition to this attractive package of rewards, Al-Hassad Islamic account incorporates a Wakala contract for projected annual profits, making this account unique and attractive to all society segments that are aspiring to build their short and long-term savings through a unique savings account with many advantages.

Asian markets follow Wall St lower as inflation fears mount

HONG KONG: Asian markets fell yesterday, tracking losses on Wall Street fuelled by growing inflation concerns and talk that central banks will have to tighten their monetary policies quicker than anticipated. While recent data and healthy corporate earnings indicate that consumers continue to spend, traders are increasingly fearful that more than a year of massive financial support - coupled with rocketing demand and supply chain snarls - could send prices out of control.

Figures Wednesday showed inflation in the United Kingdom at a decade high and an 18-year peak in Canada - a week after US

Business

Deep underground, Paris mushroom growers struggle to preserve heritage

Farmers revolutionize mushroom production

CARRIERES-SUR-SEINE: Two centuries ago, French farmers revolutionized mushroom production by moving into the maze of limestone quarries underneath Paris, but today only a handful still cultivate a heritage at risk of fading away for good. The bitter irony is that demand for traditionally grown white button mushrooms, and their more flavourful brown-capped cousins, is as high as ever.

"It's not a question of finding clients, I sell everything I can produce," said Shoua-moua Vang at Les Alouettes in Carrieres-sur-Seine, a short drive from the bustling La Defense business district west of the capital. Vang runs the largest underground mushroom cave in the Paris region, spread across one and a half hectares (3.7 acres) of tunnels in a hill overlooking the Seine river.

He counts Michelin-starred chefs as well as supermarket chains and local markets among his customers, even though he deems his mushrooms "expensive" at 3.20 euros a kilo wholesale (\$1.65 a pound). But dank trays loaded with hundreds of kilograms of fungi were going to waste during a recent visit, because Vang lacked enough hands to pick them all. Just five of his 11 workers were on the job after the others called in sick - and Vang was doubtful that all of them would actually return.

"People these days don't want to work all day in the dark like vampires," he said, estimating that this day's production would top out at 1.5 tons instead of his usual 2.5 or even three tons. He

is one of just five traditional producers of what the French call "champignons de Paris" located around the capital, along with an even smaller number in abandoned quarries north of the capital. That's down from around 250 in the late 19th century, when farmers flocked to a "royal" mushroom variety that the Sun King, Louis XIV, had made popular by having it grown at Versailles.

They had discovered that *Agaricus bisporus* would grow year-round if placed in a manure-based substrate deep underground, where temperatures and humidity could be controlled and the dark would encourage growth. It also turned out that the caves' earthy atmosphere, reinforced by covering the compost with ground-up limestone, imparted a nutty, almost mineral taste while preventing the mushrooms from becoming over-saturated with water. Even the macabre tunnels of the Paris catacombs, now a top tourist attraction, were once filled with mushroom beds.

Revival in view?

Rapid urbanization and in particular the construction of the Paris metro began pushing growers out of the capital in the early 1900s, though around 50 were still in quarries under Paris suburbs in the 1970s, often run by new generations of the same family. The arrival of cheaper imports from industrial hangars in the Netherlands, Poland and later China, which use peat instead of limestone to boost production rates, proved too much for most.

"It's hard to find people who want to take over because there's no mushroom cultivation programs in agriculture schools," said Muriel Le Loarer, who is working to revive the Paris mushroom tradition at the SAFER rural development agency.

Vang, for example, had worked 11 years at the quarry owned by Jean-Louis Spinelli, whose children declined to follow in their father's footsteps, before taking over in September 2020. "Finding people to pick the mushrooms is complicated, it's hard to find good compost, and people don't want to invest when you don't know if producers are going to make it," Spinelli said. "We're promoting the sector, helping to find financing and working with local authorities to open quarries back up," said Le Loarer, noting the growing interest in local produce and the farm-to-table trend.

For now, though, Paris mushrooms are just a tiny fraction of the 90,000 tons produced in France each year, according to figures from the Rungis wholesale market south of the capital. Officials say it's too late to create a distinctive "Paris mushroom" certification under France's AOP food appellation rules, since the name has been used generically for decades. That means producers face a marketing challenge to ensure people realize when they're buying the authentic, quarry-farmed fungi. "Here our mushrooms grow naturally, I don't boost them by spraying water because that fills them with water," Vang said. "These mushrooms from the huge hangars are basically grown by computers." — AFP

France slams Jersey as Channel fishing tensions rise again

SAINT-POL-DE-LEON: The French government accused the Channel island of Jersey yesterday of being unwilling to cooperate on fishing licences, raising tensions again just weeks after Paris threatened to impose sanctions. The island, a British protectorate just off the coast of northern France, is at the centre of a row about the granting of licences to French fisherman following the UK's departure from the European Union. "It is obvious beyond doubt that Jersey is not respecting the Brexit deal. Worse, it is showing an unwillingness to cooperate with us," French Fisheries Minister Annick Girardin said yesterday during a trip to northwest France.

She said that 46 requests for licences from French fisherman had received no reply from the Jersey authorities, while another 52 licences had expired at the end of October "denying these fishermen access to Jersey waters." At the end of October, France threatened to ban British boats from unloading their catches at French ports and to subject all British imports to inspections, raising the prospect of a trade war between the neighbors.

Girardin has previously raised the possibility of restricting electricity exports to Jersey, which depends on the French mainland for its power. Several rounds of talks



SAINT HELIER, Jersey: French fishing boats return home following their protest in front of the port of Saint Helier off the British island of Jersey to draw attention to what they see as unfair restrictions on their ability to fish in UK waters after Brexit. —AFP

between the British and French governments this month had soothed tensions and staved off the threat of sanctions, but without finding a durable solution. France views Britain and Jersey as unfairly targeting French boats by either denying them licences or failing to respond to requests, undermining the deal between Britain and the UK which guaranteed EU fishermen continuing access to British waters.

Britain and Jersey deny the accusations and say that the rejected French boats have

been unable to prove that they previously fished in UK waters, a condition for obtaining a license. In a sign that the French government anticipated some losses, Girardin also said yesterday that she was preparing a rescue plan of 40-60 million euros (\$45-70 million) for French boat owners who had been rejected. Analysts say relations between Britain and France are at their lowest in decades due to tensions over Brexit, migration and a submarine contract with Australia. —AFP

In UK, fears grow over spiking winter fuel bills

LONDON: British pensioner Doreen Thompson wears extra layers of clothes in her two-bedroom apartment outside London to avoid turning the heat on since her utility bills have jumped. The 70-year-old usually entertains guests in her kitchen because it's warmer than the living room - where walls have mould - in her government-subsidized flat in Brixton. Domestic electricity and gas prices have soared worldwide this year, driven by spiking wholesale energy costs, stoking fears over the peak-demand cold winter in Britain. As the weather turns cold, "I can't have the heating on all day because I just cannot afford to," Thompson told AFP.

Winter 'might be nasty'

Global inflation has shot higher largely on surging energy prices, eating into household budgets in Britain and abroad, particularly for those on low incomes. UK annual inflation rocketed to a near-decade high at 4.2 percent in October, official data showed Wednesday. And the rate is forecast to peak around 5.0 percent in April, compounded by soaring food prices and a supply-chain crunch as economies reopen from pandemic lockdowns.

"I'm worried about this winter because I've got a feeling that it might be quite nasty," said Thompson, whose rent accounts for almost half her monthly pension totalling £1,200 (\$1,630, 1,400 euros). Energy bills and other expenses gobble up her remaining money, while her bank account fell into the red this month. "I got a text from the bank to say that I was overdrawn," said retired social worker Thompson, who now relies on help from voluntary organizations that she used to assist. "So I checked and yes, I am in overdraft, but thank God it's only by £35 this month." —AFP

Business

India's biggest-ever IPO Paytm slumps by 27% on market debut

Traders question if the loss-making firm would ever turn profit

MUMBAI: Indian mobile payments giant Paytm lost more than a quarter of its value on its market debut yesterday after raising \$2.5 billion in the country's biggest-ever IPO, as traders questioned whether the loss-making firm would ever turn a profit. Asia's third-largest economy has been in the grip of an initial public offering frenzy, with start-ups attracting billions of dollars in investment in a bright spot in the Covid-battered economy. But while Paytm has established a leading position in the fast-growing marketplace for mobile payments it has lost money in each of the past three years and its market debut showed the limits of investor appetite.

Founder Vijay Shekhar Sharma, once named India's youngest billionaire, wiped tears from his eyes when the national anthem was played at an opening ceremony before trading began at the Bombay Stock Exchange. Referring to the phrase in the anthem "Bharat bhagya vidhata" - "the one who will define the fortune of this country" - he said Paytm has "actually done that". But the company's shares dived at the open and finished at 1,650 rupees (\$21), down more than 27 percent from their IPO price of 2,150 rupees.

"There is a lot of euphoria for the digital space and that seems to now be subsiding," said SMC Global Securities analyst Saurabh Jain. "These companies are coming out with IPOs at scorching valuations and it's anybody's guess what valuations are correct," he told AFP. "It is very difficult for a company like Paytm to turn profitable. They have the scalability but they are not able to make money through their business model." Following the debut, Paytm's market

capitalisation fell from an IPO valuation of \$20 billion to about \$13.6 billion at the close of trade.

Rakesh Mehta, a 49-year-old Kolkata-based rice exporter, said he had bought 12 shares worth 25,800 rupees in Paytm, encouraged by Sharma's bullishness about his firm. "I was shocked to see the price when it opened. I didn't get much of a chance to sell," Mehta told AFP. "I was planning to sell 50 percent for listing gains and hold the rest. Now I have no choice but to hold on. If it goes anywhere close to my purchase price, I will definitely sell. I wouldn't want to risk holding it further."

Rock music

Sharma - a schoolteacher's son who says he learned English by listening to rock music - retains a 14 percent stake in the business, worth \$2.4 billion at the IPO price but approximately \$540 million less by the close of trade. Other shareholders include Chinese tycoon Jack Ma's Alibaba group and associate Ant Financial, along with Japan's SoftBank and Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway.

Ant Financial sold 3.5 percent of its 28 percent stake in the IPO to meet regulatory requirements that no shareholder should own more than 25 percent of a listed company. Alibaba continues to own another six percent. Paytm's platform was launched in 2010 and quickly became synonymous with digital payments in a country traditionally dominated by cash transactions. It has benefited from the government's efforts to curb the use of cash - including the demonetisation of nearly all banknotes in circulation five years ago - and most recently, from the pandemic.

around the world.

After initially being reluctant to pay French newspapers for the use of their content, Google finally signed a three-year framework agreement with some of the nation's press in early 2021, but was fined 500 million euros (\$566 million) by the competition authority in mid-July for not negotiating "in good faith". Google has appealed, and is continuing negotiations to reach a new agreement. AFP had fought for news agencies to be fully eligible to benefit from neighboring rights agreements, Fries said, adding that Wednesday's deal "will contribute to the production of quality information and the development of innovation within the agency".

"This agreement with Agence France-Presse demonstrates our willingness to find common ground with publishers and press agencies in France on the topic of neighboring rights," said Sebastien Missoffe, Google's general manager in France, adding that the pact "paves the way for even closer collaboration". Under the agreement AFP will also offer fact-checking training on several continents, details of which will be announced soon, the companies said in a statement. — AFP



MUMBAI: Paytm, an Indian cellphone-based digital payment platform, founder Vijay Shekhar Sharma (left) rings a ceremonial gong during his company's IPO listing ceremony at the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) in Mumbai yesterday. — AFP

Nearly 22 million Indian shop owners, taxi and rickshaw drivers and other vendors accept payments as low as 10 rupees (\$0.13) using Paytm's ubiquitous blue-and-white QR code stickers. The platform had 337 million customers at the end of June, according to the company's

regulatory filing. In 2020-21 it handled transactions worth more than \$54 billion. Apart from Paytm, Indian companies have raised a record \$10.5 billion through IPOs in 2021 so far, including beauty retailer Nykaa, which doubled on its debut last week. — AFP

Google agrees 5-year deal to pay AFP for online content

PARIS: Google and Agence France-Presse on Wednesday said they had signed a "pioneering" five-year deal under which the world's biggest internet search company will pay an undisclosed sum for content in Europe. The agreement following 18 months of negotiations is the first by a news agency under the 2019 European directive on so-called neighboring rights, which are at the heart of multiple disputes globally between web giants and the media over payment for use of online news and other content.

"This is an agreement that covers the whole of the EU, in all of AFP's languages, including in countries that have not enacted the directive," said AFP CEO Fabrice Fries, describing the deal as "pioneering" and the "culmination of a long struggle". AFP produces and distributes multimedia content to its clients in six languages

Apple to start letting people fix own iPhones

SAN FRANCISCO: Apple said it will begin allowing people to fix gadgets they buy from the Silicon Valley giant in a concession seen as a victory for "right-to-repair" advocates. The iPhone and Mac computer maker has long restricted repairs to technicians at "Genius bars" in its shops or at authorized service centers, where device owners often meet with lengthy waits and costly tabs. "We never thought we'd see the day," read a tweet from @iFixit, which says it offers repair guides for a range of devices. "There are some catches, but were thrilled to see Apple admit what we've always known: Everyone's enough of a Genius to fix an iPhone."

Apple's new Self Service Repair program will start in the US, offering to sell tools and

parts to people who want to work on damaged iPhone 12 or 13 model handsets. It will initially focus on parts more prone to damage, such as screens, batteries and cameras. The program will be rolled out in other countries during the course of next year, and be expanded to include some Mac computers, said the Silicon Valley-based company. "Creating greater access to Apple genuine parts gives our customers even more choice if a repair is needed," chief operating officer Jeff Williams said in a release.

"In the past three years, Apple has nearly doubled the number of service locations with access to Apple genuine parts, tools, and training, and now we're providing an option for those who wish to complete their own repairs." The move comes as Apple faces criticism and lawsuits over its tight control of its "ecosystem" from iPhone hardware to the apps allowed on handsets. Laws enshrining a right by people to be able to repair things they buy have gained momentum across the US and on a federal level. — AFP

Kuwait Times Classifieds

Friday, November 19, 2021



NOTICE
November 14, 2021



Mr. Shibin Manakkaparambil Lalu, son of Mr. Manakkaparambil Gopalan Lalu, resident of Manakkaparambil House, Aluva PO, Patterippuram, Ernakulam - 683101, Kerala and Ms. Priyanka Nair, daughter of Mr. Rajan resident of H No 6 2 42 A C Guards Life Style, Residency Opp Saleem Function Hall, Lakadikapool, Hyderabad - 500001, Telangana both Indian nationals presently residing in Kuwait, have given notice of intended marriage between them under the Foreign Marriage Act, 1969. If anyone has any objection to the proposed marriage, he/she may file the same with the undersigned according to the procedure laid down under the Act /Rule within thirty days from the date of publication of this notice. Communications in this regard can be made by Email (cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in) / letters/ telephonic calls (00965- 22550171, 00965- 22533125).

K. Rathore

(K.S Rathore) First Secretary (CA)
and Marriage Officer.
Embassy of India, Kuwait

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Siji Jobin, holder of Indian Passport No. M290484 and Civil ID No. 287062207323 has changed by Surname from Jobin to Rajan. Name: Siji, Surname: Rajan hereinafter in all my dealings and documents I will be known by the name of Siji Rajan. **(C 0979)**

I, PREMJI CHAMATHEEMAL BHASKARAN (PASSPORT NO. Z3081020), S/o BHASKARAN, RESIDING AT CHAMATHEEMAL HOUSE, P.O. MANASSERY, MUKKAM, KOZHICODE, KERALA-673602 (CURRENTLY RESIDING IN KUWAIT), ON BEHALF OF MY MINOR DAUGHTER LAKSHMI, HOLDER OF PASSPORT NO. R2312579, HEREBY CHANGE HER NAME TO LAKSHMI PREMJI, WITH IMMEDIATE EFFECT. **(C 0980)**

I, PREMJI CHAMATHEEMAL BHASKARAN (PASSPORT NO. Z3081020), S/o BHASKARAN, RESIDING AT CHAMATHEEMAL HOUSE, P.O. MANASSERY, MUKKAM, KOZHICODE, KERALA-673602 (CURRENTLY RESIDING IN KUWAIT), ON BEHALF OF MY MINOR DAUGHTER GOWRI, HOLDER OF PASSPORT NO. R2312578, HEREBY CHANGE HER NAME TO GOWRI PREMJI, WITH IMMEDIATE EFFECT. **(C 0980)**
19-11-2021

I, SUHANI AVINASH D/o FRAN-

CIS AARON SOLOMON, holder of Indian Passport No. T6756529 and Civil ID No. 285110105681 has changed my name from SUHANI AVINASH TO SUHANI SOLOMON. Hereinafter in all my dealings and documents, I will be known by name of SUHANI SOLOMON. **(C 0976) 18-11-2021**

BAVAJI SHAKE S/o SABBEER SHAKE I want to change surname to BAVAJI SHAIK, holding Passport No. K6911748, Civil ID No. 291061602059. **(C 0974) 17-11-2021**

I, IRSAD KHAN JAMIL KHAN S/o JAMIL KHAN JALIL KHAN holder of Indian Passport No. K7040594 & Civil ID No. 272101902029 has changed my name from IRSAD KHAN JAMIL KHAN to IRSHAD JAMIL KHAN hereinafter in all my dealings and documents, I will be known by name of IRSHAD JAMIL KHAN. **(C 0972)**

I, Uzma a am holding Indian Passport K6931388, D/o Nazir Ahmad Bhat PR/o Soura, Srinagar J&K 190011 India hereby declare that henceforth my name in the passport is read as Uzma Nazir as per parentage /Surname which I want to be changed to Uzma Jan as per my documents thus, I am changing my name from Uzma Nazir to Uzma Jan. **(C 0973) 16-11-2021**

الطيران المدني
Civil Aviation
State of Kuwait - دولة الكويت



Tel: (+965) 161 Ext: 66819 - 66817
Fax: (+965) 24331579
www.met.gov.kw

Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Fair with light to moderate north westerly wind with speed of 12 - 32 km/h .

BY NIGHT: Fair to Rather cold with light to moderate north westerly wind with speed of 12 - 35 km/h .

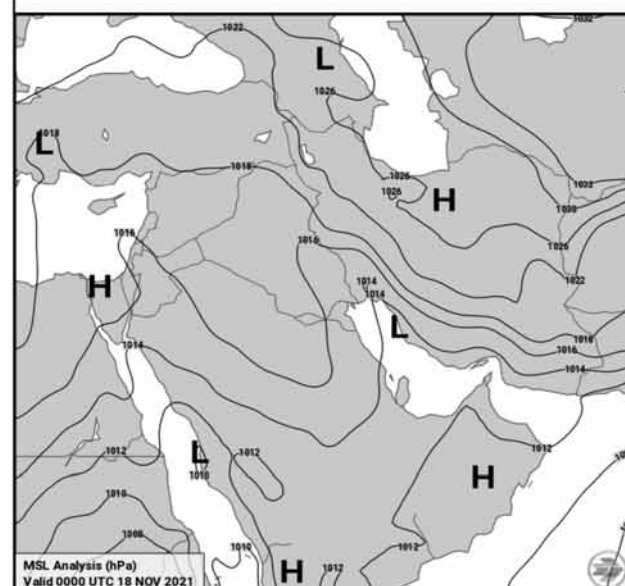
WEATHER WARNING

No Current Warnings

STATION	MAX EXP	MIN REC
KUWAIT CITY	27 °C	19 °C
KUWAIT AIRPORT	27 °C	14 °C
ABDALY	28 °C	13 °C
JAHRA	28 °C	17 °C
SALMIYAH	26 °C	20 °C
AHMADI	26 °C	19 °C
NUWAISIB	28 °C	16 °C
WAFRA	27 °C	16 °C
SALMY	25 °C	12 °C
JAL ALIYAH	27 °C	14 °C

SFC. CHART

18/11/2021 0000 UTC



4 DAYS FORECAST

DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Friday	11/19	Fair and some scattered clouds will appear	26 °C	14 °C	NW-VRB	06 - 26 km/h
Saturday	11/20	Fair and Partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times	25 °C	17 °C	SE	12 - 42 km/h
Sunday	11/21	Fair and Partly cloudy to cloudy with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times	28 °C	19 °C	SE	12 - 42 km/h
Monday	11/22	Fair and Partly cloudy with a chance for scattered rain	27 °C	18 °C	SE-NW	12 - 32 km/h

PRAYER TIMES

Fajr	04:51
Sunrise	06:13
Zuhr	11:33
Asr	14:32
Sunset	16:52
Isha	18:12

All times are local time unless otherwise stated.

UP.0

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT

MAX. Temp.	27 °C
MIN. Temp.	18 °C
MAX. RH	64 %
MIN. RH	23 %
MAX. Wind	N 39 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

Sports

India beat New Zealand to give new T20 skipper Rohit winning start

JAIPUR: India gave Rohit Sharma a winning start as captain by securing a five-wicket victory over New Zealand in the first T20 international despite a late wobble in Jaipur on Wednesday. The hosts were cruising towards a target of 165 as Rohit struck a quickfire 48 and Suryakumar Yadav made 62.

India, from needing 23 from the final four overs with eight wickets in hand, stuttered badly to leave them still requiring 10 off the last over, bowled by part-time seamer Daryl Mitchell. But Rishabh Pant struck the winning boundary over mid-off with two balls to spare to put India 1-0 ahead in the three-match series.

It was an encouraging start to life as skipper for Rohit, who took over from Virat Kohli in the shortest format following India's shock Super 12 exit at the T20 World Cup. "Towards the end we saw it wasn't easy. Was a great learning for the guys because those guys haven't batted in that situation before for India," said Rohit. New Zealand, without usual captain Kane Williamson, were playing just three days after their World Cup final loss to Australia in Dubai. India made a bright start to their chase before opener KL Rahul was caught off Mitchell Santner for just 15.

But the home side, with new coach Rahul Dravid in the dugout for the first time, took total control through Yadav and Rohit. Yadav, who was given the man-of-the-match award, struck

six fours and three sixes in his 40-ball innings before he was clean bowled by Trent Boult, who earlier removed Rohit, in the 16th over.

New Zealand dragged themselves back into the contest in the closing overs, but stand-in skipper Tim Southee turned to Mitchell instead of leg-spinner Todd Astle in the 20th over and Pant got India over the line. "We played our best cricket and took it deep," Southee said.

Guptill, Chapman impress

Earlier, half-centuries by Martin Guptill and Mark Chapman propelled the visitors to 164 for six. The Kiwis lost Mitchell for a duck, bowled in the first over by seamer Bhuvneshwar Kumar. Guptill and Chapman then put together a 109-run second-wicket partnership, hammering the Indian bowling attack at will. Chapman scored 63 in 50 balls but fell to Ravichandran Ashwin as he tried to hit the off-spinner over the leg-side boundary. Ashwin also dismissed Glenn Phillips, lbw, in the same over for nought.

But Guptill continued with his lively innings, smashing four sixes and three fours in his 70 off 42 balls before being caught at deep mid-wicket. Wicketkeeper Tim Seifert tried to accelerate but was caught off Kumar for 12. Kumar finished with figures of 2-24 while Chahar and Mohammed Siraj took one wicket each. The teams will meet in the second T20I today in Ranchi. — AFP



JAIPUR: India's Rohit Sharma plays a shot during the first Twenty20 cricket match between India and New Zealand at the Sawai Mansingh stadium in Jaipur on Wednesday. —AFP

Three athletes test positive inside Beijing Olympic bubble

BEIJING: Three athletes attending training events for the Beijing Winter Olympics have tested positive for COVID-19, Chinese officials said yesterday, with the country on high alert against the coronavirus ahead of the Games.

Beijing 2022 organizers have left nothing to chance with the games set to start in February, restricting entry to the capital and insisting on daily virus tests for thousands of athletes who will be kept within a "closed-loop" bubble. One of the athletes, a foreign luger, tested positive at the airport when entering the country and was sent to a quarantine hotel along with another infected teammate as they had no symptoms, officials said last week. But a third person has now tested positive — another luger and a close contact of the earlier cases, Zhao Weidong, an Olympics organizing committee member, said yesterday.

The latest patient is asymptomatic and has also been transferred to a quarantine facility for "medical observation," Zhao said at a press conference. Authorities are continuing to "test people, materials and the environment, as well as conducting health monitoring and disinfecting the environment," Zhao added. China is gearing up to tackle one of the largest challenges to its zero-COVID strategy as thousands of athletes are expected to descend on Beijing for the games, which will be held from February 4 to 20. City authorities this week imposed strict new rules on inbound travelers, requiring all visitors to Beijing to show a negative COVID test result from the past 48 hours and cancelling flights from higher risk areas within the country. — AFP

Villa not stepping stone to Liverpool job: Gerrard

LONDON: Steven Gerrard has slammed claims he will use the Aston Villa job as a stepping stone towards eventually taking charge of his former club Liverpool. Gerrard was hired as Villa boss last week after agreeing to leave Scottish champions Rangers.

Premier League strugglers Villa host Brighton in Gerrard's first match on Saturday and his emotional reunion with Liverpool comes at Anfield on December 11. The Liverpool legend has never hidden his ambition to manage the club he captained to Champions League glory in 2005 and FA Cup success a year later. But Gerrard is adamant his move to Villa Park after three and a half years in Glasgow was not motivated by taking another step closer to his Liverpool dream.

"It's very unfair to describe this as a stepping stone, you will never hear me say that," Gerrard told reporters at his first Villa press conference yesterday. "I'm all-in and I will give this job all it needs to be successful. The opportunity to be back in the Premier League and the opportunity to be back close to my family are the two reasons this was right for me. I am 100 per cent committed and so are my staff. There is nothing wrong with having dreams and aspirations."

While Gerrard was keen to distance himself from Anfield for now, he remains in contact with Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp after working with the Reds' youth teams before taking his first managerial job at Rangers. "Liverpool have a world-class coach in Jurgen Klopp. If he was to sign a lifetime deal right now I would be very happy for him and them," Gerrard said.



Steven Gerrard

"I've been in touch with Jurgen since day one. We live in the same area and I bump into him when he's walking his dogs. He sent me a message saying he was looking forward to a big hug on the side on December 11 and it's something for me to look forward to as well."

Former England midfielder Gerrard has established his managerial credentials by leading Rangers out of the doldrums to their first Scot-

tish crown in 10 years — in the process stopping arch rivals' Celtic in their bid to win 10 successive titles. That unbeaten league campaign with the Glasgow club, as well as their relative success in European competitions under Gerrard, suggests he is capable of revitalizing Villa. The 41-year-old has replaced Dean Smith at Villa Park after five successive defeats triggered his predecessor's sacking.

Villa are just two points above the relegation zone and Gerrard knows he needs to spark an immediate upturn in results. "Long term, the club would like to be back on a European level, I don't think now is the right time to put any date on that," he said. "For me more importantly, it is about focusing on the short-term, which is Brighton at the weekend. We need to start winning football matches again."

He has already made his mark at the training ground by banning tomato ketchup. "It was banned before I had seen it!" Gerrard said. "The players have to have the right mentality. Go above and beyond. They need to strive to be elite." —AFP

Sports

Friday, November 19, 2021

Hamilton on crest of a wave ahead of new Qatar challenge

DOHA: Fresh from arguably his greatest triumph, Lewis Hamilton will be on the crest of a wave this weekend as he seeks another momentous victory over Max Verstappen at the inaugural Qatar Grand Prix. Just days after the most spectacular win of his career at the Sao Paulo Grand Prix, the 36-year-old, a keen surfer, will be powered by Mercedes' fighting spirit and a sense of shifting momentum at the Losail International Circuit.

Protests, controversies and stewards' reviews aside, Hamilton knows that if he has the same clear speed advantage, courtesy of his new Mercedes power-unit, he can further trim Verstappen's championship lead as they go forward into the unknown.

The Dutchman held a 14-point advantage after Brazil, but that may be reduced if a review of his aggressive move to defend his lead at Interlagos results in a penalty that affects the race result. A five-second sanction would relegate him to third and cost him three points, adding more ire to Red Bull's mounting anger, and apparent disbelief at Hamilton's speed, as their rivalry with Mercedes intensifies.

"If Hamilton is also so superior this weekend in Qatar, and then in Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi, we can write off the title," Red Bull's influential advisor Helmut Marko told F1-Insider. "I have never seen such a rocket engine from Mercedes. We couldn't hold Hamilton on the straights, even though he was driving with a rear wing set at a similar steep angle to Monaco. But only Hamilton has that speed. The other Mercedes drivers are no cause for concern for us."

Quoted by the German publication, Marko added that Red Bull were considering initiating another protest of Hamilton's car. "We are mainly concerned with two things, which we may also take up with the FIA for clarification, but there will only be a protest if we have evidence that

something is not compliant with the rules."

'Triumph through adversity'

The two areas of concern are believed to Hamilton's new engine and a 'ride height' system that allegedly lowers his car on the straights to reduce drag and increase speed. Hamilton was handed a series of penalties in Brazil, where he was fastest in qualifying, but started the sprint race from the back of the grid due to a rear wing irregularity, on top of taking a five-place grid drop for a new engine.

These setbacks and the stewards' decision to take no action after Verstappen's mid-race indiscretion, which has since been the subject of a requested review from Mercedes, fuelled the champions' determination. Team boss Toto Wolff said he felt proud of his team's response.

"It was a triumph through adversity and I couldn't be prouder of the fighting spirit from every member of our team," he said. "Through each setback, our determination grew stronger, and this already close team grew tighter with every challenge thrown our way. Lewis completed a stunning victory, which will rightly be talked about for years to come. For us, that victory is just one important step on our journey and our goal is clear."

Looking ahead to the final leg of a demanding triple-header, he added: "We arrive in Qatar for a fresh challenge, a brand-new circuit for F1 and one we can't wait to race on. We have prepared as well as we can for a new track — and the performance picture, from circuit to circuit, remains unpredictable, but as Brazil showed, even on the back foot, this team will always be in there fighting. The final race of a triple-header can sometimes test your energy levels, but with just three races to decide both championships, our motivation is greater than ever." — AFP



MILWAUKEE: Giannis Antetokounmpo #34 of the Milwaukee Bucks attempts a layup against the Los Angeles Lakers on Wednesday at the Fiserv Forum Center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.— AFP

Antetokounmpo's 47 points fuel Bucks in NBA win over Lakers

LOS ANGELES: Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 47 points and Khris Middleton grabbed a slice of Milwaukee franchise history as the NBA champion Bucks beat the Los Angeles Lakers 109-102 on Wednesday.

Antetokounmpo out-muscled a Lakers lineup still missing injured superstar LeBron James, along with Trevor Ariza and Kendrick Nunn. He set a tone with 17 points in the first quarter and combined with Middleton late to thwart a Lakers rally bid.

"I wanted to be the aggressor out there," said Antetokounmpo, whose points total was his highest since he posted 50 in the Bucks' championship-clinching victory over the Phoenix Suns in game six of last season's NBA Finals.

"I wanted to initiate the contact, get in the paint, make the right play and just play with an edge out there," added the two-time league MVP, who added nine rebounds and three assists with one steal and one blocked shot. With 29 seconds remaining, he sealed the game with two free throws. The Lakers had rallied from an 11-point first-half deficit and led 87-86 with 9:29 left to play.

Middleton, playing in his first game since October 30 after completing COVID-19 proto-

cols, combined with Antetokounmpo on nine straight Bucks points that put Milwaukee up 95-91. Middleton's 16 points included a brace of three-pointers in the fourth quarter that gave Milwaukee the lead for good and tied him with Ray Allen for most in Bucks history with 1,051. "That's a very, very special place to be," Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer said.

Talen-Horton Tucker led the Lakers with 25 points and 12 rebounds. Anthony Davis, nursing a sore hip in the final period, scored 18 points and Russell Westbrook added 19 points and 15 assists for Los Angeles.

The Brooklyn Nets bounced back from a lopsided 117-99 loss to the Golden State Warriors with a 109-99 victory over the Cleveland Cavaliers at the Barclays Center. One night after coach Steve Nash admitted his team weren't in the same "category" as the Warriors, James Harden scored 27 points with 10 rebounds and seven assists and Kevin Durant added 23 points for Brooklyn.

The Nets' 21-point halftime lead was their largest of the season, but the Cavaliers kept the pressure on with a 32-19 third quarter. The Cavs, led by 25 points from Ricky Rubio, trimmed the deficit to seven points with less than five minutes remaining, but couldn't get any closer.

Over at Madison Square Garden, the New York Knicks were booed by their home fans during a 104-98 loss to the lowly Orlando Magic, who improved to 4-11. "Disappointed," Knicks coach Tom Thibodeau said after his team surrendered the lead in the final minutes of a game in which they coughed up 18 turnovers. "We have to learn from it and get ready for the next one. But we're capable of doing a lot better." — AFP



SAO PAULO: Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton celebrates after winning Brazil's Formula One Sao Paulo Grand Prix at the Autodromo Jose Carlos Pace, or Interlagos racetrack, in Sao Paulo, on November 14, 2021.— AFP

Djokovic reaches ATP Finals semis by thrashing Rublev

TURIN: Novak Djokovic moved into the last four of the ATP Finals for the 10th time with a comfortable victory over Andrey Rublev in Turin on Wednesday. The world number one, bidding to equal Roger Federer's record of six titles at the season-ending event, brushed aside fifth seed Rublev 6-3, 6-2 to secure his 50th match win of the year.

Djokovic, thanks to successive straight-sets victories, has wrapped up top spot in the Green Group. "I served well (and) that helped tremendously," Djokovic said. "I wanted to put him out of his comfort zone, taking away the time and mix up the pace. It was a great performance overall."

Norway's Casper Ruud overcame British alternate Cameron Norrie 1-6, 6-3, 6-4 in the night match to keep alive his chances of reaching the last four. The 34-year-old Djokovic is looking to cap off a remarkable year which saw him only just miss out on completing a calendar Grand Slam with defeat by Daniil Medvedev in the US Open final. He plays Norrie in his last round-robin match today. A rematch with second-ranked Medvedev in the final in Italy is still a possibility, with the Russian reigning champion sitting top of the Red Group. Djokovic is bidding for back-to-back titles after returning to action earlier this month with success in the Paris Masters, beating Medvedev in the final.

The Serb has not won the ATP Finals since 2015, losing finals in 2016 and 2018 to Andy Murray and Alexander Zverev respectively, while also

falling in an epic last-four clash with Dominic Thiem last year. The 20-time Grand Slam champion was far too strong for Rublev, though, serving 14 aces and hitting 19 winners past his overpowered opponent. He broke twice in each set of a match which lasted just 69 minutes. "Winning the first set, I put additional pressure on him, and I started to maybe play more consistently from the back of the court," Djokovic added.

Earlier, Norrie replaced Stefanos Tsitsipas in

the draw after the Greek star pulled out with an elbow injury. The world number four had refused to comment on the problem after his opening loss to Rublev, but admitted on Wednesday the injury which forced him to retire from his first match in Paris was still hampering him. "I have taken the very difficult decision to retire from the 2021 Finals due to my elbow injury, which has been bothering me for a couple of weeks now," Tsitsipas said. "It's a very difficult decision from my side." —AFP



TURIN: Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates after defeating Russia's Andrey Rublev during their first round singles match of the ATP Finals at the Pala Alpitour venue in Turin on Wednesday. — AFP

Muguruza becomes Spain's first WTA Finals champion

GUADALAJARA: Former world number one Garbine Muguruza beat Anett Kontaveit 6-3, 7-5 on Wednesday to become the first Spaniard to win the elite season-ending WTA Finals in Guadalajara, Mexico. Muguruza, winner of the 2016 French Open and 2017 Wimbledon titles, capped a 2021 campaign that saw her return to the highest level with titles in Dubai and Chicago after three years outside of the top 10. The 28-year-old is projected to end the year at number three in the world. "I'm just very happy I proved to myself once again I can be the best, I can be the 'maestra', like how we say in Spanish," she said. "That puts me in a very good position for next year, a good ranking. How can I say? A good energy. It's just the payoff for such a long year," she added. "My team and I worked hard. It pays off. Just shows us that we're doing the right way."

Muguruza said it was a delight to win "such a big, big, big tournament, the Masters, in Latin America, here in Mexico. "I think it's just perfect," she said. Arantxa Sanchez Vicario was the only other Spanish player to reach the WTA Finals championship match, falling to German great Steffi Graf in 1993 at Madison Square Garden in New York.

Fan favorite

The prestigious event was moved to Guadalajara from Shenzhen, China, because of the coronavirus pandemic, and Muguruza — who won back-to-back titles in Monterrey in 2018 and 2019 — was a favorite of Mexican fans. "Definitely I'm very supported here in Mexico," she said. "I used it this week for sure."



ZAPOPAN: Spain's Garbine Muguruza celebrates with the trophy after winning the 2021 WTA Finals Tournament singles final match in Zapopan, Mexico, on Wednesday. — AFP

Muguruza battled back from a break down in the second set, winning the last four games of the match to seal her 10th career title, breaking Kontaveit at love. She notched her second win of the tournament against Kontaveit, having ended the Estonian's 12-match WTA win streak with a must-have round-robin victory on Sunday.

It was the seventh time in WTA Finals history that round-robin opponents have had a rematch in the final. Kontaveit, whose late-season surge included four titles since August — at Cleveland, Ostrova, Moscow and Cluj-Napoca, is projected to reach a career-high ranking of seventh in the world. She had dropped her serve just four times in four matches coming into the final but was broken five times by Muguruza. "I'd like to congratulate Garbine," Kontaveit said as she accepted her runner-up award. "You've beaten me twice this week, that's just too good."

Muguruza takes the crown that Australian Ashleigh Barty won in 2019 in Shenzhen. The Finals were cancelled in 2020 because of the pandemic and Barty opted not to defend her title amid the lingering travel restrictions caused by coronavirus. Other notable absentees included Serena Williams and Naomi Osaka. The doubles title went to the Czech duo of Barbora Krejickova and Katerina Siniakova, who beat Hsieh Su-Wei of Taiwan and Elise Mertens of Belgium 6-3, 6-4. The Czechs finished the tournament unbeaten to claim their fifth title of 2021 — a haul that included their third career Grand Slam doubles title at Roland Garros and an Olympic gold medal in Tokyo. — AFP

Concern deepens for Chinese tennis star's safety

BEIJING: The boss of women's tennis has cast doubt on an email posted on China's media purportedly from tennis star Peng Shuai, saying it "only raises my concerns as to her safety." Steve Simon, chairman of the WTA, said in a statement that he had a "hard time believing" the email was written by Peng, who has not been heard from since alleging two weeks ago that a powerful Chinese politician had sexually assaulted her.

Peng, a former Wimbledon and French Open doubles champion, alleged on the Twitter-like Weibo earlier this month that former vice-premier Zhang Gaoli had "forced" her into sex during a long-term on-off relationship. The claims were quickly scrubbed from social media and she has not been seen since, drawing mounting concern over her wellbeing.

However, state-run CGTN published a screenshot on Twitter of what it said was an email written by Peng to Simon and other WTA officials. In the email, Peng purportedly claims that her earlier accusations of sexual abuse are "not true" and says she is "resting at home and everything is fine."

But doubts were quickly flagged about the language used in the purported email from Peng, which Twitter users noted had a cursor visible in the screenshot posted by CGTN. Simon said he was struggling to believe it was authentic. "The statement released today by Chinese state media concerning Peng Shuai only raises my concerns as to her safety and whereabouts," Simon wrote in a statement.

"I have a hard time believing that Peng Shuai actually wrote the email we received or believes what is being attributed to her," he added. He said he had been repeatedly trying to reach her via numerous forms of communication, to no avail. He called for "independent and verifiable proof that she is safe".

On November 2, Peng wrote on social media that Zhang — who is in his seventies — "forced" her into sex and said they had an on-off relationship lasting several years. The post appeared to have been deleted quickly, however, sparking swift accusations from critics of Beijing of online censorship.

Four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka said Wednesday that she was in "shock" about the case, with Novak Djokovic and numerous other players in recent days saying they were deeply worried about her. American player Jessica Pegula tweeted yesterday that she hoped the WTA "continues to show what we stand for as players." "I hope more people, not just tennis players, shed some light on this deeply concerning situation," she wrote. China's national tennis association has not responded to AFP requests for comment. — AFP

Sports

Football industry embraces crypto as Messi helps 'fan tokens' take off

PARIS: When Paris Saint-Germain signed Lionel Messi, the salary package included something previously unheard of for a player — a one-off payment, understood to be worth around one million euros (\$1.15m), made in PSG 'fan tokens'.

It was the result of a partnership signed by the French giants in 2018 with Socios.com which sees fans use a cryptocurrency called 'chiliz' to buy tokens allowing them to vote on issues related to the club. These issues have tended to be rather mundane, for example Juventus asking what music they should play in their stadium, but the concept has caught on.

The company has grown quickly since signing its first partnerships with PSG and Juventus to being involved with 56 football clubs and around 100 sports teams worldwide, says CEO Alexandre Dreyfus. Messi has brought more publicity, and Dreyfus believes the Argentinian will "set a trend".

"This is more a top-up that is never going to replace any compensation. It is more like a bonus, but it is a bonus that at some point players will start to ask for," Dreyfus tells AFP from his office in Malta. "We hope that in two years, during the 'mercato' (transfer window), a player will say: 'Yes I am going to that team but they had better give me a million dollars of fan tokens'."

Dreyfus admits the pandemic and resulting economic crisis has benefited his company, allowing them to multiply their partnerships. "The fact is that clubs suddenly lost 50 or 70 or 80 percent of their revenue, and they realised: 'Hey, we have fans all over the world, what can we sell them?'" They now have shirt sponsorship deals with Inter Milan and Valencia, promoting their fan tokens.

Sponsorship bonanza

New analysis by KPMG Football Benchmark shows that over 40 shirt sponsorship deals have been signed in Europe's five biggest leagues since the pandemic's onset. It says Inter doubled income by switching from Pirelli to Socios.com and a deal worth \$23.57 million.

There is a mini-revolution happening as businesses related to

cryptocurrency have started appearing on shirts. In July, Roma announced a three-year deal worth \$14 million annually that sees their shirts carry the name of DigitalBits, "an easy-to-use open-source blockchain used to power consumer digital assets". "Not only can fans witness history, but they can now own part of it," boasted Roma. "Get ready to trade and collect. Join us as we step into the future of football."

The emergence of crypto-related businesses in football comes as countries are introducing regulation to clamp down on gambling sponsorship — a ban is in place in Spain, for example, while the UK government is considering one. "The door is ajar for new companies to stick their foot in," say KPMG.

"Something has to fill the void and fan tokens, or something which is not defined as gambling but is gambling, are likely to be the big ticket in town," Kieran Maguire, a lecturer in football finance at Liverpool University, tells AFP.

Concerns

There are concerns about curious punters being drawn into using crypto-related products without having a proper understanding. To highlight their volatility, the value of 'chiliz' — a less well-known cryptocurrency than, say, Bitcoin — shot up 58 percent in the four weeks after Messi's arrival. "Ultimately these are speculative products. Someone described them to me as gambling with a small G," says Maguire. Meanwhile, some supporter groups have criticized their clubs for embracing fan tokens. Aston Villa Supporters Trust told Joe.co.uk their club's agreement with Socios.com was "wholly inappropriate" and questioned why fan engagement should be monetized.

Maguire says: "The clubs are targeting the 'non-legacy fans' and asking: 'Can we make some money out of these new fans?' If we take Manchester United, they claim to have 1.1 billion fans and in a normal year they will make around 600 million pounds (\$805m) in revenue. So that works out as about 55 pence per fan per year. That's pretty bad."



PARIS: This file photo taken on October 29, 2021 shows Paris Saint-Germain's Argentinian forward Lionel Messi reacting prior to the French L1 football match against Lille at the Parc des Princes stadium, in Paris. — AFP

For the clubs, this is where Dreyfus — a founder of French online gambling and poker company Winamax — comes in. "We are talking about two different generations that are not fighting against each other, they just don't see the same things," he insists. "I always joke saying we are not targeting a guy who has a tattoo and lives next to the stadium. Our market is really more about the digital fans, casual fans all over the world that consume sports differently to you and me historically." — AFP

Moyes renaissance has West Ham dreaming big

LONDON: West Ham manager David Moyes is enjoying a long-awaited renaissance after years in the wilderness as the Scot masterminds his club's unexpected bid to reach the Champions League. Moyes has the Hammers flying high in the Premier League and a win at Wolves on Saturday would consolidate their position in the top four.

West Ham have won their past four league games and climbed to third place with a surprise 3-2 victory over Liverpool before the international break. Sitting just three points behind leaders Chelsea, Moyes' men have their fans dreaming of a first-ever Champions League campaign. And for the first time since 1985/86, when John Lyall's side finished third, West Ham could emerge as dark horses in the title race. Not only has Moyes ended Liverpool's 25-game unbeaten run this season, he also ended Manchester City's reign as League Cup holders after knocking out Manchester United earlier in the same competition.

Those scalpings are tangible evidence of the remarkable overhaul carried out by Moyes, both on his club and his own reputation, since he returned for a second spell at West Ham in December 2019. Back then, West Ham were one point above the relegation zone, while Moyes was regarded as damaged goods after his nightmare period at Manchester United.

When Moyes was hired by United in 2013, the Scot was seen



David Moyes

as one of the Premier League's brightest young managers after his impressive 11-year reign at Everton. Although he was unable to deliver any silverware at Goodison Park, he led Everton to a top-four finish in 2005 and consistently kept them in the top half of the table on a limited budget.

Moyes' appointment at United had been endorsed by Alex Ferguson, who recommended his compatriot before retiring. Inheriting a title-winning team, Moyes was expected to maintain the success of the Ferguson era but he never looked comfortable in the harsh glare of the Old Trafford spotlight.

Back in fashion

He was criticized for his cautious tactics and ridiculed after signing Everton midfielder Marouane Fellaini, a player whose

rudimentary style contrasted with United's purist principles. Moyes soon wore the anguished expression of a man who knew his dream was fading before his eyes.

After less than a season in charge he was sacked in April 2014, with United languishing in seventh place and destined to miss out on a Champions League place for the first time since 1995. Moyes was back in management at Real Sociedad just months later, but once again he was a fish out of water. That lost year in the Basque country was followed by an even more chastening experience at Sunderland.

Taking over at the Stadium of Light in 2016, Moyes' team were relegated from the Premier League in his first and only season, while he was forced to apologize after telling a female interviewer she might "get a slap". At that point it was hard to imagine him salvaging his crumbling career. But he rescued West Ham from relegation in 2018 and, while that was not enough to keep him employed at the time, Moyes stayed true to his principles and is finally back in fashion.

Revamping his squad with bargain signings Tomas Soucek, Vladimir Coufal and Jarrod Bowen in his second spell at the club, Moyes has molded West Ham in his disciplined and feisty image, leading them to a sixth-place finish in the Premier League last season. At last the London Stadium — derided as soulless by West Ham fans following the move there in 2016 — is becoming a vibrant home to a team on the up.

"I think we're there on merit. You can see the quality and attitude of the players," Moyes said. "I want us to challenge the teams in the top four. I've laid down that challenge to the players. Hopefully one of them could be us." West Ham are aiming high and whether they reach the Champions League or not, Moyes' remarkable rehabilitation is one of the stories of the season. — AFP

Sport Times

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2021

www.kuwaittimes.net



Hamilton on crest of a wave ahead of new Qatar challenge

See Page 37