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US unwavering in Middle East security commitment: Austin

'We're also committed to not allowing Iran to get a nuclear weapon'



MANAMA: Bahrain's Minister for Defense Affairs Abdulla bin Hasan Al-Nuaimi receives the US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin in Manama. — AFP

MANAMA: The United States warned yesterday it was capable of deploying "overwhelming force" in the Middle East as it faced questions about its willingness to use its military power in the region. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin told the Manama Dialogue in Bahrain's capital that all options would be open if diplomacy fails to halt Iran's nuclear program, but he was also forced to rebut claims the US has become reluctant to use force.

The Pentagon chief was asked why Washington did not respond to last month's drone-and-artillery attack on a base used by the US-led coalition fighting the Islamic State group in Syria. "The United States of America maintains the right to defend itself. And we will defend ourselves and our interests, no matter what, at the time and place of our choosing," he replied.

"And let no country, let no individual be mistaken about that. We are committed to defending ourselves and our interests and

that includes our partners as well," said Austin. "And we're also committed to not allowing Iran to get a nuclear weapon." Iran and world powers are set for talks on November 29 aimed at reviving an accord that placed restrictions on its nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief. Tehran has always denied it is seeking nuclear weapons.

Austin said Washington's major goal was to strengthen its "unmatched" alliances in the Middle East, but said military force remained an option with tens of thousands of its troops stationed in the region. After ending its 20-year occupation of Afghanistan in August, the US is poised to withdraw its combat troops from Iraq by the end of the year. This month, Iraq's prime minister escaped an assassination attempt two days after security forces clashed with supporters of Iran-backed parties that lost support in recent elections.

Yesterday, Iran said it had seized a foreign boat smuggling diesel in the oil-rich

Gulf. Since February, Iran and Zionist entities have been engaged in a "shadow war" in which vessels linked to each country have come under attack in waters around the Gulf. The US and Zionists accuse Iran of using drones and missiles to destabilize the region.

In brief remarks to the forum, senior Saudi figure Turki bin Faisal Al Saud called for "demonstrative action" in the region, including the "total enforcement" of the arms embargo on Yemen's Iran-supported Houthi rebels, who are fighting a Saudi-led coalition. Austin said that "America's commitment to security in the Middle East is strong and sure." "Ultimately, our mission is to support diplomacy and to deter conflict and to defend the United States and our vital interests," he said.

"If we're forced to turn back aggression, we will win and we will win decisively." Austin's visit comes days before Iran returns to talks with world powers on

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Chronic diseases linked to meat consumption

PARIS: As global trade in red and processed meats has increased, so have chronic diseases associated with meat consumption, a study looking at data from 154 countries found. Researchers focused on illness and death rates from three diseases strongly linked to red and processed meat consumption: colorectal cancer, type-2 diabetes and coronary heart disease.

They drew on meat import and export figures from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to find out where in the world red and processed meats had become more available. They then checked these findings against health data from the Global Burden of Disease project. "The increased intake of red and processed meat products via trade caused the abrupt increase of diet-related non-communicable diseases," the study published in the British Medical Journal concluded.

The adverse effects of a diet high in red and processed meats is well known. But the international trade of these products also has far-reaching impacts on the climate, through greenhouse gas emissions, and biodiversity loss, through shrinking habitat, the study noted. "Few international initiatives and national guidelines for sustainable diets explicitly address the spillover impacts of the meat trade across countries," they said. They calculated a worldwide increase in related deaths of nearly 75 percent between 1993 and 2018, with major variations by geographical region.

While they estimated a 55 percent rise in related deaths in developed countries, the rate of increase in developing countries was more than double: 157 percent. "These higher rates are because many developing countries around the world exponentially relied on red and processed meat imports to meet their increased meat demands under rapid urbanization and income growth," the study says. Over the years covered by the study, developing countries expanded imports while rich ones expanded exports, the findings showed.

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World's first electric cargo ship launched

OSLO: Zero emissions and, soon, zero crew: the world's first fully electric autonomous cargo vessel was unveiled in Norway, a small but promising step toward reducing the maritime industry's climate footprint. By shipping up to 120 containers of fertilizer from a plant in the southeastern town of Porsgrunn to the Brevik port a dozen kilometers away, the much-delayed Yara Birkeland, shown off to the media, will eliminate the need for around 40,000 truck jour-

neys a year that are now fuelled by polluting diesel.

"Of course, there have been difficulties and setbacks," said Svein Tore Holsether, chief executive of Norwegian fertilizer giant Yara. "But then it feels even more rewarding to stand here today in front of this ship and see that we were able to do it," he said, with the sleek blue-and-white vessel moored behind him in an Oslo dock, where it had been sailed for the event. The 80-metre, 3,200-deadweight ton ship will soon begin two years of working trials during which it will be fine-tuned to learn to maneuver on its own.

The wheelhouse could disappear altogether in "three, four or five years", said Holsether, once the vessel makes

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OSLO: The world's first self-propelled, electric container ship MV Yara Birkeland is moored at Langkaia in Oslo, on November 19, 2021. — AFP

Biden declared healthy and 'fit' for presidency

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden got a clean bill of health from the White House doctor on Friday after undergoing an extensive, routine check-up during which his powers were briefly transferred to Vice President Kamala Harris. "The President remains a healthy, vigorous, 79-year-old male, who is fit to successfully execute the duties of the

Presidency, to include those as Chief Executive, Head of State and Commander in Chief," Kevin O'Connor, the White House physician, wrote.

The detailed report said that Biden did have "perceptibly stiffer and less fluid" motion while walking than a year ago, and suffered "increasing frequency and severity of 'throat clearing' and coughing during public speaking engagements." However, these two symptoms were not considered of immediate concern and did not appear to result from serious conditions, O'Connor's letter said.

On a raft of tests, Biden came out with high marks. He has "no signs of heart failure," "no dental issues," has no "suspicions for skin cancer," and his

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MARYLAND: US President Joe Biden waves after getting a medical check up as he departs Walter Reed Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland on November 19, 2021. — AFP

Qatar prepares to host WCup

DOHA: Exactly one year before it hosts the football World Cup, Doha is criss-crossed with trenches and snarled with traffic as officials race to install a vital feature - adequate drainage. Rainstorms are rare but paralyzing in the Qatari capital, often causing flooding that leads to gridlock. With 1.2 million fans expected next year, such disruption is to be avoided at all costs.

For taxi driver Mohamed, squeezing past construction sites in the

downtown West Bay business district, the roadworks are a headache that he and his passengers could do without. "They weren't thinking 20 years ago when they did this (drainage system)," he said. "Customers don't like waiting." Cruising down the corniche, an arcing highway with West Bay views, is usually a Doha highlight but now, with excavations and gaggles of workmen, the city's main artery is strangled.

Journey times have multiplied and in the evening rush-hour, cars sit in a giant traffic jam. Frustrations have bubbled over into rare criticism of officials on social media.

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DOHA: Photo shows construction workers at Qatar's Lusail Stadium, one of the Qatar's 2022 World Cup stadiums, around 20 kilometers north of the capital Doha. — AFP

Local

Planting requires concerted efforts, says Kuwait's agriculture authority

Kuwait plans to plant more Sidra trees instead of palms

KUWAIT: Unquestionably, tree-planting has become a national and international prerequisite that necessitates the concerted efforts of governmental and non-governmental organizations. The Middle East Green Initiative and the recently held climate change conference, known as COP26, came to serve the ultimate goal of coordinating action to boost green areas worldwide and stop the rise in global temperatures. The Middle East Green Initiative was launched in March with a view to growing 50 billion trees and boosting forests in the Middle East region. The impor-



**Increasing
countrywide
green coverage**

tance of reversing the effects of climate change is tangible across the Middle East and North Africa, where the impact of rising temperatures is already affecting livelihoods and opportunities. The initiative is mainly meant to plant 50 billion trees across the Middle East (including 10 billion at home in Saudi Arabia), through afforestation, restore an area equivalent to 200 million hectares of degraded land reducing 2.5 percent of global carbon levels, and contribute to reducing carbon emissions resulting from hydrocarbon production in the region by more than 60 percent.

The UK hosted the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow on 31 October-13 November 2021, bringing parties together to accelerate action towards the goals of

the Paris Agreement and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. The main goals of the COP26 are to secure global net zero by mid-century and keep 1.5 degrees within reach and adapt to protect communities and natural habitats. These events, together with previous gatherings, came up with a slew of concrete and effective commitments to increasing afforestation, nature reserves, parks, planting and environmental rehabilitation.

In this context, Kuwait's Public Authority for Agriculture Affairs and Fish Resources (PAAAFR) underlined that it is necessary to grow new types of plants and trees in Kuwait in a bid to ease its hot weather conditions. Therefore, it said in a press release, that it is trying hard to plant the Sidra tree, also known

Ziziphus spina-christi tree or the Christ's thorn jujube, along highways, main roads and residential and desert areas. Unlike palm trees, the Sidra tree is an evergreen shrub or tree that withstands scorching heat, thrives in the harshest environments and consumes little water, the authority said.

From now on, palm trees would only be planted in houses and farms, rather than along roads or at public parks, the authority underlined, pointing out a plan to grow Sidra trees at nature reserves. It added that contracts pertinent to public parks have been unprecedentedly separated from those bearing on roads and streets in a bid to stave off looming negative impacts on tree-growing projects nationwide. Some 39 old parks have already been rehabilitated on

the basis of this fledging separation mechanism which has been put in place for the first time since the authority was established, according to the release.

Furthermore, the authority has created a total of 64 athletic courts and 48 kids play areas as part of its endeavors to reduce buildings and boost afforestation nationwide. All these efforts, together with planting awareness campaigns, are primarily intended to increase countrywide green coverage with a view to providing more oxygen, breaking visual pollution and cutting surging temperatures, it noted. Finally, the authority emphasized that it is committed to throwing much weight behind all initiatives and campaigns by individuals and civil society organizations, along with the private sector, to increase green areas in all governorates. — KUNA

Kuwaiti official stresses Manama Dialogue's importance

MANAMA: Acting Head of the Kuwaiti National Security Apparatus (NSA) Sheikh Sabah Shamlan Abdulaziz Al-Sabah stressed yesterday the importance of the 17th Regional Security Forum - Manama Dialogue hosted by Bahrain with the participation of security service chiefs, political and economic figures. He said on the sidelines of his participation that the conference's agenda for this year reflects the importance of the work undertaken by Bahrain to discuss the issues between officials in the security, defense, political and Middle Eastern fields. He added that among the most prominent issues are the American policy to defend the Gulf region and Gulf relationship with Asian countries, regional conflicts, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction weapons as well as regional and international issues. Sheikh Sabah expressed his appreciation to Bahrain for hosting this conference, which has proved successful over the past 17 years by raising important issues related to regional and international security.

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin had stressed during the same conference the importance of strengthening cooperation with the partners in the



MANAMA: Acting Head of the Kuwaiti National Security Apparatus Sheikh Sabah Shamlan Abdulaziz Al-Sabah attends the forum. — KUNA

Middle East to address "security challenges" in the region. Austin said that the US would work to strengthen investments in this region, modernize relations with partners, and expand the basis of integrated deterrence against the challenges of the twenty-first century. He affirmed his country's commitment to strengthening the security of the region, indicating that this is among the priorities of his country. Moreover, he said that weapons alone could not give the world the security it wants, while diplomacy is the solution for most conflicts. — KUNA

Indian envoy visits Kuwait's naval base

KUWAIT: Ambassador of India to Kuwait Sibi George visited Muhammad Al-Ahmad Kuwait Naval Base recently and met Commander of Kuwait Naval Forces Brigadier General Hazza Mutlaq Al-Alati. Both sides reviewed the ongoing cooperation between the two countries and ways of furthering deepening the engagement including in maritime areas. They also discussed the joint fight against COVID-19 pandemic. Ambassador George thanked the leadership for the logistical and other support during the visit of Indian Naval Ships in June 2021 as part of the sea/air bridge set up for supply of medical oxygen to India during the pandemic. India and Kuwait share a strong maritime connect spanning over centuries. Both Navies are in close contact for further upgrading their bilateral relationship.



KUWAIT: Ambassador of India to Kuwait Sibi George meets Commander of Kuwait Naval Forces Brigadier General Hazza Mutlaq Al-Alati.

World's first electric cargo...

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its 7.5-nautical-mile trips on its own with the aid of sensors. "Quite a lot of the incidents happening on vessels are due to human error, because of fatigue for instance," project manager Jostein Braaten said from the possibly doomed bridge.

"Autonomous operating can enable a safe journey," he said. While the distance the Yara Birkeland will cover may be short, it will face many obstacles. It will have to navigate in a narrow fjord, and sail under two bridges while managing currents and heavy traffic from merchant ships, pleasure craft and kayaks, before docking at one of Norway's busiest ports. The next few months will be a learning period.

"First of all, we have to detect that there's something there. We have to understand that it's a kayak, then we have to determine what to do with that," said Braaten. "Currently, large vessels don't do much with a kayak. They can't do much. They can warn, but they cannot manoeuvre away" or reverse to avoid an incident. Autonomous navigation will require a new set of regulations that do not exist yet.

On board the Yara Birkeland, the traditional machine room has been replaced by eight battery compartments, giving the vessel a capacity of 6.8 MWh -

sourced from renewable hydroelectricity. "That's the equivalent of 100 Teslas," says Braaten. The maritime sector, which is responsible for almost three percent of all man-made emissions, aims to reduce its emissions by 40 percent by 2030 and 50 percent by 2050.

Despite that, the sector has seen a rise in recent years. International and domestic shipping and fishing combined, the industry emitted more than one billion tons of greenhouse gases in 2018, up from 962 million tons in 2012, according to the latest figures from the International Maritime Organization.

By itself, the Yara Birkeland's contribution to global climate efforts will be just a drop in the ocean - eliminating 678 tons of carbon dioxide per year churned out by the redundant trucks. And experts don't expect electric vessels to become a universal solution for the industry any time soon. "Electricity has a 'niche' use, in particular for ferries as these are often short and stable routes, possibly on coastal and river transports. But it's not well-adapted for long ocean crossings," said Camille Egloff, a maritime transport expert at Boston Consulting Group.

"Not only would (a vessel) need to be autonomous for long distances but you would also have to equip ports with battery chargers. So there are technical and infrastructure challenges that would need to be coordinated," she said. While dozens of electric ferries already criss-cross the fjords of Norway - a major oil and gas producer which is paradoxically also a leader in electric transport - ocean liners will have to rely on other technologies to go green, such as LNG, e-methanol and hydrogen. — AFP

US unwavering in Mideast security...

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resuming a nuclear deal which has been stalled since 2018, when former US president Donald

Chronic diseases linked to meat...

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The study suggests that to achieve healthier and more sustainable diets, international dialogue should

Trump walked away. On Friday, US special envoy Robert Malley told the conference that time was running out to return to the deal if Iran continues to make "advances" in its nuclear program.

"We remain committed to a diplomatic outcome of the nuclear issue," Austin said. "But if Iran is not willing to engage seriously, then we will look at all the options necessary to keep them the United States secure." Iran's Gulf neighbors are concerned that concessions could be made to the Islamic republic in the nuclear talks. — AFP

involve both health and trade bodies, citing the World Trade Organization (WTO). "Regional trade agreements of the WTO accelerate red and processed meat flows among countries," it said, and suggested it could coordinate with UN health and food agencies to improve future trade policy. Since it is observational, the study can suggest but not confirm the cause-effect relationship between meat trade and diet-related illnesses. — AFP

packages that cost thousands of dollars for a single group game. Qatar has earmarked 3.9 billion riyals (\$1.07 billion) in the 2021 budget for drainage and estuaries, compared to 3.2 billion riyals for highways. "Development of drainage stations, water treatment plants, pumping and rainwater drainage networks in several regions to prevent flooding due to rain" are a priority in 2021, the Public Budget Statement said.

Qatar has spent billions of dollars on a new metro system that is used so far mainly by migrant workers from South Asia and the Philippines, with wealthier expatriates and Qataris sticking to large SUVs and luxury cars. Ashghal, the body in charge of public works, gave assurances that the main routes will be ready to link "the eight stadiums with a rapid road network that avoids any traffic jams for their users".

"These routes are also linked to metro and bus stations as well as commercial centers for World Cup fans," said Salem Al-Shawy, deputy director of roadworks at Ashghal. "We understand that drivers are suffering... but we want to make sure that this project will finish on time before the FIFA (World Cup)," he added. In the meantime, Uber driver Mohammed, who comes from Bangladesh and has been living in Qatar for 15 years, is doing his best to keep his passengers happy. — AFP

Biden declared healthy and 'fit'...

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eye health "is reassuring." One reason for that solid report may be the doctor's finding that "the president does not use any tobacco products, does not drink alcohol, and he works out at least five days a week."

Biden, who turned 79 yesterday and is the oldest president in US history, takes three common prescription medications and two over-the-counter medicines, as well as wearing contact lenses, the letter revealed. He measures five feet, 11.65 inches, weighs 184 pounds and has a body mass index of 25. A smiling Biden returned to the White House from his checkup at Walter Reed hospital earlier, saying "I feel great." "We're in great shape," he said, wearing his trademark avi-

ator sunglasses.

While the annual visit to Walter Reed hospital was routine for a president, the requirement for Biden to transfer power while sedated during a colonoscopy exam made history. For one hour and 25 minutes, Harris was the first woman to hold presidential power in the United States. She is already the first female vice president.

The White House press office said that official letters to Congress declaring the temporary transfer of power were sent at 10:10 am. "The president resumed his duties at 11:35 am," the White House said in a statement. "Today that was another chapter in that history for many women, young girls across the country," Press Secretary Jen Psaki said, noting Harris' trailblazing role.

Harris made an unsuccessful bid for the Democratic Party nomination in 2020, before being picked as Biden's running mate. While holding the temporary presidential reins she continued to "work from her office in the West Wing," Psaki said. — AFP

Qatar prepares to host...

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"Doha has become a building site, we're driving in the middle of roadworks. And this is going to go on right up to the World Cup" next November and December, said a young Qatari. Annual rainfall is only about 75 millimeters in the city but scenes of flooding are not unknown, with cars semi-submerged, tunnels blocked and residents enjoying impromptu watersports.

"Many of Doha's roads were built without proper drainage so whenever it rained it flooded," said a source briefed on the construction efforts. "They are now rushing to install drainage, even on roads that were finished." World Cup chiefs have boasted that because of Qatar's compact size, the longest journey between any two of the eight tournament stadiums in and around Doha would be under 45 minutes.

But gridlock would affect journey times, especially with the heavy influx of visitors - some on hospitality

Local

Ultimate frisbee, global team sport garnering young people's interest

Free-spirited alternative to traditional organized sports



AMMAN: A group photo of teammates participating in the Middle East and North Africa Ultimate Frisbee Championship held recently in Jordan. — KUNA photos



Sultan Al-Sultan



Lujain Al-Mullah

AMMAN: Ultimate frisbee is a widespread international team sport that attracts many young men and women across the world in pickup games. Being a non-contact and self-refereed team game played by players with a flying disc, ultimate was developed by a group of students in the United States in 1968. Although ultimate resembles many traditional sports like rugby in its athletic requirements, it is unlike most sports due to its focus on self-officiating. The popularity of the sport has spread quickly, taking hold as a free-spirited alternative to traditional organized sports. In recent years, college ultimate has attracted a greater number of traditional athletes, raising the level of competition and athleticism.

The player with the disc is called the thrower. The thrower may not run with the disc, but must instead move the disc by passing to teammates in any direction. Game rules state that points are scored by passing the disc to a teammate in the opposing end zone, while players must not take steps while holding the disc.

In Kuwait, a team consisting of play-

ers Sultan Al-Sultan and Lujain Al-Mullah took part in the Middle East and North Africa Ultimate Frisbee Championship held recently in Jordan. Speaking on this maiden participation, Sultan said the game began to spread in Kuwait in 2017 thanks to social media campaigns and through youth occasions. Groups of young people involving males



Game began to spread in Kuwait in 2017

and females were initially interested in practicing this sport in spare times on beaches and pitches, and now there are at least a hundred players forming three teams who have occasional friendly competitions, he said. Sultan pointed out it was the first time for a Kuwaiti sports team to partake in the recent ultimate

frisbee event in Jordan. He stressed that players wishing to join his groups should be 18 years and above and have high fitness as well as physical flexibility as basic requirements.

Echoing Sultan's views, Lujain Al-Mullah said that she has been praising ultimate frisbee for nearly three and a half years. She added that she and her teammates only began to play this sport in an earnest manner a year following the outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. She regretted that most people believe that ultimate frisbee is an individual game that can only be practiced by children and youth on beaches and at parks.

Mullah elaborated that the World Flying Disc Federation (WFDF) is the international sports federation responsible for world governance of flying disc (Frisbee) sports, including Ultimate, Beach Ultimate, Disc Golf, Freestyle, Guts, and Individual Events. WFDF is a federation of 103 member associations, which represent flying disc sports and their athletes in more than 100 countries. WFDF is an International Federation recognized by the



A picture taken during Kuwait's participation in the Middle East and North Africa Ultimate Frisbee Championship held recently in Jordan.

International Olympic Committee (IOC).

On the basic rules of the sport, she said two teams of seven players compete on a playing field about the same length as a football field, but narrower. At each end of the playing field there is an end zone. Each team defends one end zone. They score a goal if one of their players catches the disc in the opposite

end zone. On the latest 12-team competition held in Jordan, she said the Kuwaiti team came seventh by winning three games and losing three others, but won the Spirit of the Game Award, she said. A team from Dubai won the third version of the sports event, which attracted as many as 300 male and female players. — KUNA

stc official sponsor of KFA championships for eighth straight year

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced the continuation of its strategic partnership with the Kuwait Football Association (KFA) and its soccer tournaments in the 2021-2022 season for the eighth consecutive year.

The signing ceremony of the official sponsorship took place at stc's Headquarters at Olympia Tower and was held in the presence of Sheikh Ahmed Youssef Al-Sabah, President of KFA, and engineer Maziad Alharbi, CEO of stc, as well as executives joining from both parties. The sponsorship of the upcoming season includes the Kuwait Premier League, the Division One league, the Super Cup, and the Amir and Crown Prince Cups may God bless and protect them, coupled with stc's active participation in promoting and achieving another successful season.

On this occasion, Sheikh Ahmed commented, "Once again, we would like to welcome the Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, one of the leading companies in Kuwait and the region, as the official sponsor of the Kuwait Football Association championships for the eighth consecutive year. We are confident that continuing this strategic partnership will help support the local sports scene by fos-



KUWAIT: Sheikh Ahmed Youssef Al-Sabah, President of KFA (left), and engineer Maziad Alharbi, CEO of stc shake hands after signing the agreement.

tering a healthy competitive spirit amongst all the Kuwaiti football clubs."

He added, "We highly value the support, assistance, and capabilities that stc brings to the table, aiding us in presenting a professional platform to host championships that reflect the caliber and quality of our sports activities while instilling good sportsmanship."

Sheikh Ahmed also pointed out that the stc Premier League brings together Kuwait's 15 football clubs to compete amongst themselves for the championship title. Through the league, the points scheme will determine the clubs that remain in the league and the clubs that will participate in the second-tier division league based on their performance.

On his part, Alharbi commented, "We look for-

ward to witnessing more friendly competition in the 2021-2022 season, and are keen to support both sports and the Kuwaiti youth. Following a difficult period due to the onset of the pandemic, we are confident that the teams will continue to perform outstandingly and compete to their best abilities to qualify for the winning titles."

Alharbi said, "stc affirms its continuous support towards the Kuwaiti community through various initiatives and activities. This vision stems from the Company's strategic approach to empower the younger generation and back entrepreneurs in their quest to introduce world changing ideas, hence stc's role in offering an array of pioneering solutions to members of the community and businesses alike."

Alharbi concluded, "By implementing our strategy to enable digital transformation in Kuwait, we have been able to position stc as a leading company within the field of innovative technology. Moving forward, we will continue to focus on seamlessly providing our valued customers with access to a wide range of innovative services and digital solutions that suit their diverse lifestyle needs."

With regards to sponsoring the activities of the Kuwait Football Association, Alharbi expressed that stc was keen to participate and sponsor the upcoming season due to the positive impact the championship generates to both individuals and the community. This sponsorship comes as a continuation of stc's collaboration with the KFA, which was initiated in 2013. He expressed that through the highly experienced team at stc, the Company will ensure that the stc Premier League maintains its glorified reputation in the local sports scene, side by side with the KFA.

Civil society's role in combating corruption

By Khaled Al-Mutawa

Civil society organizations are known as one of the most important factors in supporting political progress and promoting democratic and preventive concept of contemporary societies due to their scoop of work which focuses on two main development components which are the individuals and society.

The State of Kuwait has given this organization a great attention and value in consistency with the United Nations Convention against Corruption, which recommended pointedly the involvement of civil society in the efforts of preventing corruption starting from raising awareness of corruption and prevention methodology through promoting transparency in decision-making, encouraging participation of people in decision-making. Moreover, undertaking public information activities that contribute the intolerance of corruption, and finally respecting, promoting and protecting the freedom to seek, receive and disseminate information.

Kuwait Anti-Corruption Authority (Nazaha) is a neutral, independent authority established following the enactment of law number 2 of the year 2016 and was set up in response to the requirements of the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC). Nazaha has founded an administrative unit within its organizational structure that has a clear yet explicit job tasks which enforces the cooperation and partnership with civil society through supporting, following-up and fulfilling the initiatives submitted by them in coordination with various government bodies. Also, this unit's duty is promoting complementarity between public sector and civil society efforts to encourage integrity, combating corruption, and supporting government bodies in their inspection role.

Thereafter a mechanism for communication and participatory governance was framed according to the Kuwait's integrity and anti-corruption strategy initiatives (2019-2024) to promote cooperation with the civil society through supporting both activities and initiatives that combat and prevent corruption.

Examples of this cooperation are the insertion of a curriculum about corruption offences in the Kuwaiti Penal Code in the Faculty of Law department, organizing awareness summer clubs, reviewing initiatives that aims in monitoring government institutions, reviewing a periodic report issued by civil society, and organizing a numerous workshops, seminars and awareness-raising campaigns.

Civil society is a fundamental yet complementary partner in the process of fighting corruption and promoting integrity and transparency.

- Khaled Al-Mutawa is a Senior Media Professional at the Awareness and Education Department at Kuwait Anticorruption Authority (Nazaha)



Khaled Al-Mutawa

Arrests made during Shamlan harbor crackdown

KUWAIT: Police made several arrests during a crackdown against people violating fishing rules and environment-protection regulations at the Shamlan harbor in Sharq yesterday. Interior Ministry personnel carried out the unscheduled campaign in cooperation with the Environment Public Authority, Kuwait Ports Authority, Public Authority for Agriculture Affairs and Fish Resources, the Ministry of Commerce and Kuwait Fire Force, the Relations and Security Information Department said in a statement to the press. The ministry did not specify how many people were arrested during the campaign. It added that they were referred to the proper authorities for further action.

Drug overdose

Detectives solved the mystery behind a woman's death after her body was found in an open area in Ahmadi. The case was closed after two persons with a record of drug-related crimes confessed that they left her body when she died from a drug overdose, Al-Anbaa Arabic newspaper reported yesterday. Detectives had identified one of the suspects after checking the woman's phone record and arrested him in Qadsiya. The man said during investigations that the woman was with him and another man as they were abusing drugs in an apartment in Ahmadi, when they discovered that she had a drug overdose and died. They put her in a pickup truck and



KUWAIT: Officers are seen during a crackdown at the Shamlan harbor yesterday. — Interior Ministry photo

left her in an open area then ran away, the man reportedly told police, adding that they did so to avoid being accused of murder. The two men were sent to the proper authorities for further action.

Runaway maids

A man was sent to the administrative deportation department after he allegedly used his job as a delivery man to harbor runaway domestic helpers after convincing them to leave their sponsors' houses, Al-Anbaa reported yesterday. A police source said detectives received several complaints of housemaids escaping and found a link between their escape and delivery man. Further investigations revealed that the man worked with fake domestic helper offices that encourage helpers to escape from their sponsors' houses and work per day or hour, the source said. The man confessed to his crime following his arrest, said the source, adding that three runaway maids were also arrested during the operation while the fake offices are being raided.

Kuwait condemns Houthi militia breaking-in of US embassy in Sanaa

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry yesterday voiced Kuwait's condemnation and denunciation of Houthi militia's storming of the US Embassy in Sanaa and capturing of a number of its employees. In a statement, the ministry said this internationally criminalized act is a flagrant breach of international norms, international law, the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations and the 1968 Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, which prohibit the storming of diplomatic property and grants immunity to diplomatic missions and buildings. The ministry underlined that the State of Kuwait totally backs the US, while calling on Houthi militia to observe international law rules by withdrawing from the embassy building immediately and setting free its detained local staffers. —KUNA



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Millions of children live at high risk due to endless conflicts

KUWAIT: As millions of children return to schools after a long break due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, many other kids are living under dangerous circumstances in several regions because of endless conflicts. In 1989, world leaders made a historic commitment to the world's children by adopting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child - an international agreement on childhood. Yesterday marked the 32nd anniversary of this agreement, which is a great chance to remind the world to mobilize efforts to protect the lives of children wherever they were.

Kuwait's Ambassador to the UN Mansour Al-Otaibi expressed his deep concern about the suffering of children in areas of armed conflict. During its non-permanent membership in the Security Council 2018 and 2019, the State of Kuwait called on the council's sessions to end the grave violations that children are exposed to in areas of conflicts, said Otaibi. "A better future for every child", is the slogan of this year's World Children's Day, he added.

Ambassador Otaibi reiterated Kuwait's keenness to work to promote children's rights, adding that the Kuwaiti constitution states in its ninth article that "the family is the foundation of society." He affirmed Kuwait's support for the efforts made by the UN to preserve the dignity of children and protect their rights, pointing to Kuwait's strong partnership with the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Director of the UNHCR in Kuwait Nasreen Rabiean affirmed meanwhile that the recruitment of children causes psychological and physical harm to victims and that most of child soldiers are internally displaced because of armed conflicts. She said that this phenomenon has very serious consequences on children because it causes disturbances to the child, who needs psychological treatment, noting its impact on their educational attainment, and creates generations that do not know the language of dialogue and tolerance but rather fighting and violence.

The UNHCR, in partnership with UNICEF, is working on a program to reduce the phenomenon of child recruitment, especially refugees or displaced children, and to conduct awareness campaigns in communities to show its impact on children and societies, she added.

According to a report of the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, on (the impact of conflicts on child recruitment), there are 8,521 children who have been recruited out of 23,946 others who have been subjected to various forms of exploitation amid conflicts. The US State Department said in a report on Human Trafficking, that there are 14 countries in which children face the risk of recruitment in conflicts around the world, including six Arab countries: Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Libya, Sudan and Somalia.

In continuation of the Kuwaiti role in supporting international organizations concerned with child protection, Kuwait was ranked seventh among the ten donor countries in 2018 by UNICEF, with an amount of \$61.6 million, while the total donations provided by Kuwait to the organization since 2013 exceeded \$200 million. — KUNA

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Vehicles drive on a highway in Kuwait on a cloudy day yesterday. Today's weather is expected to continue to be partly cloudy with light to moderate freshening at times south easterly wind, with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

International aid organizations face challenging times due to coronavirus

BRUSSELS: The coronavirus pandemic has affected the work of humanitarian and charity aid organizations globally but also provided them with new challenges to offer their services to the needy. "Pandemic has provided us with a fresh humanitarian challenge, but it has also affected our capacity to deliver the normal humanitarian responses that we were doing before the pandemic," said Ed Blagden, head of supply operations in Oxfam international aid organization. He was speaking to the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) at the international aid and development community exhibition, AIDEX, which was held in the Brussels Fair grounds recently. "The challenge for us is to deliver aid and service amidst the pandemic," said Blagden. He noted that Oxfam has been playing an important role in countries like India by providing face masks, sanitary kits and oxygen concentrators. They are also engaged in humanitarian work in Yemen, Ethiopia and recently in Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, Secretary General of Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH) of Turkey, Dürüm Aydin, said the Istanbul-based organization is engaged in humanitarian and emergency aid in 123 countries around the world since 1992. It is one of the largest NGOs in Turkey and cooperates with UN agencies and international aid organizations as well as with Gulf countries. "From my point of view the pandemic has a positive effect on global humanitarian aid because it is a time for the NGOs to show ourselves more to the needy people on the field especially when it has increased the need of the people," he told KUNA. "Because of economic collapse of many states and organizations we are able to serve the people much more than ever," said Aydin. He pointed out that Kuwait is one of the major contributors in the world to give humanitarian assistance. "The late Amir (Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah) was the father of humanitarian aid programs around the world, and the current Amir (His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah) is also a leader in humanitarian assistance around the globe," he said. Aydin said IHH is cooperating with a lot of NGOs in Kuwait. "We are assisting them and they are assisting us in terms of global humanitarian crisis in particular in Syria and in some other areas. We are very much in cooperation with NGOs in Kuwait," he said.

Pal-Epsen Nordhaug, export director of the Norway-based Hallgruppen which delivers construction and building solutions, weather shelters



BRUSSELS: A general view of AIDEX. —KUNA

for building sites and tents said due to the pandemic we have been supplying to a lot of hospitals mainly in Africa for COVID response. "So, for us, it has been a major growth," he said and noted that they have also been supplying tents and hospital structures to Dubai which is the main hub for the World Food Programme. Arnaud Battery, project manager operations at the French CLS company which provides telematic solutions to UN agencies and NGOs for the humanitarian aid, said COVID-19 is a worldwide pandemic so it has some effect on all sectors. He explained that they make equipment to help vehicles track and monitor their position and road safety and are engaged in Africa and the Middle East.

Imran Nisar, head of special projects at the London-based Al-Khair foundation said the pandemic has affected everyone, noting that in the UK lots of people have lost their jobs and incomes have fallen so the spending power has got less and hence the first victim is charity donations. Nisar told KUNA that surprisingly donations for Al-Khair foundation during the fasting month of Ramadhan this year went up. A vast majority of their projects are in the Middle East, Asia and Africa, but they also do some charity work in the UK itself. Their funding comes from the public who are mainly Pakistani, Indians, Bangladeshis and there were a lot of people giving charities, he explained. They have a branch in Istanbul which covers Palestine, Syria, Yemen and Lebanon. He noted that after Brexit they

face a lot of document checks and makes their work more difficult when coming to the EU.

Alouan Abu Ibrahim from the Brussels-based Charity and Humanitarian organization established in 2013, said they do charity work in Syria, Myanmar, Palestine and Yemen. He said coronavirus had "little affect" on their work and he hopes to visit the Gulf countries, including Kuwait, soon to promote cooperation with charity organizations there. Romel Ahmad responsible for public relations at AIDEX said it was the tenth such exhibition in Brussels that the Montgomery group based in London has organized. In 2020 AIDEX was cancelled due to the pandemic. "The whole events sector in the world was ground to a halt due to the pandemic in April 2020," he told KUNA. But even after Brexit (UK left the EU in January 2020) they will continue to organize their exhibition in Brussels since it is the political capital of the EU, he said.

There were about 100 participants this year down from about 200 in AIDEX 2019 and visitor numbers were also less. AIDEX is the leading platform for the international aid and development community to come together and improve the efficiency of aid, he said and noted that Qatar is one of the major sponsors of the event. It encompasses a conference, exhibition, awards, networking and workshops. Its fundamental aim is to engage the sector at every level and provide a forum for humanitarian aid professionals to meet, source, supply and learn, he added. — KUNA

KRCS distributes winter clothes to workers



KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Red Crescent Society (KRCS) yesterday distributed 5,000 bags filled with winter clothes to workers in the industrial and commercial sectors. In a statement to the press, KRCS Chairman Dr Hilal Al-Sayer said that the initiative comes within the KRCS's programs to provide aid for the labor workers. He also stressed the society's keenness to perform its social role to serve all segments of society. Dr Sayer thanked the donors from the private sector and their vital humanitarian role in supporting the needy inside and outside Kuwait. — KUNA

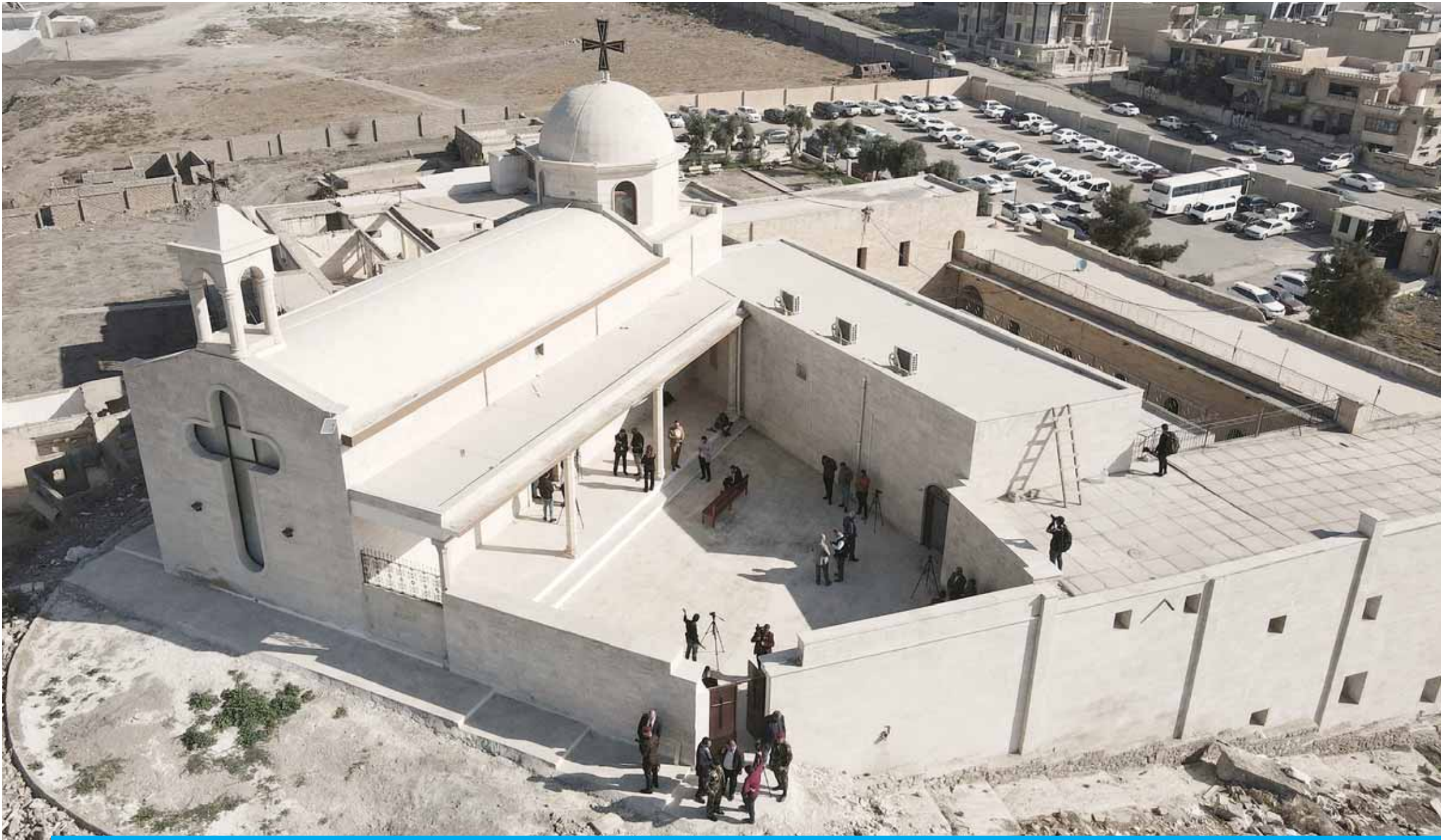


Georgia's ex-leader ends hunger strike

World weighs laws to rein in mighty algorithms

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MOSUL: Photo shows an aerial view of the Chaldean Monastery of St George (Mar Korkis) in Iraq's northern city of Mosul. — AFP

Iraqi faithful rebuild churches

IS jihadist onslaught forced thousands of Christians to flee

MOSUL: Cymbals, prayers and Chaldean Catholic liturgy resounded in Mosul's Saint George monastery, where Iraqi faithful marked the restoration of two churches destroyed by jihadists in their former stronghold. Dozens gathered in one of the monastery's churches that have been rebuilt in stone six years after the Islamic State group (IS) pulverized them, in a city home to one of the world's oldest Christian communities. It is the latest sign of a slow return to normality in Iraq's second city. Mosul was left in ruins after three years of jihadist occupation which ended in 2017 when an Iraqi force backed by US-led coalition air strikes pushed them out.

"We have old memories in this monastery," said Maan Bassem Ajjaj, 53, a civil servant who moved to Arbil, capital of the neighboring autonomous region of Kurdistan, to escape the jihadists. "My son and daughter were baptized here," he said. "Each Friday, Mosul's Christian families would come here."

The US Department of State funded the project, which also had support from a Christian non-governmental group, L'Oeuvre d'Orient, according to Samer Yohanna, a superior of the Antonian order of Chaldean monks.

He told AFP that the jihadists destroyed 70 percent of the monastery the year after they occupied Mosul in 2014 and declared the establishment of an Islamic "caliphate". The IS onslaught forced hundreds of thousands of Christians in Nineveh province surrounding Mosul to flee. Iraq's Christian population has shrunk to fewer than 400,000 from around 1.5 million before the US-led invasion of 2003 that toppled dictator Saddam Hussein. On a visit to Iraq in March, Pope Francis prayed outside another ruined church, one of at least 14 which IS destroyed in Nineveh.

Although the churches have been repaired, other parts of the centuries-old monastery still need restoration. "You can see walls that are still standing but are weak and which need to be reinforced," Yohanna said. Chaldean

Bishop Thabet Habib, from the Al-Qosh diocese, said further work was needed so the entire monastery "can regain its splendour". Last month, Mosul's Muslim community celebrated with a ceremony to mark the birthday of the Prophet Mohammed at the historic Al-Nuri mosque, which too was severely damaged by IS but is also being restored. — AFP



Latest sign of a slow return to normality



MOSUL: Christian worshippers attend mass at the reopening ceremony of a church at the Chaldean Monastery of St George (Mar Korkis) in Iraq's northern city of Mosul. — AFP

Fuel rationed, travel limited in flooded western Canada

MONTREAL, Canada: Officials in flood-stricken western Canada announced travel and fuel restrictions Friday as the region grapples with supply difficulties, the latest on a list of struggles caused by torrential rains. Record rainfall hit southwestern British Columbia Sunday and Monday resulting in landslides and flooding which destroyed roads and infrastructure and forced the temporary closure of the Trans Mountain pipeline.

"We are asking people to limit their fuel consumption and vehicle travel at this time and are putting in place orders under the provincial state of emergency to support this," Mike Farnworth, the province's public safety minister, said at a press conference. Individuals will no longer be able to buy more than 30 liters (eight gallons) of fuel when going to the pump. "We are asking people not to travel through severely affected areas - for their own well-being, but also to make

sure the fuel we do have goes toward the services people need in this time of crisis," Farnworth said.

"These steps will keep commercial traffic moving, stabilize our supply chains and make sure everyone gets home safely," he added. Authorities are still searching for four missing people in the Pemberton region, where a woman's body was discovered this week by relief workers. The army, which has been mobilized since Wednesday, is working in several areas of the province to clear roads and build a new levee in the town of Abbotsford, which was partially submerged and could be subject to further rain forecast for next week.

Some 60 soldiers arrived in the city on Thursday. "Pretty much every army base in the country is standing by to be ready to deploy if they have to," Pamela Hogan, a public affairs officer with the Canadian Armed Forces, told AFP. "Canadian Armed Forces members will be assisting the civilian engineers that are in charge of the dike building," she said. Heavy rains are expected again in the area next week. In the course of months Canada's Pacific coast has suffered repeat natural disasters, including extreme summer heat at the end of June which experts attributed to climate change, followed by major wildfires. — AFP

Ethiopia insists airspace safe as US warns of risk

ADDIS ABABA: Ethiopia insisted on Friday that its airspace was safe after the United States warned of a possible risk to civilian aircraft because of the spiraling conflict. The Federal Aviation Administration this week advised US carriers to exercise caution while flying into or near Addis Ababa, as the year-long war moves closer to the Ethiopian capital.

Airlines "should plan to exercise caution during flight operations due to the potential inadvertent risk to civil aviation operating in or near areas of fighting," it said in a statement. "Civil aircraft may be directly or indirectly exposed to ground weapons fire and/or surface-to-air fire." But the Ethiopian Civil Aviation Authority dismissed the US warning as "baseless and quite contradictory to the reality". "Ethiopian Civil Aviation Authority would like to state that any flight in Ethiopian airspace including Addis Ababa international airport is safe and secured."

The government declared a nationwide state of emergency earlier this month and ordered Addis Ababa residents to prepare to defend their neighborhoods amid fears that rebels from the northern region of Tigray were heading for the capital. The US

embassy has evacuated non-essential staff and is urging US citizens to leave the country while commercial flights are available. Washington has been among the most vocal critics of the war in Africa's second most populous nation, which has killed thousands of people and driven hundreds of thousands to the brink of starvation.

Top US envoy Jeffrey Feltman was in Ethiopia this week, along with his African Union counterpart, former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, as part of intensifying efforts to try to end the war. Getachew Reda, spokesman for the rebel Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), said Friday that Obasanjo had travelled to Tigray for "extensive discussions" with the group's leadership.

"They... agreed to continue to engage in the pursuit of peace and stability in the country," Getachew said on Twitter. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Wednesday renewed Washington's call for a ceasefire during a visit to Kenya, after warning last week that Ethiopia risked "implosion" unless the government and the TPLF negotiate a deal. Obasanjo had warned Sunday that peace talks "cannot deliver" without an immediate halt to the fighting. — AFP

International

US authorizes COVID boosters for adults, recommends for over-50s

World's hardest-hit country enters a new winter wave

WASHINGTON: The United States authorized the Pfizer and Moderna COVID vaccine boosters for all people aged 18 and older on Friday, as the world's hardest-hit country enters a new winter wave of the pandemic. Boosters were previously available to the immune compromised, people over 65, those at high risk of severe disease, and people in high risk occupations.

The new decision "helps to provide continued protection against COVID-19, including the serious consequences that can occur, such as hospitalization and death," acting commissioner Janet Woodcock of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) said. A panel of experts convened by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) then ratified the decision to broaden eligibility, while explicitly recommending boosters for all people over 50, even absent underlying conditions.

"I am really glad that we have clarity and streamlining of the recommendations so that all Americans can understand the vaccines that are recommended for them at this time," said Camille Kotton, an infectious disease clinician at Massachusetts General Hospital. CDC director Rochelle Walensky formally signed off on the panel's recommendations, stating that boosters

"are an important public health tool to strengthen our defenses against the virus as we enter the winter holidays."

The FDA said it based its decision on data demonstrating a strong immune response to boosters from hundreds of people dosed with both brands of vaccines. Pfizer also carried out a clinical trial involving 10,000 people aged over 16 which found that the booster showed an efficacy against symptomatic infection of more than 95 percent compared to those who did not receive a booster. Both vaccines are available to people six months after completing their primary series.

Pfizer's vaccine is dosed at 30 micrograms, the same as the primary series, while Moderna's is 50 micrograms, half the primary series. People who received the Johnson & Johnson one-dose vaccine were already eligible for a booster of any brand two months after their first shot. The booster decision comes as cases are rap-

idly rising nationally, reaching 88,000 new infections per day on average as the country enters its fifth wave, according to the latest data. America is officially the pandemic's hardest-hit country, with more than 760,000 deaths.

Many unknowns

Prior to Friday's decision, some outside experts had expressed misgivings over widening boosters to all adults. The vast majority of those people becoming hospitalized or dying with COVID are unvaccinated, and the best way to control the winter wave would be to reach those people, rather than topping up the vaccinated, the critics said. A potential downside, they argued,

was that vaccine holdouts might conclude the shots are ineffective. Another risk is a greater number of cases of vaccine-linked heart inflammation (myocarditis), especially among younger males. Accumulating evidence shows the risk may be

greater for the Moderna vaccine compared to Pfizer, likely because of its higher dose.

Both companies are conducting post-authorization studies to assess the risks of myocarditis after third shots. Overall, however, both health agencies took the view that the benefits outweigh the risks. It is expected that boosters, by reducing symptomatic cases, will also help reduce community transmission, though the extent to which this might happen is not known. It is also possible that, rather than considering the third dose a booster, the vaccines work optimally when administered three times - something that will become more clear over time as data accrues.

Experts are in broad agreement however that boosters alone can't resolve the pandemic while the poorest countries, especially in Africa, remain stuck in the single-digit percentages for people covered by their initial shots. Last week, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus decried the fact that rich countries are administering six times more vaccine doses every day than low-income countries are delivering primary doses. This increases the risk of new variants of concern emerging in those regions, which could eventually evade the protective action of current vaccines. — AFP



Over 760,000 perish in US

World weighs laws to rein in mighty algorithms

PARIS: From the YouTube videos we're recommended to deciding who gets a job, algorithms wield an ever-growing influence over our lives-and policy-makers worldwide want to rein them in. While China is worried about delivery app algorithms that encourage their drivers to speed, US lawmakers are grappling with social media recommendation systems that have sent some users down dangerous rabbit-holes.

"Algorithms can be useful, of course, but many people simply aren't aware of just how much their experience on these platforms is being manipulated," John Thune, one of numerous US senators proposing new social media legislation, wrote in a CNN op-ed. Facebook has faced fierce criticism after a whistleblower revealed that executives knew the site's algorithm systematically promoted inflammatory posts in people's newsfeeds, fuelling division and unrest from India to Ethiopia.

Frances Haugen, the ex-Facebook engineer behind the revelations, believes people deserve to know more about how the content they see is shaped by the jumble of data that gets fed into the social media machine. "I think if we just say, 'we are going to regulate algorithms', that is so amorphous," Haugen told AFP in an interview last week. "I think it's more powerful to say, 'Hey Facebook, you have a lot more transparency than we do,'" and force the company to reveal more about how its systems work, she said.

More boring social media?

Campaigners and lawmakers may agree that tech giants' algorithms need more public oversight, but how to achieve that is a different matter. "There are some really hard unanswered questions," said Daphne Keller, director of platform regulation at the Stanford Cyber Policy Center. In the European Union, where lawmakers are debating two vast pieces of tech legislation, "some proposals say algorithms should prioritise authoritative sources of information, and others say they should prioritise diverse sources", Keller noted.

"How do you reconcile those two goals?" The path forward is just as unclear in the US, where dozens of legal amendments have been proposed by lawmakers torn over what exactly it is about social media that needs fixing. "On the left, people don't like all the harmful stuff like hate speech and misinformation; on the right, people think that their free speech is being taken away," summarized Noah Giansiracusa, author of "How Algorithms Create and Prevent Fake News". Politicians and academics have suggested various means of limiting the harmful side-effects of social media algorithms—none without their complications.

Some suggest platforms like Facebook and Twitter could be made legally liable for what they publish, which would discourage them from amplifying posts that spread hate or misinformation. But in the US, where most social media giants are based, Giansiracusa said this would quickly face legal challenges from critics charging that it violates the right to freedom of speech. Alternatively, governments could restrict social networks' ability to personalize what people see in their feeds.

YouTube and Facebook have been accused of unintentionally radicalizing some people in this way, feeding them post after post of conspiracy theory-laden content. Social media companies could be obliged to simply show people posts in chronological order—but that risks making scrolling down a feed more boring. The algorithms would no longer be able to calculate what a user will probably find interesting—a photo of a close friend getting married, for instance—while downgrading tedious posts about what an acquaintance had for lunch. "There is no simple solution," Giansiracusa concluded. — AFP

Austria imposes partial lockdown, mandatory jabs

VIENNA: Austria has become the first EU country to announce it would make coronavirus vaccinations mandatory and will next week impose a partial lockdown in the face of spiraling infections. The lockdown, which comes into effect tomorrow, constitutes the toughest restrictions introduced in Europe in recent weeks as COVID-19 cases surge continent-wide, fuelled by vaccine resistance.

Austrians will not be allowed to leave home except to go to work, shop for essentials and exercise. The restrictions will initially last 20 days with an evaluation after 10 days, Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg said. Schools will remain open, although parents have been asked to keep their children at home if possible. Working from home is also recommended.

Vaccination against COVID-19 in the Alpine nation will be mandatory from February 1 next year, Schallenberg said. So far, the Vatican alone in Europe has imposed a vaccination mandate. The World Health Organization continues to favor policies that "demonstrate the benefit and safety of vaccines for the greatest possible acceptance of vaccines, rather than imposed mandatory vaccination," spokeswoman Fadela Chaib told reporters in Geneva.

But Schallenberg said: "Despite months of persuasion, we have not succeeded in convincing enough people to get vaccinated," and that vaccination is the only "exit ticket" out of the pandemic. Austria has already imposed movement restrictions on those not vaccinated or recently recovered from the virus, ordering them to stay at home since Monday, becoming the first EU country to



VIENNA: Demonstrators take part in a rally held by Austria's far-right Freedom Party FPÖe against the measures taken to curb the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, at Maria Theresien Platz square in Vienna yesterday. — AFP

do so. But infections have continued to rise. On Friday, a new record of more than 15,800 new cases was recorded in the EU member of nearly nine million people.

'Tragedy'

"I was hoping that there wouldn't be a general lockdown," said Markus Horvath as he prepared to shut from Monday his stall selling wooden jewellery at a Christmas market in Vienna. Christian Edlmayr, selling glass ornaments at another Vienna Christmas market, said he would lose half his yearly revenue. "This will be very, very bad for me," he said. Under the partial lockdown, only outlets deemed essential will remain open such as supermarkets, banks, pharmacies and post offices.

Andreas Schneider, a 31-year-old from Belgium who works as an economist in the Austrian capital, also described the lockdown as a "tragedy", saying confining just the unvaccinated had been "reasonable" since they had a choice.

Other European countries are also re-introducing curbs to fight the virus's spread. On Friday, the German state of Bavaria cancelled all of its popular Christmas markets this year, and announced a shutdown of clubs, bars and night service at restaurants. "The situation is very, very serious and difficult," state premier Markus Soeder told a news conference. Last Saturday, the Netherlands shut bars, restaurants, cafes and supermarkets from 8:00 pm for three weeks with non-essential shops forced to shut at 6:00 pm. — AFP

US president hits 79: potential successors watch from wings

WASHINGTON: As Joe Biden pops the cork on his alcohol-free birthday bubbly this weekend he will not need to be reminded that he was born as close to the end of Abraham Lincoln's presidency as he was to the start of his own. The veteran Democrat, who turns 79 yesterday, has said publicly he intends to run for reelection but there has been persistent speculation that he could change his mind given his advanced years. There is usually little intrigue around the nomination when a US president is still in his first term, as no occupant of the White House has declined to seek reelection since Lyndon Johnson more than 50 years ago.

But Biden would be 86 at the end of a second term, and potential successors and their sponsors are already circling, seeing another four years as an assignment too far in Biden's storied political career. In a new Politico/Morning Consult poll, only 40



MARYLAND: US President Joe Biden boards a helicopter after getting a medical check up at Walter Reed Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland. — AFP

percent of voters surveyed agreed with the statement that Biden "is in good health," while 50 percent disagreed—a 29-point shift over a year. "If his health declines, as sometimes happens in one's 80s, his plans might change," said David Greenberg, a journalism and history professor at Rutgers University in New Jersey.

US can benefit Africa amid rising Chinese influence: Blinken

DAKAR: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Friday that Washington will treat Africa a "major geopolitical power" where it can deliver tangible benefits, making the case to preserve US influence as rival China invests heavily. Days before China holds a major meeting on Africa in Senegal, where Blinken arrived later Friday, the top US diplomat said President Joe Biden plans to convene a summit of African leaders, which the White House said will be held next year.

In an address at the headquarters of the West African bloc ECOWAS in Abuja, Blinken made no explicit mention of China but said he knew Africans have been "wary of the strings" that often come with foreign engagement. "I want to be clear - the

United States doesn't want to limit your partnerships with other countries," Blinken said.

"We don't want to make you choose. We want to give you choices. Our approach will be sustainable, transparent and values-driven," he said. He said that other nations' infrastructure deals can be "opaque, coercive, burden countries with unmanageable debt, are environmentally destructive and don't always benefit the people who actually live there." "We will do things differently," he said.

The Biden administration considers a rising and authoritarian China the top 21st-century challenge of the United States but has taken a more subtle approach than the previous administration of Donald Trump, which loudly berated the Asian power. Blinken's speech also departed markedly in emphasis from previous administrations of both parties by dwelling little about military cooperation, long on the top of the US wish-list in Africa. The Biden administration "firmly believes that it's time to stop treating Africa as a subject of geopolitics - and start treating it as the major geopolitical player it has become," Blinken said. — AFP



DAKAR: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (back-ground left) watches as Bechtel President for Europe, Africa and the Middle East Justin Siberell (left) and Ageroute Director General Ibrahim Ndiaye (right) congratulate after signed an agreement during a commercial diplomatic event with US companies and the government of Senegal yesterday. — AFP

International

'It's killing us': Smog-choked roads take their toll in India

Delhi ranked the world's worst capital for air quality

NEW DELHI: Stinging eyes, an unrelenting cough and chronic lung disease have taken their toll on Bhajan Lal, an auto rickshaw driver navigating the Indian capital's chaotic roads and poisonous air. For the last three decades, Lal carted passengers along bumpy thoroughfares to temples, markets and offices in New Delhi, working every day through the winter months when a pall of toxic smog settles over the sprawling megacity. "The pollution causes a lot of problems for my throat," the 58-year-old told AFP, after a morning spent in the driver's seat of his motorized three-wheeler. "My eyes sting... My lungs are affected, which creates breathing problems. Mucus builds up and collects in my chest."

“
Pollution causes a lot of problems for my throat”

Delhi is consistently ranked the world's worst capital for air quality and on its most polluted days the smog can cut visibility on the roads to barely 50 meters. Levels of PM2.5 pollutants—the microparticles most harmful to human health, which can enter the bloodstream through the lungs—last week reached more than 30 times the maximum daily limit recommended by the World Health Organization. "I feel so

sorry looking at children and their health," said Lal. "They are already getting sick."

Lal's business suffers and he sometimes drives around the streets for an entire day without finding passengers, who prefer paying extra to sit through their commutes inside a cab. For those without the luxury of escaping the choking air, the health impacts are severe. AFP accompanied Lal to a doctor's check-up where he was diagnosed with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease, a progressive condition that gradually limits airflow to the body.

"If he doesn't take the regular medication now, he will go into a state where the airways will go narrowing and narrowing, and progressively worsening," said Vivek Nangia, Lal's doctor. Factory emissions, vehicle exhausts and crop-clearing fires from farms in neighboring states combine to cast the city of 20 million people in an otherworldly coat of yellow-grey haze near the end of each year. Piecemeal efforts to mitigate the smog, such as a public campaign encouraging drivers to turn off their engines at traffic lights, have failed to make an impact.

'A gas chamber'

"I don't know from where the solution will come for this pollution, which is killing us," Delhi resident Vijay Satokar told AFP. "We have become a gas chamber." This week authorities took the drastic step of ordering six of the 11 coal power plants in Delhi's vicinity to close down until further notice. City officials also shut schools indefinitely, barred trucks except those carrying essential goods from entering the capital until next week, and told civil servants to work from home. But they stopped short of accepting a call by India's



NEW DELHI: Commuters make their way amid smoggy conditions in New Delhi yesterday. — AFP

Supreme Court to declare the city's first "pollution lockdown", which would have restricted the population to their homes.

Smog is blamed for more than a million deaths in India annually, and a recent University of Chicago study found that air pollution was likely to reduce life expectancy by more than nine years for four in every 10 Indians. Authorities have struggled to address the root causes, with national coal consumption nearly doubling in the last decade. India fought more ambitious curbs on dirty energy at this month's COP26 climate summit, a move driven by its need for cheap fuel

to power its booming economy.

Rural agricultural workers meanwhile constitute a powerful voting bloc and year-end farm fires—the cheapest way to clear fields before the next growing season—continue unabated despite a ban two years ago. Winters in the capital, once appreciated for their mild weather after the long and scorching summer months, have become an annual endurance test for its inhabitants. "I find it so difficult to breathe living in Delhi," said local resident Dinesh Doval. "Sometimes I feel I should leave the city. But then where should I go?" — AFP

Time shrinking for Iran nuclear deal, US envoy warns

MANAMA: The US envoy for Iran warned Friday that Tehran was approaching the point of no return for reviving a nuclear deal after it boosted its stocks of enriched uranium before talks resume this month. Robert Malley said Iran risked making it "impossible" to gain any benefit from resuming the agreement, which has been on hold since then president Donald Trump withdrew the United States from it in 2018. This week, with Iran set for talks with world powers in Vienna on November 29, the International Atomic Energy Agency said Tehran had again increased its stockpile of highly enriched uranium.

"The time will come if Iran continues at this pace with the advancements they've made, (it) will make it impossible even if we were going to go back to the JCPOA to recapture the benefits," Malley told the Manama Dialogue conference in Bahrain. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action was the agreement struck in 2015 under which Iran agreed to clear limits on its nuclear activities in return for an easing of sanctions. "Iran's advances are spreading alarm across the region... that's what's making the clock tick faster and making all of us say that the time is short for a return to the JCPOA," Malley said.



On Wednesday, the US and its Gulf Arab allies accused Iran of causing a nuclear crisis and destabilizing the region with its ballistic missile program and support for armed militias. Malley said the US shared a "commonality of purpose" with rivals Russia and China "because we want to avoid that crisis, all of us, the crisis that would be sparked if Iran continues on its current path". "And I want to be clear, because there's no ambiguity about what they seem to be doing now, which is to drag their feet on the nuclear talks and accelerate the progress in their nuclear program."

The US envoy said he was not encouraged by the statements from the new Iranian government of President Ebrahim Raisi, which earlier on Friday accused Washington of conducting a "propaganda campaign" against the country. "If they stick to their public pronouncements, unfortunately we're not headed in the right direction... but let's wait to see what happens," he said, pledging that President Joe Biden would honour a revived deal.

"Our intent, our clear intent in coming back into the deal is to stick with the deal because we don't want to see a nuclear crisis," Malley said. Iran had reacted angrily to a US pledge to take its Gulf Arab allies' interests into account in any revived nuclear deal with their arch rival. "The US government, which is responsible for the current situation after withdrawing from the nuclear deal, is once again trying to provoke a crisis," foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh charged. In a tweet later, Malley said he had a "very constructive" phone call with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov and Chinese Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Ma Zhaoxun on the Iran talks. "Our three countries are in strong agreement on the need for a return to full compliance with the JCPOA," he said. "We are working together to achieve it by aligning our approaches as we head to the 7th round of talks," he said. — AFP



PUNJAB PROVINCE: Sikh devotees gather around a bus carrying the Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh holy book) during a religious procession on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev, the founder of Sikhism, in Nankana Sahib. — AFP

Pakistanis welcome India Sikhs for Guru Nanak's birthday

NANKANA SAHIB: The scent of flowers and perfume hangs in the air as thousands of Sikhs from India were welcomed to Pakistan on Friday for one of the world's biggest birthday celebrations: the 552nd birth anniversary of the Guru Nanak. The festivities were taking place at the shrine to the founder of the Sikh religion in Nankana Sahib, the Pakistani city where he was born in 1469.

The emotion is heightened this year, as devotees from Pakistan's arch-rival India were unable to cross the border in 2020, due to coronavirus restrictions. "I have goosebumps, I can't explain how I'm feeling," Darshan Singh, a 70-year-old farmer from India, tells AFP. "I never thought we would get this sort of love from our Pakistani brothers," he says. "These women are not Sikh, these children know nothing about our faith, but they are standing up to welcome us with open arms and clean hearts."

Many others were similarly swept up in the rare sense of cross-border unity between Pakistanis and Indians, divided when the subcontinent was partitioned at independence in 1947. Annie Munjal, a 24-year-old from Delhi, says her grandparents often told her stories of growing up in Pakistan's Lahore, near the Indian border, before partition. "We had heard from them how Pakistan was, but we never got to see," she says. "Now we are here... they are just like us." The celebration of more than 12,000 people at the shrine, or gurdwara, is infectious.

Curious Muslim residents of the city stand on their rooftops to watch, and shower the Sikh processions

Georgia's ex-leader ends hunger strike

TBILISI: Georgia's jailed opposition leader and ex-president Mikheil Saakashvili ended his 50-day hunger strike yesterday after he was moved to a military hospital from a prison clinic, his doctor said. The flamboyant pro-Western reformer launched a hunger strike after being jailed upon his return from exile in Ukraine on October 1, saying his arrest was political.

On Thursday, Saakashvili, 53, fainted and doctors urged authorities to move him to a regular clinic, saying his life was in danger. Georgian authorities had initially rejected the medical recommendations, but Justice Minister Rati Bregadze said Friday they were open to moving Saakashvili to a military hospital "where his health and security will be protected at most by the state."

In the early hours of yesterday, Saakashvili "was transferred from a prison hospital to a military clinic" in the city of Gori, some 90 kilometers west of the capital Tbilisi, his lawyer Dito Sadzaglishvili told AFP. His personal doctor, Nikoloz Kipshidze, said "(Former) president Saakashvili formally called off his hunger

with rose petals and chocolates. At the main gates, young Muslims and Hindus join Sikhs in dancing to the beat of the dhol, a South Asian drum. Posters welcoming the pilgrims alternate with heavy security on the streets leading to the shrine. The devotees, many of them barefoot, wave saffron flags as they sing hymns and recite poetry and religious texts - all before a massive lunch of rice, naan, chickpeas and sweets.

'Long wait is over'

The first of ten gurus who developed the Sikh faith, Guru Nanak's teachings laid the basis for a community that now numbers up to 30 million across the world. But most of the faithful are now in India, where their families fled the sectarian violence that claimed millions of lives during partition. It was only in 2019 that Pakistan opened a visa-free corridor allowing Sikhs from India to visit Kartarpur, a town where another shrine built to mark the guru's death lies. That white-domed gurdwara was so close to the border that for decades devotees in India could see it, but not visit - a situation akin to Muslims being able to see Medina but never enter.

The Covid-19 pandemic prevented Indians from crossing in 2020. This year authorities agreed to reopen the corridor, and the faithful began streaming across in preparation for the birthday celebrations this week. Some stayed in Kartarpur, while many made their way 180 kilometers southwest to join those celebrating in Nankana Sahib. "My years long wait is finally over. I am steps away from my guru's home," Buljit Kaur, a 61-year-old pilgrim from India, tells AFP in Nankana Sahib.

Pervaiz Ahmed, a 41 year old local doctor was coming out of a mosque on the same street as the gurdwara. "Sikhs find their roots here, this is the place they belong to. We have no objections seeing them coming in such big numbers," he said. The Indian farmer, Darshan Singh, says he will return with his family. "This is the first time I came to Gurdwara Nankana Sahib, and it looks like I have wasted 70 years of my life," he says. "The emotions and feelings cannot be explained." — AFP

strike right after he was transferred to the Gori military hospital." "He still is in a life-threatening condition and was placed in an intensive care ward," Kipshidze told AFP, adding that Saakashvili's "refeeding will begin later on."

'Illegal imprisonment'

"I will never accept my illegal imprisonment," Saakashvili said on Facebook Friday evening, adding that he was ready to "appear before a fair trial and accept any verdict it delivers." In 2018, Saakashvili was sentenced in absentia to six years in jail for "abuse



TBILISI: Georgians rally to demand the release of the jailed ex-president and opposition leader Mikheil Saakashvili in Tbilisi. — AFP

Censors, legal hurdles stifle China's #MeToo movement

BEIJING: China's #MeToo movement has stumbled in the face of swift internet censors, a patriarchal society and a legal system that places a heavy burden on the claimant. Explosive claims this month by tennis star Peng Shuai that a former top Communist Party politician had sexually assaulted her marked the first time allegations have hit the top layer of government. But her accusations were swiftly scrubbed from the Chinese internet, and she has not been seen publicly since.

Others have faced the same fate, with an increasingly austere Beijing cracking down on any form of grassroots social movement. The global #MeToo movement reached China in 2018 when a wave of women published allegations of sexual harassment against university professors. Threatened by the prospect of an uncontrolled mass movement, authorities quickly began blocking social media hashtags and keywords. The phrase #MeToo is still blocked.

Prominent feminists face regular police harassment and detention — including activist Sophia Huang Xueqin, arrested in September for "inciting subversion of state power", according to Reporters Without Borders. Although leader Xi Jinping has declared women are "an important force driving social development and progress", there are barely any women in key government roles in China. Political leadership is a man's world, with only one woman in the Communist Party's elite 25-member Politburo. Xi has also been aggressively pushing a conservative narrative of women as mothers and wives. New legislation clarifying the concept of sexual harassment passed last year in China, but accusers still face major obstacles. "You have to constantly prove you're honest... and that you're not using this issue to hype yourself," a woman who had made an allegation of sexual misconduct told AFP, asking to remain unidentified as she feared retaliation. But for the accused, "it's actually very simple", she said. "He can just deny it and does not need to prove his innocence." — AFP

of office" - charges he had rejected as trumped up and politically motivated. The United States Department of State has urged the Georgian authorities to "treat Mr. Saakashvili fairly and with dignity, including right to fair trial." "As soon as I am set free, I'll join you - as equal among equals - in rebuilding our country," Saakashvili wrote in an address to the nation. He thanked Georgians for the "unbelievable show of solidarity and humanity" and called for a campaign "to liberate the country" from the rule of oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili's Georgian Dream party. "I believe in our victory as never before." — AFP

Business

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2021

Turks hammered by currency crisis

Turkish lira hits record low as central bank cuts interest rate

ISTANBUL: Turkish pensioner Abdullah Cici and his wife Hatice travelled across Istanbul to hunt for bargains at a popular bazaar. They were disappointed. "We need a lot of things but we cannot buy them. There's salami, sujuk (sausage) over there. I am a human. I also crave for them but I cannot afford," he said.

"Our salaries are now worth peanuts." The price swings at the market offer a snapshot of the toll dealt on consumers by soaring inflation and a currency that has lost almost a third of its value against the dollar this year.

The lira sank to a record low on Thursday, 11.30 against the dollar, after the central bank apparently caved again to pressure from President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to cut interest rates for a third straight month. Analysts blame most of Turkey's problems on unconventional economic policies that focus on economic growth at the price of high inflation and a depreciating currency.

Annual inflation has reached 20 percent, quadruple the government target. The Cicis have had to adapt. "We buy in small amounts, half a kilogram instead of one," said Hatice Cici, holding a small bag of produce worth a total 120 lira (\$10.78, 9.5 euros). One loaf of fresh white bread costs 2.5 lira Friday compared to two lira a month ago. One kilo of minced meat is around 90 lira, up from 70 lira in October. Five kilos of oil have risen from 80 to 100 lira. The net minimum wage is 2,825 lira, while

unemployment is in the double digits. Erdogan has blamed big supermarket chains for uncontrollable price increases.

"Erdogan is running the show," said Fawad Razaqzada, analyst at ThinkMarkets. "If he wants lower interest rates he will get lower rates, regardless of how high inflation might be or how the economy is doing," Razaqzada said. "It is very difficult to see the light at the end of the tunnel for the Turkish lira unfortunately." Sellers shout "there's no price increase in our shop" at the bustling Eminonu shopping district in Istanbul.

But pensioner Naime has recorded the shifting prices in a notebook that she keeps in her bag. "I calculate everything. I write down prices," she said. "I cannot buy whatever I want. When I go to the market the second day, it's never the same price again," she said. In the past she had money to spend and could go on holiday with her family. "We cannot do any of that now and barely make ends meet."

No more picnics

Another retiree, Feriye, said she came to the bazaar to find a cheaper coat for her husband to spend the winter as she could not afford one she saw at a shopping mall. "I earn a pension of 2,600 lira (200 euros). Tell me how come a coat costs 1,600 lira (120 euros)?" she said. "I don't know if I can find an affordable one here." Hafzullah Canbay, a shuttle driver who was fishing on the Galata



ANKARA: Customers stand by the desk at a currency exchange office in Ankara. — AFP

bridge near the bazaar, said policies have made the rich richer and the poor poorer. "If you ask me what's the solution, let me put it clear, I have no expectation from any political party," he said. "If you ask me whether I am hopeful, I am not. I cannot

see the light."

Canbay said he used to picnic every weekend with his children. "It's no longer possible," he said. "We have to live according to our calculations. That's our situation." —AFP



Reliance is abandoning a \$15 billion deal for Saudi Aramco to buy a 20 percent stake in its oil refining and chemicals unit.

India's Reliance ditches \$15bn Saudi Aramco deal

MUMBAI: India's oil-to-telecoms giant Reliance is abandoning a \$15 billion deal for Saudi Aramco to buy a 20 percent stake in its oil refining and chemicals unit, it said, as the firm pivots towards renewable energy. The deal was announced more than two years ago by Reliance chairman Mukesh Ambani, Asia's richest man, and touted as the biggest foreign investment in the conglomerate's history.

But Reliance and other major Indian firms have since poured billions of dollars into green power as the government pushes to reduce its dependence on imported fossil fuels and as the country's cities are assailed by pollution. Saudi Aramco is the world's biggest oil-producing company and vies with Apple for the title of the most valuable firm on the planet.

Ambani in June this year pledged to invest \$10 billion in renewable energy over the next three years.

Reliance said in a late-night statement Friday that due to its "evolving" portfolio of businesses, the two firms had "mutually determined that it would be beneficial for both parties to re-evaluate the proposed investment". It was withdrawing a legal application that would have paved the way for Saudi Aramco to take the stake in its oil-to-chemicals division, it added.

The unit includes Reliance's refining, petrochemicals and fuels marketing businesses, among them the giant Jamnagar refinery in Gujarat. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's political powerbase. Reliance recently announced it would build four "giga factories" at Jamnagar making solar panels, storage batteries, and hydrogen-related products to create one of the largest integrated renewable energy manufacturing facilities in the world.

The Mumbai-headquartered firm's rise was powered by its oil and petrochemicals businesses but in recent years it has diversified into areas ranging from telecoms to retail. —AFP

Fed should quicken stimulus pullback due to inflation

WASHINGTON: The sharp rise in US inflation even as the labor market rapidly improves means the Federal Reserve should remove stimulus from the economy more quickly, a central bank official said Friday. The Fed this month began slowing the pace of bond purchases it started early in the pandemic to provide liquidity to the economy, but has expressed caution over when it will increase interest rates even as consumer prices hit a 30-year high.

Fed board member Christopher Waller said "the rapid improvement in the labor market and the deteriorating inflation data have pushed me towards favoring a faster pace of tapering and a more rapid removal of accommodation in 2022." As the world's largest economy has made a rapid recovery from the deepest downturn on record, prices have soared due to global supply bottlenecks and shortages, as well as labor constraints.

The annual consumer price index in October hit 6.2 percent—its highest level in more than three decades and well beyond the Fed's two percent goal. Prices have "escalated substantially this year," Waller said, and "despite the highest wage gains in years, inflation this year has wiped out any real wage increase for the average worker."

"High inflation is painful to Americans who have little choice about the goods and services they buy



for everyday living," he said in a prepared speech. His comments were the strongest yet from a top central banker, as Fed Chair Jerome Powell has repeatedly said that while inflation is higher than expected, most of the factors driving it are transitory.

But Waller noted that "price pressures are no longer concentrated in a few categories, they appear to have broadened," and it is "very concerning" that consumer surveys show the public is worried the rate will stay above two percent. The central bank slashed the benchmark borrowing rate to zero in March 2020 to help ward off a deeper economic crisis, and has said it will not raise rates until the economy is at maximum employment and inflation is on track to stay at or a bit above two percent.

Waller said the criteria for inflation to hold at or above two percent has been met, and the economy "making great strides towards achieving the employment leg of our mandate." The Fed this month started reducing the pace of its monthly purchases of Treasury securities and mortgage-backed bonds, but has said it could cut back more quickly. —AFP

Biden hails major boost for giant social welfare expansion

WASHINGTON: US lawmakers elevated President Joe Biden's giant social welfare bill to the Senate on Friday, in a major step toward realizing his vision for the more equitable, greener society that he hopes will be his legacy. Build Back Better—an assortment of education, health, childcare and climate reforms—was green-lit by the House of Representatives days after Biden signed into law the first part of his economic blueprint, a sweeping upgrade of the country's crumbling infrastructure.

The \$1.8 trillion measure faces a bumpy, weeks-long ride in the Senate, with the Democrats' deficit hawks wary of freewheeling spending amid spiraling inflation, before it gets a final rubber stamp in the House. Speaker Nancy Pelosi had hoped for a vote late Thursday but Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy commandeered the floor for a record-breaking eight and a half hours in a bid to derail the bill.

Democrats rushed to the well of the House to clap and cheer as Pelosi was finally able to announce it had cleared the lower chamber a day later than expected. The White House released a statement from the president, who was undergoing a medical check-up requiring anesthetic, calling the vote "another giant step forward in carrying out my economic plan to create jobs, reduce costs, make our country more competitive." The legislation would provide millions of jobs, according to the White House, although Republicans have characterized it as an example of wildly out-of-control Democratic spending.

Deal-breaker

That warning was echoed by the US Chamber of Commerce, which pointed to rising gas and food prices, supply chain challenges and worker shortages, saying the shopping spree would "only make things worse." The legislation will likely be trimmed further in any case in the upper chamber, where Democrats have the narrowest of majorities and moderates are voicing concerns over Biden's spending plans.

Annual inflation jumped to 6.2 percent last month, giving Republicans another cudgel to bash Biden with as they bid to retake both chambers of Congress in next year's midterm elections. House Democrats, who have been bickering for months over the price tag of Build Back Better, would have lost the party-line vote had there been more than three defectors. In the end only one Democrat—from a competitive district in Maine — joined every Republican in rejecting the bill.

UK retail sales grow for first time in 6 months

LONDON: British retail sales rose in October after five months of zero growth thanks to early Christmas purchases, official data showed Friday. Sales by volume climbed 0.8 percent from September, the Office for National Statistics said in a statement.

"After five months of no growth, retail sales picked up in October," ONS chief economist Grant Fitzner said in a statement.

"Clothing, department stores and toy shop sales reported a boost... with some retailers suggesting



WASHINGTON: US lawmakers elevated President Joe Biden's giant social welfare bill to the Senate on Friday in a major step toward realizing his vision for the more equitable and greener society.

Republicans seized on an analysis from the independent Congressional Budget Office saying the bill would boost the deficit by \$367 billion over 10 years. But Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Friday it was "more than fully paid for," and that tougher tax enforcement would help reduce the deficit as the government compelled large corporations and top earners to "pay their fair share."

'Crapacular mess'

The bill is likely to be taken up by the upper chamber in late December or possibly January, with more urgent priorities such as avoiding a debt default and a government shutdown expected to take up much of the holiday period. Pelosi downplayed the potential for senators making major changes, telling reporters after the vote that 90 percent of the text had been agreed among Democrats in Congress and the White House. "There were some differences at the end, and we'll deal with that as we go forward," she said.

The Senate has been locked in a 50-50 split for one of the longest periods in its history, and, with no votes to spare, every Democrat effectively has a veto on any bill as long as Republicans stick together.

Senate progressives are pushing for a national paid family leave program and a bigger expansion of health care benefits, but the latest inflation data could torpedo those efforts. The United States is the world's only advanced economy that offers no paid time off to new parents. Biden's spokeswoman Jen Psaki said the president "absolutely" wanted to see the provision in the final text. "He also knows and recognizes that you need the majority of members in the Senate—every single Democrat—to support something, to get it across the finish line," she told reporters. Nebraska's Ben Sasse led a chorus of opprobrium from Senate Republicans over the legislation, labeling it a "crapacular mess" that will lead to "a million more annual IRS (tax) audits." —AFP

that early Christmas shopping helped to bolster trade," he added.

UK retail sales volumes had dropped during September as the country suffered supply constraints and high prices. Although sales of petrol surged in late September as drivers rushed to fill up their tanks, a UK fuel-shortage crisis likely meant consumers visited stores only for necessities, analysts said.

The UK is facing delays to the shipping of goods owing to an acute shortage of lorry drivers. UK private sector business activity expanded at the fastest pace in three months in October, a key survey showed. Growth was however accompanied by an unprecedented rise in inflationary pressures due to higher wages and supply chain costs, according to the survey from IHS Markit and the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply. —AFP

Business

Gulf Bank wins 'Best Innovation In Customer Experience' at Future Enterprise Awards 2021

Award given at a prestigious ceremony held as part of GITEX Global 2021



Mohammed Al-Qattan with the award

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank, one of the largest leading banks in Kuwait, was awarded the 'Best Innovation In Customer Experience' award at the prestigious Future Enterprise Awards 2021, held in the last week of GITEX Global.

Organized by CPI Media Group and the technology platform TahawulTech.com, the annual awards ceremony celebrates various companies and individuals from the Middle East's IT ecosystem that have demonstrated excellence in their fields over the past year. Gulf Bank has received the award in recognition of its recent transformation journey that has seen it embrace a multi-experience approach, strengthening its market differentiation with enhanced customer and employee experiences.

Gulf Bank's suite of solutions, in partnership with its technology provider, Alghanim Engineering, enable the financial institution to not only meet the digital demands of its customer base, but also to create a more flexible working environment for its Customer

Contact Center staff, who are now empowered to work from anywhere. "We are incredibly proud of the recognition that TahawulTech.com has given us as we continue to invest heavily in providing an extraordinary experience for customers and employees alike. We are continuing to invest in our digital capabilities to create exceptional engagement across all touchpoints throughout the customer journey - all while maintaining the highest standards of privacy and security. We are looking forward to being back at next year's awards ceremony with even more innovations," said Mohammed Al-Qattan, General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank.

Kausar Syed, Group Sales Director at CPI Media Group, added: "The new digital economy is fuelled by experiences and these experiences are being driven by the leaders we have celebrated. It is a great honor for us to host these awards and pay homage to those like Gulf Bank, who are taking responsibility for creating a better society for us all."

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti bank of the future. The bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience. Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining a robust sustainability program at the community, economic, and environmental levels through sustainability initiatives that are strategically selected to benefit both the country and the bank. The bank also supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various relevant parties to achieve it. For more information on Gulf Bank's various initiatives and activities, customers can visit one of Gulf Bank's branches or log on to Gulf Bank's Online/Mobile Banking services.

Japan unveils record \$490bn stimulus to boost COVID recovery

TOKYO: Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida announced a record \$490 billion stimulus for the world's third-largest economy Friday as he looks to shore up the country's patchy pandemic recovery. The 56 trillion yen injection, the third since the COVID crisis struck last year, "is enough to deliver a sense of safety and hope to the Japanese people", Kishida said.

The vast spending plans are expected to be approved by the cabinet later in the day and reportedly include cash and coupon handouts to families with children under 18 who meet an income cap, as well as pay rises for nurses and caregivers. It comes after Japan's economy shrank far more than expected in the second quarter as leaders struggled to overcome virus surges by imposing containment measures in Tokyo and other cities.

Former prime ministers Yoshihide Suga and Shinzo Abe poured 40 trillion yen and 38 trillion yen respectively into the economy in 2020, although some analysts have raised doubts over how effective that stimulus has been. "We have been able to build economic measures that will lead to a new society after the pandemic," Kishida said at policy talks between the cabinet and ruling coalition.

He said the 56 trillion in spending—roughly 10 percent of Japan's total GDP—was expected to rise as high as 79 trillion yen including other elements such as loans from private funds.

Kishida triumphed in a general election last month, having pledged to deliver a huge spending program after Suga stepped down, partly over his government's virus response. Businesses, especially restaurants and bars, have endured months of on-off restrictions on opening hours and alcohol sales since the pandemic began. Japan's borders also remain shut to tourists.

Government data showed this week that Japan's economy shrank 0.8 percent in the three months to September—far worse than market expectations—as a record surge in virus cases hit spending and supply-chain issues hampered business. However, daily cases have nosedived in recent months, and more than three-quarters of the population are now fully vaccinated, with most restrictions now lifted nationwide.

'We need accountability'

Analysts said the stimulus would support Japan's growth to some extent, but some questioned the effectiveness of handouts, with UBS warning it was unlikely to be a "game-changer" for the country's economic outlook. Japan already has an enormous public debt load, amounting to over 250 percent of GDP according to the International Monetary Fund. Stimulus measures could "undermine Japan's fiscal health" by increasing the debt burden, warned Yoko Takeda, chief economist at the Mitsubishi Research Institute. "Kishida tried to display his leadership by unveiling the record package swiftly," she told AFP.

"But its size overshadows the contents. The package may not help stimulate spending and only end up swelling people's savings," she added, alluding to fears that handouts would be deposited rather than ploughed back into the economy. Hideo Kumano, chief economist at Daiichi Life Research Institute, was also skeptical. "This is a huge package but its impact on GDP appears limited," he said.

"This hand-out and across-the-board policy may not necessarily lead to spending," he told AFP. The country's Board of Audit says nearly half of the stimulus already implemented by previous governments has yet to be used. Kengo Sakurada, chairman of the Japan Association of Corporate Executives noted this week. "We need accountability from the government on why this one will be successful," he told reporters.

Junichi Makino, chief economist at SMBC Nikko said in a note that the package should lift the GDP by 3.3 percent. He said a domestic travel discount program would likely have the most meaningful impact, along with subsidies for purchases and incentives for business. "Details of the package will be the key. The market will be focusing on the exact sizes of those high-impact programs," he wrote. —AFP



Dr. Najat Mukhtar conducts a training course on sign language at AUB

AUB provides training courses for its staff on sign language

KUWAIT: In line with its on-going efforts to enhance the banking experience of its customers with special needs, Ahli United Bank (AUB) organized a specialized training course. The course aims to train number of the bank's branches managers and employees on sign language. This course targets to develop the branches employees' abilities to be able to meet various needs of customers with hearing and speech impairments. The program also seeks to integrate this group of customers in the community by facilitating their communication with branches' employees.

This course comes in line with CBK instructions that require banks to have employee with knowledge of sign language readily available at branches to communicate directly with customers with hearing and speech impairments using sign language. The two consecutive days training course was delivered by Dr

Najat Mukhtar, who is considered one of the best sign language experts in Kuwait. The course covered the basics of sign language and its application to help people with hearing and speech difficulties. The bank selected staff were trained on specialized banking terms and general terms used in daily life. They also received general training to help them dealing with customers with hearing and speech difficulties.

Commenting on the mentioned training course, Naqeb Amin, HR General Manager at Ahli United Bank said, "This training course was organized in line with the bank's strategy which seeks to provide the best banking services and meet needs of all customers, including those with different needs. This strategy also aims to strengthen the bank's leading role in CSR area besides, it is to improve the level of customer service performance at the bank, for all customer segments, especially those with special needs."

Amin added: This training program complements the series of sign language programs provided by AUB. The aim of these courses is to help customers with hearing and speech difficulties to perform their banking transactions with complete independence. Furthermore, these courses reflect the bank's commitment to serve all segments to make positive changes in their lives.

Huge protests cast spotlight on Chinese factories in Serbia

ZRENJANIN, Serbia: When Dung Nguyen left Vietnam to work abroad, the 37-year-old said he'd been assured he would be employed by a German company in Serbia, only to have his passport taken away upon arrival at a Chinese-run factory where conditions were dire. The situation at the factory and the alleged deception used to lure employees has made headlines in Serbia after Nguyen and hundreds of other Vietnamese went on strike this week. The strike that started on Wednesday was a rare show of defiance by laborers at a Chinese-backed enterprise in the country. Beijing has invested billions in Serbia and neighboring Balkan countries in recent years, hoping to expand its economic footprint in central Europe.

Serbia has been quick to cash in on China's interest, as it seeks to court a range of investors amid the ongoing tug of war between the East and West over influence in the Balkans. But Belgrade has repeatedly been accused of giving Chinese-owned companies a free hand in how they run their operations.

Critics from civil society, human rights groups and in the media say the government has turned a blind eye to environmental concerns and potential human rights violations. The Vietnamese workers were employed to build a factory for the Chinese tire company Linglong in the small northern city of Zrenjanin, considered a centerpiece of Beijing-backed investment in Serbia. But according to Nguyen, the living and work conditions were untenable and not what he had been promised.

"We are living as if we were in jail... all our passports were kept by the Chinese when we arrived at the airport," Nguyen told AFP in a video message sent from inside the living quarters. "I cannot talk more as I am afraid my saying would impact others," he added. Even before the strike, private security guards were posted near the workers' dormitories next to the factory site and journalists including from AFP were prevented from entering the premises.

'Unfit housing'

Human rights organizations AII and ASTRA published a joint report earlier this week demanding "urgent action" from Serbian authorities. "A large number of established facts indicate the possibility that workers are victims of human trafficking for the purpose of labor exploitation," it said. According to the report, the Vietnamese workers had not been provided with heating, electricity or hot water and the facilities lacked adequate infrastructure and sewerage. "The conditions were nowhere near suitable for housing human beings,"

Danilo Curcic, a human rights lawyer from AII said during an interview with local broadcaster N1 TV. "I don't think it's an overstatement to say that some people do not keep animals in those conditions." Construction workers at the Zrenjanin factory had already staged two strikes within the last six months, according to AII, sparked by unpaid salaries and a lack of food. A short documentary aired by N1 this month also showed workers living in cramped conditions inside a makeshift dormitory at the site.



ZRENJANIN, Serbia: Vietnamese workers are seen near the Linglong construction site plant in Zrenjanin, Serbia, Friday. — AFP

'Unacceptable'

"It is unacceptable that an aspiring EU member state seems to tolerate this on its territory and remains silent on cases of potential forced labor in Europe," Viola von Cramon, a member of the European Parliament for Germany, said. Linglong said that the Vietnamese workers were not officially employed by the company and had been hired by a Chinese subcontractor. "Linglong's only obligation to its contractors is to pay them compensation for the work performed under the contract," the company said in a statement.

It added it was planning meetings with subcontractors to "inform them about the values the company upholds" and demanded the workers were transferred to "better accommodation". It did not respond to an AFP request for further clarification. On Friday night, the Vietnamese workers were asked to sign a statement declaring they had "voluntarily and consciously" agreed to work at the site, AFP confirmed from various sources. "Everybody became anxious and scared, without knowing what the Chinese would do to us," Nguyen said.

"We don't want to work in the Chinese company. We want to leave. Please help us." Vietnam's foreign ministry said officials had received no reports of "violence and harassment" at the factory but said it was monitoring the situation. In a 2019 case that cast a disturbing light on unscrupulous trafficking networks, 39 Vietnamese migrants were found dead in a refrigerated truck in Britain after it had crossed the Channel from Europe.—AFP



TOKYO: Pedestrians walk outside Shinjuku station in Tokyo. — AFP

First German states cancel all Christmas markets over virus

MUNICH: The German states of Bavaria and Saxony on Friday cancelled all their Christmas markets and unveiled drastic curbs on public life as the country scrambles to contain soaring coronavirus infections.

"The situation is very, very serious and difficult," Markus Soeder, premier of the southern state of Bavaria, said as he also announced a shutdown of clubs, bars and night service at restaurants. The eastern state of Saxony unveiled similar measures and went even further by closing all sporting and cultural venues, banning tourism, public consumption of alcohol and barring the unvaccinated from non-essential shops and hairdressers.

Saxony premier Michael Kretschmer—whose state has Germany's lowest vaccination rate at just under 60 percent of the population—admitted that many of the restrictions would affect the vaccinated as well. But he said tough action was needed to keep hospitals from being overwhelmed and called for "solidarity" from all citizens. "We need more 'we' and less 'I' in this pandemic," he told reporters.

Bavaria and Saxony are among the hardest hit regions in the ferocious fourth COVID wave sweeping Germany. While Germany had a weekly incidence rate

of 340.7 recorded infections per 100,000 people on Friday, according to the Robert Koch Institute health agency, the figure was far higher in Saxony (593.6) and Bavaria (625.3).

'Health, of course'

The Bavarian state capital of Munich on Tuesday had become the first major German city to cancel its Christmas market for the second year in a row. Saxony's cancellations means the famed Dresden Christmas market is also scrapped. Germany hosts some 2,500 Christmas markets each year, cherished by visitors who come to savor mulled wine and roasted chestnuts, and shop for seasonal trinkets among clusters of wooden chalets.

In pre-pandemic times, they drew about 160 million domestic and international visitors annually who brought in revenues of three to five billion euros (\$3.4 billion to \$5.6 billion), according to the BSM stallkeepers' industry association. "It's a catastrophe for us," Eleonore Stiegel, who operates a stand at the Christmas market in the historic town of Bamberg, told AFP. "We have already bought our wares and now are left with nothing for the second year in a row."

Konrad Friedrich, who also plies his trade at the Bamberg market, said he could understand the decision given the explosion in infections. "What's more important? The market or health?" he said. "Health, of course." In addition to the new nighttime restrictions, Bavarian sport and culture venues will be subject to a 25-percent capacity limit and retail outlets will have to restrict customer flows, Soeder said.—AFP

Business

KFH: Smartphones, Internet and social media are high risk means of fraud on bank cards

Al-Arbeed warns against disclosing banking info to suspicious parties or fake sites

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) is continuing its awareness messages to customers and employees as part of "Be Aware" campaign, thus warning against the risks of falling in the traps of fraudulence and the hacking of all types of credit cards which have increased recently. No information about bank accounts or bank cards should be disclosed to any unknown parties, suspicious people, or fake websites. Immediate contact must be made with the bank or regulatory authorities to report any fraudulence case or hacking of credit cards or information.

Group Acting DGM - Banking Cards, Talal Al-Arbeed said that demand on e-payment transactions is expected to increase considering the increase in new money transfer systems and robust e-trading worldwide. The tremendous increase in the numbers of e-payment systems users has tempted cyber criminals to commit fraudulence crimes after obtaining the bank card number and the secret number (CVV) which consists of three digits at the back of the card. Purchase transactions through credit cards are very simple as they comprise two steps: authorization and payment.

Al-Arbeed added that although a major part of fraudulence transactions on credit cards, ATM and internet can be avoided yet hackers will always attempt to invent new tricks to keep up with the latest developments e.g., promoting financial prizes which require the disclosure of banking card details or transfer of funds to the customer for unrealistic reasons by unknown parties

Types of cards

Regarding the types of banking cards, Al-Arbeed said that there are several types of cards. However, the most common types are three cards, credit cards, ATM and prepaid cards.

Types of fraudulence

He said that fraudulence is divided into two main types, the first and most common on internet represents the stealing of the card details during transactions which require usage of the card. The fraud steals the card details and use them illegally without having to use the card itself. Second type is represented in stealing the information from the card itself. This method has become less common. It appears in shops when the dishonest seller passes the card on an information storage machine and uses this information later for making purchases.

Mobile fraudulence

He indicated that fraudulence through the phone is one of the main channels to steal funds from the cards. Criminals are disguised as bank employees, police, or others. They convince their victims that there are threats on their accounts so that they discover secret information and steal funds. Frauds use the trick of pressing the key or one of the digits in preparation for other pre-planned steps in accordance with very tight methods that enable the



Talal Al-Arbeed

hacker to complete the hacking process. He warned all users to take precaution against any calls from strangers, not to disclose any information about the account or the card, to end the call immediately and not to discuss any details of any type. He emphasized that no card No. or ID No. should be given to any person and no transaction should be conducted over the phone unless the customer is the one who initiates the call and knows the company very well.

Social media applications

He stated that the increase social media applications and the increased dependence thereon in purchases, cross border shopping and transaction processing, was accompanied by different types of fraudulence. He indicated that in cases of online shopping through personal computers, no access information, passwords, or any other information should be saved. He warned against the links attached to e-mail messages which ask the user to enter his personal data. Do not click on them at all even it appears that the bank is the sender. The customer must know the party he is dealing with.

He added "before you purchase anything online from an unknown seller, search online for the seller information through search browsers. Also check consumers' comments and opinions. When you pay online make sure that the webpage address starts with //https, examine the page carefully and minimize as much as possible the amount of personal information on social media websites. Do not share password with anybody and check and update privacy and security settings continuously.

Online fraud

Alarbeed asked all banking cards users to deal with their cards exactly as they deal with their cash funds especially online. Do not transfer or accept in your accounts any funds sent by unknown parties. Be aware of the attractive offers when doing online shopping. Keep your mobile and computer devices secured always. Avoid using public computers or WiFi to conduct banking transactions.

General warnings to travelers

Al-Arbeed said that, upon traveling, the person must carry the cards which he needs only and to be always alert when using the card. He should not conduct any transaction through the phone. He must ensure to know all emergency phone numbers of his bank and must immediately report the incident if the card is stolen or lost. In general, it should always be ensured, when updating the information, to contact the bank and verify the details of account statements on regular basis and not to ignore any alerts from the bank. He should report the incident to the police in case card is stolen or lost.

Credit cards parties

Al-Arbeed mentioned that the customer should know the parties in the funds transfer transaction when using credit cards. There are 5 parties: The bank issuing the card - The customer using the card - The merchant - The global organization carrying the card trademark - The merchant's bank receiving the sale documents and follows up the member banks settlement of the amounts due on the card.



Stocks, oil, euro slide on Austria's partial lockdown

LONDON: European stocks fell Friday along with the euro as Austria announced a new partial lockdown to try to curb surging COVID cases, which also triggered heavy losses for oil prices. The latest COVID-19 rules in Austria and more limited steps in Germany added pressure to US markets, although the Nasdaq finished at an all-time high on strength in tech shares.

The restrictions in Austria will begin tomorrow and vaccination against COVID-19 in the eurozone country will become mandatory from February, Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg said.

Fawad Razaqzada, market analyst at ThinkMarkets, warned of a "short-term correction as investors wake up to the risks facing the eurozone economy," despite the prospect of a weaker euro boosting exports. "It is not necessarily about Austria," he said, pointing to "concerns that similar lockdown measures might be introduced to other parts of Europe."

Bourses in London, Paris and Frankfurt all fell, with travel sector firms especially hard hit as British Airways shed six percent or around £400m off the carrier's market capitalization. Oil prices tumbled and the benchmark Brent North Sea oil contract fell about three percent to under \$80 per barrel.

Back on Wall Street, both the Dow and S&P 500 retreated as investors largely shrugged off the House's approval of Biden's \$1.8 trillion package to address climate change and bolster the US safety net, awaiting its passage in the Senate. But the Nasdaq jumped 0.4 percent to finish above 16,000 points for the first time as markets weighed the risk of economic weakness due to another COVID-19 wave.

"What the tech gains could be showing is the reemergence of growth concerns," said Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare, alluding to the latest COVID-19 restrictions in Europe. Earlier, Asian stock markets mostly closed higher, but Chinese e-commerce titan Alibaba plunged by more than 10 percent after warning of a weaker outlook following China's crackdown on the tech sector and slowing growth in the world's second-biggest economy.

With Alibaba a big player on Hong Kong's Hang Seng Index, the market dropped more than one percent. Other tech firms including Tencent and XID suffered smaller losses. Other major Asian indices ended the week higher, with Tokyo up as the government announced plans to inject \$490 billion into the Japanese economy to kick start its recovery from the pandemic —AFP

Mazda CX-5 2021, the only vehicle to earn top rating in crash tests: IIHS

KUWAIT: The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) announced yesterday that the Mazda CX-5 achieved the highest performance and was the only vehicle out of 20 small SUVs to earn its top "Good" rating in a new, tougher side crash test. This was the first test series of 2020-2021 model year vehicles using a more stringent test, aimed at addressing higher severity crashes by using a heavier barrier traveling at a higher speed to simulate the striking vehicle.

"Safety is a top priority at Mazda, and we have long researched how to protect occupants in side impacts," said Masaki Ueno, MNAO vice president of R&D, design, and quality assurance. "We have studied real-world crashes and used computer simulation to consider body structure and load paths, resulting in the robust design that has existed in the CX-5 since the 2017 model year."

"We developed this new test because we suspected there was room for more progress, and these results confirm that," IIHS President David Harkey says. "The good rating for the CX-5 shows that robust protection in a more severe side crash is achievable."



Mazda is proud to add this top achievement to our list of accolades from IIHS, including all-tested Mazda vehicles earning the IIHS 2021 TOP SAFETY PICK+, the highest award in safety. These vehicles include the Mazda3 Sedan Hatchback, Mazda6, CX-3, CX-30 (built after September 2020), CX-5 and CX-9. The IIHS is an independent, non-governmental safety-testing organization, funded by the insurance industry.

Ashish Tandon, General Manager of KAICO (Kuwait Automotive Imports Co WLL - Alshaya &

Alsagar) stated, "KAICO takes great pride in sharing this key safety award which demonstrates Mazda's build quality. Our vision is to continue to provide our car-loving customers and their families with innovative products, technologies, and experiences that enhance the joy of driving".

Waleed Alqahtani, Mazda Brand Manager of KAICO stated, "Kaico has always been proactive in providing the best offers and facilities in the Kuwaiti market, as this ties into our business philosophy that the customer comes first."

The cool features in Huawei nova 9 ultra vision camera

KUWAIT: We all go through a lot before we post stuff on our social media channels. First, we need to find a subject matter that is worth sharing, and then we need to take a good photo or video, capturing what is interesting about it. Then there is also post-editing. Sometimes we may want to rejig the composition to make sure everything is immaculate before the post goes live, while on other occasions we need to edit together a couple shots into a video. Not to mention the mini tweaks we need to apply to make it a perfectly fine shot. All that sounds like a chore, but capturing instantly sharable moments is easier than ever with the latest Huawei nova 9 - the Trendy Flagship & Camera King.

The Huawei nova 9 - Colour No 9

Huawei nova 9 lives up to the brand's reputation for beautiful photograph quality. The smartphone comes equipped with a new 50MP Ultra Vision AI Quad Camera system that includes a 50MP Ultra Vision Main Camera with a 1/1.56-inch sensor - the largest yet on a Huawei nova Series smartphone. With this large sensor, you can capture high-resolution images, not only that, even when you magnify and crop photos you can still clearly see the smallest details. The camera setup also includes an 8MP Ultra-Wide Angle Camera for taking expansive landscape shots and group photos, in addition to a 2MP Depth Camera which adds Bokeh effects to your photos and a Macro Camera for taking pictures from as close as 4cm.

In addition, another key feature is Huawei's RYYB color filter array (CFA), which are exclusive to Huawei

flagship smartphones, the large sensor can capture 40 percent more light intake than other smartphone cameras that use a RRGB CFA sensor. The extra light allows the Huawei nova 9 to produce much brighter images while capturing in low-light situations, further improving the versatility of the camera. Be it sunsets, sunrises or lowly lit restaurants.

Show the world how beautiful you are

No social sharing experience is complete without good selfies? The 32MP front-facing high-resolution camera on the Huawei nova 9 is fitted with a large 1/2.8-inch sensor with high resolving power and light sensing capabilities. Both the front and rear cameras on Huawei nova 9 allows you to capture high-definition quality photos and videos. With Huawei's revolutionary, flagship-grade XD Fusion Engine technology, every photo and video taken on Huawei nova 9 retains its exquisite detail.

The Huawei nova 9 also offers beauty effects for selfies, to make skin tones and textures more authentic and natural against complex light sources and backgrounds. Additionally, Huawei's Super Night Selfie algorithms use AI (Artificial Intelligence) to increase the brightness of dark spots and reduce digital noise in photos. These features mean that all your selfies taken on HUAWEI nova 9 will be ready to post online from the moment you hit the shutter.

Next level vlogging at the tips of your hands

With Continuous Front/Rear Recording - an all-new feature introduced on the Huawei nova 9, you can



capture either side in one video with no post-editing required, and with Dual-View Video, you can even show both perspectives at once, as simple as that!

Moreover, with the Petal Clip app, you can easily choose from a variety of video templates and themes before posting your vlogs or other videos to social media in no time. Complicated

editing processes have been streamlined thanks to Video Search and One-Click Video Creation. In addition, just in case you take a photo, which you like and want to share it with the world or your friends, and family, you can easily download your favorite social media application. Running on EMUI 12, the Huawei nova 9 offers a smart and seamless experience to users. The trusted, innovative and secure AppGallery is available on the Huawei nova 9, where users can download a wide range of high-quality apps.

The newest stylish iteration to the popular Huawei nova Series does not only come with a staggering 50MP Ultra Vision Camera with innovative front camera features. It also boasts a stunning design highlighted by a unique Colour No 9, a 6.57-inch curved 120Hz display, blazing-fast 66W Huawei SuperCharge and a host of Super Device and EMUI 12 cool features, which make the Trendy Flagship & Camera King the hottest tech gadget to get right now.

Lifestyle | Features

DiCaprio tackles climate crisis in satire 'Don't Look Up'



Leonardo DiCaprio

Leonardo DiCaprio said he signed up for Netflix's star-studded film about a comet threatening to wipe out life on Earth because it is an urgent analogy for the climate crisis. The dark satire "Don't Look Up" stars DiCaprio and Jennifer Lawrence as astronomers whose warnings about imminent catastrophe fall on deaf ears in a starkly partisan and divided United States led by an incompetent president-played by Meryl Streep. Fresh from attending the UN COP26 climate change summit in Glasgow, DiCaprio said Adam McKay's script solved the "next to impossible" problem of making a suspenseful film about a crisis that "evolves over a century."

"How do we as a species, as a society, as a culture, politically, deal with imminent armageddon?" DiCaprio asked a Los Angeles preview screening audience on Thursday. "He had cracked the code, so to speak, on how to bring all the insanity that we as the human race are responding to this crisis, in a two-hour format," he said. The film, also starring Ariana Grande, Cate Blanchett, Mark Rylance and Jonah Hill, hits theaters December 10 before streaming on Netflix from Christmas Eve. McKay, whose wide-ranging career spans cult comedies "Anchorman" and "Step Brothers" and satirical works "The Big Short"

and "Vice", has become one of Hollywood's most in-demand directors. Reviews for "Don't Look Up" are under embargo, but initial reaction Thursday was effusive, with Variety's Clayton Davis predicting it will make "a seismic impact (pun intended)" on the Oscars race. DiCaprio said he hoped the film would "start to create different conversations, and more people talking about it will push the private sector and the powers that be to make massive change." But he admitted he had "not much" optimism about humanity's ability to resolve the climate crisis. "Especially after coming back from Glasgow and seeing these commitments that

can be changed by the next wacky administration that might come in and pull out," he warned. Nearly 200 nations came together on a global deal to combat climate change after two weeks of painful negotiation, but fell short of what science says is needed to contain dangerous temperature rises. The planet has "such a limited amount of time and there's such a massive scale that needs to happen so quickly," said DiCaprio. "And if we don't do something, we know the outcome. We know the outcome." — AFP

Twin pandas born in French zoo named Yuandudu and Huanlili

Twin panda cubs born in a French zoo were on Thursday named Yuandudu and Huanlili at a ceremony attended by football star Kylian Mbappe, who has been named the animals' 'godfather'. Paris Saint-Germain star and France Mbappe and Chinese Olympic diving gold medalist Zhang Jiaqi, the 'godmother', were both at the event at the Beauval zoo in Saint-Aignan, central France. The naming of baby pandas is traditionally the prerogative of China's First Lady, but this time Peng Liyuan gave the job to the French public. "More than 122,000 French people connected to our website to choose the names, Yuandudu and Huanlili," from a number of options, zoo director Delphine Delord said. Mbappe and Zhang unveiled a commemorative plaque to mark the occasion.

"It's a great honor to be here 100 days

after the birth of our two wonders," Mbappe told the guests at the naming ceremony. "It's an honor but also a responsibility because, behind it, there is the project to protect this endangered species," he added. Panda reproduction, in captivity or in the wild, is notoriously difficult as experts say few pandas get in the mood or even know what to do when they do. Further complicating matters, the window for conception is small since female pandas are in heat only once a year for about 24-48 hours. Only around 2,000 pandas remain alive in the wild in China, although the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) removed them from the red list of endangered species in 2016. The Beauval cubs, born on August 2 and both females, are the offspring of Yuan Zi and Huan Huan who were loaned to France by China a decade ago. The panda parents also had twins back in 2017, but only one survived.

"The names Yuandudu and Huanlili are inspired by their parents' mes, Yuan Zi and Huan Huan. They evoke the wish for healthy growth for the babies and symbolise the deep ties between China and France," said Delord. Forty-five percent of the online votes were for those names, she added. — AFP



This photograph shows the panda cub twins named Yuandudu and Huanlili at The Beauval Zoo in Saint-Aignan-sur-Cher, central France. — AFP

Photographer whose images helped define 70s rock dies at 72

British music photographer Mick Rock, whose iconic images of artists including David Bowie and the Sex Pistols earned him the nickname "the man who shot the 70s", has died aged 72, his family said Friday. "It is with the heaviest of hearts that we share our beloved psychedelic renegade Mick Rock has made the Jungian journey to the other side," his family said in a message posted on his Twitter page. "He was a photographic poet—a true force of nature who spent his days doing exactly what he loved, always in his own delightfully outrageous way."



British photographer Mick Rock

"He was a mythical creature; the likes of which we shall never experience again." Johnny Marr, guitarist with British indie group The Smiths, tweeted "Goodbye for now my friend and comrade Mick Rock. The visionary poet," along with a picture of the pair. Rock was born in west London in 1948 and graduated from the prestigious Cambridge University with a degree in Medieval and Modern Languages. He developed an interest in photography while at university, shooting local gigs. Rock went on to create album covers for US rock legends Lou Reed and Iggy Pop along with country star Waylon Jennings. Other subjects included rapper Snoop Dogg, Daft Punk, Debbie Harry, Ozzie Osbourne and close friend David Bowie. —AFP

Salma Hayek receives Hollywood Walk of Fame Star

A star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame was unveiled Friday honoring Salma Hayek Pinault for a career that has included receiving a best actress Oscar nomination. Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti, Adam Sandler and Oscar-winning director Chloe Zhao will join Hayek Pinault in speaking at the 6 p.m. ceremony in front of the box office of TCL Chinese Theatre Hollywood IMAX. Hayek Pinault and Sandler appeared together in the 2010 comedy "Grown Ups" and its 2013 sequel "Grown Ups 2." Zhao directed Hayek Pinault in the recently

released Marvel film "Eternals."

Due to coronavirus protocols, there is no longer a dedicated area for fans to witness Walk of Fame ceremonies. Fans were encouraged to watch a stream of the ceremony on the Walk of Fame's website. "After the pandemic is resolved, we hopefully will go back to normalcy for our ceremonies with fan pits," Martinez said.

The star is the 2,709th since the completion of the Walk of Fame in 1961 with the first 1,558 stars. The ceremony comes five days before the release of Hayek Pinault's latest film, "House of Gucci," portraying crafty psychic Pina Auriemma, who Patrizia Reggiani (Lady Gaga) forges a dangerous alliance with after her husband, Maurizio Gucci (Adam Driver), the head of the family's fashion house, files for divorce. "Pina was a very interesting woman," Hayek Pinault said. "She's clairvoyant. A psychic. She can tell the future. When she and Patrizia meet, they immediately connect, and something that starts as a professional relationship becomes a very strong, important friendship for both of them." Roberto Bentivegna, who wrote the screenplay for the three-decade saga

of the family behind the Italian fashion empire with Becky Johnston, said Hayek Pinault "brought a real humanity to Pina, a woman who really comes to care about Patrizia."

"She could've been played her in a very cynical way as someone who is just using Patrizia for her money, Bentivegna said. "Instead, Salma and Lady Gaga developed a real chemistry, both on screen and off. It was fantastic." Born September 2, 1966 in Coatzacoalcos, in the Mexican state of Veracruz, Hayek Pinault began her career in 1988 in the Televisa telenovela "Un Nuevo Amanecer." The following year she portrayed the title role in the Televisa telenovela "Teresa" about a beautiful and intelligent young woman desperately seeking to flee from her impoverished neighborhood.

Hayek Pinault moved to the Los Angeles area in 1991, appearing in episodes of the syndicated action crime drama "Street Justice," the HBO comedy "Dream On" and the NBC comedy "Nurses" before making her film debut in the 1993 drama "Mi Vida Loca" about

young Mexicanas and Chicanas growing up in then gang-ravaged Echo Park. Hayek Pinault made her feature film debut in "Midaq Alley," a 1995 Mexican film about residents in a lower-middle class neighborhood of Mexico City.

Hayek Pinault began her collaboration with director Robert Rodriguez with the 1995 neo-Western action film "Desperado." She would later appear in his films, "From Dusk Till Dawn," "Once Upon a Time in Mexico," "Spy Kids 3-D: Game Over" and "The Faculty." Hayek Pinault received a best actress Oscar nomination in 2003 for her portrayal of Mexican artist Frida Kahlo in "Frida," which she also produced. Hayek Pinault received an outstanding guest actress in a comedy series Emmy nomination in 2007 for her recurring role of magazine editor Sofia Reyes in the ABC comedy-drama "Ugly Betty," which she also produced. Hayek Pinault also had the recurring role of nurse Elisa Pedrera on the NBC comedy "30 Rock."

—www.nbctv.com



Mexican-US actress Salma Hayek poses on her Hollywood Walk of Fame Star during the unveiling ceremony in Hollywood, California. — AFP photos



Mexican-US actress Salma Hayek (second left) reacts as her Hollywood Walk of Fame Star is unveiled, alongside US actor Adam Sandler (second right), Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti (left) and Chinese filmmaker Chloe Zhao (top second left).

Biden saves two turkeys from Thanksgiving ovens

In a light-hearted end to a drama-filled week, Joe Biden issued the traditional presidential pardon to two turkeys Friday, saving them from heading to Thanksgiving tables. "Every American wants the same thing. They want to be able to look the turkey in the eye and tell them everything's going to be OK," Biden said in a comic spin on one of his trademark phrases about showing empathy for fellow Americans. "And so folks, it's going to be OK," he said.

The two large white turkeys named Peanut Butter and Jelly won their clemency in a Rose Garden ceremony ahead of next Thursday's national Thanksgiving holiday, when families traditionally gather around tables laden with roast turkey. Biden quipped that the lucky

birds had been chosen in a "turkey presidential primary" contest "based on their temperament, appearance and, I suspect, vaccination status." Referring to the COVID vaccine booster shots that his government is encouraging Americans to take ahead of winter, he said, "instead of getting basted, these two turkeys are getting boosted." Peanut Butter and Jelly are headed next to a new life at Purdue University in Indiana.

Biden, who underwent a lengthy annual medical exam Friday, was set to fly to his family home in Delaware for the weekend and his 79th birthday on Saturday. Earlier Friday, the House of Representatives passed his huge social spending bill, which now goes to the Senate. This follows Biden's signing of a historic infrastructure package, already passed by Congress, on Monday. —AFP



US President Joe Biden pardons the turkey 'Peanut Butter' as Andrea Welp (right), turkey grower from Indiana, and Phil Seger, chairman of the National Turkey Federation, look on during the White House Thanksgiving turkey pardon in the Rose Garden of the White House in Washington, DC. — AFP photos



Turkeys, Peanut Butter and Jelly, wait for the arrival of US President Joe Biden during the White House Thanksgiving turkey pardon.

Lifestyle | Features



A statue of character Monkey D Luffy, also known as Straw Hat, is displayed at the 'One Piece' anime souvenir shop in Tokyo. — AFP photos



A statue of character Shanks, also known as Red Hair is displayed at the 'One Piece' anime souvenir shop in Tokyo.

JAPAN'S HIT 'ONE PIECE' ANIME MARKS 1,000TH EPISODE



Cards celebrating 1000 episodes of "One Piece" anime are displayed at a souvenir shop.



A woman pays at the cashier of the "One Piece" anime souvenir shop.

Two decades after "One Piece" introduced the world to a swash-buckling pirate in a straw hat, fans of the Japanese cartoon series are giddily awaiting this weekend's release of the 1,000th episode. "One Piece" first appeared in manga (comic book) form in Japan in 1997, with an anime (animated TV series) version following two years later. Since then the franchise has become a global cultural phenomenon, smashing records and winning fans around the globe. Nonetheless, it wasn't an immediate hit.

"It's a miracle," Ryuji Kochi of Toei Animation, the Japanese company behind the anime series, said of the 1,000-episode landmark. "From the beginning, it was a tough title. It was not easy to place on the TV," he told AFP, adding that growing a fanbase for the show was not easy either. Kochi said it had taken 13 long years for the anime, following the adventures of hat-wearing hero Monkey D Luffy, to reach cult status. Today, however, hundreds of millions of fans are gripped by every twist in the hunt for the eponymous One Piece, the treasure coveted by all pirates. The popularity of the manga version has also endured as the TV show has taken off. Its creator Eiichiro Oda holds the Guinness World Record for "most copies published for the same comic book series by a single author" — 490 million, to be precise.

Netflix beckons

The 1,000th episode of the anime series will be released in 80 countries over the weekend. In Tokyo, a giant banner of the main characters has been erected at Shibuya station, one of the Japanese capital's main transport hubs. Special screenings are planned across the US, while in France—the world's biggest manga and anime market after



In this picture, a woman walks past a poster of characters of "One Piece" anime at Shibuya Station in Tokyo, ahead of the release of the 1000th episode.

Japan—more than 100 cinemas are planning a marathon watching binge. Fans from Africa to Europe to the Middle East have posted some 20,000 selfies to a fan site in honor of the milestone.

"I've been a One Piece fan for 20 years!" tweeted one Japanese enthusiast impatient to watch the landmark episode. "I've been watching it since junior high, and I'm still enjoying it even after growing up." French fan Alexis Poriel, who runs a manga fan group on online platform Discord, said the broad scope of "One Piece" was a key reason for its popularity. "It talks about social issues, there's action, there's humor," the 26-year-old said. "One Piece" manages to really make a link with societal

questions," he added, from racism to geopolitical intrigues.

The series also spans geographical and cultural references, from ancient Egypt to medieval Japan, that help to make it feel universal. As for what's next—a live-action adaptation by Netflix is in the works, with fans speculating that it could catapult the franchise to global household name status similar to "Star Wars" or "Harry Potter". Netflix's announcement of the cast set social media alight earlier this month, with 18-year-old Mexican actor Inaki Godoy preparing to take on the role of Luffy.—AFP

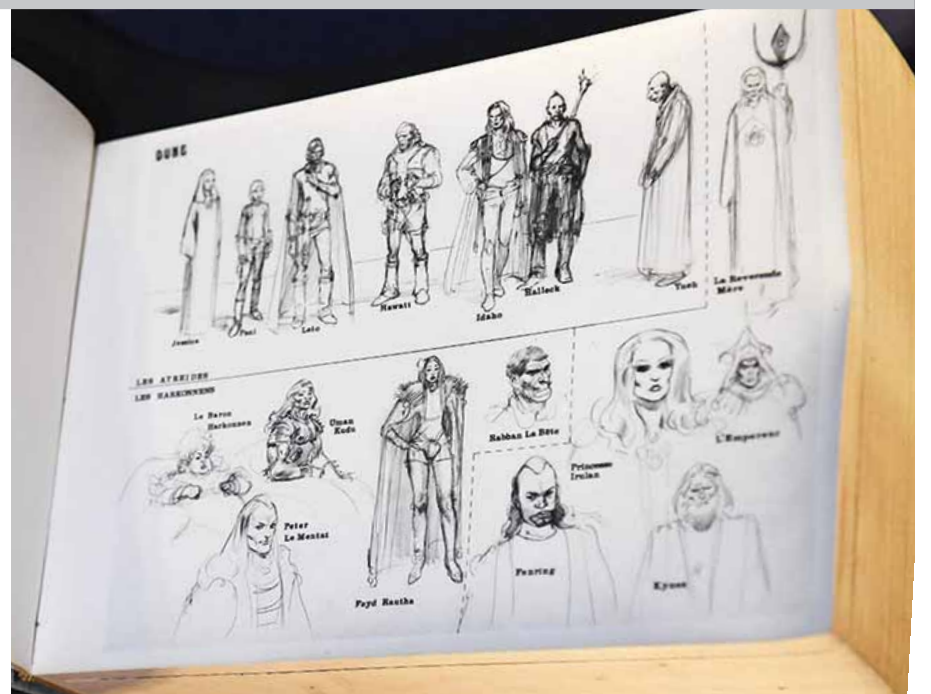
Storyboards for doomed 'Dune' film up for auction

It has entered film folklore as one of the great missed opportunities: the doomed 1970s adaptation of "Dune" that was supposed to bring together Salvador Dali, Mick Jagger and Pink Floyd. The project famously collapsed after four years of work by cult Franco-Chilean director Alejandro Jodorowsky, but now his storyboards are going up for auction in Paris on Monday. With a new version of "Dune" starring Timothee Chalamet packing cinemas around the world in recent weeks, interest in Jodorowsky's version has been reignited and Christie's is valuing the drawings at 25,000 to 35,000 euros (\$28,000 to \$40,000).

They are collected in one large notebook, and were made by celebrated French graphic novelist Moebius (alias Jean Giraud, who died in 2012) and Swiss illustrator Giger, who went on to design "Alien" in 1979 and died in 2014. The tumultuous project was due to include surrealist Dali, Rolling Stones frontman Jagger, actor-director Orson Welles and silver screen legend Gloria Swanson in the cast, with Pink Floyd among the bands approached for the soundtrack. It collapsed for lack of funding—a story retold in the 2013 documentary "Jodorowsky's Dune". The brainchild of author Frank Herbert, "Dune" was first published in 1965 and became a six-volume

space opera of massive influence, not least on "Star Wars". Following the latter's blockbuster success, Hollywood took renewed interest in "Dune" in the early 1980s.

That led to David Lynch's version, released in 1984 with a cast including British musician Sting and Patrick Stewart of "Star Trek: Next Generation", which had its own troubles and became one of the decade's biggest flops. Jodorowsky's storyboards have taken on mythical overtones among sci-fi fans—said to have influenced later genre hits including "Blade Runner". "We know of several other copies: one was offered for auction several years ago, another is in Jodorowsky's possession... A third has been partially reproduced online," said Christie's. It said around 10 to 20 copies were produced, though it was hard to be certain.—AFP



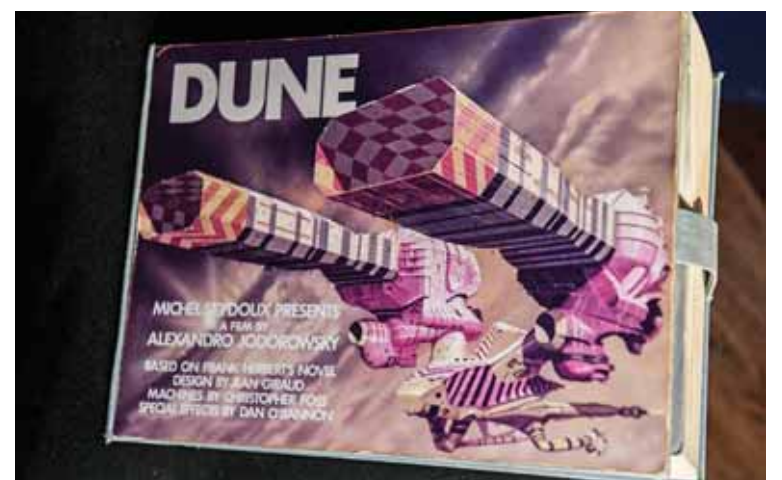
A page of one of the ten Alejandro Jodorowsky's epic 1970 Dune storyboard copies is displayed.



A page of one of the ten Alejandro Jodorowsky's epic 1970 Dune storyboard copies is displayed to the public three days before an auction at Christie's Paris gallery.



A page of one of the ten Alejandro Jodorowsky's epic 1970 Dune storyboard copies is displayed.



One of the ten Alejandro Jodorowsky's epic 1970 Dune storyboard copies is displayed to the public three days before an auction.—AFP photos



A general view shows part of the Vinpearl leisure complex on Phu Quoc island as the island prepares for its first international tourists to arrive after a COVID-19 vaccine passport scheme kicked off this month in Vietnam. — AFP photos



A general view shows part of the Vinpearl leisure complex on Phu Quoc island.



An employee (center) paints conical hats inside the Vinpearl leisure complex on Phu Quoc Island.

Corals and cable cars: Vietnam tourist island reopens with big dreams

Tour guide Lai Chi Phuc has been counting down the days until travellers return to the white-sand beaches and thick tropical jungle of Vietnam's Phu Quoc, a once-poor fishing island pushing to be Asia's next holiday hotspot as pandemic restrictions ease. Yesterday, around 200 South Koreans touched down on the island, which lies a few kilometers off Cambodia in the azure waters of the Gulf of Thailand, after a vaccine passport scheme kicked off this month in Vietnam.

Among the arrivals was Tae Hyeong Lee, who was returning to the island for a third time and keen to make a beeline for the beach. "It's wonderful to be here. This is my first time travelling out of South Korea since the pandemic started," he told AFP. But others may skip the lazy beach break in favor of action and entertainment as they shuffle between a 12,000-room hotel complex, an amusement park, 18-hole golf course, casino, safari park and miniature Venice. The \$2.8-billion leisure resort, part of the "sleepless city" model, opened six months ago as COVID-19 ravaged tourism across the world-and as other Asian countries reliant on the industry, like Thailand, were rethinking their mass tourism frameworks.

For 33-year-old Phuc, who remembers a poverty-stricken childhood where "everyone wanted to escape Phu Quoc", the island's growing popularity gave him a way to return home after years of scratching out a living as a salesman in the nearby cities of the Mekong Delta. "But it's a pity also," he told AFP, lamenting the loss of the island's palm-fringed beaches to resorts.

Flood of plastic

Ahead of Saturday's reopening, staff at Vinpearl resort-where the arrivals are staying-swept beaches, arranged cutlery on tables and laid out sunbeds. Others busied themselves painting delicate flowers on conical hats. "When we heard visitors were coming back, I was just so excited," said duty manager Ngo Thi Bich Thuong. Before the pandemic in 2019, around five million people, including half a million foreigners-most-



A couple poses for wedding photos in the compound of the Vinpearl leisure complex on Phu Quoc Island.

ly from China, South Korea, Japan and Russia-holidayed on Phu Quoc. Vingroup-the enormously powerful conglomerate behind the new complex-is pushing to make the island: "a new international destination on the world tourist map".

To cater for the tourist boom, 40,000 hotel rooms have been built, planned or are under construction, vice chairman of the Vietnam Tourism Advisory Board Ken Atkinson told AFP-"that's more hotel keys than they have in Sydney, Australia". Globally popular vacation spots such as Thailand's Phuket have given Vietnam something to aim for. Atkinson took a group of senior Vietnamese government officials there in 2005 — but while Phuket's vibrant international tourist scene took years to build up: "Vietnam has a tendency of wanting to do everything all at once", he noted. "Unfortunately I don't think there was enough attention given to what would be in the long-term benefit of the island," he added.

Phu Quoc is a UNESCO biosphere reserve-surrounding waters are stuffed with coral reefs and its beaches were once nesting spots for Hawksbill and Green turtles. But no nesting has taken

place in recent years, the UN body said in their last assessment in 2018.

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) has warned of "an almost unimaginable flood of plastic" that chokes rivers, canals and sea life. Around 160 tons of trash-almost enough to fill 16 trucks-is generated every day,



Women pose for photos at the Vinpearl leisure complex on Phu Quoc Island.

according to WWF, which says the island's waste management is not fit to cope with the tourism explosion. "More and more tourists are very conscious of the environment. They don't want to be going to places where beaches are littered or where effluent is going into the sea," Atkinson warned.

Pockets of paradise

But alongside the trash, and the garish headline attractions-including the world's longest non-stop three-rope cable car and Vietnam's first teddy bear museum-there are still pockets of paradise. Chu Dinh Duc, 26, from mainland Vietnam, first saw Phu Quoc from the back of a motorbike in 2017. Speeding through dense forests and winding his way to the few remaining sleepy villages where fishermen cast their nets into the ocean as the sun came up, he fell in love.

Two years later, he opened a simple homestay business catering to foreigners. "My goal here is not to take a lot of their money," he said. "But I want as many as possible to come." "If Phu Quoc remained undeveloped, it would just be a pearl undiscovered." — AFP



A staff member walks past a swimming pool inside the Vinpearl resort on Phu Quoc Island.

Back on all fours with titanium paws for Russia rescue dog

Monika the Russian rescue dog is ready for her new life after she was fitted with four prosthetic titanium paws in a pricey and complex operation paid for by a crowd-funding campaign. Two weeks after the procedure, the small beige pooch is still weak and tired, but she's back on her feet again. "Luck and

experience played its part," said Sergei Gorshkov, the vet who completed the challenging op. The 33-year-old from the Siberian city of Novosibirsk has fitted artificial limbs on more than 30 furry patients, including a quadruple transplant on a cat. But this was the first time he had tried the operation on a dog.

Monika had travelled far for this life-changing surgery. She was found by volunteers in a forest near Krasnodar, a city in southern Russia 4,000 kilometers (2,485 miles) from Gorshkov's clinic. Her four legs were bloody stumps. "Nobody really knows what happened to her. Some volunteers think that somebody cut her paws off out of cruelty," Gorshkov told AFP. Monika-estimated to be between two and four years old-could have suffered the fate of thousands of stray dogs that are found injured: put down or just left to die.

Luckily, she ended up in the caring hands of Alla Leonkina, a volunteer from Krasnodar. Leonkina said that for almost a year she and a friend took care of Monika, who was in a "terrible state".

While looking after Monika, she heard about Gorshkov's clinic and launched an online campaign to fund the surgery. Within a month, they had 400,000 rubles (\$5,400, 4,800 euros) — a large sum for Russia. Leonkina said that Monika flew to Siberia sitting next to her on the plane. The campaign also financed the prosthetic titanium legs that were made using a 3D printer. Gorshkov said that Monika's bones will grow and adapt to the artificial limbs "like antlers on a deer". And once she's recovered, Monika will be able to walk into her new home. — AFP

Kim Kardashian and Leeds aid Afghan female footballers' flight to Britain

Members of the Afghanistan women's youth development football team have been airlifted to the UK in an evacuation flight funded by US celebrity Kim Kardashian. The 35 female footballers and their families, a total of 130 people, arrived at Stansted Airport, east of London, in the early hours of Thursday morning, according to the ROKIT Foundation. The squad had been in Pakistan on temporary 30-day visas since escaping from Afghanistan following a takeover of the country by the Taliban but risked being sent back when their asylum period expired if no other country was prepared to take them in.

But a charter flight brought them to the UK, where they will spend 10 days of a coronavirus quarantine in a hotel before starting their new lives. A representative for Kardashian, best known as a star of reality television, told Britain's PA news agency the flight was funded by her and her SKIMS brand. Siu-Anne Gill, chief executive officer of the ROKIT Foundation which helped organize the footballers' escape from Afghanistan, said she was "extremely humbled by the courage shown by these girls".

"That's inspired us to ensure that their efforts in getting over the border don't go to waste," she added. Since their return to power on August 15, the Taliban have said that women can play

football but only under strict conditions-namely barred from playing in public.

Other Afghan female players have fled to Portugal

Leeds United are among the organizations offering to help the footballers who have arrived in England, with Andrea Radrizzani, the owner of the Premier League football club, saying in a statement: "We are delighted the Afghan Women & Girls Development Football



Kim Kardashian

Team and their families, led by their brave, former captain Khalida Popal have landed safely in the UK, following extensive efforts by a number of partners. "We are honored to have played our part and grateful that the UK government has enabled their resettlement in the UK." He added: "This demonstrates the power of football and sport in general, as a force for good and shows how the football community is able to collaborate and mobilize to save lives.

"Through Play for Change Charitable Trust and Leeds United we stand ready to support the girls and their families in building an inclusive and prosperous future. We can't wait to see them playing football again." —AFP



These pictures show Monika, an amputee dog with four artificial limbs, at a veterinary clinic in Novosibirsk. — AFP photos

Sports

One year from World Cup, clock ticks louder for Qatar

Six of eight stadiums due to host Arab Cup Nov 30

DOHA: After upending the football establishment by winning the right to host the World Cup, Qatar's preparations are heading into overdrive with a year to go as they rush to welcome more than a million fans and prove their critics wrong.

The tiny Gulf state has a reputation for punching above its weight but challenges do not come much bigger than holding football's showpiece event in a desert peninsula of 2.7 million without a strong sporting tradition.

Twelve months before the November 21, 2022 kick-off, the Qatari capital Doha, which is hosting almost the entire tournament, is dotted with roadworks and building sites that are causing chaos for its inhabitants. With some Qatari infrastructure projects delayed by the pandemic, the clock is ticking more loudly than organizers might have liked, just as scrutiny of the preparations starts to rise.

However, most of the building blocks are in place, with six of the eight World Cup stadiums due to host the 16-team Arab Cup from November 30. "I've never seen a country in the world which has been so ready so much in advance... it will be like a toy store for fans when they come," FIFA president Gianni Infantino said in Qatar this week.

Qatar rocked football in 2010 when they beat favorites the United States in the World Cup bid process, a victory that sparked accusations of vote-buying — which were hotly denied — and questions over the country's suitability.

Since then, FIFA's old guard has been

toppled in a welter of corruption cases and Qatar has emerged as a major player in the sport, snapping up French giants Paris Saint-Germain and with the Qatar Foundation becoming Barcelona's first shirt sponsor.

'A lot of criticism'

Meanwhile, Qatar has faced constant criticism of the working conditions of its hundreds of thousands of migrant laborers, including those who built the World Cup stadiums. It has responded with labor reforms, although officials admit the situation is a "work in progress".

"Since we won the World Cup (rights) we have received a lot of criticism. There is constructive criticism that we tried to take on board," Fatma al-Nuaimi, head of communications at the Qatar organizing committee, said last month.

"We also try not to let this criticism stop us." Qatar has also come under fire for its criminalization of homosexuality.

Resource-rich Qatar has been active in other sports apart from football, holding the world athletics championships in 2019 and its inaugural Formula One grand prix takes place today, exactly a year before the World Cup opens.

But the World Cup, with 1.2 million visitors pouring in — nearly half the country's population — is an undertaking of an altogether different scale. Serious questions are being asked about where the fans will stay, with reservations already closed at Doha's limited collec-



DOHA: In this file fisheye photo taken on October 22, 2021 shows fireworks illuminating the venue during the opening ceremony of the Al-Thumama Stadium in the capital Doha, ahead of the Amir Cup final football match between Al-Sadd and Al-Rayyan. — AFP



Providing stay for visitors main challenge

tion of hotels.

Officials have talked about providing floating hotels and promoting home-stays, while many fans will end up in newly built apartments and even air-conditioned tents. Even so, accommodating such numbers — about 300,000 a day, plus 150,000 World Cup workers, according to one source with knowledge of the matter — looks difficult.

'Uncharted waters'

"This World Cup is being implemented in uncharted waters: there has never been a mega-sporting event with so many visitors and working staff in addi-

tion to the regular population on such a small territory who will stay put for the duration," the source said. "There is simply no historic experience to draw from."

Most of the World Cup stadiums will be tested, albeit with limited numbers of fans, at the upcoming Arab Cup which finishes on December 18, a year to the day before the World Cup final. The Lusail Stadium, which will host the 2022 decider, will not feature at the Arab Cup as it is undergoing "testing and commissioning of... multiple systems", its project manager told AFP last month.

Meanwhile, Qatar has pledged to vaccinate fans who are not inoculated

against COVID-19, while FIFA has moved to allay concerns about the availability of alcohol in the Muslim country, where it is largely banned. "(Alcohol) will be available in designated areas during the upcoming FIFA World Cup," a FIFA spokesperson told AFP. On the pitch, holders France are strongly tipped, with England also expected to figure but European champions Italy must fight through a playoff next year just to qualify. Expectations are low for Qatar, who will make their World Cup debut after qualifying as hosts, despite their impressive Asian Cup victory in 2019. — AFP



LE MANS: In this file photo taken on January 20, 2012 PSG's French managing director Jean-Claude Blanc (second left) flanked by Paris Saint-Germain's Qatar President and CEO Nasser Al-Khelaifi (fourth left), Prime Minister Francois Fillon (second right) and Sports minister David Douillet (third right), applauds during the French cup football match Sable-sur-Sarthe against Paris Saint-Germain at the Le Mans stadium, western France. — AFP

Qatar and PSG, a lasting bond beyond World Cup

PARIS: Qatar's investment in French giants Paris Saint-Germain, and its use of the club as a central tool for the gas-rich emirate's soft power diplomacy over the past decade, is unlikely to change after next year's World Cup, experts predict.

What is Qatar going to do after the tournament? Will it pour money into the club on the same scale, having spent over a billion euros since the 2011 takeover by Qatar Sports Investments (QSI), albeit without winning the Champions League, European football's holy grail?

This question is quietly mulled by the ranks of French football observers, and in particular PSG supporters, who have seen Kylian Mbappe, Neymar and Lionel Messi move to the French capital.

'Tool of seduction worldwide'

In football terms, the sums are huge. Yet it appears almost irrelevant to gas-rich Qatar. "I think the World Cup is just one part, it's already a triumph itself for Qatar to have obtained it. But that shouldn't in any way change their policy," believes Raphael Le Magoaric, a PhD researcher in geopolitics specialized in the Gulf countries.

Predicting the future and diplomatic strategy of a country is a perilous exercise, experts questioned by AFP warn. The risks are manifold, and several factors can intervene to change the perspective at any given moment. But the tidal wave ridden by the emirate for nearly 30 years seems well anchored to Qatar's strategy.

Coincided in the late 1980s, the term "soft power" was popularized by the American political scientist Joseph Nye, co-founder of the international relations theory of neoliberalism, who served in both the Carter and Clinton administrations. It refers to the power of influence, the persuasion of others through appeal and attraction, without coercive means.

"Shortly after the invasion of Kuwait, Qatar asked itself the question, 'Who can prevent them from such an attack?' It's not its army, nor its oil tankers, nor its technology. It's Western public opinion," said geopolitics expert Marc Lavergne, the director of research at the

French Nations Centre for Scientific Research and the University of Tours.

"Qatar has developed a whole set of pillars that can be linked to soft power, such as art and a global sports policy in which Paris Saint-Germain is a tool of seduction worldwide. It's the construction of a smooth image, exotic, idealized. Qatar is not going to stop developing this strategy tomorrow," he added.

'Best showcase for emirate'

It's a policy which has put Qatar on the world map from a geopolitical view. "Close to 15 years ago Qatar did not exist in public opinion," says Lavergne. "Paris Saint-Germain is central to this policy. With the club they reach the whole world."

The refusal to sell French World Cup-winning forward Mbappe last summer, despite an offer of 180 million euros from Real Madrid, was perceived by some as financial folly. "But the economists asked about it in France don't have Qatar's frame of reference," Le Magoaric said. "You have to compare these investments to those of a defense ministry."

The money has helped the club win seven French league championships in the past decade and PSG reached the final of the 2020 Champions League. Europe's showpiece for club sides. Other analysts said next year's World Cup matters little in view of the success so far of the emirate's strategy.

"Since the beginning and still today, PSG constitutes in my mind a major investment for the country. For some, it's the best showcase for the emirate," says Carole Gomez, senior research fellow in sport and geopolitics at IRIS, a French think tank on geopolitical and strategic issues.

"I don't believe investment will be withdrawn the day after the World Cup. For one, because the geopolitical and economic reasons that pushed Doha to invest in sport are still there. It's still a question of asserting its individuality in front of its neighbors, notably Saudi Arabia and the UAE, but equally to diversify its economic investments in order to think about the post-gas era."

In addition, the ties between Qatar and France stretch well beyond the realms of this sporting connection. "Qatar is a strategic ally of France, and has been for years," underlined Lavergne. An alliance in which the football club is just one element, but a sensitive one. "Everything that affects Paris Saint-Germain is extremely sensitive, it's in the hands of the emir. It's eminently strategic," Le Magoaric added. —AFP

The Middle East's La Masia: Qatar academy fuels World Cup dream

DOHA: With many millions of dollars invested and thousands of hours spent on the training pitch, Qatar's great football experiment will face the ultimate test when its start-from-scratch team makes its World Cup debut next year.

Honed at Doha's renowned Aspire Academy by coaches imported from Spanish giants Barcelona, no expense has been spared by tiny, wealthy Qatar, who crave respectability on the pitch as the Middle East's first World Cup hosts.

Now, as night falls over the state-of-the-art facility just a year from the tournament's start, the players' laughs and jokes on the pitch are replaced by serious expressions. "I feel pressure and responsibility, it's a beautiful and difficult feeling at the same time," midfielder Abdallah Al-Ahrak told AFP. "We're nearly there, only a year to go. We're trying to prepare as well as we can."

Before the Aspire graduates blossomed, football was a desert for resource-rich Qatar, who embarrassingly lost all three group games at the 2015 Asian Cup in Australia. Just four years later, Qatar scythed through the competition to be crowned Asian champions for the first time, with Sudan-born Aspire alumnus Almoez Ali netting a bicycle-kick — his record ninth goal of the tournament — in the 3-1 final win over Japan.

The team coached by Felix Sanchez, who was lured from Barcelona's famed La Masia academy, alma mater of Lionel Messi, also won the 2014 Asian under-19s title during its nine years together. "It's more than two years since we won the Asian Cup. We can't be content with just living off our memories, but we shouldn't forget what we've accomplished, either," the Spaniard said.



DOHA: In this file photo taken on January 4, 2017 Bayern Munich players attend a training session at the Aspire Academy in Doha. —AFP

'Anything can happen'

Seventy percent of Qatar's team came through Aspire, according to its website, but football isn't the facility's only success story. High-jumper Mutaz Essa Barshim is a two-time world champion and famously agreed to share Olympic gold this year with Gianmarco Tamberi of Italy.

But next year, it will be all about the World Cup and hopes of similar scenes to 2019, when Qataris and the country's expatriates — who make up about 90 percent of the population — enjoyed a rare moment of joint celebration.

Those hopes rest on the shoulders of the Qatari team who, during AFP's recent visit to Aspire, were training on a small pitch as teenagers in sports gear ambled down corridors nearby. Goalkeeper Yousef Hassan said the players' excitement is rising as their World Cup "dream" creeps closer and closer to reality. "I've watched the World Cup on TV since I was small. I've always had that ambition, that desire that one day I'd play in it too," he said.

"Thank God we've been given this chance that we have today, and we're all determined to make the most of it," added the 25-year-old. "We're going to write our names in history, obviously it's something we're really looking forward to."

Qatar, who are the first hosts never to have qualified for a World Cup by right, can take heart from the example of South Korea, who stunned Portugal, Italy and Spain to reach the World Cup semi-finals as co-organizers in 2002. "Anything is possible in football," said Hassan. "Every time, one team that nobody expected manages to go far in the competition. Anything can happen."

Coach Sanchez acknowledged that Qatar will face a "big challenge" against the "best teams in the world". His first goal: "Get out of the pool stage". "It's a big responsibility. More than pressure, we feel pride to be able to play in a World Cup," Sanchez said. For Qatar's supporters, among the country's expat-dominated 2.7 million inhabitants, it's a golden chance to see their team compete at the highest level. "We've been talking about the World Cup for 10 years. We really hope they'll be successful," said a young fan in the center of Doha. —AFP

Sports

Celtics down Lakers to spoil LeBron James's return, Warriors beat Pistons

Suns rally to beat Mavs; short-handed Nets outlast Magic

LOS ANGELES: Los Angeles superstar LeBron James scored 23 points in his return from an eight-game injury absence but the Boston Celtics spoiled the Lakers' welcome back party with a dominant 130-108 NBA victory.

James made 10 of 16 attempts, including three of seven from three-point range. He pulled down six rebounds and handed out two assists in his first game since suffering an abdominal strain in a victory over the Houston Rockets on November 2. James used his jump shot, rarely driving through Boston's defense. He had just one free-throw attempt and missed it, just the 23rd time in 1,317 career contests that he failed to make a foul shot in a game.



James with 23 points on 10-16 shooting



BOSTON: Jayson Tatum #0 of the Boston Celtics and LeBron James #6 of the Los Angeles Lakers collide during a game at TD Garden on Friday in Boston, Massachusetts. — AFP

The Celtics, meanwhile, finished with 56 points in the paint. They trailed by 14 early, but out-scored the Lakers 33-21 in the third quarter to take an 11-point lead into the final period. The fourth quarter also belonged to Boston, who out-scored the Lakers 37-26 in the final period as they rolled to victory.

"They turned it up a notch and we didn't," said Lakers guard Russell Westbrook, who scored 12 points. Boston's Jayson Tatum led all scorers with 37 points and pulled down 11 rebounds. Marcus Smart added 22 points and former Laker Dennis Schroder added 21. Anthony Davis paced the Lakers with 31 points. He said he thought James "looked like his old

self" but said the team would inevitably need to make adjustments after playing without him for two weeks.

James said there was work to do after yet another dismal third quarter performance from the Lakers. But, he added: "There's no level of panic. There should be a sense of urgency anytime we hit the floor. We have to figure out how we can keep that sense of urgency as close to 48 minutes as possible." James said physically he "felt OK." "I'm more looking forward to seeing how

I feel tomorrow when I wake up. That is the tell-tale sign if I'm going in the right direction with my injury," he said.

Short-handed Warriors win

In Detroit, Golden State's Jordan Poole stepped up with superstar Stephen Curry sitting out, scoring a season-high 32 points to propel the league-leading Warriors to a 105-102 victory over the Pistons.

Andrew Wiggins added 27 points and Nemanja Bjelica added 14 off the bench for Golden State, who were without Curry a day after he scored 40 points despite a sore hip in a 104-89 victory over the Cavaliers in Cleveland.

The Warriors were also missing Draymond Green — nursing a bruised thigh in the wake of the game in Cleveland — Andre Iguodala and Otto Porter Jr because of injuries, but still improved their NBA-best record to 14-2. Poole and Wiggins combined for 14 early points as the Warriors grabbed a 17-4 early lead.

The Pistons narrowed the gap, but when Poole returned from a spell of rest on the bench the Warriors went on a 16-6 run to regain control. Poole had 22 points in the first half to help the Warriors take a 56-51 lead at the interval. Golden State never trailed in the second half, pushing their lead to as many as 16 points.

The Phoenix Suns, fueled by 19 points from both Mikal Bridges and Devin Booker, rallied to beat the Dallas Mavericks 112-104 and stretch their winning streak to 11 games. Dallas, playing without injured Luka Doncic, led 84-79 heading into the fourth quarter, but a 10-2 scoring run put Phoenix ahead for good with 9:27 left to play.

The short-handed Brooklyn Nets, with Kevin Durant sidelined by a sprained right shoulder, eked out a 115-113 victory over the Orlando Magic. James Harden led the Nets despite connecting on just seven of 15 shots from the field — three of 13 from beyond the arc.

Harden made 19 of 20 free-throws as the Nets rallied from an early 19-point deficit. Brooklyn outscored the Magic 37-21 in the third quarter to take a 90-83 lead. The Magic clawed back to lead by two early in the fourth, but a three-point play by LaMarcus Aldridge put the Nets back in front for good with 6:25 remaining. — AFP

Players must be vaccinated for Australian Open

MELBOURNE: All players at the Australian Open must be vaccinated, tournament chief Craig Tiley confirmed yesterday, piling more pressure on world number one Novak Djokovic, who has refused to reveal if he has been inoculated.

Melbourne, where January's Grand Slam is held, has spent more than 260 days under lockdown during the pandemic and the government of the state of Victoria made clear last month there would be no concessions for unvaccinated players. Tiley said the playing group know they must get the jab to compete at Melbourne Park.

"There's a lot of speculation about vaccination and just to be really clear, when the (Victoria) premier announced that everyone on site... will need to be vaccinated, we made that clear to the playing group," he told Channel Nine television. "All the playing group understands it, our patrons will need to be vaccinated, all the staff working at the Australian Open will need to be vaccinated."

This includes nine-time champion Djokovic. Tiley said the Serbian superstar, who would be gunning for a record 21st Grand Slam singles title if he competes in Melbourne, "has said that he views this as a private matter for him".

"We would love to see Novak here. He knows that he'll have to be vaccinated to play here," he added. "He's won the Australian Open nine times, I think he'd love to make it double digits and win it 10 times."

Djokovic said this month he would await official confirmation on the requirements from Tennis Australia before making a decision. "I am going to decide on whether I go to Australia after I see an official statement from Tennis Australia," he said on the eve of the Paris Masters. "There has been no official announcement or statement and until that is out I won't be talking about this any more. I do not



TURIN: Serbia's Novak Djokovic arrives for his first-round singles match of the ATP Finals against Britain's Cameron Norrie at the Pala Alpitour venue in Turin on Friday. — AFP

want to be part of the stories about the assumptions and what ifs."

Just 50 percent of players were fully vaccinated six weeks ago, but it shot up to 80 percent after the Victoria government's announcement, Tiley said, adding that it was "continuing to track towards 100 percent".

Phenomenal athlete

The Australian Open went ahead this year, but players were forced to spend two weeks in hotel quarantine, crowds were restricted and a five-day snap lockdown was called mid-event. Organizers expect it will run as scheduled in 2022 from January 17, with fully vaccinated players set to enter Australia without being quarantined or confined to bio-secure bubbles.

Bumper crowds will also be permitted, with

Victoria hitting 90 percent vaccination, allowing long-standing restrictions to be swept aside, including capacity limits on sporting events. While doubt remains over Djokovic, Tiley said Rafael Nadal will return in search of a 21st Slam crown, although fellow 20-time Grand Slam champion Roger Federer has been ruled out with a persistent right knee injury.

Top-ranked Ashleigh Barty will make another attempt to win her home major on the women's side, and defending champion Naomi Osaka will also play. Tiley said Serena Williams was also expected as she continues to target a 24th Slam title to equal Margaret Court's all-time record.

"We've been in regular touch with Serena Williams, who is in full training and planning to be back in 2022," he said. "A phenomenal athlete and formidable competitor, Serena absolutely still has the fire to make and break records." — AFP



PISA: Kuwait's Paralympic fencer Suleiman Al-Tamimi (right) raises Kuwait's flag after winning the silver medal in the men's foil category during the IWAS Wheelchair Fencing World Cup, held currently in Pisa, Italy.

Kuwait wins silver in IWAS Wheelchair Fencing World Cup

PISA: Kuwait's Paralympic fencer Suleiman Al-Tamimi won the silver medal in the men's foil category during the IWAS Wheelchair Fencing World Cup, held currently in Pisa, Italy. France's Laurent Vadon was the victor, while Poland's Patryk Banach and Italy's Michele Massa were third.

The tournament concludes today with the men's sabre and women's foil competitions. Kuwait will be represented in the women's foil category by Khuloud Al-Mutairi and Ayesha Matar. Chairman of the Kuwait Paralympic Committee Torky Al-Shimmari expressed lauded Tamimi's achievement, which came in his first international participation following the COVID-19 pandemic. "We were able to hoist Kuwait's flag in a world Paralympic championship despite tough competition from many outstanding fencers," he said. "This is an indication of the high technical level Kuwait fencers have reached."

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LEICESTER: Chelsea's Italian midfielder Jorginho (left) vies with Leicester City's English midfielder James Maddison during the English Premier League football match between Leicester City and Chelsea at the King Power Stadium in Leicester yesterday. — AFP

Chelsea extend lead, thrash Leicester

Watford inflict more misery on Man United

LONDON: Manchester United slumped to another damaging defeat for manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer in losing 4-1 at Watford yesterday as Chelsea thrashed Leicester to extend their Premier League lead to six points. Solskjaer has clung onto his job despite a run of just one win in seven Premier League games to slip to seventh, 12 points adrift of the leaders. A managerial change made an instant impact for Aston Villa as late goals from Ollie Watkins and Tyrone Mings beat Brighton 2-0 to give Steven Gerrard a winning start to his coaching career in the Premier League.

However, Newcastle slipped to the bottom of the table in the absence of their new boss Eddie Howe, who tested positive for coronavirus on Friday, as the Magpies were held 3-3 at home by Brentford. United's hierarchy has remained loyal to Solskjaer despite intense pressure in recent weeks to make a change. But even their resolve will be tested after a fifth defeat in seven league games against the struggling Hornets. Watford could even afford to miss an early penalty

twice as David de Gea saved from Ismaila Sarr and Kiko Femenia's follow-up from the first spot-kick was ruled out for encroaching.

Joshua King worked under Solskjaer in the United youth ranks and did his old boss no favors by converting a low cross on 28 minutes to give the home side a deserved lead. Sarr made amends for his penalty misses just before the break by drilling home from a narrow angle. Solskjaer responded by introducing Donny Van de Beek at half-time and his refusal to give the Dutchman more opportunities will be questioned after he made an instant impact to turn home Cristiano Ronaldo's header across goal.

However, just as the visitors were building momentum, captain Harry Maguire's miserable season suffered another setback when he was sent off for a second bookable offence. Joao Pedro and Emmanuel Dennis rubbed more salt into United's wounds in stoppage time. After a tough Champions League trip to Villarreal on Tuesday, United travel to the league leaders Chelsea

next weekend with the question again whether Solskjaer will still be in charge.

Chelsea surge clear

The Blues were dominant as they toyed with Leicester in a 3-0 win despite still missing record signing Romelu Lukaku through injury. Antonio Rudiger's header opened the scoring before N'Golo Kante came back to haunt his old side with a brilliant run and strike from the edge of the box. Substitute Christian Pulisic put the seal on a brilliant all-round performance from the European champions, who also had two goals ruled out for offside. "It's a good away game, an excellent result," said Chelsea boss Thomas Tuchel. "We knew we needed to be strong from first to last minute. This is what we did." Gerrard got off to a dream start at Villa Park as his new side moved four points clear of the relegation zone.

England internationals Watkins and Mings produced stunning finishes in the final six minutes to edge

a nervy contest against Brighton. Howe had to watch a thriller at St. James' Park from a hotel in isolation. The Magpies twice had to come from behind after Ivan Toney cancelled out Jamaal Lascelles' opener for the home side. Rico Henry put Brentford in front before the much-maligned Joelinton leveled. Lascelles then netted at the wrong end, but Allan Saint-Maximin salvaged a point for Howe's men that does little for their bid to beat relegation as they are five points adrift of safety.

Norwich also got a bounce from a new manager as they moved off the foot of the table in Dean Smith's first match in charge thanks to a 2-1 win over Southampton. Che Adams put the Saints in front, but Teemu Pukki and Grant Hanley lifted the Canaries to within three points of safety. Burnley remain rooted in the bottom three after another six-goal thriller at Turf Moor ended 3-3 with Crystal Palace. West Ham missed the chance to move into second and cut Chelsea's lead to three points as Raul Jimenez scored the only goal in a 1-0 win for Wolves at Molineux. — AFP

Reus hits late winner as Dortmund slash Bayern's lead

BERLIN: Second-placed Borussia Dortmund reduced Bayern Munich's lead at the top of the Bundesliga to a single point yesterday as Marco Reus' late winner sealed a 2-1 home victory against Stuttgart. Dortmund's Dutch striker Donyell Malen scored his first Bundesliga goal since his summer transfer from PSV Eindhoven, but Stuttgart forced a mistake in the hosts' defense which led to an equalizer by Roberto Massimo.

With time running out, Dortmund counter-attacked from their own box and Reus tapped into an empty net to snatch victory after Bayern suffered a shock 2-1 defeat at strugglers Augsburg on Friday. "We didn't really shine, but we fought," Dortmund defender Mats Hummels told Sky. "It was another step in the right direction." Dortmund host Bayern in a potential top-of-the-table clash in a fortnight's time.

Bayern's defeat at Augsburg was only their third loss in all competitions this season, but Julian Nagelsmann admitted being "really angry" for the first time as coach after a poor first-half performance. Yet less than 24 hours later, Dortmund labored in their bid to bridge the gap in the table. Home



DORTMUND: Dortmund's Belgian midfielder Axel Witsel (left) and Stuttgart's Danish midfielder Nikolas Narrey jump to head the ball during the German first division Bundesliga football match BVB Borussia Dortmund VFB Stuttgart yesterday. — AFP

goalkeeper Gregor Kobel showed why Dortmund paid Stuttgart 15 million euros (\$17 million) for him in the close season as he denied former team-mate Tanguy Coulibaly with a superb save just before the break.

The injured Erling Haaland celebrated in the stands when his stand-in Malen scored from the

edge of the area. However, Dortmund's defensive frailties this season were again exposed when Manuel Akanji cheaply yielded possession and Stuttgart quickly moved the ball to Massimo who fired past Kobel. However, Reus finished off a counter-attack to claim his 145th goal for Dortmund and secure a crucial three points. — AFP

Atalanta thrash Spezia to hold onto top 4 spot

MILAN: Atalanta made sure that they would stay in the Serie A top four yesterday with a thumping 5-2 win over Spezia. Gian Piero Gasperini's side are level on 25 points with Inter Milan, who sit third and host league leaders Napoli today evening, after a dominating display in Bergamo. A Mario Pasalic brace and Duvan Zapata's penalty, which the Colombian forward scored at the second attempt after Spezia players encroached during the first saved spot-kick, ensured a comfortable first-half lead for Atalanta after M'Bala Nzola had opened the scoring for the away side.

Late goals from Luis Muriel and Ruslan Malinovskyi then wrapped up the points and consolidated Atalanta's place in the Champions League positions and warm-up nicely for Tuesday's trip to Young Boys. The win extends the gap between Atalanta and fifth-placed Lazio to four points before the Roman club hosted Juventus in evening match. Spezia sit in 16th, just two points above the relegation zone and regional rivals Genoa and Sampdoria, after their eighth defeat in 13 games so far this season. Later AC Milan will have the chance to move top of Serie A when they face Fiorentina in Florence. — AFP