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V O L V O



Dubai opens glitzy Expo with extravagant show

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Local

Why we have 100 fils falafel sandwiches


 KUWAIT HISTORY

 By Nawara Fattahova
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Falafel sandwiches are a staple breakfast food in much of the Arab world, a national dish welcome in good times and bad. In Kuwait, falafel sandwiches aren't only a breakfast tradition. They are regulated.

The price of a falafel sandwich has not changed in Kuwait for more than 40 years: 100 fils. Inflation may drive up the costs of a burger and fries, the price for a shwarma sandwich and hummous bowl. But falafel sandwich prices are fixed by minister decree 44/1984, which also mandates the use of at least two falafels in each sandwich.

The decree was issued based on the recommendations of Kuwait's late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, to allow people to always be able to buy a falafel sandwich.

Falafels sandwiches may not seem like a big deal but they can provide an important source of food for the lowest earners in Kuwait. There are thousands, if not tens of thousands of people here who earn less than two dinars per day and must pay for their rent, food, clothing and other necessities as well as sending money home to their relatives. Affordable food options means that even the most impoverished can eat.

Over the years, some restaurants have changed the size of the sandwich, the size of the falafels, but the principle remains. If any restaurant violates this decree and increases the price of a falafel sandwich, customers can report the violation to the customer protection department of the ministry of commerce and industry. In fact, many fines have been issued by inspectors for such violations. According to an inspector of the customer protection department, they still visit restaurants to check if they are respecting the decree, and penalize violators.



 PHOTO OF THE DAY

KUWAIT: An aerial view of the Arabian Gulf coast from Sharq. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

'No to sexual harassment in the workplace'

#MeToo Kuwait edition


 JUST KIDDIN', SERIOUSLY

 By Sahar Moussa
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Have you ever been sexually harassed or felt discriminated at your workplace? Sexual harassment and discrimination are all too common all over the world. Now in Kuwait the government is taking additional steps to address the issue.

Last Monday, Minister of Commerce and Industry and Chairman of the Public Authority for Manpower Abdullah Al-Salman issued a decision banning sexual harassment and discrimination at the workplace in the private sector. The decision warned employers against discriminating based on gender, age, pregnancy and social status. It also banned sexual harassment at work in all its forms, including on social media.

There are many types of harassments, but what do sexual harassment and discrimination at the workplace mean exactly? Sexual harassment is simply harassment that is sexual in nature and generally includes unwanted sexual advances, conduct or behavior. According to the UN, it can be categorized into verbal, non-verbal and physical - and can apply to both men and women.

Examples of verbal sexual harassment may include making sexual comments or innuendos, whistling at someone, catcalls, turning work discussions into sexual topics or telling sexual jokes or stories, asking personal questions about social or sexual life, repeatedly asking a person out who is not interested, telling lies or spreading rumors about a person's personal sex life, referring to an adult as a girl, hunk, doll, babe, or honey, making sexual comments about a person's body, making kissing sounds, howling and smacking lips.

Non-verbal sexual harassment includes staring at someone, blocking a person's path, following the person,

giving personal gifts, displaying sexually suggestive visuals, making sexual gestures with hands or through body movements, and making facial expressions such as winking, throwing kisses or licking lips.

As for physical harassment, it includes giving a massage around the neck or shoulders, touching the person's clothing, hair or body, hugging, kissing, patting or stroking, touching or rubbing oneself around another person, and standing close or brushing up against another person.

Sexual harassment in all its types is criminalized in Kuwait; it always has been, but the question is how they will implement this decision at the workplace? What are the mechanisms through which women can report such behaviors without being afraid? Who will guarantee their rights? It is necessary to make this decision real, with real procedures and processes that women can actually follow and that are accessible to them.

What are the actions and steps that will be taken? Are they going to oblige companies to implement an internal or formal complaint system policy to protect and acknowledge employees' rights to anonymity and security from retaliation? How can we guarantee that complaints will be investigated by an impartial authority?

The decision states that action will be taken if there is solid proof, but what if sexual harassment happened behind closed doors - how can an employee prove it? Will they have the guts to come forward and complain? Because naturally, women will fear the potential social backlash, and if an investigation is opened, the stigma of going to the police station is not very acceptable in the Arab society. That is why a more detailed explanation on this matter must be issued.

I hope this decision creates a safer work environment for employees, particularly women, especially in the private sector. There are many cases where women are subjected to sexual harassment, but they feel helpless and fear losing their jobs or the chance of promotion. The #MeToo campaign supported women and opened the door to highlight sexual harassment. However, in our society, this subject remains a taboo, especially for women.

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Local

Shifting sands

hit the road

FEATURE

Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

In many far-flung areas of Kuwait, especially in Salmi, Subbiya and Wafra, roads are partially covered by sand, posing a hazard to motorists. Even highways haven't been spared by the encroaching sand, with sometimes only a narrow strip of asphalt available to traverse. The sand can be deadlier on roads that are unlit and undivided, mostly in remote desert areas.

PHOTO



Local



Local



For people with broken electronics, Hawally's 'Hinges Man' to the rescue

By Ben Garcia

Is your laptop fan whirring? Or your desktop won't start? Are you struggling to get your phone charger to work? Our reliance on electronic devices has become near universal, but these devices don't always work, and when they stop, we are suddenly in urgent need of expert support.



In Hawally, an entire street is dedicated to shops for fixing computers, laptops and mobiles. Anyone driving along Ibn Khaldoun Street will find sign after sign advertising such services, and for those in need of tech-

nical expertise, this street is the first resort.

One such expert is Pakistani resident Mohammad 'Abid' Usman, known as the "Hinges Man". He specializes in fixing hinges of all kinds, from the type found on the back of photo frames to the hinges holding doors in their jambs. Abid, 53, started with a small kiosk - just a table and chair - and opened for business with a focus on hinge repair. Over time, he expanded from fixing doors, gates and lids to laptop hinges and other computer-related services.

Abid worked for Dell in Karachi before accepting a job in Kuwait. "I came to Kuwait in December 2006. When I came, I didn't have an employer or job waiting for me, so I stayed with my elder brother in Mangaf. After three days, I saw a mobile shop and offered my services to the shop owner. The owner immediately handed me seven mobile units, and I repaired them all. So he asked me to work in his shop. After working for a few days, I asked for payment, but the man wouldn't pay me. It was a waste of time working for him without a salary, so I moved to Jahra and found work at an electronics shop there," Abid told Kuwait Times.

After two years, he managed to set up his own shop in Lulwa Complex on Ibn Khaldoun Street (shop number 22). "One shop eventually led to a second and a third. But during the pandemic, I closed the other two shops, because I couldn't pay the rent



without any income. I kept this shop because I need to work and feed my family," he said.

"This pandemic has taught us so many important lessons in life - everything we have is merely temporary. One day, it will disappear just like that," Abid said. "I was very lucky to save at least one shop. Some people working with me left for Pakistan. Others transferred to other businesses because I could no longer pay their salaries. From five people I am down to just one now - back to where I started."

During the height of his business, he was able to secure his children's future and pur-

chase properties and a few businesses back home. Abid admits his business has not fully recovered, but believes his repair business will rise up again. "There were so many challenges in 2020 and 2021 due to COVID-19. The closure of our business for around six months in 2020; the curfews and lockdowns affected us, as customer traffic reduced. But I can say that we are slowly recovering. Maybe when schools reopen, jobs and business will follow," he concluded.



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Local

Kuwait Amir leaves for Germany on private visit

Sheikh Nawaf receives congratulations on anniversary

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah left for Germany on a private visit yesterday. His Highness the Amir was seen off at the airport by His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem, His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

In other news, Kuwait's Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah sent Wednesday a letter to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to congratulate him on the first anniversary of his assumption of power. In his letter, Sheikh Ahmad stated that Kuwait, under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad, has made headways in all domains, particularly in economy, culture and development. He re-

newed allegiance to His Highness the Amir and vowed to do all in his power to serve Kuwait and strengthen its position on the international stage. The foreign minister also wished His Highness the Amir everlasting wellbeing.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir received yesterday a cable of congratulations from Chairman of the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) Mohammad Jassem Al-Saqr in which he expressed, on behalf of KCCI members and board of directors, his sincere congratulations on the first anniversary of His Highness' assumption of power. His Highness the Amir sent a reply in which he thanked and appreciated the message, wishing Saqr good health and wellness. His Highness the Amir also received a cable of congratulations from Pope Tawadros II, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St Mark, on the first anniversary of his assumption of power. In a reply, His Highness the Amir expressed appreciation for the message, wishing him good health and wellness. —KUNA



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is seen off at the airport before leaving for Germany on a private visit yesterday. — Amiri Diwan photo



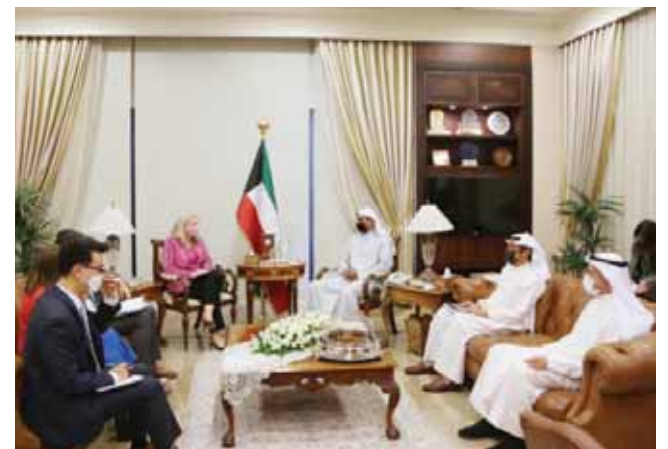
ALGIERS: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah hands a letter from His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to Algerian president Abdelmadjid Tebboune. — KUNA

Amir sends letter to Algeria President on fraternal bonds

ALGIERS: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday sent a written letter to Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune on historical fraternal relations between both countries and ways of bolstering them. Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah delivered the letter while he was welcomed by the Algerian president in Algiers earlier yesterday. During the encounter, the foreign minister conveyed His Highness the Amir's greetings to the president, government and people of Algeria, while the Algerian leader, in turn, asked Sheikh Ahmad Nasser to deliver his greetings to His Highness the Amir and the government and people of Kuwait. During the meeting, they discussed firm and deep-rooted historical relations between both countries and their people in all fields, the latest regional and international developments and how to shore up Arab solidarity in order to fulfill the expectations of the Arab people, given that Kuwait holds the current 156th presidency of the Council of the Arab League at the ministerial level for six months to come. —KUNA

Deputy Foreign Minister meets Australia, US, UK ambassadors

KUWAIT: Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Ambassador Majdi Al-Dhafiri met yesterday with Australian Ambassador to Kuwait Jonathan Gilbert, US Ambassador to Kuwait Alina Romanowski and UK Ambassador Belinda Lewis. During the meeting, the three ambassadors presented an overview of the US, UK and Australia security pact (AUKUS) along with its goals. They also reviewed regional and international developments, Kuwait's Foreign Ministry said in a statement. Assistant Foreign Minister for the Deputy Foreign Minister's Office Affairs Ambassador Ayham Abdullatif Al-Omar, and Deputy Assistant for Foreign Minister for American Affairs Salah Al-Haddad attended the meeting. — KUNA



A view from the meeting.

Defense Minister visits Military Police Command

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah said yesterday military police was a "role model in discipline" and they contributed to success of missions of the army. Sheikh Hamad, during a visit to Military Police Command, said order and discipline in military were key to advancement and development of armies, a statement by the army chief of staff command said. He commanded the military police personnel for excelling in their duties. Sheikh Hamad was briefed about tasks and missions of the military police, and their role in maintaining discipline among army units, in addition how to protect very important persons. He conveyed greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah speaks to Military Police personnel during the visit. — Defense Ministry photo

Local

Kuwaiti political groups, MPs welcome Amir's call for dialogue

First Kuwaiti female judges given assignment

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti political groups and lawmakers yesterday strongly welcomed a call by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on the government and the National Assembly to start a national dialogue to resolve all problems in the country.

At least six political groups welcomed the call and expressed the hope it will lead to resolving the country's political impasse and put the country back on the right track. The first term of the National Assembly was marred with endless political disputes that disrupted assembly sessions and put the country in political paralysis. The groups, Islamic Constitutional Movement, Popular Action Movement, Kuwait Democratic Forum and National Islamic Alliance, Kuwait Democratic Forum, the Islamic Salaf Alliance represent the spectrum of Kuwaiti political trends including Islamists, liberals, Shiites and nationalists.

The first four groups said in a joint statement that the dia-

logue should be utilized by all parties to unify ranks and correct the political process, and described the call as a blessed initiative. They said that the success of the dialogue depends on confidence building measures, preparing a well-defined timetable and complying with the principles of the constitution.

Deputy speaker Ahmad Al-Shuhomi said the initiative should lead to stability in the country for the authorities to work together to serve the Kuwaiti people. Opposition MP Farz Al-Mutairi said the initiative should be able to end all disputes and lead to the return of exiled former opposition MPs and activists. Opposition MP Obaid Al-Wasmi said the dialogue will result in preparing all formulas that serve the interests of the people and the state and end all the reasons that caused disputes.

In the meantime, the judiciary authority yesterday took an unprecedented historical measure in assigning first female judges to preside over misdemeanor courts, allowing them to issue verdicts in minor cases. About 13 female judges had been asked to preside over courts like the traffic and normal courts.



The National Assembly.

Police arrest 85 in Jahra crackdown

KUWAIT: Jahra Security Directorate carried out a campaign to crack down on loose labor on Wednesday, resulting in the arrest of 85 violating individuals, nine of whom did not have an ID. All were sent to concerned authorities, the Interior Ministry announced yesterday.

In other news, a small fire broke out in an elevator at a mall in Egaila. Mangaf and Qurain firemen evacuated the complex and put out the blaze. No injuries were reported. Separately, Kuwait Fire Force Chief Lt Gen Khalid Al-Mikrad received Pakistani Ambassador to Kuwait Sajjad Haidar. They discussed mutual issues on firefighting and civil defense. Mikrad also received Chairman of E-Media Federation Faisal Al-Sawwagh, Secretary General Zaid Al-Sane, Secretary Mohammad Zafer and board member Abdullah Al-Ayan.



KUWAIT: This handout photo released by the Interior Ministry yesterday shows people lined up during a police crackdown in Jahra.

Merchants urge premier to reconsider ban on 60+ visas

KUWAIT: Following the stand of Commerce and Industry Minister Abdullah Al-Salman that calls for amending the decision to not renew residencies of residents aged 60 and above who do not have a university degree, 11 associations and Chairman of Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry Mohammad Al-Saqr joined him and sent letters to His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah asking to change the decision.

Informed sources quoted in an Al-Rai Arabic newspaper report published yesterday said car dealerships, industries,

money exchanges and other companies also sent letters separately asking for reviewing the decision, especially for technical workers to gain from their experience, which is in favor of public interest.

They told the prime minister that due to the importance of projects they are carrying out in the public and private sectors whose completion is linked to time schedules, and to avoid disruption of the country's development plan resulting from the coronavirus pandemic, there is a need to amend the decision in a way that suits the requirements of these various sectors.

They said car dealerships, money exchanges and industries regularly evaluate their technical workers and only retain the best among them. The companies blamed firms that bring in workers and leave them loose, while dealerships, exchanges and industry unions have not had any violation with regards to loose labor for over 50 years. They said the skilled labor they rely on do not need a university qualification - only experience, competence and courses inside and outside Kuwait.

Tree-planting campaign in Kuwait

KUWAIT: The United Nations (UN) has launched a tree-planting campaign in Kuwait in collaboration with the country's civil society groups, in an endeavor to address climate challenges. Speaking to reporters yesterday on the sidelines of the campaign launched by UN staff at Mishref area in Hawally Governorate, the UN Secretary-General's Resident Representative Dr Tarek Elsheikh said the tree-growing initiative is part of the UN's activities in Kuwait targeting practical response to climate challenges. He added that the UN is especially keen this year on addressing environment issues and diverse climate challenges and changes the world is facing at present. The UN official noted that as the Climate Summit is due in November, the UN wants to see Kuwait and the UN office in this Gulf country launching climate initiatives, chiefly tree-growing which is deemed an essential element of sustainable and healthy environment. Elsheikh added that the UN office has adopted a host of activities purposed to spur young people to get engaged in initiatives pertinent to energy usage, waste recycling and the fight against desertification. — KUNA

Kuwait to vaccinate bedoon students

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Education said yesterday that bedoon (stateless) students would be getting COVID-19 vaccination jabs on Saturday, October 2, at Kuwait Vaccination Center in Mishref. Students of grades 7-9 would be vaccinated between 10:00 am and 2:00 pm, the Ministry's Private Education Department said in a statement. It added that students in grades 10-12 would be vaccinated between 2:00 pm and 5:00 pm. Students should bring their identifications or birth certificates to register them and in order to get an appointment for a second dose, the ministry added. — KUNA



Embattled French former president gets 2nd jail term

North Korea's Kim calls US offer of talks a 'petty trick'

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GUAYAQUIL: Inmates are seen on top of the prison roof during a riot at the Guayaquil Regional prison in Guayaquil, Ecuador. —AFP

116 killed in prison violence

Bloody clashes between rival gangs in an Ecuador jail

GUAYAQUIL: The death toll from bloody clashes between rival gangs in an Ecuador prison reached 116, with nearly 80 more wounded, President Guillermo Lasso said Wednesday, as soldiers surrounded the facility—one of the country's many overburdened and understaffed jails. Inmates went to war armed with guns and grenades on Tuesday at the Guayaquil prison complex: a clash between prisoners believed to be linked to Mexican drug gangs—mainly the Sinaloa and Jalisco New Generation cartels. President Lasso announced the new toll at a late Wednesday press conference, describing the prison slaughter as an “unfortunate event.”

Soldiers and a tank guarded the complex Wednesday as police on horseback patrolling the perimeter were confronted by worried family members of the men locked up inside. “We want information because we don't know anything about our families, our sons,” said one

woman, who would not give her name. “I have my son there.” Tuesday's violence was the latest in a series of bloody prison clashes that have claimed the lives of nearly 200 inmates in Ecuador so far this year.

The SNAI prison authority said in a tweet that the death of “more than 100” prisoners had been confirmed, with 52 more wounded. At least six were beheaded, the national prosecutor's office said earlier in the day, adding that two police officers were wounded in the operation to retake control of the prison. Officers were attacked by inmates with guns. Earlier in the day, Lasso announced on Twitter that he was declaring a “state of exception,” which will allow him to suspend rights and use public force to restore calm.

Lasso said that he would head a security committee in Guayaquil to control the emergency, but also guaranteed protection of “human rights for all those involved.” A police

charge on the prison had prevented “more deaths,” said the police chief for the city of Guayaquil, Fausto Buenano. Ecuador's prison system has become a battleground for thousands of prisoners with ties to powerful Mexican drug gangs. On February 23, simultaneous riots at four jails including Guayaquil left 79 inmates dead, several of them beheaded.

'A war'

Last week, police confiscated two pistols, a revolver, some 500 rounds of ammunition, a hand grenade, several knives, two sticks of dynamite and homemade explosives at one of the city's prisons. Two weeks ago, Guayaquil's Prison Number 4 was attacked by drones, part of “a war between international cartels,” prison authorities said. There were no casualties in that attack.

“There has been a prison crisis since 2010, with an average of 25 homicides per year, but

it has accelerated significantly from 2017 to the peak of this year,” Ecuadoran security expert Fernando Carrion said. Ecuador's prison system has 65 facilities designed for about 30,000 but which house an actual population of 39,000 inmates. There are chronic staffing shortages. The country's human rights ombudsman said there were 103 killings in prisons in 2020, with corruption enabling inmates to bring in arms and ammunition.

Located between Colombia and Peru, the world's leading cocaine producers, Ecuador is a key transit for drug shipments to the United States and Europe. Guayaquil is Ecuador's most populous city and its main port. Between January and August Ecuadoran authorities seized about 116 tons of drugs, mainly cocaine, compared to 128 tons in all of 2020. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) has condemned the ongoing violence in Ecuador's prisons. —AFP

International

Zionist top diplomat makes a landmark visit to Bahrain

Zionist embassy to be opened in Bahrain

MANAMA: Zionism's top diplomat Yair Lapid began a landmark visit yesterday to Bahrain where he will open the Zionist embassy one year after the US-brokered normalization of ties. The Zionist foreign minister touched down at Manama airport over an hour before a Gulf Air A320 took off in the opposite direction for the first commercial flight between the two countries. Crew members waved the flags of Bahrain and Zionist entity from cockpit windows of the passenger jet when it landed later at Ben Gurion airport near Tel Aviv.

The Bahrain flight and Zionist entity's first bilateral ministerial visit to the Gulf country are part of a thaw in regional relations after the United Arab Emirates, Morocco and Sudan also agreed last year to establish ties with Zionists under agreements known as the Abraham Accords. "We've landed in Bahrain. I'm proud to represent Zionist entity in an official and historic first in the kingdom. Thanks for the warm reception," Lapid said on Twitter.

Lapid met later with his Bahraini counterpart Abdullatif Al-Zayani. "We talked about the cooperation between our countries and about taking the official peace between us and turning it into an active, economic, security, political and civic friendship," he tweeted. However, anger simmers in some quarters over the accords, which broke with decades of Arab consensus that there would be no relations with Zionists while the Palestinian question remains unresolved.

Protesters burned tyres on the outskirts of Manama early yesterday, sending clouds of black smoke into the air, and the hash-

tag #BahrainRejectsZionists in Arabic was circulating on social media. Extra security was stationed on the route to the airport and no Zionist flags were visible on main roads. Opposition activists have called for further protests later on. "The visit of the FM to Bahrain is an act firmly rejected, condemned and denounced by the people of Bahrain," Sheikh Hussein Al-Daih, deputy secretary-general of the opposition Al-Wefaq National Islamic Society, told AFP on Wednesday.

'Peaceful diplomacy'

Memorandums of understanding on technology and the economy will be signed during Lapid's visit, along with agreements involving national water company and Sheba hospital, Zionist officials said. The Arab countries involved in the Abraham Accords have stressed the economic benefits of ties with Zionist entity, with half a billion dollars in trade already reported with the UAE.

The UAE, Bahrain and Morocco became the first Arab states in decades to normalize relations with Zionists last year, following negotiations spearheaded by former US president Donald Trump. The Zionist state had earlier reached peace treaties with neighboring Egypt and Jordan. On the first anniversary of the accords this month, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken pledged to continue the efforts of the Trump government. "This administration will continue to build on the successful efforts of the last administration to keep normalization marching forward," Blinken said.



TEL AVIV: A Gulf Air A320 aeroplane coming from the Bahraini capital Manama arrives at Ben Gurion Airport near Tel Aviv yesterday. —AFP

"We will encourage more countries to follow the lead of the Emirates, Bahrain and Morocco. We want to widen the circle of peaceful diplomacy." Beyond economics, the rapprochement was also driven by mutual concern over Iran, with the regional rivalry even pushing Saudi Arabia into quietly building relations with the Zionist state. Lapid is the main architect of Zionist coalition government that ousted ex-premier Benjamin Netanyahu, who signed the Abraham Accords. Lapid has visited UAE and Morocco since becoming foreign minister in June. —AFP

The Western Sahara: Contested desert land

RABAT: The disputed Western Sahara, a former Spanish colony, has long been a bone of contention on the international stage. In the latest twist, the European Union's top court on Wednesday cancelled two trade deals with Morocco after a case brought by the Algeria-backed Polisario Front movement, which seeks independence for the territory. Morocco, which controls 80 percent of Western Sahara, has offered autonomy but maintains the territory is a sovereign part of the kingdom.

Desert and ocean

Western Sahara sits on the western edge of the vast desert, stretching along about 1,000 kilometers of Atlantic coastline. Its inhospitable terrain supports only around 650,000 people. As Spain withdrew in 1975, its northern neighbor Morocco moved in, claiming the territory as part of its kingdom. But it was opposed by the Polisario Front, which took up arms to fight for independence, with the International Court of Justice ruling in favor of self-determination. In November 1975, 350,000 Moroccans took part in the so-called Green March to the border, to press the kingdom's claim on the territory's large reserves of phosphate and rich offshore fisheries. The following year, the Polisario Front proclaimed the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), with the support of allies including Cuba and neighboring Algeria, its most important backer.

Sand wall

The Polisario initially gained the upper hand, before being pushed back into the interior. During the 1980s, Morocco built a sand wall to keep Polisario fighters out of territory it controlled. The outermost defensive line runs for 2,700 kilometers, ringing the part of Western Sahara now under Moroccan control. It is fortified with barbed wire and trenches, and is one of the world's largest minefields. The SADR is a

member of the African Union, but controls less than 20 percent of the territory, mostly empty desert.

Troubled region

The United Nations has failed to find a lasting settlement since it brokered a ceasefire on the line of control in 1991. A referendum it organized over Western Sahara's future in 1992 was aborted as both parties objected to who was eligible to vote. Since 2007, Rabat has refused any referendum and has offered only autonomy instead of independence.

Morocco-Algeria tensions

The conflict has long poisoned Morocco's relations with neighboring Algeria. Their border has been closed since 1994, and between 100,000 and 200,000 Sahrawi refugees live in camps around the Algerian desert town of Tindouf. In August, Algeria severed diplomatic relations with Morocco, accusing Rabat of "hostile actions". On September 22, Algiers closed its airspace to Moroccan planes.

Talks fail

Relaunched in late 2018 after a long break, United Nations-brokered talks between Morocco, the Polisario Front, Algeria and Mauritania have been deadlocked since the 2019 resignation of the UN's Western Sahara representative. In September 2021, Morocco said it had agreed to the nomination of former UN Syria envoy Staffan de Mistura to the post. UN reports have highlighted human rights violations committed by Morocco in the territory and a deterioration of conditions in the Tindouf camps.

Migrant pressure on Spain

In April, Polisario leader Brahim Ghali went to Spain, reportedly for treatment for Covid-19, a move Madrid says was made on humanitarian grounds but which prompted a diplomatic crisis between Morocco and Spain. In May, between 8,000 and 10,000 migrants crossed into Spain's North African enclave of Ceuta from Morocco, in what some have seen as a ploy by Rabat to put pressure on Madrid.—AFP

Algeria-Morocco standoff threatens Spain gas supplies

TUNIS: Algeria pumps huge volumes of gas through Morocco into Europe, but with Algiers and Rabat at loggerheads as a pipeline agreement nears expiry, experts say the taps could soon be turned off. That would hit Spain's gas supplies just as prices soar across Europe and with winter approaching, and Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares was due in Algeria yesterday to discuss the issue, his office told AFP. Algeria, Africa's biggest natural gas exporter, has been using the Gaz-Maghreb-Europe (GME) pipeline since 1996 to deliver several billion cubic metres (bcm) per year to Spain and Portugal. But the GME contract is due to expire at the end of October - just over two months after Algiers severed diplomatic ties with Rabat over "hostile actions".

And in August, Energy Minister Mohamed Arkab told Spanish ambassador Fernando Moran that Algeria was ready to deliver all its Spain-bound gas exports via an alternative undersea pipeline, bypassing Morocco. "A deal to continue the GME agreement before October 31 is very unlikely," Maghreb geopolitics expert Geoff Porter said. "In light of the lack of diplomatic channels between Rabat and Algiers, it's difficult to see any pathway for negotiations." —AFP

International

Qataris gearing up for first legislative polls

A rare nod to democracy in the Gulf state

DOHA: Qataris are gearing up for inaugural legislative polls tomorrow that are a symbolic democratic step for the Gulf region but are unlikely to alter the monarchy's balance of power. The October 2 election is for 30 members of the 45-strong Shura Council, a body with limited powers that was previously appointed by the emir as an advisory chamber.

While it is a rare nod to democracy in the Gulf, which is mostly ruled by absolute monarchies and where only Kuwait has a fully elected parliament, observers say this is no turning point for Qatar. Instead, they stress that it comes with heightened scrutiny on the country which is set to host next year's World Cup. Qatar had announced it would hold elections to the Shura Council in 2007, but the vote was postponed.

"It is important to understand that the ambition is not to create a constitutional monarchy but increase participation" in society, said Andreas Krieg, chief executive of risk consultancy MENA analytica. "Applying metrics of democracy is wrong." The Shura will be allowed to propose legislation, approve the budget and recall ministers. But the emir, all-powerful in the world's largest exporter of liquefied natural gas, will wield a veto. The streets of Qatar's towns have been speckled with billboards adorned with beaming candidates sporting the national white thobe.

Candidates have appeared on state-run TV to pitch for support, with each contender pictured against an identical backdrop alongside slides stating their policies - a far cry from the expensive political ads typical elsewhere. And unlike established democracies, there have been no adversarial head-to-head debates between candidates. Beyond single-candidate town hall meetings, posters and TV spots, the

country's introduction to democracy has been limited, with no change of government possible and political parties outlawed.

Approved candidates

All candidates had to be approved by the powerful interior ministry against a host of criteria, including age, character and criminal history. At glitzy campaign events, candidates attempted to woo sometimes modest crowds with waiter service of hot drinks, buffet meals and glossy campaign literature. The candidates are mostly men, with just 28 women among the 284 hopefuls running for the 30 available council seats. The remaining 15 seats will be appointed by the emir. Most of Qatar's 2.5 million residents are foreigners ineligible to vote. Candidates will have to stand in electoral divisions linked to where their family or tribe was based in the 1930s, using data compiled by the then-British authorities.

Diplomatic sources suggest families and tribes have already conducted internal ballots to determine who will be elected for their constituencies. Qataris number about 333,000, but only descendants of those who were citizens in 1930 will be eligible to vote and stand, disqualifying members of families naturalized since then. Some members of the sizable Al-Murrah tribe are among those who face being excluded from the electoral process, sparking a fierce debate online.

'Creating a divide'

Experts have suggested that representatives of those groups excluded could be among those directly appointed by the emir. "I've seen it create a di-

vide within our society, that we (younger Qataris) had hoped no longer existed," said a voter, who declined to be named because of the sensitivity of the issue. The electoral law prohibits "stirring up tribal or sectarian strife among citizens in any way" or receiving campaign funding from abroad. Qatar's election process has sparked a torrent of fake news on social media with the Arabic hashtag #BoycottQatarElections trending on Twitter, despite initially being posted by only one account.

Officials in the emirate fear the polls could be exploited by Qatar's neighbors Saudi Arabia and the

United Arab Emirates (UAE). Municipal councils are the only elected public chambers in Saudi Arabia. In the UAE, half the seats on a government advisory body were elected during a ballot in 2015, when about one-quarter of citizens had the right to vote. Qatar held its first municipal election in 1999. Ahead of tomorrow's vote, volunteers gathered to receive step-by-step instructions on how the electoral process would work "from the time the voter arrives" through casting their ballot to leaving, the Qatar Tribune daily reported. —AFP



AL WAKRAH, Qatar: A waiter pours a drink as Qataris sit during a campaign rally for Qatar's inaugural Shura Council election, in Al-Wakrah. —AFP

Qatar: The key dates since independence

DOHA: Gas and oil rich Qatar, which holds its first legislative polls tomorrow, survived a bruising stand-off with its Gulf neighbors to emerge as a key broker in Afghanistan. Here are key dates since its independence in 1971.

Al-Thani family in power

On September 3, 1971, Qatar gains independence from Britain. The Gulf monarchy had become a British protectorate in 1916 as the Ottoman Empire crumbled during World War I. It had been ruled by the Al-Thani family since the mid-19th century. Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad Al-Thani overthrows his cousin, Emir Ahmad, in February 1972 and takes power. In June 1992, Qatar becomes the third Gulf monarchy after Kuwait and Bahrain to sign a defense cooperation agreement with the United States, after the 1990-1991 Gulf War and the liberation of Kuwait by a US-led coalition following its invasion by Iraq.

Bloodless coup

Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani takes power in June 1995, overthrowing his father in a bloodless coup while the latter is abroad. In March 1999, the first direct municipal elections take

Contacts with Zionists

Zionist foreign minister Tzipi Livni visits Doha in April 2008. Although Qatar and Israel do not have formal diplomatic relations, they maintain informal contacts.

World Cup

In December 2010, Qatar is selected as host of the 2022 FIFA World Cup, the first Arab nation to organise the prestigious football competition.

Support for Arab Spring

Qatar supports popular uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria during the 2011 Arab Spring via its Al Jazeera network's rolling television news coverage. In October 2012, the emir visits the Gaza Strip and its Islamist rulers Hamas. Qatar is one of the Palestinian enclave's main bankrollers.

Emir abdicates

In June 2013, the emir abdicates in favor of his son, 33-

year-old Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, a first in the recent history of the Arab world.

Diplomatic crisis

Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain cut ties and transport links with Qatar in June 2017. They say they want Doha to sever its alleged connections with radical Islamist groups - which Qatar denies - and distance itself from Iran. Qatar announces in December 2018 that it will quit the OPEC oil cartel, citing its greater reliance on gas exports. In January 2021, Saudi Arabia and the other three boycotting nations announce the restoration of relations with Doha.

Labor rules scrapped

In October 2019, Qatar announces plans to scrap key aspects of its controversial "kafala" labor rules, including the requirement for some workers to obtain employers' permission to change jobs and permits to leave the country.

Afghanistan

In August 2021, Qatar becomes a key broker in Afghanistan with the withdrawal of US forces, helping evacuate thousands of foreigners and Afghans, engaging the new Taliban rulers and supporting operations at Kabul airport. With Washington's blessing, Qatar had invited the Taliban to open an office in Doha in 2013 as a back channel for talks. —AFP

International

Embattled French ex-president Sarkozy given second jail term

A fresh blow to the right-winger

PARIS: A French court yesterday handed former president Nicolas Sarkozy a one-year prison sentence for illegal financing of his 2012 re-election bid, dealing a fresh blow to the right-winger seven months after he received a jail term for corruption. Sarkozy, 66, will not serve time behind bars under the terms of yesterday's verdict, with the court ruling that he could serve it at home by wearing an electronic bracelet.

He was not in court to hear the judge impose the maximum sentence for illegal campaign financing after finding that Sarkozy had "voluntarily neglected to exercise oversight over the spending incurred." Sarkozy's lawyer Thierry Herzog said his client would appeal the conviction. Sarkozy spent nearly twice the legal limit of 22.5 million euros (\$26 million) on his failed bid for a second term in office.

The case is one of several arising from a string of investigations into Sarkozy's affairs, which have largely failed to dent his popularity among conservative voters. In March, he became France's first postwar president to be sentenced to jail relating to his attempts to secure favors from a judge in return for the promise of a plum retirement job. He has accused the judiciary, with which he crossed swords during his time as president between 2007 and 2012, of hounding him. "I never betrayed the trust of the French people," he told the TF1 channel in March.

Sarkozy: Shadowed by legal woes

PARIS: Nicolas Sarkozy, who ruled France as a tough-talking right-wing president from 2007 to 2012, is seen by supporters as a dynamic savior but by detractors as a vulgar populist mired in corruption. A second criminal conviction issued yesterday, this time for illegal campaign financing during his 2012 election bid, six months after a guilty verdict in a graft trial, has dealt a new blow to any ambition of "Sarko" returning to frontline politics.

However even if the career of the energetic former "hyper-president" may now be shadowed by legal disgrace, he is likely never to go to jail under the terms of both verdicts. Since failing to win a second mandate in 2012 and then losing out on his party's nomination in 2017, Sarkozy has been submerged in legal problems but has still retained support on the right. During his five-year term, Sarkozy, now 66, took a hard line on immigration, security and national identity. After winning the presidency at age 52, Sarkozy was initially seen as injecting a much-needed dose of dynamism, making a splash on the

Fake invoices

Sarkozy pulled out all the stops in 2012 as he sought to fend off his Socialist rival Francois Hollande for a second term. A series of lavish US-style election rallies caused his costs to spiral, with the final bill coming to at least 42.8 million euros. The public relations firm Bygmalion, hired to organise the events, set up a system of fake invoices to mask the real cost of the events. While the investigation failed to prove Sarkozy was aware of the fraud, the court ruled that he had "undeniably" profited from it. At his five-week trial in May and June, the prosecution portrayed him as having a "cavalier" attitude to the public money available to candidates during campaigning.

Sarkozy argued he had been too busy running the country to closely scrutinize the accounts. His Union for a Popular Movement party, since renamed the Republicans, picked up the tab for most of the excess. Thirteen other people, including Sarkozy's former campaign manager, several Bygmalion executives and a handful of former Republicans directors, were also tried in the case. They received jail terms of up to three and a half years in prison, with part of the sentences suspended.

Corruption case

The case failed to garner much interest among the public, seen as less sensational

international scene and wooing the corporate world. But his presidency was overshadowed by the 2008 financial crisis, and he left office with the lowest popularity ratings of any postwar French leader up to then. He pulled out all the stops in an ultimately doomed bid to defeat Socialist Francois Hollande for a second term in 2012, and his latest conviction relates to the financing of that campaign.

'Special link'

That defeat made him the first president since Valery Giscard d'Estaing (1974-1981) to be denied a second term and Sarkozy famously promised: "You won't hear about me anymore." But that prediction turned out to be anything but true, with ongoing legal problems and his marriage to former top model Carla Bruni keeping Sarkozy in the spotlight. Few were surprised when he returned to frontline politics, in 2014 winning the leadership of the conservative UMP party, since renamed The Republicans. But he failed to win the party's nomination for another crack at the presidency in 2017. He has remained hugely popular on the right and lines of fans queued in the summer of 2020 to have him sign his latest memoir, "The Time of Storms", which topped best-seller lists for weeks. "I have a special link with the French. It may stretch, it may tighten, but it exists," he said. Even now, with no clear candidate on the right to take on President Emmanuel Macron in 2022, —AFP



PARIS: File photo shows former President Nicolas Sarkozy (2nd right) arriving for a hearing of the so-called Bygmalion case trial which sees him charged with illicit financing for his failed 2012 re-election campaign. —AFP

than his earlier corruption trial. Sarkozy received a three-year jail term for corruption and influence peddling in that case, two years of which were suspended. He has also appealed that verdict.

In that case too he will likely avoid prison even if he loses his appeal, with the judge saying she would consider letting him serve his sentence under electronic surveillance at home. Be-

fore Sarkozy, the only French leader to be convicted in a criminal trial was his predecessor Jacques Chirac, who received a two-year suspended sentence in 2011 for corruption over a fake jobs scandal relating to his time as Paris mayor. Sarkozy has also been charged over allegations that he received millions of euros for his 2007 election campaign from the late Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi. —AFP

Presidents, PMs guilty of graft

PARIS: Nicolas Sarkozy - who was sentenced to a year in jail yesterday for illegally financing his 2012 re-election bid - is one of several former French presidents and prime ministers who have been found guilty of graft and fraud.

Nicolas Sarkozy

Former right-wing president Nicolas Sarkozy has a faced a long list of probes into corruption and campaign financing violations since he left office in 2012 and lost his legal immunity. In 2017 he was charged with illegal financing of his failed 2012 campaign, and in 2020 became the first French ex-president to stand trial on corruption charges. Yesterday's verdict comes just six months after he got a three-year term - two of those suspended - for trying to bribe a judge with a plum retirement job in exchange for inside information on an enquiry into his campaign finances. But the 66-year-old will be able to serve his time outside prison, likely at home wearing an electronic bracelet. Sarkozy has appealed both convictions.

Francois Fillon

Sarkozy's former prime minister Francois Fillon was last year sentenced to five years in prison, three of them suspended, for orchestrating a fake job for his wife in a

scandal that arguably cost him the presidency in 2017. Fillon's Welsh-born wife Penelope was given a suspended three-year sentence for participating in the scheme that saw her paid over one million euros in public funds over a 15-year period. The couple was also ordered to pay fines of 375,000 euros (\$423,000) each. They have since appealed.

Jacques Chirac

Former conservative president Jacques Chirac (1995-2007) became the first president to be convicted for graft in 2011 when he was given a two-year suspended sentence for siphoning off public money to pay people working for his political party while he was Paris mayor. The ailing 79-year-old was too ill to attend his trial, nor did he appeal.

Alain Juppe

Prime minister under Chirac from 1995 to 1997, Juppe was sentenced to a 14-month suspended jail term in 2004 in a separate scandal over fake jobs for members of his right-wing RPR party at Paris city hall between 1988 and 1995. He was also barred from public office for one year.

Edith Cresson

The European Court of Justice convicted Edith Cresson - France's prime minister from 1991 to 1992 - for favoritism in 2006 for granting a job to a friend while she was a European Commissioner in Brussels in the late 1990s. —AFP

International

UK police officer gets a rare whole-life jail term

Woman arrested, kidnapped, raped, murdered

LONDON: A British police officer who falsely arrested a woman for breaking coronavirus restrictions, then kidnapped, raped and murdered her, was given a rare whole-life jail term yesterday. Judge Adrian Fullford told Wayne Couzens, 48, his offences were “grotesque”, after he snatched Sarah Everard off the streets of south London in March.

Everard’s disappearance sparked one of Britain’s most high-profile missing persons investigations and protests calling for better safety for women in public spaces. But there has been widespread horror and revulsion at the involvement of a police officer, who exploited lockdown restrictions and abused his position of trust to kill. Couzens, who served with the elite diplomatic protection unit of London’s Metropolitan Police, admitted kidnapping, rape and murder at a hearing in July and was sacked.

Sentencing him at the Old Bailey, in central London, Fullford called Couzens’ actions “devastating, tragic and wholly brutal” and said his victim was “wholly blameless”. “The misuse of a police officer’s role such as occurred in this case in order to kidnap, rape and murder a lone victim is of equal seriousness as a murder for the purpose of advancing a political, religious ideological cause,” he added. Couzens, who will die in jail, becomes the latest of only 60 criminals who will never be considered for release. Former colleagues said he had disgraced their uniform, and the Met Police said it was “sickened, angered and devastated” by his crimes.

‘Warning signs’

The high-profile case refocused attention on how the police handle complaints of violence against women and girls in Britain. Questions have been raised about why previous complaints of indecent exposure against Couzens, said to have been a user of sex workers and violent pornography, were not dealt with. The leader of Britain’s main opposition Labour party, Keir Starmer, a former chief prosecutor for England and Wales, said legislation needed to be tightened.

He also called for a review of how Couzens was able to “slip through the net”, despite a series of “warning signs”. Starmer’s Labor colleague, Harriet Harman, a former women’s minister, said the case had “shattered” women’s confidence in the police and called for the resignation of Met Police Commissioner Cressida Dick. The Met, Britain’s biggest police force, was already under fire for its botched initial handling of the double murder of two sisters in a London park last year.

In that case, detectives were accused of not taking their disappearance seriously, and two officers were suspended for taking crime scene photos and sharing them on WhatsApp. Demonstrators outside the Old Bailey said the Met Police had “blood on their hands”. Roxanne Tiffany, 20, said: “I think what a lot of women are maybe grasping for is ‘we’re sorry and this is what we’re doing to ensure this doesn’t happen again.’” The student said she had attended previous vigils for Everard, which were contro-



LONDON: An undated handout picture shows Sarah Everard, who went missing on March 3, and was consequently found having been murdered. Wayne Couzens (right), a British police officer who falsely arrested a woman for breaking coronavirus restrictions, then kidnapped, raped and murdered her, was given a rare whole-life jail term yesterday. — AFP

versally broken up by Met officers for breaching social distancing rules.

Couzens snatched Everard, a 33-year-old marketing consultant, as she walked to her home in Brixton, south London, from a friend’s house in nearby Clapham. Security camera footage showed Couzens, who had just finished a 12-hour shift guarding the US Embassy, stopping Everard

by the side of the road. He showed her his warrant card, then used his police handcuffs to restrain her, before driving her in a hire car to Kent in southeast England, some 80 miles away. Couzens, a married father-of-two, initially told officers he had been forced to seize the university graduate and hand her over to a Romanian gang to whom he owed money. — AFP

Global hits and local heroes: COVID jabs around the world

PARIS: Some have become global mainstays and others are staying local: here is an overview of more than 20 approved COVID-19 vaccines currently in use, and a few that fell by the wayside.

mRNA leads the pack

Messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccines developed by US-German alliance Pfizer/BioNTech and American company Moderna have emerged as the most successful vaccines in use today. A survey from Canada’s McGill University shows the Pfizer jab Comirnaty has been approved in 100 countries, while Moderna’s Spikevax is authorised in 70.

Ground-breaking mRNA technology teaches our cells to make a harmless piece of protein found on the surface of the virus that causes COVID-19, prompting the immune system to develop antibodies that can fight off the real thing in case of infection. A Chinese study published online this week comparing vaccine efficacy data found that Comirnaty and Spikevax work better than other jabs, even against the Delta variant currently dominating across the globe. The study has yet to be peer-reviewed.

Runners-up

A widely-distributed vaccine developed jointly by Swedish

firm AstraZeneca and Britain’s Oxford University, along with another made by Johnson & Johnson affiliate Janssen-Cilag in the US, are both based on viral vector technology. The more traditional approach uses a genetically engineered version of the common cold adenovirus as a “vector” to shuttle genetic instructions into human cells.

AstraZeneca’s jab, named Vaxzevria, is approved in the European Union and was widely distributed after its release, but it was restricted in many countries when the vaccine was linked to statistically rare instances of blood clots. It does not have US approval, and has been largely used to supply the Covax jab scheme that provides shots to poorer countries. Janssen’s was the fourth jab to be approved in the EU, but its seemingly convenient one-and-done dosage became a liability with the rise of Delta, which experts say is too resistant to be beaten with just one dose of any vaccine.

Local heroes

There are a number of vaccines distributed only or mostly within the country where they were developed, though a few have limited international reach. China’s two WHO-approved vaccines—the Sinopharm jab, and CoronaVac from the lab Sinovac—have been given in about 50 countries. Two other Chinese firms, Cansino and Anhui Zhifei Longcom, are also marketing vaccines within China. Russia has approved four domestically developed vaccines including Sputnik V, which currently has the green light in about 70 countries but lacks approval from the EU and the World Health Organization (WHO). India gave the green light to its Zydus Cadila vaccine at the end of August, making it the first DNA vaccine ever approved for use in humans. — AFP

From fear to freedom: The abortion reforms in Mexico

MEXICO CITY: When Fernanda Garcia went to hospital with pain and bleeding after taking medication to end her pregnancy, a nurse threatened to report her and said she could go to prison. Following a ruling by Mexico’s top court that abortion is not a crime, cases like hers could become a thing of the past in the conservative Latin American nation. An adverse reaction to the medication Garcia took forced her to seek treatment, despite the potential repercussions in the central state of Guanajuato, where abortion is allowed only after rape.

The nurse “told me that I was bad, that I didn’t know what I’d done, that I would face prosecution and could end up in jail,” the 22-year-old told AFP. She grabbed her belongings and fled in fear. On September 7, a month after Garcia’s traumatic experience, Mexico’s Supreme Court ruled that criminalizing abortion is unconstitutional. The decision followed a constitutional challenge to the penal code of the northern state of Coahuila, where abortion carries a punishment of up to three years in prison. It will affect the whole of Mexico, opening the way for women across the country to access the procedure without fear of prosecution. The ruling “made me feel a little relieved, but I’m still very anxious,” said Garcia, adding that fear of arrest had even provoked suicidal thoughts. — AFP

International

‘Belly of the beast’: From 13, kids treated as adults online

US senators call hearing over ‘toxic effects’

WASHINGTON: Facebook drew outrage for its now paused plans for an Instagram app for kids aged 12 and under. But 13-year-olds are already welcome on social media with few protections and sometimes tragic effects, experts and parents said. That’s because 13 effectively serves as the age of majority online under a two-decade-old law, and is the minimum set by Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat - all of which are massively popular among children.

Josh Golin at advocacy Fairplay said the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) intended to protect the privacy of kids aged 12 or under, but was crafted well before social media and is now dangerously outdated. “At age 13, essentially the internet treats you as an adult,” Golin told AFP. “I doubt very many people now would say... ‘That seems like a good time to throw them into the belly of the beast.’” US senators have called a hearing about the “toxic effects of Facebook and Instagram” on young people, which will include the questioning of Facebook executive Antigone Davis. Worries over the platforms’ potential to harm youth have spiked after a scathing Wall Street Journal series revealing the social media giant’s own research showed it knew of the damage Instagram can do to teenage girls’ well-being.

In the wake of those reports, Facebook announced Monday it was suspending development of the kids’ version of the photo-sharing app to consult with the parents and advocacy groups who fought against the plan. Yet, Tristan Harris, president and co-founder of the Center for Humane Technology, noted: “That doesn’t stop all the kids who are on there already, whose suicidal ideation, body

dysmorphia, anxiety and depression are still there.”

He was referring to some of the long list of harms attributed to steady social media use among young people. The worries are only amplified for 13-year-olds, who are about a decade from having the fully developed parts of the brain key to making choices and controlling impulses. Facebook and Instagram had argued that kids are getting phones steadily younger, lying about their ages, getting apps and need something designed for them.

However, Alex Stamos, a former chief security officer for the social media giant, said that the problems online go beyond software and apps. “Preteens probably shouldn’t have phones, but parents give them anyway... Young teens shouldn’t be on social media, but parents allow,” Stamos tweeted. Lawmakers have put forth bills - including Senator Ed Markey, who helped craft COPPA - but their glacial speed has failed to even come close to the frantic speed of technology’s changes on human lives.

‘Get kids addicted early’

The Federal Trade Commission is reportedly now considering beefing up online privacy safeguards, including for children, but changes would likely be years away if the watchdog took up the problem. “Raise the age to 16, for everybody involved that would be way smarter,” James Steyer, founder and CEO of advocacy group Common Sense Media, told AFP. He added that the tech companies also need to put real resources - on the scale of hundreds of millions of dollars - into enforcing the age limits already in place. Behind the fear and outrage directed at social media are



ARLINGTON: Social media applications logos from LinkedIn, YouTube, Pinterest, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter are displayed on a smartphone in Arlington, Virginia. — AFP

horrific accounts of online bullying, self-harm and toxic body obsessions exacerbated by posts. Joann Bogard’s 15-year-old son Mason told her he loved her before running off to take a shower at their home in 2019, but a loud thump soon alerted the family something was wrong. — AFP

US ‘lost’ the 20-year war in Afghanistan

WASHINGTON: The top US general conceded in a stark admission on Wednesday that the United States “lost” the 20-year war in Afghanistan. “It is clear, it is obvious to all of us, that the war in Afghanistan did not end on the terms we wanted, with the Taliban in power in Kabul,” General Mark Milley, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the House Armed Services Committee.

“The war was a strategic failure,” Milley told a committee hearing about the US troop pullout from Afghanistan and the chaotic evacuation from the capital Kabul. “It wasn’t lost in the last 20 days or even 20 months,” Milley said. “There’s a cumulative effect to a series of strategic decisions that go way back,” said the general, the top military advisor to President Joe Biden, who ordered an end to the 20-year US troop presence in Afghanistan.

“Whenever you get some phenomenon like a war that is lost-and it has been, in the sense of we accomplished our strategic task of protecting America against Al-Qaeda, but certainly the end state is a whole lot different than what we wanted,” Milley said. “So whenever a phenomenon like that happens, there’s an awful lot of causal factors,” he said. “And we’re going to have to figure that out. A lot of lessons learned here.”

Milley listed a number of factors responsible for the US defeat going back to a missed opportunity to capture or kill Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden at Tora Bora soon after the 2001 US invasion of Afghanistan. He also cited the 2003 decision to invade Iraq, which shifted US troops away from Afghanistan, “not effectively dealing with Pakistan as a (Taliban) sanctuary,” and pulling advisers out of Afghanistan a few years ago. Biden, in April, ordered a complete pullout of US



WASHINGTON: United States Army General Mark A. Milley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff responds to questions during a House Armed Services Committee hearing on the conclusion of military operations in Afghanistan. — AFP

forces from Afghanistan by August 31, following through on an agreement reached with the Taliban by former president Donald Trump.

Milley and General Kenneth McKenzie, commander of US Central Command, told a Senate committee on Tuesday that they had personally recommended that some 2,500 troops remain on the ground in Afghanistan. White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Biden had received “split” advice about what to do in Afghanistan, which the United States invaded following the September 11, 2001 Al-Qaeda attacks on New York and Washington. “Ultimately, it’s up to the commander-in-chief to make a decision,” Psaki said. “He made a decision that it was time to end a 20-year war.” — AFP

CNN blocks access to Facebook page in Australia

SYDNEY: CNN has blocked access to its Facebook page in Australia after a court ruled media companies were liable for defamatory user comments on their stories. Yesterday, Australian users trying to navigate to CNN’s Facebook page received a message that the content was restricted. Australia’s High Court upheld a ruling earlier this month that held media companies responsible for user comments on a story, opening them to potential prosecution under the country’s heavy defamation laws. The US-based news operation said on Wednesday it had asked Facebook to help publishers disable the comments on their platform in Australia but the tech giant “chose not to do so”.

“We are disappointed that Facebook, once again, has failed to ensure its platform is a place for credible journalism and productive dialogue around current events among its users,” a CNN spokesperson said in a statement on the outlet’s website. Facebook announced in March that publishers would be able to turn off comments for specific posts, but has not introduced the page-wide feature sought by CNN.

In a statement, a Facebook spokesperson said: “While it’s not our place to provide legal guidance to CNN, we have provided them with the latest information on tools we make available to help publishers manage comments.” The original case was brought by Dylan Voller, an Indigenous former youth detainee who claimed publishers of the Sydney Morning Herald, The Australian, and Sky News were responsible for defamatory user comments posted under stories about him on their public Facebook pages. — AFP

International

‘Too much water’: Floods wreak misery in S Sudan

Tens of thousands flee wrecked homes

JUBA: Children’s textbooks, utensils, clothing and crops: All lost to rising floodwaters that have forced tens of thousands of people in South Sudan to leave their wrecked homes as overflowing rivers deluge farmland and swallow up livestock. Barely 16 kilometers from the capital Juba, the devastation is apparent, with locals surrounded by water as they try to feed their children and find a safe place to sleep. “The water is too much,” a visibly distressed Sabina Nene said.

“The rain came and drenched us (overnight),” the 30-year-old widow said, as she attempted to dry maize (corn) to prepare porridge for her four children. Like thousands of other farmers stranded by the downpour in the suburb of Kworjik, she now uses flood water for all her family’s basic needs, including for drinking and cooking. Too exhausted to worry about the health risks, other concerns weigh on her mind. “We want tents, this is the first thing. We want mosquito nets because the mosquitoes are too many and disturb us,” she said. “And we want food.”

Kworjik official James Subek Pitia told AFP that at least 9,000 locals were affected by the floods there. That is a fraction of the 426,000 people reeling from the disaster across the world’s youngest country, according to the UN’s emergency response agency. Emergency workers have used canoes and boats to reach cut-off populations, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Hu-

manitarian Affairs said in a briefing note last week, warning that more heavy rains and flooding were expected in the coming months.

Fleeing families

Some families fled Kworjik for Juba, local resident Albert Alsayo Laku told AFP, while others have taken shelter in churches and in a handful of tall under-construction buildings that managed to withstand the deluge. But the majority stayed back or set up makeshift camps along a highway connecting Kworjik with Juba, grabbing what few possessions they could from the ruins of their flimsy thatched huts. “We want the government to come to our rescue and relocate us from this place,” said Laku, who has 11 children.

The disaster, which has also damaged health facilities and schools, came a year after record floods affected some 700,000 people in the East African nation. Around 100,000 of those displaced last year have still not returned home, according to OCHA. In some parts of the country, conflict has complicated efforts to help those in need, with UN teams struggling to get aid to some 25,000 people in Warrap, a northwestern state plagued by ethnic violence.

Funding shortages threaten to exacerbate the misery. OCHA last month warned of limited supplies and a cash shortfall, saying that it had received only 54 percent of the \$1.7 billion required

West Bank clash

In a separate incident in Burqin, in the northern West Bank near Jenin, Zionist troops and border police conducted an overnight operation “to arrest suspects and locate weapons,” a police statement said. “During the operation, an armed terrorist fired at the forces who were operating in the village during a riot,” police said.

“Border police forces responded with gunfire toward the terrorist and neutralized him,” police said, with a spokesman confirming his death to AFP. Palestinian militant group Islamic Jihad said the man killed was Alaa Zayoud, 22, a member of its military wing. No Zionist forces were wounded in the incident in the West Bank, a Palestinian territory under Zionist military occupation since 1967.

On Sunday, five Palestinians were killed after a raid in the West Bank sparked gun battles with Hamas militants, two of them in Burqin, officials said. One of those killed in Burqin on Sunday was an Islamic Jihad member, and the movement said yesterday that Zayoud had “joined” him. Hamas, the militant rulers of the Gaza Strip, issued a statement in support of the “martyrdom” of Zayoud, saying “armed resistance and comprehensive confrontation” with Zionists were the way to expel “settlers” from “our occupied land”.

In a third and unrelated incident in Gaza, Zionist troops “spotted three suspects approaching the security fence,” an army statement said. “One of the suspects was seen carrying a suspicious backpack and digging in the ground. (Zionist) troops at the scene fired towards the suspect,” the army said, adding that it was reviewing the incident and was “aware of reports that a Palestinian was killed.” —AFP



JUBA: Displaced villagers stay with their belongings along a road after being evacuated from flooded water in Juba, South Sudan. —AFP

to pay for programs in South Sudan. The UN’s World Food Program said earlier this month that it has suspended food aid to over 100,000 displaced people in the country, warning of further reductions unless it receives more cash. Four out of five

of South Sudan’s 11 million people live in “absolute poverty”, according to the World Bank in 2018, while more than 60 percent of its population suffers from severe hunger from the combined effects of conflict, drought and floods. —AFP

Zionist fire kills 3 Palestinians

JERUSALEM: Three Palestinians were killed yesterday by Zionist fire, including a woman who tried to stab officers in Jerusalem, a militant shot during West Bank clashes and a Gazan who approached the border fence. The violence comes days after a raid on militants in the occupied West Bank left five Palestinians dead.

At dawn in Jerusalem, the sound of gunshots rang through the Old City, with the body of a woman lying on a stone street that leads to the Al-Aqsa mosque, an AFP journalist said. She was later draped in a survival blanket. Police said she had attempted to stab officers after being stopped for a check because her conduct aroused suspicion. “During the questioning, the terrorist pulled out a knife and tried to stab the officers. They immediately responded with gunfire and neutralized her,” a statement said, noting medics later pronounced her dead.

The woman was identified by Palestinian officials as Israa Khozaimieh, 30, from Qabatiya in the northern West Bank. The attempted attack did not result in any casualties. Zionist security forces are stationed at each entrance to the Al-Aqsa mosque compound, Islam’s third holiest site, known to Jews as the Temple Mount, the holiest site in Judaism. The compound lies in east Jerusalem, which Zionists occupied in 1967 and later annexed in a move never recognized by the international community.

Ethiopia holds delayed elections in three regions

ADDISABABA: Conflict-torn Ethiopia is holding elections yesterday for dozens of federal parliamentary seats, the final round of voting before Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed forms a new government next week. The 47 contests are taking place in the Somali, Harari and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples’ (SNNP) regions, and polling stations were open in all three places yesterday morning, election board spokeswoman Solyana Shimeles said.

Africa’s second most populous country held landmark national polls in June, and Abiy’s Prosperity Party secured a new five-year term with a landslide win, taking 410 out of 436 contested seats. But no voting occurred in the northernmost Tigray region, the site of a brutal conflict that erupted in November, and 83 races elsewhere were delayed due to either logistical or security issues. The results from yesterday’s polls, which will not have significant bearing on the balance of power in parliament, are not expected until October 10 at the earliest. There is no concrete timeline for elections for the remaining 36 seats, which include 18 in the Amhara region and eight in Oromia.

Amhara has been scarred by fighting between government troops and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front

(TPLF) rebel group, while Oromia is grappling with an insurgency by the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA). Voters will also decide on 108 regional council seats yesterday. And in southwestern Ethiopia, nearly 900,000 eligible voters will participate in a referendum on whether to break away from SNNP and form their own region, a move intended to funnel more federal cash to an area hobbled by a long history of underinvestment.

Opposition boycott

Abiy came to power in 2018 on the back of several years of anti-government protests and promised to break from Ethiopia’s authoritarian past, in part by holding the most democratic elections the country had ever seen. The ruling coalition that preceded Abiy claimed staggering majorities in the two previous elections, which observers said fell far short of international standards for fairness. A more open vote in 2005 saw big gains for the opposition but led to a lethal crackdown on protests over contested results.

This year some opposition parties, notably in Abiy’s native Oromia region, opted to boycott the polls, complaining that their candidates had been arrested and their offices vandalized. More than 20 percent of constituencies nationwide in June were contested only by the Prosperity Party, and turnout in many of them was 100 percent, according to election board data. The largest opposition party in Somali region, the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), announced earlier this month it would not participate in yesterday’s polls, citing suspected irregularities in the registration process. —AFP

International

North Korea's Kim calls US offer of talks a 'petty trick'

Biden administration accused of continuing a hostile policy

SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un condemned a US offer of dialogue as a "petty trick", state media reported yesterday, and accused the Joe Biden administration of continuing a hostile policy against his nuclear-armed country. Talks between Pyongyang and Washington have been effectively at a standstill since the collapse of a 2019 Hanoi summit between Kim and then-president Donald Trump over sanctions relief and what North Korea would be willing to give up in return.

Under Biden, the United States has repeatedly offered to meet North Korean representatives anywhere, at any time, without preconditions, while saying it will seek denuclearisation. But Kim condemned the declarations as "no more than a petty trick for deceiving the international community and hiding its hostile acts", the official KCNA news agency reported. The new administration was pursuing "military threats" and a "hostile policy" unchanged from the past, "but employs more cunning ways and methods in doing so", he said in a lengthy address to the Supreme People's Assembly (SPA), North Korea's rubber-stamp parliament.

Pyongyang has been largely biding its time in recent months as it assessed the Biden government and focused on domestic issues. It has been behind a rigid self-imposed blockade since early last year to protect itself from the coronavirus pandemic, with the economy suffering as a result and trade with key partner China dwindling to a trickle. But Kim's speech was the latest in a series of actions with international ramifications this month.

This week, North Korea tested what it said was a hypersonic gliding missile, and earlier this month announced it had successfully fired a long-range cruise missile, after holding a scaled-down military parade. Pyongyang's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs are banned under UN Security Council resolutions, and it is subject to multiple international sanctions as a result. The United States condemned this week's launch, but in response to

Kim Yo Jong: North Korea leader's newly promoted sister

SEOUL: Sister, adviser, and now top official: The latest promotion of Kim Yo Jong, sibling to North Korea's leader, solidifies her position in Pyongyang's circles of power, analysts say. She has long been among Kim Jong Un's closest lieutenants and one of the most influential women in the isolated regime, and yesterday it was made official when state media announced she had been named to the State Affairs Commission (SAC), the country's top government body.

It is a major step up from her relatively junior position as a vice department director in the ruling party, and is likely to heighten speculation that she could be a long-shot candidate to succeed her brother - whose health is a regular topic of rumor - in the event of his demise. Such a transition would give the socially conservative North its first female leader, but analysts caution it would defy convention. "Kim Jong Un has raised Kim Yo Jong's status," said Shin Beom-chul, a researcher at the Korea Research Insti-

Kim's comments said it "harbors no hostile intent toward the DPRK" - the acronym for the North's official name.

"We are prepared to meet with the DPRK without preconditions," a State Department spokesperson said in a statement, reiterating the offer. "We hope the DPRK will respond positively to our outreach." The UN Security Council will hold an emergency meeting on North Korea, at the request of the United States, France and the United Kingdom, diplomatic sources told AFP Wednesday. North Korea has not shown any willingness to give up its arsenal, which it says it needs to defend itself against a US invasion. Kim's speech indicated Pyongyang would keep improving its capabilities unless Washington changed course, said Hong Min, a senior researcher at the Korea Institute for National Unification in Seoul. "It has come to a judgment that it has no choice but to get ready for a long-haul approach with the US, meaning it will continue developing strategic weapons while keeping a stable peace mode with the South."

'Double-dealing attitude'

Washington and Seoul are security allies, and the United States stations around 28,500 troops in the South to protect it from its neighbor. Last month, the two held joint military drills that always infuriate Pyongyang. The North has repeatedly excoriated the South and its President Moon Jae-in since the collapse of the Hanoi summit, and blown up a liaison office on its side of the border that Seoul had built.

At the UN General Assembly this month, Moon reiterated his call for a formal declaration of the end of the Korean War, where hostilities ceased in 1953 with a ceasefire rather than a peace treaty. But Kim said the South was "in servitude to the US", and that an end-of-war declaration could only come with "mutual respect" and an end to the "unfair and double-dealing attitude and hostile viewpoint".

tute for National Strategy.

Born in 1988, according to Seoul's Ministry of Unification, Yo Jong is one of three children born to Kim's predecessor Kim Jong Il and his third known partner, former dancer Ko Yong Hui. She was educated in Switzerland alongside her brother and rose rapidly up the ranks once he inherited power after their father's death in 2011.

Her existence was barely known to the wider world until his funeral, when she was seen on state television standing right behind Kim Jong Un, looking tearful and ashen-faced. In contrast an inscrutable smile played on her lips when she rode down an escalator at Incheon airport as her brother's envoy to the 2018 Winter Olympics, becoming the first member of the North's ruling dynasty to set foot in the South since the Korean War. Every detail of her visit was closely watched, from the clothes she wore to the bag she was carrying and even her handwriting.

In keeping with the secrecy shrouding North Korea's leaders, it is not known whether she is married. More recently she has often been seen at her brother's side, including at his summits with the South's leader Moon Jae-in and then US president Donald Trump: On their 60-hour train journey to Hanoi for a meeting which then collapsed, she was seen bringing Kim an ashtray when he stepped off for a cigarette break. —AFP



PANMUNJOM: In this file picture, North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un (left) signs the guest book next to his sister Kim Yo Jong during the Inter-Korean summit at the Peace House building on the southern side of the truce village of Panmunjom. —AFP

Nonetheless, he expressed a willingness to restore North-South communication lines in early October. Seoul is also spending billions on military development as both Koreas build up their weapons capabilities in what could become an arms race on the peninsula, with ramifications for neighboring Japan, China and the wider region. This month, South Korea successfully test-fired a submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) for the first time, making it one of a handful of nations with the advanced technology. This week, it held a ceremony to launch its third submarine capable of carrying SLBMs. —AFP

N Korea's 'hypersonic' missile: What we know

SEOUL: North Korea this week tested what state media called a hypersonic gliding missile, sophisticated weaponry that would be the nuclear-armed nation's latest technological advance and could factor into the strategic balance. Here are some questions and answers on the technology and North Korea's capabilities:

What is a hypersonic missile?

Hypersonics are defined as being able to travel at velocities of at least five times the speed of sound — Mach 5, or more than 6,100 kilometers per hour. As well as their sheer speed, they can manoeuvre in mid-flight, making them much harder to track and intercept than traditional projectiles. By cutting flight times, they also reduce the opportunity to respond. Depending on the design, they can be capable of carrying nuclear warheads or conventional ones, and have the potential to alter the strategic balance.

Who has them?

Russia is generally seen as the world leader in the technology so far, developing a range of new hypersonic weapons that President Vladimir Putin has dubbed "invincible". In July it successfully tested the

Zircon, a ship-launched hypersonic missile travelling at seven times the speed of sound. It already has Avangard hypersonic glide vehicles and the air-launched Kinzhal (Dagger) missiles in its arsenal. Russian officials say the Avangard has reached a staggering 33,000 kilometers per hour during tests. Others are looking to catch up: Washington is spending billions on several research programs and said this week it had successfully tested an air-launched hypersonic missile built by Raytheon that reached a speed "greater than Mach 5". China has also tested hypersonic glide vehicles, according to the US Congressional Research Service, which says both Russian and Chinese hypersonic systems are designed to be nuclear-armed.

What does N Korea have?

Details on the North Korean missile - the Hwasong-8 - are limited. Pyongyang's official KCNA news agency said the test had "confirmed the navigational control and stability of the missile", the "guiding manoeuvrability and the gliding flight characteristics of the detached hypersonic gliding warhead", and the engine. It did not say what speed it had reached, but added that it had an "ampoule" fuel system - a propellant canister that could eliminate the need for launch-site fuelling. Ordinary liquid-fuelled missiles cannot be transported with their propellant on board as its volatility makes it too dangerous to do so. —AFP

International

Small boats and big tensions between France and Britain

15,400 attempt to cross the Channel in the first 8 months

ESCALLES: “The moment they are in the boats at sea, they’ve won,” says a French policeman as he looks out across a windswept departure point for migrants heading across the Channel to Britain. Day and night, military police officers like Maxence, a bearded deputy commander in the Gendarmerie, head out to the dunes and sandy beaches near the northern port of Calais in search of boats. With the aid of thermal-imaging binoculars, he and a colleague surprised a group of around 80 people a few nights ago as they took delivery of two semi-rigid inflatable dinghies and outboard engines in a forested sea-side spot.

“We were about 200 meters from them when we heard doors slam, and we thought it was the logistics arriving,” he said. “We came out with all our lights and alarms blaring, as well as tear gas just in case we were attacked.” At first sight of the police flashlights, the migrants scattered in all directions and the people-smugglers sped off in their vehicle, having lost their kit but not their freedom. Maxence, who is not authorized to give his full name, says the daily game of cat-and-mouse is wearing-night shifts often mean trudging for 10-12 kilometers in soft sand in the dark.

But despite his efforts, across in Britain, frustration is growing that French security forces are not doing more. A total of 15,400 people at-

tempted to cross the Channel in the first eight months of this year, a rise of 50 percent from the figure for the whole of 2020, according to French coast guard statistics. At the end of August, more people crossed in a single day (828) than in the whole of 2018 (600) when migrant sea crossings took off.

Blackmail?

In early September, a meeting in London to discuss the issue between British Home Secretary Priti Patel and her French counterpart Gerald Darmanin saw ties between London and Paris sour further, after years of tension over Brexit. Following an agreement in July for Britain to finance border security in France to the tune of 62.7 million euros (\$73.8 million), Patel reportedly wanted to tie the funds to a reduction in the number of crossings.

The hardliner, who has explored the idea of building floating barriers in the Channel, was also reported to have sanctioned the use of “pushback” tactics to turn back the small boats towards French waters. A day after the meeting, Darmanin took to Twitter to say that France would “not accept any practice that breaks maritime law, nor any financial blackmail”. French security forces are adamant that they cannot intercept boats because attempting to do so



GRAVELINES: Migrants, including families, embark on the beach of Gravelines, as a ferry of the Danish shipping company DFDS sails in the Channel (Manche), near Dunkirk, northern France. — AFP

could cause them to capsize.

Despite the stormy diplomatic relations, signs of cooperation between the two neighbors were evident on a recent patrol along the coast near Calais, with the cliffs of Britain clearly visible,

just over 30 kilometers away. Even before the latest agreement in July, successive British governments have spent hundreds of millions of euros over the past decade on border security around Calais. — AFP

Russia detains head of cybercrime group on treason charges

MOSCOW: Russia on Wednesday detained the head of one of the country's leading cybersecurity firms on charges of treason, in a move that targets a company collaborating with the West on stemming cyberattacks. The arrest comes after US President Joe Biden earlier this year raised concerns with Russian President Vladimir Putin that Moscow is allowing cybercrime directed at Western countries to flourish in the country.

Founded in 2003, the Group-IB group specializes in the detection and prevention of cyberattacks and works with Interpol and several other global institutions. Moscow's Lefortovsky district court ordered the group's 35-year-old co-founder and CEO, Ilya Sachkov, to be held in pre-trial custody for two months on treason charges, the court's press service said. It did not provide details of the charges. Treason cases in Russia are typically classified, and the charges carry sentences of 12 to 20 years behind bars.

Group-IB said Wednesday that its Moscow headquarters had been searched the previous morning. “Top management and legal services are working to clarify the situation,” the group said in a statement. In a separate statement it said its “employees are confident in their manager's innocence and honest business reputation”. A source in Russia's security services told the state-run TASS news agency that Sachkov denies collaborating with “intelligence agencies of foreign states”. — AFP

Erdogan, Putin discuss warplanes, submarines

ANKARA: Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan discussed deepening defense industry cooperation with Russia during talks with his counterpart Vladimir Putin this week, the Turkish leader was quoted as saying yesterday. Erdogan and Putin held their first face-to-face talks in 18 months in the Black Sea resort of Sochi on Wednesday, with the Syrian conflict high on their agenda. “We had the opportunity to discuss what steps we could take on plane motors, warplanes,” the Turkish leader told journalists on his return to Turkey. “Another area where we can take several steps together is on building boats. We will God willing take joint steps even on submarines,” he added, NTV broadcaster reported.

The two men even spoke about Turkey-Russia cooperation in space, Erdogan said. His comments will raise eyebrows in the West and especially in the United States, after Washington slapped sanctions on Turkey last year over its multi-billion-dollar purchase of the Russian-made S-400 air defense system. The US also expelled Turkey from the F-35 program under which Western allies produce the next-generation fighter jet's parts and secure its early purchasing rights.

Ankara was expecting as many as 100 of the stealth fighter jets, and multiple Turkish suppliers were involved in the construction. Erdogan reaffirmed Turkey's commitment to the S-400, vowing Ankara “would not take a step back” from the purchase, but called on the US to either give the

planes Turkey ordered or return its \$1.4 billion payment. Relations between Turkey and the US are strained, and Erdogan admitted last week that his personal ties with US President Joe Biden had “not gotten off to a good start”. But Biden and Erdogan are expected to meet at a G20 summit in Rome next month.

Syria tensions

Erdogan also said he proposed that Turkey and Russia could work together on building two more nuclear power plants, on which the Russian side agreed to cooperate. Turkey's first nuclear power plant is under construction by Russia's Rosatom state nuclear energy firm in the country's south coast and it is expected to be online for Turkey's centenary as a post-Ottoman republic in 2023.

Despite Erdogan's warm words, the relationship between Turkey and Russia is complex, with the two countries on opposing sides in conflicts such as Libya and Syria. Erdogan offered only vague comments on the two men's talks about northwestern Syria where regime troops and Moscow have increased airstrikes in recent weeks. Last year Turkey and Russia agreed a ceasefire deal for Idlib, the last major jihadist and rebel stronghold in northwest Syria. “We focused on the need to take steps together on the issue,” Erdogan said, and finding a “permanent, final and sustainable solution” for Idlib.

Russia stressed the need to “implement” the agreement, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters Thursday, “in terms of ousting terrorist elements from Idlib”. But Peskov would not elaborate on whether that meant Russian forces would continue airstrikes and if Turkish forces had to withdraw. A UK-based war monitor said at least 11 fighters from a pro-Turkish rebel group were killed Sunday in Russian air raids outside the northern Syrian town of Afrin. — AFP

Friday Times

LIFESTYLE

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No time to lose: 007 fans flock to UK cinemas to see latest film

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English actor Daniel Craig walks on the red carpet after arriving to attend the World Premiere of the James Bond 007 film *No Time to Die* at the Royal Albert Hall in west London. — AFP



Lifestyle | Features

Rock and roar: Japan region's riff warns of bear attacks



Singer Yuuzen Taguchi, 69, said such advice served him well on the one occasion he encountered a bear near a field. "It's very frightening when one just appears before you," he told AFP. "You want to run away, but my grandparents told me years ago that if you ever encounter a bear, don't turn around and just back away slowly," he added. "I was taught that rural knowledge that comes from co-existing with bears when I was a kid." There were more than 3,300 bear sightings in Iwate prefecture last year, up from just 700 in 2017.

Authorities hope the song, which is playing at local roadside shopping centers until October 31, will teach people how to stay safe. Songwriter Kaoru Toudou, 61, said he originally wrote it as a blues number. But Taguchi, who has played in bands for the past 50 years, gave it an uptempo rock twist when he added his howling vocals. "It's said that bears are timid creatures, so I think if one heard the song playing outside, it would run away," Toudou said. "That's the power of rock and roll." — AFP

Can rock and roll keep people safe from bear attacks? One Japanese region is hoping so, and has commissioned a cautionary anthem warning residents about the threat of its ursine inhabitants. Bears are common across Japan and regularly spark frantic hunts when they venture into towns, where they have attacked and even killed residents.

A spike in the number of bear sightings in rural northern Japan has been met with a novel response: the Iwate prefecture government has commissioned a rock song that will be belted out across the region. "So you think bear cubs are cute?" the song lyrics begin, as screaming guitars and pounding drums play in the background. "Discard that naive way of thinking! Nearby that cub is a parent bear, and it'll suddenly attack you! Roar, roar, roar, roar, roar, roar-it'll suddenly attack you!" The track was written and performed by a pair of local sexagenarian rockers and offers sobering advice such as "never turn your back and run away", and "trying to play dead doesn't work".

Danish artist loaned \$84,000 by museum keeps cash, says it's art

A Danish museum loaned an artist 534,000 kroner (\$84,000) in cash to recreate old artworks of his using the banknotes, but he ended up pocketing the money and sending blank canvasses with a new title: "Take the Money and Run". Jens Haaning, a Danish artist, was commissioned by the Kunsten Museum in the western city of Aalborg to reproduce two works using the cash-Danish kroner and euros-to represent the annual salary in Denmark and Austria. But the museum's director Lasse Andersson told AFP that "two days before the opening of the exhibition we got an email from Jens telling us he won't be showing the works we agreed on".

The artist was true to his word, sending two blank canvasses. Andersson said he laughed out loud and decided to show the works anyway in the museum's modern art exhibition that opened on September 24. He said they have a "humoristic approach" and were "a reflection on how we value work". Haaning, 56, defended keeping the money, saying "the artwork is essentially about the working conditions of artists". "It is a statement saying that we also have the responsibility of questioning the structures that we are part of. And if these structures are completely unreasonable, we must break with them," he said in a press release. While the museum's



A woman stands in front of an empty frame hung up at the Kunsten Museum in Aalborg, Denmark. — AFP

director has seen the funny side so far, he indicated that would only last until the end of the exhibition. "If the money is not returned on January 16 as agreed, we will take the necessary steps to ensure that Jens Haaning complies with his contract," Andersson said. For his original commission, Haaning received 10,000 kroner (\$1,500), plus an exhibition bonus. — AFP



A woman stands at the Malecon's coast in Havana. — AFP photos



Young people play at Havana's Prado.

Havana reopens its beaches - but masks are required

Beaches and pools in the Cuban capital Havana, as well as the famed Malecon seafront promenade, were reopened on Wednesday, officials announced, after being shut for nine months due to the coronavirus pandemic. A formal notice in state media, citing Havana governor Reynaldo Garcia Zapata, said beaches and pools would be open at half-capacity for now, and that all virus prevention measures needed to be respected. "In pools and in beach areas, wearing a mask is manda-

tory, except when swimming," the announcement said. Exercise in public places is also once again allowed.

The Malecon is a popular meeting spot for capital residents, who go there to jog, fish or just sit and chat with friends—all banned since January due to the pandemic. Last week, restaurants, bars and other public places reopened in eight of Cuba's 15 provinces with limited capacity—a relief for Cubans after nine months of closures. Officials said Cuba's bor-

ders will be reopened to international tourists from November 15, and schools will gradually open their doors in October and November.

According to state media, the reopening was made possible "given the sustained decrease in the number of confirmed cases over the last eight months and the progress in the vaccination campaign." That is especially true in Havana, where more than 70 percent of the population is now vaccinated, according to official data.

Cuba has so far tallied more than 870,000 cases of COVID-19 and nearly 7,400 deaths. The daily case total has steadily decreased. By using three locally-developed vaccines, none of which are approved by the World Health Organization, the Caribbean island country now has inoculated more than 45 percent of its population of 11.2 million. The nation hopes to pass the 90 percent threshold by November.

Britney Spears' father removed as her guardian

Britney Spears' father was removed from his controversial role as his daughter's guardian on Wednesday by a Los Angeles judge, ending a long and bitter legal battle by the pop princess. Jamie Spears was suspended with immediate effect and replaced with a temporary conservator "in the best interests" of the singer, said Judge Brenda Penny, calling the present arrangement "untenable." "Mr Spears is ordered to turn over all the conservatorship assets," said Penny. Spears' father has controlled her life for the past 13 years, under a legal arrangement the 39-year-old US singer has slammed as "abusive."

Wednesday's move came after a years-long campaign that played out in public, and after the emergence in the last week of two new powerful documentaries featuring allegations that Jamie Spears had bugged his daughter's phone calls. Spears' lawyer Mathew Rosengart described her father as a "cruel, toxic and abusive man." "Britney deserves to wake up tomorrow without her father as her conservator," Rosengart said. "It is what my client wants, it is what my client needs, it is what my client deserves." Dozens of supporters gathered outside the courtroom cheered and wept as news of the ruling emerged. Spears' fiancé Sam Asghari took to Instagram to post "FREE BRITNEY! CONGRATULATIONS!!!!!!!" along with a photo of what appeared to be him handing the singer a rose. In their motion filed this week, Spears' lawyers said: "Every day that goes by with him as conservator-every day and every hour-is one in which he causes his daughter anguish and pain."



Fans of Britney Spears protest in front of the Stanley Mosk Courthouse during Britney's hearing to end her father's controversial guardianship, in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

'Kafka-esque nightmare'

Those claims were seemingly bolstered by a New York Times documentary released Friday that alleged Jamie Spears had surveillance devices secretly installed in his daughter's bedroom to record her conversations. "It really reminded me of somebody that was in prison," a former security firm employee told the "Controlling Britney Spears" filmmakers. The pop star's lawyers said the Times' allegations about her father showed "horrifying and unconscionable invasions of his adult daughter's privacy."

Jamie Spears denies any illegal surveillance took place. Another new documentary-Netflix's "Britney vs Spears," released on Tuesday-claims the singer twice tried to hire her own lawyer in the early years of the conservatorship, but was denied. In July, Spears was finally successful in appointing her own lawyer-Rosengart-and last month, her father filed a petition for the conservatorship to be ended. The judge appointed accountant John Zabel as a temporary conservator of Spears' estate, in an arrangement she said can last until the end of the year. — AFP



People arrive to attend the World Premiere of the James Bond 007 film "No Time to Die" at the Royal Albert Hall in west London. — AFP

No time to lose: 007 fans flock to UK cinemas to see latest film

James Bond fans in Britain flocked to cinemas yesterday as the new 007 film finally hit big screens, 18 months later than planned but to a host of positive reviews. Cinema chains have been selling tickets for weeks to "No Time To Die", the latest superspy blockbuster which premiered in London Tuesday night and has since earned widespread critical acclaim. It is set to give chains around the UK their biggest opening since 2019, with Vue cinemas selling more than 270,000 tickets and Odeon over 175,000 in advance. The film, originally set for release early last year but repeatedly postponed due to the pandemic, is Daniel Craig's fifth and final outing in the role of the suave secret agent.

"It's better than good. It's magnificent," The Times newspaper's film critic Kevin Maher gushed, giving it a maximum five stars. "Craig is a towering charismatic presence from opening

frame to closing shot, and he bows out in terrific, soulful, style." Peter Bradshaw, of The Guardian, also lavished five stars on the film, arguing its duration of nearly three hours-unusually long for the franchise-is justified. "Craig's final film as the diva of British intelligence is an epic barnstormer," he wrote. "You can see the pleasure everyone takes in this gigantic piece of ridiculously watchable entertainment which feels like half its actual running time." However, the praise was not universal and others disagreed about its length of two hours and 43 minutes. John Nugent, writing in Empire magazine, criticized the middle of the movie for getting "bogged down by plotting" and that it "doesn't justify that heaving runtime".

'Enduring popularity'

Impatient movie-goers, who have been waiting since 2015's "Spectre" for the 25th installment in the 007 franchise, were able to watch the new film from as early as 8:00 am (0700 GMT) yesterday. Cineworld, which closed the doors to its 127 UK cinemas when the film was last year delayed again until 2021, said it had sold out a number of upcoming screenings. Meanwhile Odeon noted around 40 percent of tickets were going to patrons who are returning to the cinema for the first time since they re-opened following pandemic closures. More than a third of its tickets sold to the film have been to customers aged over 46, it added.

"The film has seen the strongest level of demand from an older audience for over 18 months, showing the enduring popularity of everyone's favorite spy," an Odeon statement said. "No Time To Die" is part of a backlog of major productions held back by distributors during the pandemic, hitting cinemas hard, and forcing some new films to be streamed. It is hoped the movie will kickstart new releases alongside a sustained return of audiences. At Tuesday's star-studded premiere at London's historic Royal Albert Hall, Craig said he was "relieved" the film had finally arrived on the big-screen. "We make Bond movies for the cinema," he told Sky News from the red carpet. — AFP



English actor Daniel Craig walks on the red carpet after arriving to attend the World Premiere of the James Bond 007 film 'No Time to Die' at the Royal Albert Hall in west London.



Paris
Fashion Week



Paris Fashion Week



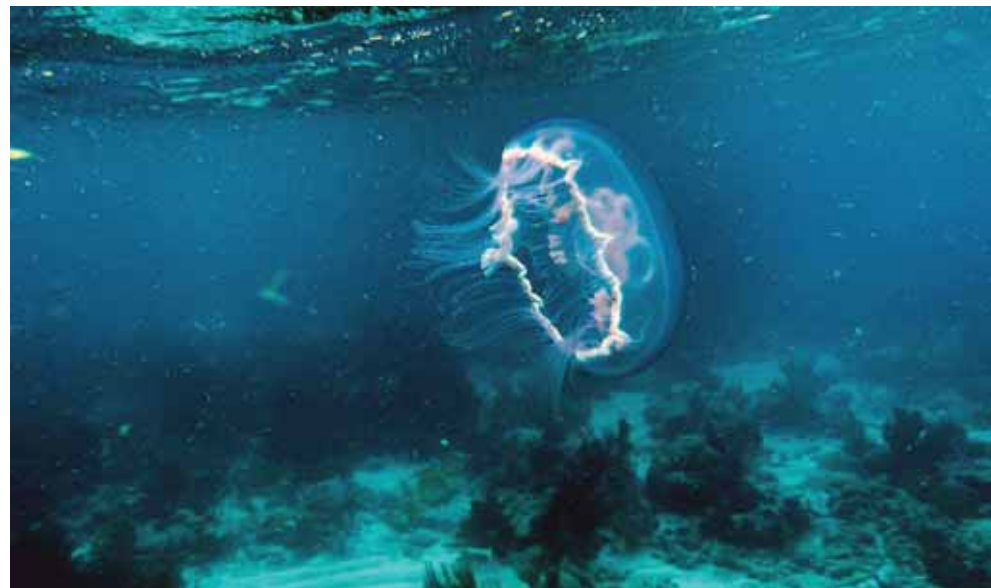
Models present creations for Rochas Womenswear Spring-Summer 2022 collection during the Paris Fashion Week. —AFP photos



Lifestyle | Feature



Dead coral sit on the ocean bed in the Straits of Florida near Key Largo, Florida. — AFP photos



A jellyfish swims over dead coral on the ocean bed in Straits of Florida near Key Largo, Florida.

Scientists race to save Florida coral reef from mysterious disease

At a laboratory in central Florida, biologist Aaron Gavin uses tiny pipettes to carefully feed shrimp to more than 700 corals living in huge saltwater tanks, with sunlight-mimicking lamps glowing above them. The work of the scientists here could be the last chance to save the species that make up the only coral reef in the United States' continental waters. Gavin and his team have diligently recreated the coral reef habitat found in the waters off the southern tip of the state, complete with artificial currents and local fish.

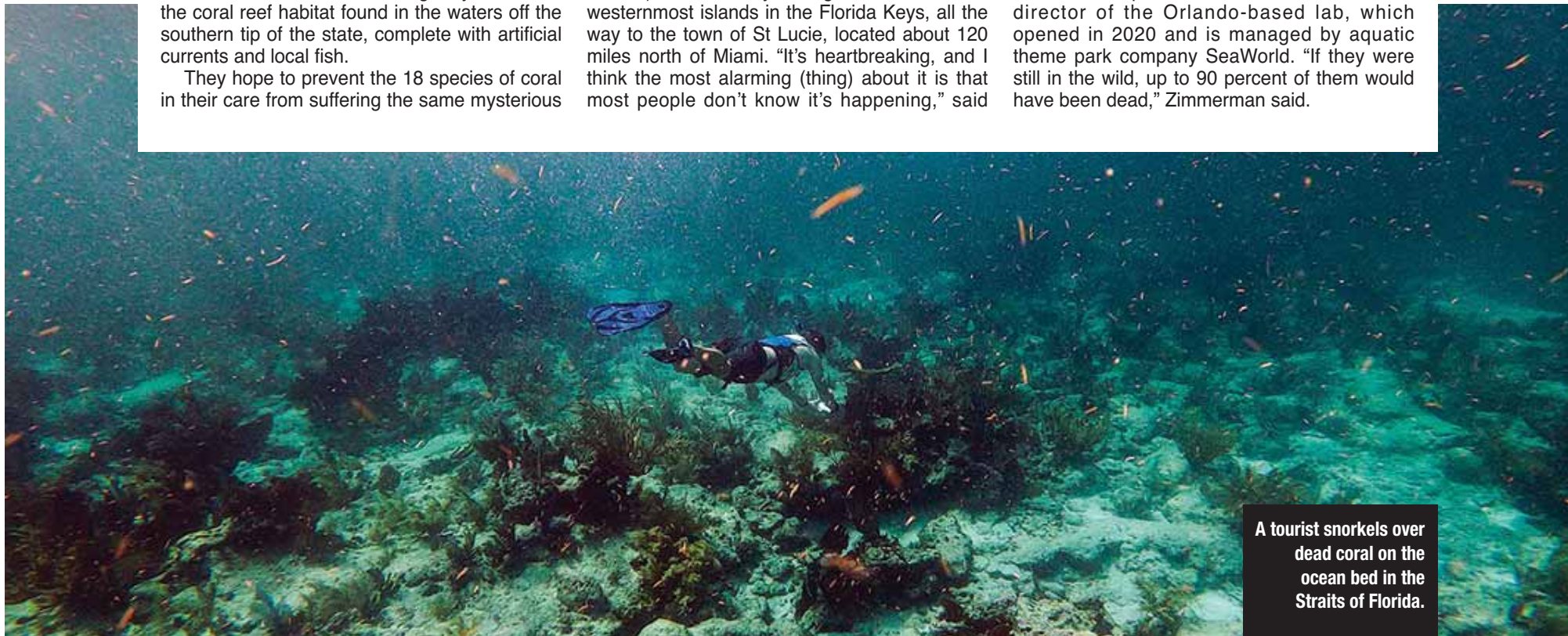
They hope to prevent the 18 species of coral in their care from suffering the same mysterious

ailment, called SCTLD (stony coral tissue loss disease), that is afflicting their wild cousins. Among the sprawling mangroves and darting schools of fish off the Florida Keys, the damaged corals—normally dark—now appear as large white patches on the floor of the Atlantic Ocean. The situation is the same all along the Florida Reef Tract, which stretches 360 miles (580 kilometers) from the Dry Tortugas, which are the westernmost islands in the Florida Keys, all the way to the town of St Lucie, located about 120 miles north of Miami. "It's heartbreaking, and I think the most alarming (thing) about it is that most people don't know it's happening," said

Michelle Ashton, the communications director of the Fish and Wildlife Foundation of Florida.

Rescue

What Gavin and his colleagues discover at the Florida Coral Rescue Center could change the future of the state's marine ecosystems. "We are holding the corals safely and healthy in our care," explained Justin Zimmerman, the director of the Orlando-based lab, which opened in 2020 and is managed by aquatic theme park company SeaWorld. "If they were still in the wild, up to 90 percent of them would have been dead," Zimmerman said.



A tourist snorkels over dead coral on the ocean bed in the Straits of Florida.

Lifestyle | Feature

Friday, October 1, 2021



A staff member works on restoring Florida's coral reef.

The group, faced with the threat of more than 20 of the 45 species of hard corals in the area going extinct, devised the unprecedented plan to extract healthy corals from

the region's waters and care for them in these artificially equipped aquariums in the hope they can be returned to their wild habitats in the future. "You are looking at the



Fish swim near dead coral in the Straits of Florida.

future of Florida Reef Tract in this room," Aston said of the corals in the Orlando aquariums. "And their grandchildren will be what goes back out to the water."

Return to the sea

The first part of the rescue plan has allowed wildlife authorities to save nearly 2,000 colonies of corals, now stored at more than 20 institutions in 14 different states. The second part of the plan requires researchers to successfully return the corals to the ocean—though such an operation would likely take place a long time from now, as corals reproduce very slowly.

The scientists are studying the genetics of the rescued animals in an effort to cultivate new specimens that could be more resistant to disease, as well as other threats such as warming water temperatures and pollution. The success or failure of these endeavors could have huge consequences for the region. Stony corals, made up of limestone skeletons, are what create coral

reefs, which in turn provide a home for a quarter of marine life. Plus, the structures are natural barriers between the open ocean and land, reducing the strength of waves that hit the coastline, especially during hurricanes and other storms.

And a hit to coral health could mean a hit to Florida tourism revenue, as one study estimated that visitors drawn to the state for fishing and diving along the reef generate \$8.5 billion. Key Largo resident Steve Campbell, 59, is worried about what comes next. He is sitting next to the small tourist boat he captains, currently anchored in the port. He said the coral disease has already had an impact on his business. "I've been in the Florida Keys now for 20 years, and I'm out on the water every day," he said. "Obviously we make our living out here, so we take people out to the reef for the enjoyment of seeing the reef." "So for us it's extremely important." — AFP



A tourist snorkels near the Christ of the Abyss statue surrounded by dead coral on the ocean bed.



A staff member works on restoring Florida's coral reef at Florida Coral Rescue Center.



A staff member works on restoring Florida's coral reef at Florida Coral Rescue Center in Orlando.



A shark swims near an elderly couple as they relax in the Straits of Florida near Islamorada, Florida.



Hot to trot: *Shetland ponies* prove popular during pandemic

For hundreds of years, the inhabitants of the northernmost part of Scotland and the United Kingdom have bred small horses - the Shetland pony. The animals, named after the unforgiving northern archipelago in the North Sea, have long drawn attention for their distinctive shape, size and rough hair. But during the coronavirus pandemic they saw their value soar to new highs, prompting hopes of another bumper year as

the islands' annual sale approaches.

"People had more money because they stayed at home and couldn't go on holiday, and a pony is a very nice way to spend your time," Sheena Anderson, chair of the Pony Breeders of Shetland Association, told AFP. While demand for Shetland ponies has fluctuated over the last 12 months, prices in 2020 hit records of more than £3,000 (\$4,100, 3,500 euros) for one of the tiny horses. In



tougher times, they have sold for as little as a few hundred pounds each-and sometimes even less.

Breeders are now champing at the bit for the upcoming October 1 auction, which has been held online for the last few years. Because of their size, Shetland ponies are cheaper and easier to maintain than larger horses, said Anderson. And, as well as being relatively strong for their stature, "they're cute", she added. This year the breeder is putting two of the ponies up for sale. She said as well as having a strong legs and a good "tail, top line and movement", the animals also have to have a certain look. "It's like a beauty contest," Anderson explained, stroking Dester, a miniature beige specimen, barely one meter (3.3 feet) tall.

International interest

The breeders are counting on high demand this year driven by the online sale, which has widened access to buyers from all over the world. "We've had interest already from people in Germany and Norway," said Anderson, but buyers have also bid for the ponies from Russia, Canada and the UAE. Prices remain very low compared to their larger cousins and pony breeders-who number about 100 on Shetland-often struggle to make a living. "I do it as a hobby. I don't make any money on it," Anderson, a nurse by profession, said, adding that in other countries, like the Netherlands, breeding is better regulated, organized and more lucrative.

For the head of the breeders' association, the peaceful Shetland ponies are an integral



Lifestyle | Feature



Sheena Anderson, chair of the Pony Breeders of Shetland Association (right) speaks to AFP at Papil, Burra near Lerwick.



part of the remote islands' culture and identity. The horses are everywhere—grazing on windswept hills, their manes tossed in the strong ocean breeze, or walking on white sandy beaches buffeted by turquoise waters. Elaine Tait, whose parents breed Shetland ponies, fell in love with the animals from the age of five, when she repeatedly told them: "I want a pony." Her parents relented, then five years later at the age of 10, she got her second. Today, alongside the family business, she has founded her own riding school for children and a separate business for tourists: the Shetland Pony Experience.

110 miles (180 kilometers) north of mainland Scotland, and just under halfway to Norway. When the harsh winter sets in, grass is scarce and only the smallest creatures were able to survive. As a result, the ponies have super strength for horses of their size and a century ago put it to use in agriculture or in coal mining.

Today, they are bought to show in competitions, for horse racing, breeding, to teach children how to ride, as pets or even therapy animals. Libby Morrison, a therapist, explained on her website she has found "horse-human interaction to have a wide range of benefits for those affected by anxiety, depression, PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), and autism". — AFP

Therapy animals

The Shetland ponies' tiny stature is thought to have been part of their adaptation to the islands' harsh climate. The windswept archipelago, home to some 23,000 people,



Shetland ponies graze on a field at the Shetland Pony Experience at Papil, Burra near Lerwick. — AFP photos

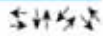
Kids Page

Word Search



Word Search
Easter

D P E E P S S H E S M W K K
 F B F D F X P Z G U C X T T
 X A C E D N R C G N S V U H
 U S D Y Z Y I H H D L D L N
 Z K D A B C N I U A E E I F
 B E U W W O G C N Y A C P Q
 L T C Q K B N K T B S O S F
 E I K K H U A N P N T R G E
 S N L D P N D O E W E A D H
 S E I M W N H S D T R T Y X
 I S N L L Y S W T D J E E C
 N T G K O O R T Z S O C L C
 G V S J R I D A F F O D I L
 S S D C M G R A S S Y N O Y



- | | | | |
|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|
| SPRING | BLESSINGS | NEST | CROSS |
| HOP | PEEPS | BONNET | DYE |
| DUCKLINGS | JOY | EGG HUNT | DECORATE |
| BUNNY | DAFFODIL | GRASS | CHICK |
| SUNDAY | EASTER | TULIPS | BASKET |

Color It



Kids Mazes



Find the objects



Find 15 objects in the picture



Word Scramble

Insects Word Scramble

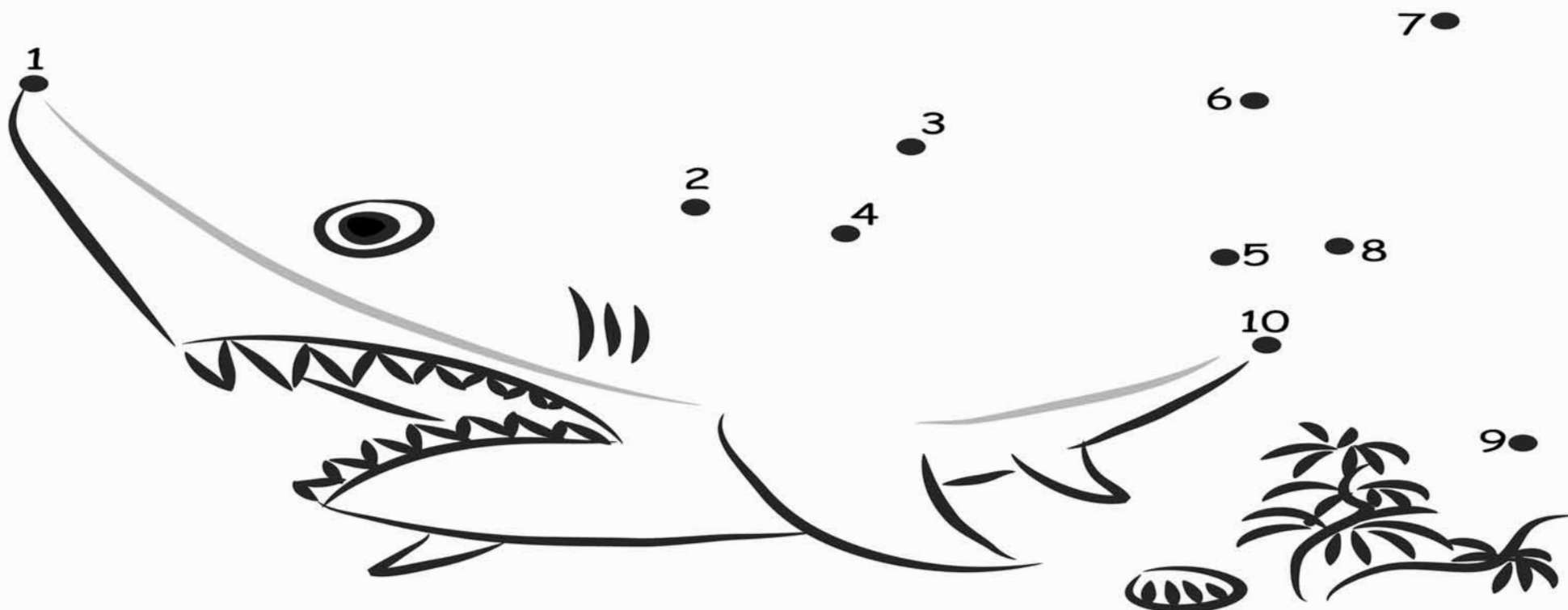
All of the scrambled words below are names of insects you have probably heard about. Can you put the letters in the right order to spell the 19 different insect names correctly?

OUTMQISO	
BTLTEUYFR	
MTHO	
LEEBET	
CCIDAA	
ELYFSRHO	
PAWS	
ITKSC GBU	
AYGPRNI NMATSI	
EBE	
ALFE	
LNFOAYGRD	
AGDBLYU	
PSESHRAQPOR	
EIRETTM	
COOCHRKAC	
NAT	
RIEKCTC	
YLF	



Join the dots

- Join the dots from 1 to 10.



Business

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2021

32 China factory activity shrinks for first time since February 2020



33 US, EU pledge joint action on tech issues, semiconductors



34 'YOLO' generation of investors is ready for anything, even a crash



Dubai opens glitzy Expo 2020

DUBAI: Dubai opened its extravagant Expo 2020 yesterday with a flashy ceremony boasting fireworks and lights displays as it attempts to woo the world despite the pandemic. The domed Al Wasl Plaza, centerpiece of the vast Expo site, was lit by spectacular projections as Crown Prince Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum declared the \$7 billion event open. "The entire world gathers in the UAE as we inaugurate together, with the blessing of Allah, Expo 2020 Dubai," Sheikh Hamdan said.

It kicks off a six-month world fair attended by more than 190 countries. Organizers are hoping for 25 million visits to Expo 2020, the first in the Middle East, which is set to be the most attended event since the pandemic. This year's Tokyo Olympics went ahead largely without fans. However, travel restrictions remain in place around the globe during a spectacle that was conceived pre-COVID-19 and is starting a year late.

Themes of sustainability and the planet's future were prevalent in the lavish show at Al Wasl Plaza, centerpiece of the vast Expo site which sprawls across an area twice the size of Monaco. Futuristic constructions dot the purpose-built showground in the Dubai suburbs, where countries are bidding to outdo each other for ingenuity and innovation.

The first world exhibition was held in London in 1851, when it was housed in the newly built Crystal Palace. The Paris edition of 1889 featured the Eiffel Tower, then intended as a temporary attraction. Expo 2020 will be unmistakably tinged by the pandemic, with masks and social distancing mandatory on site. Visitors need to be vaccinated or have a negative PCR test to enter.

The United Arab Emirates, population 10 million, has reported a rapid drop in coronavirus cases, falling below 300 this week - less than half the figure a fortnight earlier. Dubai, one of the UAE's seven emirates, has long strived for international recognition with projects such as the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building at 828 m.

Workers have been putting the final touches on infrastructure and facilities at the site this week as the clock ticked down to the delayed launch. A succession of politicians, business leaders, celebrities and sports people are expected at the Expo, whose diverse attractions include the Harlem Globetrotters and a Chinese robot panda.

A full-scale hyperloop cabin, touted as the future of long-distance travel and transport, is among the exhibits, while Egypt has sent an ancient coffin from pharaonic days. China has one of the largest pavilions - a LED-lit, lamp-shaped creation - while Morocco's is made with traditional mud-building methods. The Zionist entity is also taking part, a year after the UAE and the Zionist state normalized ties. — AFP



DUBAI: A general view shows the opening ceremony of the Dubai Expo 2020 yesterday. — AFP photos

PREMIER MARKET WEEKLY TECHNICAL BULLETIN

WEEK ENDED ON 30 SEPTEMBER 2021

No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance										Valuation Multiples *				
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	959	953	959	951	8	14,339,988	-7	-0.73%	13.45%	940	960	23.2	2.05	2.0%	1.27
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	236	238	240	236	4	30,546,593	2	0.85%	8.68%	234	240	21.6	1.13	2.0%	1.13
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	225	223	225	223	2	5,782,410	-1	-0.45%	7.21%	222	226	NM	0.98	0.0%	1.01
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	226	228	229	226	3	13,691,886	2	0.88%	7.04%	225	230	18.0	0.93	2.1%	1.05
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	825	822	826	821	5	15,102,702	-3	-0.36%	21.42%	820	830	35.8	3.71	1.1%	1.41
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	771	768	773	767	6	1,260,349	-3	-0.39%	35.21%	761	773	63.0	4.51	0.0%	1.05
204	National Investments	Financial Services	196	198	203	196	7	11,852,997	3	1.54%	46.67%	195	203	7.1	0.92	5.1%	1.24
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	156	158	159	156	3	3,872,638	1	0.64%	-0.63%	153	159	NM	1.53	3.1%	0.59
252	Al Imtiaz Investment	Financial Services	133	136	138	131	7	34,273,270	3	2.26%	21.43%	133	137	NM	0.83	0.0%	0.99
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	146	152	154	146	8	93,276,796	6	4.11%	39.45%	148	154	29.4	1.12	0.0%	0.97
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	781	770	785	761	24	1,593,619	-11	-1.41%	17.20%	761	772	19.4	1.81	0.7%	1.11
501	National Industries	Financial Services	245	241	247	241	6	23,423,731	-4	-1.63%	36.93%	239	246	6.2	0.90	0.0%	1.44
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	810	840	850	810	40	2,011,916	32	3.96%	11.26%	821	850	31.5	0.95	6.0%	0.93
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	875	900	901	870	31	3,271,938	26	2.97%	40.63%	877	900	25.6	2.12	5.9%	0.72
526	Al Qurain	Basic Materials	382	379	382	376	6	1,774,086	-1	-0.26%	12.13%	374	382	30.4	1.00	4.0%	0.75
603	Agility	Industrials	990	985	992	983	9	6,023,167	-4	-0.40%	45.71%	981	991	28.7	1.88	0.9%	1.49
605	Zain	Telecommunications	601	599	606	599	7	11,541,876	-3	-0.50%	-1.16%	597	602	13.8	2.24	5.5%	1.36
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,330	3,298	3,344	3,290	54	886,090	-32	-0.96%	-13.19%	3286	3315	6.0	3.80	12.1%	0.49
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	226	233	234	225	9	7,831,680	6	2.64%	7.87%	226	234	NM	0.75	0.0%	0.86
818	Ahli United Bank	Banking	287	285	287	282	5	26,338,270	-2	-0.70%	25.55%	282	287	21.1	2.29	1.3%	1.13
821	Warba Bank	Banking	262	266	266	262	4	6,895,922	5	1.92%	12.71%	262	268	15.8	2.11	0.0%	0.99
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	631	636	645	623	22	2,502,993	7	1.11%	4.61%	625	638	20.1	1.82	2.7%	0.44
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	373	376	380	373	7	2,362,917	2	0.53%	2.73%	375	380	NM	1.57	0.0%	0.48
826	Shamal Az-Zour	Utilities	237	237	239	235	4	6,126,260	0	0.00%	-14.44%	233	238	20.5	4.96	5.1%	0.67
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	1,807	1,845	1,860	1,800	60	1,042,295	43	2.39%	67.73%	1840	1872	13.2	7.04	2.2%	0.76

* As of end of week closing

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Business

China factory activity shrinks for first time since February 2020

Beijing urges banks to avoid housing speculation to curb Evergrande risk

BEIJING: Chinese factory activity contracted in September for the first time since the height of its initial coronavirus outbreak in February 2020, official data showed yesterday, as it faces waves of power outages and fears for the real estate sector. The Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) — a key gauge of manufacturing activity in the world's second-largest economy—slipped to 49.6 from 50.1 in August, the National Bureau of Statistics said.

Any figure below the 50-point mark represents contraction, while above it indicates growth.

It is the first time China's PMI has contracted since COVID first began spreading around the country, forcing the government to impose lockdowns that led factories to shut and battered the world's number two economy. But now authorities are struggling to tackle an energy crunch caused by tight coal supplies and sky-high prices, leading to factory suspensions and power blackouts in at least 17 provinces in recent months.

The growing power crisis, exacerbated by local government restrictions on factories to cut energy use, has led some major banks to lower their annual growth forecast for China, while there are also concerns about the impact on supply chains for global firms such as Apple and Tesla.

NBS senior statistician Zhao Qinghe said the PMI fell below the threshold because of "the relatively low prosperity of energy-intensive industries". Julian Evans-Pritchard of Capital Economics

warned: "Industry looks set for further weakness given that property construction is in the early stages of structural slowdown, power rationing may persist for some time and exports are likely to drop back as global consumption patterns normalize." The figure was slightly below the forecast of Bloomberg analysts, who expected a small rebound after successfully containing recent coronavirus outbreaks. While China's economy has largely bounced back from the initial blow of the pandemic, multiple outbreaks in the summer hit domestic tourism and manufacturing as fresh containment measures and lockdowns were introduced in swathes of the country.

As a result, China's non-manufacturing PMI—which measures activity in construction and services—shrank in August for the first time since the pandemic began, but rebounded back to growth in September. Default fears around Chinese real estate giant Evergrande—bogged down in a \$300 billion debt quagmire—have also hit consumer confidence, as the government tries to stop financial risk from spilling over into the rest of the property sector.

Zhiwei Zhang, chief economist at Pinpoint Asset Management, said the weak PMI would serve as an "alarm" for the government. "Economic growth in Q4 will likely slow further without a change of government policies, and the pace of slowdown may pick up," he said.



QINGZHOU, China: Workers assembling vehicles at a factory in Qingzhou, in China's eastern Shandong province. —AFP

Meanwhile, China has urged banks to steady the housing market and avoid speculation as fears mount that Evergrande's debt crisis could spill over into the property sector. Saddled with more than \$300 billion in liabilities that it is struggling to repay, the Chinese property developer's potential collapse poses systemic risks for the national and global economy.

At a Wednesday meeting, the People's Bank of China (PBOC) said the country's financial sector must meet the goals of "stabilizing land and housing prices" and "insist on not using real estate as a short-term economic stimulus," according to an online statement. The central bank also stressed that "houses are used for living, not speculation". —AFP

ABK announces free Emirates Visa Signature benefits

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK), in partnership with Emirates Skywards, the award-winning loyalty program of Emirates and flydubai, recently launched a new campaign offering ABK Emirates Signature cards free of charge for the first year. This exclusive offer will commence effective 1st October 2021 until 31st December 2021. During this period, all new ABK Emirates Visa Signature credit cardholders will be issued a card without the first year's annual fees, along with all the benefits of the existing cobranded card.

Alongside this, for the first time in Kuwait, ABK Emirates Visa cardholders have the benefit of upgrading their Emirates Skywards membership tier by earning Tier Miles while spending on their card, locally or internationally. This offer is open to customers until 31st December 2021 and is available for ABK Emirates Visa Infinite and Signature credit on eligible spend across all categories, including: Online shopping, utility bill payments, groceries, educational fees, and much more.

This exclusive offer also allows ABK Emirates Visa cardholders to earn 1 Tier Mile for every 4 Skywards Miles earned. Cardholders simply need to use their cards to fast-track to the next Tier—unlocking elite tier benefits such as bonus Miles while flying Emirates and flydubai, Emirates lounge access, priority check-in, complimentary seat selection, additional baggage allowance, and many more privileges.

ABK's strategic partnership with Emirates Skywards reaffirms the Bank's commitment to enhancing its customers' banking experience by providing exclusive personalized offerings, rewarding value propositions and shopping experiences with added-value.

Huawei Watch 3 Pro unlike any other smartwatch out there

KUWAIT: So you have finally got yourself or you're thinking of getting the all-new most elegant eSIM smartwatch with the longest battery life - the Huawei Watch 3 Pro but now you are probably wondering what features it has and how you can exactly make full use of the cool and futuristic Super Device features that come with it? Well, here are all of your questions answered.

What makes the design of the Huawei Watch 3 Pro stand out?

The Huawei Watch 3Pro is an outstanding smartwatch, featuring 3D curved glass, hi-tech ceramic materials, heavy-duty titanium watch body, 3D rotating crown, and stylish watch straps. The watch body is made of 316L stainless steel, capable of resisting daily small abrasions and sweat corrosion. The smartwatch is made of an aerospace-grade titanium fused with sapphire glass lens that guarantees durability. Additionally, the watchstrap is not only used to fasten the watch body to the wrist, the increasingly diversified materials and colors turn it into a fashion accessory.

What is eSIM?

Simply put, eSIM is a digital SIM embedded in your

phone or smartwatch that allows you to activate a mobile number without using a physical SIM card. The Huawei Watch 3 Pro supports a standalone communication system. You can stay connected even when you are out for outdoor activities or in times when you find it inconvenient to carry your phone. By simply activating the eSIM service on your smartphone, you can have the same phone number on your Huawei Watch 3 Pro, while enjoying the same data and voice tariff plans as on your smartphones. Moreover, its long battery life allows you to use it on its own without the need of carrying your phone

What are the health management features that come with the Huawei Watch 3 Pro?

The Huawei Watch 3 Pro is a fitness and health assistant, offering over 100 workout modes, skin temperature detection with the new high-precision temperature sensor, fall detection and SOS alert. It also boasts health monitoring features such as heart rate, SpO2, sleep and pressure, the smartwatch series' comprehensive feature set allows you to stay up to date on your health condition.

What are the Super Device and smart experience features found on the Huawei Watch 3 Pro?

Thanks to its Super Device capabilities providing a truly intelligent experience across all types of scenarios, Huawei Watch 3 | 3 Pro users can connect directly from the convenience of their smartwatches to several smart applications.

Business

US, EU pledge joint action on tech issues, semiconductors

TTC lays out a lengthy to-do list, to counter China's dominance

PITTSBURGH: US and EU officials pledged to join forces to deal with a host of technology and trade issues to secure semiconductor supplies and counter China's dominance.

The inaugural meeting of the Trade and Technology Council (TTC) laid out a lengthy to-do list, but perhaps the most significant achievement was the symbolic restoration of good relations after the damage suffered under the administration of former president Donald Trump.

"It's just a remarkable spirit of cooperation and collaboration, and a desire between the United States and European Union to work very, very closely together," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told reporters. But the summit also set its sights on forced labor, artificial intelligence, digital privacy and protecting human rights activists online, as well as monitoring foreign investment in key sectors and controlling exports of sensitive products.

The high-level meetings were held as industries worldwide grapple with shortages of crucial semiconductors that are harming manufacturing, including of autos, and pushing prices higher. The TTC was born out of President Joe Biden's summit in Brussels in June, when he attempted to repair relations battered by Trump's aggressive actions against trade rivals and allies alike, as well as more recent missteps that have riled Brussels.

The biggest thorn in the relationship are the Trump-era tariffs on steel and aluminum shipped from Europe, which the Biden administration has suspended but not withdrawn.

That dispute loomed over the tech meeting but was not on the agenda, although officials have said recently that they are nearing a permanent solution. The ministers met at a massive World War II-era munitions factory and later steel mill

in Pittsburgh that has been converted into an advanced robotics research facility.

Semiconductor supply

The talks were led on the US side by Blinken, Trade Representative Katherine Tai and Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo, and on the European side by EU Executive Vice Presidents Margrethe Vestager and Valdis Dombrovskis. They did not announce specific actions but mapped out key areas for 10 working groups to focus on before the next meeting, which likely will be next spring in Europe, according to a European source.

"We represent those largest economies, collectively," Blinken said after the meeting. "When we're working together, we have a unique ability to help shape norms, the standards and rules that govern the way technology is used." Seeking to address the global shortage of vital computer chips, the officials pledged in their final communique to work together "on the rebalancing of global supply chains in semiconductors, with a view to enhancing respective security of supply" and production, including of the most advanced chips.

Demand for electronic devices of all kinds has exploded since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, as more people work, study and find entertainment at home. Semiconductor manufacturers at times have had to temporarily close their factories due to COVID-19, leaving them struggling to meet global demand and hamstringing industries including automakers. Raimondo has said the chip shortage is both an economic and a national security concern, and called for investments in domestic manufacturing in the European Union and United States.



PITTSBURGH, US: US Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo (right) speaks to the press as Trade Representative Katherine Tai looks on during the inaugural US-EU Trade and Technology Council in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on Wednesday. —AFP

Containing China

The lengthy communique does not mention China by name, but the world's second-largest economy is omnipresent throughout, notably in the frequent mentions of concerns posed by "non-market economies." In addition to semiconductors, the sides are grappling with how to work together to counter what they view as China's unfair trade practices. The Biden administration so far has continued Trump's strong line towards Beijing, keeping in place punitive duties on Chinese goods, while the European Union has taken a less confrontational stance.

The ministers pledged to work jointly and through reforms of the World Trade Organization (WTO). "We stand together in continuing to protect our businesses, consumers, and workers from unfair trade practices, in particular those posed by non-market economies, that are undermining the world trading system," the statement said.

But it also highlighted the need to keep tabs on investments in sensitive areas—something Washington did when it banned Huawei's participation in the US advanced 5G cellular network—and control sensitive exports that could undermine national security. —AFP

Walmart to hire 150,000 US workers ahead of holiday season

CHICAGO: Walmart announced Wednesday it will hire 150,000 more workers in the United States, joining other large companies in staffing up ahead of the holiday shopping season. The nation's biggest private employer, Walmart said "most" of the new positions in its home market would be permanent, full-time roles spread across the country.

The number comes on top of a previously announced plan to add 20,000 workers in supply chain roles. Walmart has 1.6 million employees in the United States. Other large companies, including Amazon, FedEx and Macy's have also announced huge hiring campaigns this fall as the pandemic accelerates a push towards greater e-commerce activity.

Walmart in recent years has invested heavily in programs to deliver goods to customers, or provide curbside pickup of groceries outside stores. The latest recruitment drive "will ensure we're ready to help customers shop however they want, whether they're in a store, using curbside pickup or shopping online," Walmart Chief



CHICAGO: In this file photo a worker collects shopping carts at a Walmart store in Chicago, Illinois. —AFP

People Officer Julie Murphy said in a news release.

But a tight labor market has emerged as a challenge to employers this year, pressuring wages in an economy still navigating COVID-19. Walmart's starting wage is now between \$12 and \$17 an hour depending on the position, compared with the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour. —AFP

Eurozone jobless rate falls again

FRANKFURT: The unemployment rate in the eurozone continued to fall in August, official data showed yesterday, as the effects of the pandemic on hiring in Europe eased further over the summer months. The EU's Eurostat agency said the seasonally-adjusted rate dipped to 7.5 percent of the active population, after 7.8 percent in June and 7.6 percent in July.

For the 27-member European Union as a whole, including countries not in the single currency bloc, unemployment also fell by 0.1 percentage points over one month in August to 6.8 percent. The agency estimates that 14.47 million European Union residents were out of work in July.

The data were a marked improvement over a year ago when unemployment stood at 8.6 percent of the working population in the euro area in August 2020 and 7.7 percent in the EU. —AFP

Business

‘YOLO’ generation of investors is ready for anything, even a crash

Older investors view the new trend with skepticism

NEW YORK: Wall Street has been a booming place over the past year and a half even as the wider US economy has suffered—a trend that an entire generation of young investors has both noticed, and cashed in on.

Known as the YOLO generation—after the saying “you only live once”—the good fortune these new entrants to stock trading have had is sometimes viewed with skepticism by older investors who have seen the market boom and bust in the past. There’s also the fact that young traders are some of the most eager proponents of soaring “meme stocks” like GameStop and AMC. Outsiders may dismiss investors under the age of 35 as dangerously optimistic, but they generally see themselves as better informed than their elders and ready for anything—even a crash.

Most are too young to have seen their portfolios sunk by the dot-com bubble’s bursting in 2000, or perhaps even the 2008 financial crisis. The market’s swoon in the spring of 2020, which lasted only about three months during the worst COVID-19 shutdowns, did not really register as a crisis.

In June, a survey showed 72 percent of investors under the age of 34 felt confident in their portfolio decisions, according to E-Trade. “For their entire adult life, the market has gone up,” marketing professor Scott Galloway said in a recent interview with *The Wall Street Journal*, adding that many seem to believe this will continue.

Philip Fernbach, a professor at the University of

Colorado and co-director of the Center for Research on Consumer Financial Decision Making, warned that many young investors may be getting ahead of themselves. “Overconfidence can lead us to take on too much leverage,” he told AFP, adding that there could “potentially be a wake-up call... down the line if the market has a sustained decline.”

Some 80 percent of investors born in the late 1990s and after are willing to take on debt to invest, according to an April poll from MagnifyMoney. “People are trying to get rich overnight on a low probability bet, which is exactly what gambling is,” Fernbach said. “That’s a huge part of what’s going on here.”

Underestimating risk?

But Jonathan Royere, a 25-year-old programmer, considers this view of today’s young investors an inaccurate stereotype. “When they see YOLOs and everything, that’s what draws attention,” he said. “That’s not what most people do. “It would just be like, oh, you see (that) Instagram model doing something stupid online, and you think all women act like that on Instagram? Well, that’s not true.”

Royere maintains that many young investors are clued in to the mores of the market, understanding that “2008 is not over,” he said. “I think the education part is what makes this different,” he said.

Ryan Scribner, a personal finance and investor personality who has 738,000 subscribers on Youtube, says his generation “has just really figured



NEW YORK: People walk near Wall Street in the financial district of Manhattan on Wednesday in New York City. — AFP

out how to collectively research together and share information in the forums.” Far from cocky, many are circumspect about the market’s prospects and quick to recognize how central bank maneuverings have juiced recent gains.

“There’s a broad understanding that equity performance had been driven by Fed policy,” said Evan Domingos, a 21-year-old undergraduate at Wheaton College who trades equities. Royere maintains that the “younger generation is more prepared for a market crash than the older ones,” noting that his cohort sees the Federal Reserve’s

influence and knows “the music will stop.” Scribner, for his part, has organized his portfolio with an eye towards a possible crash, giving priority to lesser-known names.

Domingos also thinks his generation will probably adapt to market shifts.

“It’s not entirely proven if newer traders will be able to shift gears with the market but adaptability shown by retail traders with market volatility and down cycles such as during the 2018 US-China trade (conflict) and the COVID-19 pandemic would suggest so much,” Domingos said. — AFP

Philippine economy to take 10 years to recover from virus

MANILA: The Philippine economy will take more than a decade to return to pre-pandemic growth, an official said yesterday, warning the next two generations of Filipinos would be paying for the cost of COVID-19. Lockdowns and other restrictions aimed at slowing the spread of the coronavirus have shattered the Southeast Asian nation’s economy, throwing millions out of work and leaving many poor families hungry.

“Our long run total cost of COVID and the quarantine both to the present and future society—meaning our children and our grandchildren—will reach 41.4 trillion” (pesos, or \$810 billion), Economic Planning Secretary Karl Kendrick Chua said. The figure is more than twice the Philippines’ gross domestic product in 2020, which the World Bank estimates at \$361.5 billion.

The losses would be felt over the next 10 to 40 years, Chua said. Consumption, investment and tax revenues would struggle to recover as social distancing rules prevent key sectors, such as tourism and restaurants, from fully reopening. Lower productivity caused by death, illness or lack of schooling during the pandemic “is likely to be permanent”, he added.

The economy is expected to expand by four to five per-



MANILA: Lockdowns and other restrictions aimed at slowing the spread of the coronavirus have shattered the Southeast Asian economy. — AFP

cent this year, Chua said, compared with a record contraction of 9.6 percent in 2020. But it would take 10 years before the country returned to pre-pandemic growth, which averaged 6.4 percent in the 10 years before COVID-19 hit.

Nearly 70 percent of the economy, including 23.3 million workers, remained under “heightened quarantine” restrictions, Chua said. He warned lockdowns caused greater hunger and were not the answer to the pandemic.

The Philippines has recorded more than 2.5 million infections, including over 38,000 deaths. Just over a quarter of the adult population has been fully vaccinated amid a delayed and slow vaccination rollout. — AFP

Rising food prices in Brazil hit the neediest most

RIO DE JANEIRO: Marli Fumagalli looks at prices carefully as she walks through a market in Brazil and says her dietary mantra in hard times like these is “less beef, more vegetables and lots of creativity.” Inflation is running high in Latin America’s largest economy but it is even worse for foodstuffs, and this has become a daily challenge for the most vulnerable people. Many people, like Fumagalli, a retiree who lives on a small pension, have changed the way they eat in order to cope with the higher prices. “My bank account is always overdrawn,” said Fumagalli, 69, who has to feed her mother and two daughters, besides herself. “I only have enough to buy inferior cuts of meat and use it as stuffing to make it go further,” she said.

As of August the consumer price index had risen 9.68 percent in the past 12 months, but food prices shot up by nearly 14 percent in that same span, government figures show. “Food inflation is exerting pressure on family budgets since 2020, especially lower income people,” said Joelson Sampaio, an economics professor at the Getulio Vargas Foundation. The foundation’s figures from April show that 27.7 million people in Brazil — 13 percent of the population—live below the poverty line. In Brazil, that is set at 261 reales a month, or \$49. The proportion of poor people is up from 11 percent in 2019. At the market where Fumagalli shops, vendor Jose Guerreiro says he offers less and less beef and lots of chicken in its place. “I try to avoid raising prices by switching suppliers, but it is pointless, Guerreiro said. “It is a snowball.” Prices of red meat have gone up three times that of the overall inflation rate. — AFP

Sports

Hakuho retirement leaves sumo facing 'void' at top

TOKYO: Sumo will struggle to fill the "void" left by the retirement of its greatest-ever champion Hakuho, experts say, with few new stars emerging and public interest in the ancient Japanese sport likely to wane. Hakuho helped usher in a new wave of sumo popularity with a record 45 tournament wins, drawing huge crowds to his epic battles with archrival Asashoryu in the late 2000s.

But the Mongolian-born 36-year-old handed in his retirement notice on Monday after persistent trouble with his right knee, leaving fans wondering how sumo will cope in his absence. Sumo commentator John Gunning told AFP Hakuho was "one of those athletes that transcend their own sport", likening him to football's Pele or basketball's Michael Jordan. His departure leaves just one wrestler, Terunofuji, at sumo's highest rank of Yokozuna - and even his long-term future is unclear.

"I don't see anybody that's going to fill the void," said Murray Johnson, another commentator. "Terunofuji is the only one that can take that role, but with his knees, how long does he last? If he lasts any longer than a couple of years, that would surprise me." The 29-year-old Terunofuji only reached the yokozuna rank in July, after an injury-plagued career that saw him drop to the second-lowest division at one point.

By contrast, Hakuho was sumo's longest-serving yokozuna, with over 1,000 bouts at the rank. His titanic tussles with charismatic bad boy Asashoryu were the stuff of legend, pitting the popular Hakuho against the man the crowds loved to hate. Asashoryu retired in 2010, but two years later Hakuho had an-

other yokozuna rival in the shape of Harumafuji. Kakuryu and Kisenosato later joined them at the sport's highest rank.

Gunning says such "storylines" are what drives sumo's popularity. "Sumo is a sport that has always been based around rivalry at the very top of the rankings," he said. "What you really want is the best of the best going at it, all the time. So with Hakuho gone and Terunofuji not having a rival of the same standing, there's going to be a dip in interest."

Yokozuna troubles

Gunning says there is "hope on the horizon", and names Hoku-seiho - a two-meter-tall, 19-year-old prodigy scouted by Hakuho - as a possible future star. But the current crop of wrestlers has been less than convincing during Hakuho's injury-enforced absence over the past year. A string of journeymen have emerged from the pack to win their first titles, only to sink back into mediocrity. Meanwhile, the wrestlers at the second-highest rank of ozeki have consistently disappointed. Sumo journalist Shoko Sato says the sport could soon find itself without a yokozuna for the first time since the period between May 1992 and January 1993. "All the current ozeki are weak, so there might not be any new yokozuna for a while, and Terunofuji's knees are bad so I don't think he'll be around for long," she said. "I'm worried that interest in sumo will gradually decline."

The coronavirus pandemic makes it difficult to judge sumo's current popularity, with several tournaments cancelled or held behind closed doors. The sport has made a concerted effort to court



TOKYO: This picture taken on Jan 8, 2019 shows Yokozuna or sumo grand champion Hakuho of Mongolia taking part in a traditional ring-entering ceremony at Meiji shrine. — AFP

younger fans in recent years, and the Internet has also helped it attract a sizeable overseas audience. Gunning believes interest has cooled slightly since Hakuho's injury troubles began, and that his departure will lead to an inevitable "dip in popularity".

But he also says "the premature death of sumo has been reported on countless occasions". Commentator Johnson agrees that the sport will overcome this latest bump in the road. "Everyone says that if you look in the crowd, it's just a bunch of old men and women," Johnson said. "Well that might be the case, but it will just be a new bunch of old men and women." — AFP

IPL's Delhi back Ashwin after Warne's 'disgraceful' jibe

DUBAI: Delhi Capitals leapt to Ravichandran Ashwin's defense after Australian spin legend Shane Warne slammed the star all-rounder's "disgraceful" single in a feisty Indian Premier League encounter. Ashwin had a verbal exchange with Kolkata Knight Riders skipper Eoin Morgan and Tim Southee after he grabbed an extra run following a throw that ricocheted off his partner Rishabh Pant's arm. Usually a batsman avoids a run when the ball from a fielder hits him and deviates away because it is seen as against the spirit of cricket, although there are no rules stopping the batter getting the runs.

The retired Warne, who led Rajasthan Royals to victory in the inaugural edition of the popular Twenty20 tournament in 2008, told his 3.6 million followers on Twitter: "The world shouldn't be divided on this topic and Ashwin. It's pretty simple - it's disgraceful and should never happen. Why does Ashwin have to be that guy again? I think (Morgan) had every right to nail him!"

But Delhi co-owner Parth Jindal hit back as he recalled the 2019 World Cup final when England were awarded four runs after Martin Guptill's throw for New Zealand deflected off Ben Stokes' bat to the boundary. "So when the ball ricochets off Ben Stokes for 4 additional runs which single handedly allows England to win the 50 over World Cup there are no issues?" Jindal tweeted, calling the criticism of Ashwin "hypocrisy at its best".

Pant, the Delhi captain, said the run was in the "spirit of the game" and described the incident as "part and parcel" of cricket after Tuesday's match in the UAE. Kolkata wicket-keeper-batsman Dinesh Karthik had tried to cool down tempers. "I do not think Morgan appreciates that he is someone when the ball hits the batter, he expects them not to run because of the spirit of cricket," Karthik, who is Ashwin's former



Ravichandran Ashwin

India teammate, told reporters. "It is a very grey area, a very interesting topic. I have my own opinion on it, but I can just say I am happy to play peacemaker."

Ashwin later exacted a small measure of revenge when he got Morgan out for nought with his off-spin in Kolkata's chase, but the Indian ultimately ended up on the losing side. Ashwin was involved in another spirit-of-cricket debate two years earlier in the IPL when he controversially ran out England's Jos Buttler while the batsman was backing up at the non-striker's end. While legitimate, the so-called Mankad dismissal is widely considered unsporting. — AFP

Qatar to hold its first ever Formula One Grand Prix

DOHA: Qatar will hold its first ever Formula One Grand Prix in November replacing the cancelled Australian GP, organizers announced yesterday. The race will take place at the Losail International Circuit north of Doha on Nov 21 and will form the first part of a Middle Eastern ending to the Formula One season as it will be followed by races in Saudi Arabia and the season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix.

Qatar has also signed a 10-year deal to host Formula One from 2023. The Australian GP, traditionally a season-opener, was moved towards the end of the season in a bid to ensure it could go ahead in the light of COVID-19 restrictions. In spite of that, it was cancelled for a second year running. "We are very pleased to welcome Qatar to the Formula 1 calendar this season and for the longer term from 2023," said F1 President and CEO Stefano Domenicali.

"We have shown that we can continue to adapt and there is huge interest in our sport and the hope from many locations to have a Grand Prix. The huge effort from all the teams, F1 and the FIA has made it possible to deliver a 22-race calendar, something that is very impressive during a challenging year and something we can all be proud of."

The Losail Circuit opened in 2004 and has hosted Moto GP since then, under floodlights which will also be used for the Grand Prix. In its statement, F1 said it would confirm the venue for the race in Qatar from 2023 onward at a later date, suggesting a possible change from Losail. It is the latest sporting coup for gas-rich Qatar, which will host the football World Cup in 2022. — AFP

Sports

Six Argentine players barred from Wallabies clash after COVID breach

BRISBANE: Argentina's Rugby Championship clash with Australia was thrown into chaos Thursday after six players were ruled out for breaching coronavirus restrictions with an unauthorized trip to a health retreat. The group from the Argentina team, which also included two staff, headed to Byron Bay from their Gold Coast base and were stopped when they tried to return across the state border into Queensland on Wednesday.

Under COVID-19 rules, anyone entering Queensland from a designated Covid hotspot area, like neighboring New South Wales, must have permission or face mandatory quarantine. "This travel across the state border is a direct breach of the present Queensland government health orders and Sanzaar's Rugby Championship tournament biosecurity plan," governing body Sanzaar said, adding that it was "very disappointed". "All members of this group are now ineligible to participate further in the Rugby Championship as they have breached tournament rules."

Argentina have a 44-strong squad and the game will go ahead on the Gold Coast Saturday, but with capacity capped at 75 percent in Cbus Super Stadium after the state imposed new restrictions Thursday following six new community cases of COVID-19. The players involved were Sebastian Cancelliere, Joaquin Diaz Bonilla, Felipe Ezcurra, Pablo Matera, Santiago Medrano and Santiago Socino.

Tighthead prop Medrano and No.8 Matera, a former captain, are first-team regulars who started the 27-8 defeat to Australia last weekend, while hooker Socino frequently comes off the bench. It is another headache for coach Mario Ledesma, whose team have lost all five of their tournament games so far. He drafted in Enrique Pieretto to replace Medrano and Rodrigo Bruni for Matera among five changes to the run-on side.

Wallabies coach Dave Rennie said Argentina's problems weren't his concern as Australia chase four wins in a row for the first time at the Rugby Championship. "The focus is on us," he said after naming 38-year-old prop Greg Holmes on the bench for his first game since 2016 and back-rower Sean McMahon for his first since 2017. "I've obviously discussed that (Argentina players), but I think there's plenty of motivating factors for them. "Whoever we end up in front of us, we'll deal with it on the day."

Top priority

Holmes will become the oldest Wallaby since World War II after being brought into camp to help out younger players last month. Rennie made three changes to his run-on side, with Pete Samu starting at blindside flanker, while Jordan Petaia gets a chance on the wing with Marika Korobete given the week off. Darcy Swain rotates into the starting second row with Matt Philip benched.



BRISBANE: A statue of Australian rugby league living immortal Wally Lewis is seen at the front entrance of Suncorp Stadium yesterday. — AFP

Argentina Rugby (UAR) said the players and staff stuck in New South Wales were holed up at a hotel awaiting their fate. "For the UAR, bringing a solution to this issue has become a top priority," it said. "At the same time, an internal process has been put into place in order to clarify and to determine responsibility for what

has happened."

The scandal comes just days after Ledesma lashed out at Sanzaar and Rugby Australia for being "disrespectful" because a captains photo shoot in Townsville last week went ahead without Pumas skipper Julian Montoya. Sanzaar and Rugby Australia subsequently apologized. — AFP

Beijing Olympics rules out overseas fans over virus threat

BEIJING: February's Beijing Winter Olympics will be held without overseas spectators and athletes must be fully vaccinated against the coronavirus or face 21 days' quarantine, the International Olympic Committee said. The measures, which do allow spectators who are living in mainland China, were revealed with the Games just four months away and after the Tokyo 2020 Olympics similarly juggled with how to go ahead safely during the pandemic.

The Tokyo Games, which were postponed by a year because of the health crisis, mostly took place without any spectators to prevent infections. Another difference from Tokyo will be that all participants must be vaccinated or will need to do a 21-day quarantine on arrival in the Chinese capital. Athletes who can provide a "justified medical exemption" will have their cases considered.

All attendees will enter a strict "bubble" as soon as they land that covers Games-related areas and stadiums as well as accommodation, transport, catering and the opening and closing ceremonies. The decisions, announced by the IOC but taken by Chinese organizers, are a foretaste of a package of measures to be released in October designed to prevent the Games from turning into a source of contamination.

Speaking at Beijing's Olympic Park yesterday, locals said that safety must come first, even if that means foreign fans missing out. "I think it's the right thing to do because foreign spectators can watch it broadcast live," said Zhang Xinyu, 29. "But if there are a lot of people travelling, it won't be safe for either the athletes or the foreign guests." — AFP

Veteran Holmes set to become oldest Wallaby since WWII

BRISBANE: Greg Holmes will become the oldest Wallabies player since World War II after being included on the bench for their clash against Argentina tomorrow, while Sean McMahon was another surprise call-up. A flanker by trade, the 38-year-old Holmes played the last of his 27 Tests in 2016.

Now with Western Force, he was brought into the camp by coach Dave Rennie to help out in Perth last month and has had such an impact that he has unexpectedly been given another chance. Back-rower McMahon was also a shock inclusion on the bench, back for the first time since facing Scotland at Edinburgh in 2017 before taking a lucrative contract in Japan with Suntory Sungoliath.

That move ruled him out of further selection as an overseas-based player, but tweaks to the so-called "Giteau Law" now allow Rennie to select two foreign-based players with less than 60 Tests of experience. "Both Greg and Sean have worked extremely hard on the field and around their detail off the field and they're both super-excited to represent their country again on Saturday evening," said Rennie. "We've felt really well supported during all of our Tests in Australia this year and we're looking to finishing the Rugby Championship with a performance the team and the country can be proud of." — AFP

All Blacks shuffle backs for Springboks showdown

BRISBANE: All Blacks coach Ian Foster has tweaked his backline for tomorrow's Rugby Championship Test against South Africa after his wingers struggled against the high ball last week. George Bridge and Will Jordan paid the price for nervy displays out wide in the face of a Springbok aerial bombardment during last week's tight 19-17 win over the South Africans.

Foster instead recalled Sevu Reece on the right wing and shifted Rieko Ioane to the left, making room in the centers for Anton Lienert-Brown's return from injury. The only other major change to the starting XV for the sixth-round match on Australia's Gold Coast was Brad Weber replacing TJ Perenara at scrum-half. Fly-half Beauden Barrett retains his spot ahead of star pivot Richie Mo'unga, who rejoined the squad this week after a spell in quarantine after a delayed departure from New Zealand for the birth of a baby.

The forward pack was untouched with Ardie Savea again appointed captain. Foster said energy levels were high among the All Blacks, who claimed the Rugby Championship title last week and remain undefeated in this year's tournament. "The fact that we now have the chance to achieve a potential Grand Slam against our southern hemisphere opponents is pretty special... it has already given this weekend's Test an edge," he said.

Foster said the New Zealanders, who also regained the world number one ranking during this year's Rugby Championship, wanted to make amends for some uncharacteristic mistakes last week. "We didn't look after the ball as well as we could have and some of our work at the ruck wasn't as good as we wanted," he said. "We have to lift our performance in that area and the team is keen to get that right this weekend." — AFP

Sports

On a rollercoaster career, Thill provides late thrill

BRUSSELS: It was a Hollywood ending, but not for the global superstars of Real Madrid, flattened by a spectacular goal from an unlikely hero whose career has been a trek through football's less glamorous outposts. Sebastien Thill smashed a 90th-minute winner in the Champions League on Tuesday to give Moldovan champions Sheriff Tiraspol a 2-1 victory at the Bernabeu. "It's one of the best and one of the most important goals of my career, that's for sure!" he said.

It was a waking dream for the previously anonymous attacking midfielder from the footballing backwater of Luxembourg. Among his many tattoos is one that might have appeared presumptuous a few months ago but now seems prophetic. They show his number (31), his name (Thill), and the Champions League trophy, which he has long dreamed of playing for.

On Tuesday, he chased that dream hard, running 12 km, more than any other player on the field, before finishing with a flourish. "I had cramp, the team had run so much," said Thill. "The side were so brave with how we played and luckily enough I was able to score a bit of a stunner." Thill's shot was too good for one of the best goalkeepers in the world, Thibaut Courtois. It ensured victory for a club from the separatist enclave of Transnistria playing only their second match at the group stage.

Sheriff, the perennial Moldovan champions, had already beaten two bigger names, Dinamo Zagreb and Red Star Belgrade, in the preliminary rounds but 13-time European champions Real Madrid are an altogether scarier Goliath. "After the game we all went crazy," Thill said. "We're so happy." At home, the club play in front of modest crowds. Football data site Transfermarkt calculates that their average attendance in the

Moldovan League this season is 538.

There were officially 5,200 at the club's first Champions League match against Shakhtar Donetsk on September 15. Even with COVID restrictions and stadium reconstruction, there were still 29,000 for Thill to stun at the Bernabeu. Thill has come a long way.

Mowing the pitch

Fourteen months ago, he was an amateur at Progres Niederkorn in Luxembourg, training in the evening on a pitch he had mowed during the day as a municipal gardener. Niederkorn sold him to Tambov, a club struggling in their only season in the Russian premier league. Tambov had to release all but three of their players during the winter break, including Thill, as they went on to finish a distant last in the table before going bankrupt.

"There were salary problems, so I only spent four months there," Thill told the website footballski.fr, which specializes in Central and Eastern European football. He was recruited by Sheriff and was impressed because the club possessed an infrastructure that "many first division clubs in Europe don't have".

Thill moved to an isolated football outpost in self-proclaimed independent Transnistria whose sovereignty is recognized only by other secessionist territories in the former Soviet Union such as Abkhazia or South Ossetia and whose club still plays in the Moldovan league. The son of two Luxembourg internationals, Serge, who played briefly in the Belgian lower divisions for Athus, and Nathalie, Thill also has two younger brothers, Vincent and Olivier, who play professionally and are both with Volska



MADRID: Sheriff Tiraspol's midfielder Sebastien Thill vies with Real Madrid's French midfielder Eduardo Camavinga (right) during the UEFA Champions League match at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium on Sept 28, 2021. —AFP

Poltava, third in the Ukrainian league.

Sheriff lead the group and next face Italian champions Inter Milan. As he looked forward, Thill showed he is also mastering the interview techniques of the top professionals. "We're in a tough group," he said. "We have to keep our feet on the ground. We have to take it one game at a time and give 100 percent. Yes, I scored a great goal, now we celebrate a little and then we get back into the league." —AFP

On the fast Finnish roads, Ogier can seal eighth title

PARIS: If results fall completely his way, Sebastien Ogier could clinch his eighth World Rally title in nine seasons with two rounds to go in Finland this weekend. The Frenchman, who has announced he is retiring after this season, is 44 points ahead of Welsh Toyota team-mate Elfyn Evans, 50 ahead of Belgian Thierry Neuville of Hyundai and 51 ahead of the revelation of the season, Finn Kalle Rovanpera, who also drives for Toyota.

With a maximum 30 points available if he wins and takes the power-stage bonus, Ogier could build a lead of 61 points or more and go into the last two rallies of his career, in Spain and Italy, already champion. Yet Ogier has only won the "rally of the 1000 lakes" once before, in 2013. A more realistic target could be protecting his lead and then clinching in two weeks in Catalonia, where he sealed his 2014 and 2016 titles.

"Nothing is decided in the championship yet, so let's see what approach we will take on this rally, but I'm looking forward to driving those roads in this car," said Ogier. To allow fans to attend, the rally was moved from its usual midsummer dates to October for the first time, while an Arctic Rally was added in the country in February. The Finland Rally is one of the fastest on the calendar: A sprint on

gravel punctuated by spectacular jumps.

But the autumn dates mean cooler, wetter conditions are likely and some stages will be run after nightfall. "We can expect the grip from the stages to be lower than usual, and if the weather is bad it could be very slippery," said Jari-Matti Latvala, the Toyota team principal and a Finn. The Toyota team, Latvala pointed out, are based in Finland. "Our car has been developed on Finnish roads and we know that we should be strong there."

'One of the coolest things'

Neuville has finished runner-up to Ogier four times in the championship without collecting a title. He also came second in 2019. "One of the high-speed events in the season, one of the challenging events for myself," said the Belgian. "But I still enjoy the driving, at that speed with the jumps and the precision you need...it makes it very special."

Evans finished runner-up last season after crashing out of the season finale. "The speed is always a shock," said Evans. "Regardless of how much testing you do before the event, when you get going and start the stage then it's very fast. "The Finns, generally speaking, tend to settle in a little bit quicker than anybody else and that's the key." Estonian Ott Tanak, a Finnish resident who interrupted Ogier's title reign in 2019 and who won the Arctic Rally this year and the Finland Rally in 2018 and 2019, agreed. "One of the biggest challenges is the speed and the big jumps, it's always important to get the confidence very early as it's so fast it's difficult to get big gaps," he said. —AFP

Fury wary of Wilder as trilogy bout looms

LOS ANGELES: World heavyweight champion Tyson Fury believes he will be facing the most dangerous incarnation of Deontay Wilder yet when he clashes with his American rival for the third time next month. Fury, the undefeated World Boxing Council heavyweight champion, faces Wilder in a trilogy fight in Las Vegas on October 9 in his first bout since dethroning the 35-year-old from Alabama via a seventh technical knockout in February last year.

That victory followed an epic 2018 battle between the two heavyweights in Los Angeles which ended in a draw after Fury remarkably climbed off the canvas following a 12th round knockdown. Fury had initially been set for a unification fight this year with former world champion Anthony Joshua, but was ordered to grant Wilder a rematch in May after the intervention of an independent arbitrator.

The fight was originally due to be held in July but was postponed until October after Fury's training camp was hit by an outbreak of COVID-19. Talking to reporters on a video conference call on Wednesday, Fury (30-0-1, with 21 knockouts) said next week's fight was "make-or-break" for the hard-hitting Wilder. "The one thing I don't do is underestimate anybody," Fury said. "Whether it's the smallest man in the room or the fattest man in the room, I'll never underestimate anyone. "Make no mistake - this

will be Deontay Wilder's make-or-break moment in his life. Anybody can lose a fight, anybody can have a bad night. "But this is his make-or-break fight. He's a three-to-one underdog. He's got everything to gain and nothing to lose. "Everyone expects me to go in there and beat him down - which I will - but you can never write Deontay Wilder off because he's at his most dangerous now."

'Wounded' by Joshua loss

Fury said he had been "wounded" watching Joshua lose his WBA, IBF and WBO belts in a defeat to Oleksandr Usyk on Saturday, effectively scuppering any chance of a money-spinning unification fight with his fellow Briton. However the self-styled "Gypsy King" would not be drawn further on Joshua's defeat or whether he had considered a future fight with Usyk.

"Usyk did his job, and that's all I know," Fury said when asked about the Ukrainian's performance. "He won his fight, and good luck to him. "There's not much to assess or express. Did I watch the fight? Yes I did. Was I absolutely wounded when Usyk won? Yes I was. I was hoping that Joshua could win the fight. But he couldn't and that's none of my business. So my only concern now is beating Deontay Wilder - he's the most dangerous heavyweight out there.

"In my opinion, Wilder beats Joshua, Usyk, all the rest of the division comfortably - but he cannot beat me. I've no real concern about anything else other than Wilder, I've got a mammoth task ahead. It's a very dangerous task that I'm giving 100 percent focus, and I don't care who I fight after this. Let me get through Wilder first and then on Sunday morning we can talk about who I'll fight next. But right now I don't give a damn." —AFP

Sports

Beleaguered Barcelona thumped by Benfica in Champions League

LISBON: Barcelona suffered more European humiliation on Wednesday after a 3-0 defeat by Benfica left them in serious danger of failing to make it out of their Champions League group. A hammering in Lisbon, which saw Darwin Nunez score twice, including a second-half penalty, also delivered another heavy blow to Ronald Koeman's hopes of staying on as Barca coach.

Nunez's double and a smart finish from Rafa Silva consigned Koeman's team to a second consecutive 3-0 loss in Group E, after they were thrashed by the same scoreline at the hands of Bayern Munich earlier this month. Koeman's tactics will again come under scrutiny, with Gerard Pique substituted after just 33 minutes, seemingly to avoid picking up another yellow card, only for Eric Garcia to be sent off late on for a second booking.

Frenkie de Jong, Barcelona's most creative player for the first half an hour, was also shifted into central defense to replace the departing Pique. It is the first time since 2000 that Barcelona have lost back-to-back group games in the Champions League, which was also the last time the club failed to make the tournament's knock-out stage.

They have a mountain to climb now to avoid the same fate, sitting bottom of the table, with Benfica four points ahead in second and a crunch game at home to Dynamo Kiev to come next month. "The easiest thing is to look at the coach but we are all responsible," Sergio Busquets said. "We are in a critical situation. We have only played two games but we have zero points. We have two games against Dynamo and we have to win both."

Whether Koeman is still in charge for that game remains to be seen given his future is not even secure for this weekend,

when Barcelona play at Spanish champions Atletico Madrid in La Liga. The club might view the upcoming international break as the more logical time to make a change but despite Koeman's pleas for support, and perspective, his team have now won only one of their last five games and it appears a matter of when, not if. "I can't say anything because I don't know what the club feels about this," said Koeman. "I can't answer more questions about this because it's not in my hands. We'll see."

Dire financial problems

Earlier on Wednesday, La Liga had laid bare Barcelona's dire financial problems by slashing their spending limit for this season to €97 million (\$112.48 million), the seventh highest in La Liga. But even in adversity there is a baseline level of performance and Koeman is currently not managing to reach it. Benfica were dynamite on the break all night but they needed only 135 seconds to take the lead as Nunez ran at Garcia from the left and was allowed to dart inside and strike the ball inside the near post.

Barcelona had chances to equalize as Pedri arrowed a brilliant through-ball for Frenkie de Jong, who squared for his teammate Luuk de Jong, but he was denied by a brilliant block six yards out. Frenkie de Jong laid another chance on a plate for his namesake but again the opportunity went begging, with the midfielder's attacking contributions suddenly cut short in the 33rd minute, when Pique went off.

Benfica looked the more likely to score again in the second half as Marc-Andre ter Stegen rushed out but failed to get to the ball first. Nunez rounded the goalkeeper but curled against the outside of the post from 40 yards. Koeman brought on the



LISBON: Benfica's Brazilian defender Lucas Verissimo (left) heads the ball in front of Barcelona's Dutch forward Memphis Depay and Benfica's Argentine defender Nicolas Otamendi during the UEFA Champions League match at the Luz stadium on Wednesday. —AFP

19-year-old Nico Gonzalez, Philippe Coutinho and Ansu Fati in the 67th minute but in the 68th, Benfica made it two. Joao Mario played a neat one-two with Roman Yaremchuk, who hit Ter Stegen only for Silva to sweep in the rebound. A Sergino Dest handball was picked up by VAR, allowing Nunez to score a third from the spot, before Garcia completed a humbling night for Barcelona by being sent off with three minutes left. —AFP

Benfica loss leaves Koeman on brink at Barcelona

LISBON: Ronald Koeman said "I don't know" three times when asked if he has the support of the Barcelona board after a 3-0 defeat at Benfica in the Champions League left the Dutch coach on the brink of the sack. Any credit gained from the morale-boosting victory over Levante on Sunday evaporated in Lisbon, where Barca were subjected to yet another European humiliation that puts their hopes of reaching the knock-out stage in doubt.

Club president Joan Laporta will hold a meeting, according to reports in the Catalan press, in which it will be decided whether Koeman should remain in charge for tomorrow's crunch La Liga game against Atletico Madrid. That a change is even being considered before one of the most important games of the season, and with an international break coming up immediately after, shows how little confidence in Koeman there is left.

"I feel like I have the support of the players," said the 58-year-old. Asked if he felt supported by the club, Koeman said: "I don't know, I don't know, I don't know." When Koeman, who played for Barca in 1989-1995, was appointed by Laporta's predecessor Josep Maria Bartomeu in August 2020 the club beamed "welcome home!" and called him "a legend". But after an encouraging first season in which Barcelona won the Copa del Rey and in the end were disappointed not to win the league, Koeman's homecoming has quickly turned sour. He has never enjoyed the backing of Laporta, who tried to find a replacement in the summer but was unable to find a suitable successor or more likely persuade them to join. —AFP

Lewandowski scores double as Bayern thrash Dynamo Kiev

MUNICH: Robert Lewandowski scored twice for the second straight Champions League game this season as Bayern Munich cruised to a 5-0 home win over Dynamo Kiev on Wednesday. Lewandowski claimed the 76th and 77th Champions League goals of his career as Bayern cantered into a two-goal lead at the break before Serge Gnabry, Leroy Sane and Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting netted in the second half.

Lewandowski also hit a brace in the 3-0 drubbing of Barcelona a fortnight ago and, in total, he has scored 24 goals in his last 18 Champions League appearances to bolster his credentials for the Ballon d'Or award at the end of November. The result means Bayern top Group E, two points clear of their next opponents Benfica, who beat Barcelona 3-0 in Lisbon on Wednesday.

"We did pretty well," said man-of-the-match Sane. "We kept things calm at the back, showed our dominance and we were strong in our finishing." The 25-year-old appeared to have scored the goal of the night when he sent the ball flying into the net from the left wing, but he admitted it was a fluke. "No, it wasn't intentional, I just wanted to put a good cross in. My technique isn't that good," he said with a smile.

Dynamo Kiev coach Mircea Lucescu picked a defensive line-up designed to contain the Bundesliga champions, but the hosts took the lead with less than 12 minutes gone. Kiev captain Serhiy Sydorchuk handled in the area from a Joshua Kimmich corner and Lewandowski converted the resulting spot-kick in front of 25,000 fans, a third of the Allianz Arena's capacity due to Bavaria's COVID-19 regulations.

The Poland striker scored his second when Bayern's relentless pressing led to Thomas Mueller threading a pass between two defenders for Lewandowski to fire home on 27 minutes. This was the 19th Champions League game in which Lewandowski has scored two or more goals. It threat-



MUNICH: Bayern Munich's Polish forward Robert Lewandowski (left) and Dynamo Kiev's Ukrainian defender Illia Zabarnyi vie for the ball during the UEFA Champions League match on Wednesday. —AFP

ened to turn into a first-half rout as Sane's shot smacked against the post 10 minutes before half-time.

On one of the rare occasions when Dynamo got out of their own half, Uruguayan winger Carlos de Pena forced Manuel Neuer to tip the ball over the bar. Poland international Tomasz Kedziora and Volodymyr Shepelev came off the bench to help the visitors repeatedly thwart Bayern after half-time until Gnabry hit the net on 68 minutes.

Sane went close on two occasions, before Gnabry finished off a counterattack that started in Bayern's box. With Sane, Mueller and Lewandowski sprinting up in support, Gnabry went it alone and fired in a superb shot which crashed in off the underside of the crossbar. Sane's attempted cross then caught Dynamo goalkeeper Heorhiy Bushchan off guard as he was beaten at his near post. Lewandowski trudged off to a standing ovation with 11 minutes left and his replacement Choupo-Moting headed in Bayern's fifth in the dying stages. —AFP

Sports

Ronaldo rescues 'lucky' Man Utd from more Villarreal misery

MANCHESTER: Ole Gunnar Solskjaer admitted Manchester United "got lucky" after Cristiano Ronaldo marked his record-breaking 178th Champions League appearance with a 95th-minute winner to beat Villarreal 2-1 at Old Trafford on Wednesday. The five-time Ballon d'Or winner had barely threatened until he fired past Geronimo Rulli for his fifth goal in as many games since returning to United.

Solskjaer's men were staring down the barrel of another embarrassing group stage exit from the Champions League after deservedly falling behind early in the second half to Paco Alcacer's smart finish. Alex Telles' stunning strike quickly levelled, but they looked set to drop more points in Group F until Ronaldo's late intervention.

Despite the result, there was little in the performance to quell the growing questions as to whether Solskjaer is the man to get the best out of a squad of supremely talented individuals that are yet to click as a collective. "That's what happens at Old Trafford, we had to throw caution to the wind and got lucky in the end," said Solskjaer. "When you've got Cristiano on the pitch there is always a chance."

Ronaldo's late show beat Solskjaer's famous strike to win the Champions League in 1999 as United's latest winning goal in the competition. However, for most of the 95 minutes Villarreal were the better side and were left to rue not tak-

ing their chances as they sit bottom of the group on one point from two games. "We're annoyed. The game was basically over, we just needed to see it out and we didn't," said Villarreal defender Pau Torres. "We were impeccable before that. We took the lead, were creating chance and were better than Man United at Old Trafford."

United were without three of their first-choice back four with Harry Maguire and Luke Shaw sidelined by injury, while Aaron Wan-Bissaka was suspended after being sent off in the 2-1 defeat to Young Boys on matchday one. A makeshift defense looked as such in the first half as Villarreal wasted a host of chances to inflict more misery on the Red Devils after beating them in May to win the Europa League.

De Gea was the fall guy in the Europa League final as he was the only player of the 22 on both sides to fail to score in a marathon penalty shootout. However, he has started the season in supreme form and made brilliant saves from Arnaut Danjuma and Alcacer to keep the game scoreless at half-time.

United fall behind

United did not heed their warnings as eight minutes into the second period another promising break from Danjuma finally got the finish it deserved as Alcacer prodded through the legs of De Gea at the near post. Telles was at fault for



MANCHESTER: Manchester United's Portuguese striker Cristiano Ronaldo (center) celebrates with Manchester United's Swedish defender Victor Lindelof at the final whistle in the UEFA Champions League at Old Trafford stadium on Wednesday. — AFP

the opening goal as he played Danjuma inside. But the Brazilian quickly made amends in spectacular fashion as he volleyed home Fernandes' free-kick from outside the area for his first United goal.

Solskjaer had named an extremely offensive line-up with Ronaldo flanked by Jadon Sancho

and Mason Greenwood, and Paul Pogba alongside Fernandes in midfield. But it was another night to forget Sancho since his £73 million move from Borussia Dortmund in July. The England winger was easily kept in check by Juan Foyth before being replaced 15 minutes from time by Edinson Cavani. — AFP

Chiesa strikes to give Juve huge win over holders Chelsea

TURIN: Federico Chiesa proved to be a big game player once again with the only goal in Juventus' 1-0 Champions League win over holders Chelsea which could kick-start their faltering season. Sat 10th in Serie A after a succession of unconvincing performances domestically, Juve top Group H with a perfect six points thanks to a superbly taken winner 10 seconds after half-time from Chiesa, one of Italy's stars at Euro 2020.

Massimiliano Allegri's side took down the European champions, despite missing starting forwards Paulo Dybala and Alvaro Morata, with a disciplined performance that sucked the life out of the Blues and restricted them to very little in front of goal. "We showed the Juventus spirit tonight, and that's what the coach asks of us," Chiesa, who has been criticized by Allegri this season, told Amazon.

"There has never been any problem between me and the coach. I do what he asks of me. When Juve start off poorly there is always a lot of unnecessary noise: we all want to take the club back to the top." Juve are three points clear of both Chelsea and Zenit, who they play in Saint Petersburg in three weeks. "The players put in a great performance against the European champions. We were solid defensively and conceded very few chances. (Wojciech) Szczesny barely had a save to make," said Allegri to Amazon.

"We also missed some really good chances on the counter but I'm happy. We haven't conceded a goal, we have six points, it's another step towards qualifying." Chelsea dominated the ball in the early stages but it was the home side who had the first real chances of the game, both of which came after pouncing on sloppy passes in midfield.



TURIN: Juventus' Italian forward Federico Chiesa (second left) shoots past Chelsea's Senegalese goalkeeper Edouard Mendy to open the scoring during the UEFA Champions League match at the Juventus stadium. — AFP

Chelsea held at bay

Adrien Rabiot was barracked by the home crowd in the 16th minute when after sprinting away on a break with almost the entire Chelsea team still upfield, he elected to play a pass to Federico Bernardeschi which was completely mishit and rolled to Edouard Mendy. Four minutes later it was Chiesa's turn to show the Blues a clean pair of heels after pinching the ball, only for his low shot from a tight angle to drift just wide.

Juve's gameplan of sitting in and stopping Chelsea from getting a passing rhythm going worked but they initially lacked a focal point and too often let off the hook a Chelsea team missing the dynamism of N'Golo Kante and Mason Mount. However they got the goal they deserved immediately after the break through Chiesa, who has had an uncertain start to the season but confidently met Bernardeschi's through ball to lash home the opener at the near post. — AFP

'Anything is possible' for Man Utd as Ronaldo papers over the cracks

MANCHESTER: Cristiano Ronaldo's record 178th Champions League game had been one of his quietest for 94 minutes until the ball broke kindly for him to break Villarreal hearts at Old Trafford on Wednesday. Manchester United's returning hero rode to the rescue just in time to salvage a 2-1 win from another performance which cast more doubt over where the Red Devils are headed under Ole Gunnar Solskjaer.

The Norwegian badly needed three points after a run of three defeats in four games and got it with seconds to spare. However, Solskjaer conceded United had "got lucky" and were "saved" by goalkeeper David de Gea as Villarreal enjoyed the overwhelming majority of the chances. The difference between the sides was in who was on the end of those opportunities.

De Gea denied Arnaut Danjuma, Paco Alcacer, Moi Gomez and Boulaye Dia either side of Alcacer's deserved opener for the visitors on 53 minutes. Alex Telles' spectacular strike from distance quickly restored parity, but it was not for another half an hour that the all-time top goalscorer in the Champions League took center stage. "Cristiano Ronaldo only got one chance and, well, he's Cristiano Ronaldo," said Villarreal defender Juan Foyth, who had kept United's most expensive summer signing Jadon Sancho quiet all night. — AFP

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Qatar to hold its first ever Formula One Grand Prix