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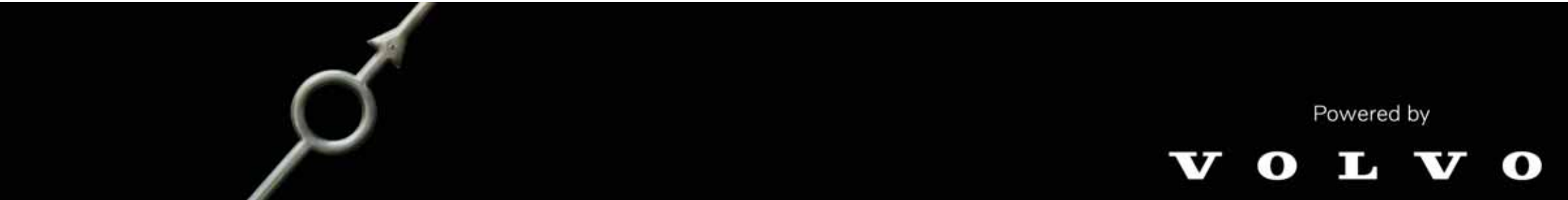
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WHO recommends use of first malaria vaccine for children

New study offers hope for first-ever dengue treatment

Kuwait marks 1st anniversary of Sheikh Mishal's nomination as Crown Prince

KUWAIT: Kuwait today marks the first anniversary of HH Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's nomination as the country's Crown Prince. HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah nominated Sheikh Mishal on Oct 7, 2020 to be his Crown Prince to contribute to running the affairs of the nation, maintaining security and stability as well as further boosting development and prosperity. On Oct 8, 2020, HH Sheikh Mishal took oath at a



HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

special session of the National Assembly with 59 MPs in attendance. Sheikh Mishal has been close to decision-making circles for the past six decades, contributing immensely to the development of Kuwait.

Throughout his career, which he started at the ministry of interior until becoming deputy president of Kuwait National Guard, Sheikh Mishal has always been keen on highlighting the importance of national security. — KUNA (See Page 2)

GENEVA: The World Health Organization yesterday endorsed the RTS,S/AS01 malaria vaccine, the first against the mosquito-borne disease that kills more than 400,000 people a year, mostly African children. The decision followed a review of a pilot program deployed since 2019 in Ghana, Kenya and Malawi where more than two million doses were given of the vaccine, first made by the pharmaceutical company GSK in 1987.

After reviewing evidence from those countries, WHO said it was "recommending the broad use of the world's first malaria vaccine", the agency's director general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said. The WHO said in a statement it was recommending the widespread application of the vaccine among children in sub-Saharan Africa and in other regions with moderate to high malaria transmission.

Many vaccines exist against viruses and bacteria but this was the first time that the WHO recommended for broad use a vaccine against a human parasite. "From a scientific perspective this is a massive breakthrough," said Pedro Alonso, Director of the WHO Global Malaria Program. The vaccine acts

against plasmodium falciparum - one of five parasite species and the most deadly.

Malaria symptoms include fever, headaches and muscle pain, then cycles of chills, fever and sweating. Every two minutes, a child dies of malaria, according to the World Health Organization. Before the newly recommended vaccine can reach African children, the next step will be funding. "That will be the next major step... Then we will be set up for scaling of doses and decisions about where the vaccine will be most useful and how it will be deployed," said Kate O'Brien, Director of WHO's Department of Immunization, Vaccines and Biologicals.

Meanwhile, new research may have found the first-ever treatment for the dengue virus, which affects tens of millions each year, producing the brutal symptoms that earned it the moniker "breakbone fever". Tests in cell cultures and mice found that a newly identified compound can effectively disarm the virus, stopping it from replicating and preventing disease, according to a study published yesterday in the journal Nature.

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News in brief

UAE 'overcomes' COVID crisis

ABU DHABI: The United Arab Emirates declared yesterday that it has overcome the COVID crisis, recording its lowest number of infections this month since summer last year. "I wanted to assure you all that our lives must go back to normal," said Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed in footage published by the official WAM news agency. "There are some changes in how we work, in our families' studies or our personal lives... but we thank God for everything," said the de facto UAE ruler. — AFP

Iran slams Zionist 'presence'

MOSCOW: Iran said yesterday that it has "serious concerns" about the Zionist entity's presence in the Caucasus, as tensions mount between Iran and Azerbaijan over Baku's ties with the Zionist entity, a major arms supplier. "We certainly will not tolerate geopolitical change and map change in the Caucasus," Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian told reporters. "We have serious concerns about the presence of terrorists and Zionists in this region." — AFP

US reveals nuke numbers

WASHINGTON: The US State Department published on Tuesday the number of nuclear warheads the country stockpiles for the first time in four years, after former president Donald Trump placed a blackout on the data. As of Sept 30, 2020, the US military maintained 3,750 active and inactive nuclear warheads, down by 55 from a year earlier and by 72 from the same date in 2017. The figure was also the lowest level since the US nuclear stockpile peaked in 1967, when the total was 31,255 warheads. — AFP

Telegram adds record 70m users

MOSCOW: Telegram's founder Pavel Durov said Tuesday that the encrypted messenger app had added a "record" 70 million users in one day after Facebook and its Instagram and WhatsApp platforms were hit by a massive outage. According to monitoring firm SensorTower, Telegram has gone from the 56th most downloaded free app in the United States to the fifth. In January, Durov said Telegram had over 500 million monthly active users and gained 25 million users in a day after a tweak to WhatsApp's data-sharing terms. — AFP

Duo wins Nobel Prize for work on catalysts

STOCKHOLM: Germany's Benjamin List and US-based David MacMillan yesterday won the Nobel Chemistry Prize for developing a tool to build molecules which has helped make chemistry more environmentally friendly. Their tool, which they developed independently of each other in 2000, can be used to control and accelerate chemical reactions, exert-

ing a big impact on drugs research.

Prior to their work, scientists believed there were only two types of catalysts - metals and enzymes. The new technique, which relies on small organic molecules and which is called "asymmetric organocatalysis" is widely used in pharmaceuticals, allowing drug makers to streamline the production of medicines for depression and respiratory infections, among others.

Organocatalysts allow several steps in a production process to be performed in an unbroken sequence, considerably reducing waste in chemical manufacturing, the Nobel

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NOBELPRISET I KEMI 2021
THE NOBEL PRIZE IN CHEMISTRY 2021

Benjamin List, Germany
David MacMillan, USA

STOCKHOLM: A screen displays the co-winners of the 2021 Nobel Prize in Chemistry, Germany's Benjamin List (left) and David MacMillan of the US, during a press conference at the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences yesterday. — AFP

Singapore robots stoke privacy fears

SINGAPORE: Singapore has trialed patrol robots that blast warnings at people engaging in "undesirable social behavior", adding to an arsenal of surveillance technology in the tightly controlled city-state that is fueling privacy concerns. From vast numbers of CCTV cameras to trials of lampposts kitted out with facial recognition tech, Singapore is seeing an explosion of

tools to track its inhabitants.

Officials have long pushed a vision of a hyper-efficient, tech-driven "smart nation", but activists say privacy is being sacrificed and people have little control over what happens to their data. Singapore is frequently criticized for curbing civil liberties and people are accustomed to tight controls, but there is still growing unease at intrusive tech.

The government's latest surveillance devices are robots on wheels, with seven cameras, that issue warnings to the public and detect "undesirable social behavior". This includes smoking in prohibited areas, improperly parking bicycles, and breaching coronavirus social-distancing rules.

Continued on Page 2



SINGAPORE: In this photograph taken on Sept 6, 2021, a man gestures to an autonomous robot named "Xavier" as it patrols a shopping and residential district. — AFP

Two stranded whales rescued in Argentina

BUENOS AIRES: Rescue teams saved two stranded whales along the Atlantic coast of Argentina Tuesday, the World Marine Foundation said. The animals were stranded on the beach of the seaside resort town of La Lucila del Mar, 360 km south of Buenos Aires, just as spring arrives to the southern hemisphere.

"The first, which was stranded on Sunday, was a juvenile female humpback whale, 32 feet (9.8 m) long and

approximately eight tons in weight," the conservation group said in a statement. The second individual, which "is a male of the same species, 28 feet long, and approximately seven tons, appeared Monday night," the foundation added.

Some 30 people participated in the rescue operation, including local residents, marine conservationists, Civil Defense members, coast guard officers, firefighters, volunteers and beach lifeguards. Their collective efforts allowed the animals to return to the sea, the statement said. "Upon arriving to survey the first animal's situation, primary support efforts were immediately carried out, including assuring the individual's position

Continued on Page 2



LUCILA DEL MAR, Argentina: Rescuers help a stranded humpback whale on the shores of the Argentine Sea in Buenos Aires province on Tuesday. — AFP

Local

Kuwait marks 1st anniversary of Sheikh Mishal's nomination as Crown Prince

Deputy Amir, Crown Prince receives Speaker, Prime Minister



KUWAIT: Deputy Amir and Crown Prince His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem. — KUNA photos



Deputy Amir and Crown Prince His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Deputy Amir and Crown Prince His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday at Bayan Palace National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem. His Highness also received His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

Kuwait marks today the first anniversary of Sheikh Mishal's nomination as the country's Crown Prince. His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah nominated Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on October 7, 2020 to be his Crown Prince to contribute to running the affairs of the nation, maintaining security and stability as well as further boosting development and prosperity. On October 8th, His Highness Sheikh

Mishal took oath at a special session for the National Assembly with 59 MPs in attendance.

Sheikh Mishal has been close to the decision-making circles for the past six decades, contributing immensely to the development of Kuwait. Throughout his career, which he started at the Ministry of Interior until becoming deputy president of Kuwait National Guard, Sheikh Mishal has always been keen on highlighting importance of national security. Born in 1940, Sheikh Mishal received primary education at Mubarakiya School and he continued education in Hendon Police College in Britain and graduated in 1960. Sheikh Mishal joined the MoI after graduation and become head of general intelligence department in 1967 with a rank of Colonel. He continued as intelligence

chief until 1980. On April 13, 2004, the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah named Sheikh Mishal as deputy president of Kuwait National Guards (KNG). He contributed to the development of KNG and promoted its supporting role to state institutions during times of crises, the latest was the coronavirus pandemic.

KNG adopted three five-year plans to strengthen its capabilities to deal with emerging multifaceted challenges. KNG, under Sheikh Mishal's guidance, sealed cooperation protocols with state institutions to offer support when necessary, like the 2018 airport crisis, addressing radioactive leak in oil facilities and supporting the fire department in major accidents. KNG also joined the International Association of Gendarmeries and Police Forces with

Military Statues (FIEP), a move that Sheikh Mishal said would contribute to exchange of expertise in a quickly evolving world.

French President decorated Sheikh Mishal with an Order on December 4, 2018 for his contribution in building modern Kuwait and boosting friendship between Kuwait and France. Sheikh Mishal was also the honorary president of Kuwait society of pilots in 1973-2017, and was one of founding members of Kuwait amateur radio society. His Highness the Crown Prince was very close to the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah accompanying him on numerous official and private visits. He was with Sheikh Sabah during his treatment in the US from July of 2020 and until His Highness' passing on September 29, 2020. — KUNA

Kuwait Defense Minister receives ambassadors



KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah meets German Ambassador to Kuwait Stefan Mobs. — KUNA photos



Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah meets US Ambassador to Kuwait Alina L. Romanowski.



Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah meets Spanish Ambassador to Kuwait Miguel Jose Moro Aguilar, accompanied by the newly appointed Spain's military attaché resident in Riyadh Colonel Jose Maria Cenarro. Sheikh Hamad wished Colonel Cenarro success in his new post. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah received yesterday German Ambassador to Kuwait Stefan Mobs. In a statement, the Ministry of Defense said that the two

sides discussed bilateral ties between the two countries and latest regional and global developments. Sheikh Hamad also received US Ambassador to Kuwait Alina L. Romanowski, where they discussed bilateral coopera-

tion and ways to enhance them. The statement noted that Sheikh Hamad lauded the historical ties between Kuwait and the US. Furthermore, Sheikh Hamad received the Spanish Ambassador to the country

Miguel Jose Moro Aguilar, accompanied by the newly appointed Spain's military attaché resident in Riyadh Colonel Jose Maria Cenarro. Sheikh Hamad wished Colonel Cenarro success in his new post. — KUNA

WHO recommends use of first...

Continued from Page 1

And it appears to be effective whether taken protectively before infection or as a treatment after the virus is contracted. It is an "exciting" development in the battle against dengue, according to Scott Biering and Eva Harris of the University of California, Berkeley's School of Public Health. It "represents a major advance in the field of dengue therapeutics," the pair, who were not involved in the research, wrote in a review in Nature.

There is no doubt about the threat posed by the mosquito-borne dengue virus, which is estimated to infect at least 98 million people a year

and is endemic in 128 countries worldwide. It can cause intense flu-like symptoms, and sometimes develops into severe dengue which can be fatal. And because there are four different strains of the virus, infection with one doesn't protect against another, and catching dengue a second time is often more serious.

No treatment exists so far, with efforts focusing instead on reducing transmission - including a program that infects mosquitoes with a disease-resistant bacteria. A vaccine called Dengvaxia is approved for use only in some countries and is effective against a single strain. Enter the unassumingly named JNJ-A07, a compound found by screening thousands of potential candidates, in a process researcher Johan Neyts described as like "looking for a needle in a haystack".

It turned out to be worth the wait. Its effect "in infected animals is unprecedented," Neyts, who helped lead the research, told AFP. — AFP

List, who is a director at the Max Planck Institute in Germany, said. "It's hard to describe what you feel in that moment, but it was a very special moment that I will never forget."

Asked about what the prize would mean for his future as a researcher, List promised he had "a few more plans." "I always like to go to the extremes. 'Can we do things that were just impossible before?' List told reporters. "I hope I live up to this to this recognition and continue discovering amazing things."

MacMillan, born in Scotland but a professor at Princeton University in the US, also thought he was the target of a prank, saying he originally went back to sleep when he started receiving texts from Sweden early yesterday. "I am shocked, and stunned and overjoyed," MacMillan said in a statement from Princeton University. — AFP

Duo wins Nobel Prize for work...

Continued from Page 1

committee at the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences said. List and MacMillan, both 53, will share the 10-million-kronor (\$1.1-million) prize. "I thought somebody was making a joke. I was sitting at breakfast with my wife," List told reporters by telephone during a press conference after the prize was announced.

In past years, he said his wife has joked that he should keep an eye on his phone for a call from Sweden. "But today we didn't even make the joke,"

Two stranded whales rescued...

Continued from Page 1

allowed it to breathe, keeping its pectoral fins underwater in order to stabilize its body temperature as much as possible," the organization said.

The whole procedure was "difficult," the group said. At one point, the force of the waves knocked the whale over so that the mammal's blowhole was underwater and it was unable to breathe. "Thanks to a quick action, they were able to turn it over,"

Singapore robots stoke...

Continued from Page 1

During a recent patrol, one of the "Xavier" robots wove its way through a housing estate and stopped in front of a group of elderly residents watching a chess match. "Please keep one-meter distancing, please keep to five persons per group," a robotic voice blared out, as a camera on top of the machine trained its gaze on them.

During a three-week trial in September, two robots were deployed to patrol the housing estate and a shopping center. "It reminds me of Robocop," said Frannie Teo, a 34-year-old research assistant, who was walking through the mall. It brings to mind a "dystopian world of robots... I'm just a bit hesitant about that kind of concept", she added.

Digital rights activist Lee Yi Ting said the devices were the latest way Singaporeans were being watched.

said Sergio Rodriguez Heredia, a biologist at the World Marine Foundation's Rescue Center.

Rescuers tucked cables underneath the whale's body - connected to a huge backhoe tractor crane - hoping to free it from the sandy sea floor. The workers noticed the second whale overnight, seeing it was in a "good state of health," said Augusto Giachetti, director of the Civil Defense's coastal division. They waited until dawn to begin the second whale's rescue. "It was necessary to realign the animal, using the assistance of a backhoe and special cables to move it a big enough distance that it was able to float," he Giachetti said. Once the whale realized it was able to float, it swam out to sea. — AFP

"It all contributes to the sense people... need to watch what they say and what they do in Singapore to a far greater extent than they would in other countries," she told AFP. But the government defended its use of robots, saying they were not being used to identify or take action against offenders during the tech's trial, and were needed to address a labor crunch as the population ages.

"The workforce is actually shrinking," said Ong Ka Hing, from the government agency that developed the Xavier robots, adding they could help reduce the number of officers needed for foot patrols. The island of about 5.5 million people has 90,000 police cameras, a number set to double by 2030, and facial recognition tech - which helps authorities pick out faces in a crowd - may be installed on lampposts across the city.

There was a rare public backlash this year when authorities admitted coronavirus contract-tracing data collected by an official system had been accessed by police. The government later passed legislation to limit its use. But critics say the city-state's laws generally put few limitations on government surveillance, and Singaporeans have little control over what happens to the data collected. — AFP

Local

Zain takes part in launching smart meters project in Kuwait

Event held at JACC in the presence of Minister of Electricity and Water

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, took part in the special event held at Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center (JACC) to officially launch the smart meters project. The event was held in the presence of Dr Mishan Al-Otaibi, Minister of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy, and Eaman Al-Roudhan, Chief Executive Officer of Zain Kuwait. Zain's participation came as part of its partnership with the ministry to manage electricity and water smart meter systems in Kuwait.

During her opening speech at the event, Roudhan said: "We are extremely proud to be a strategic partner to the government, represented by the Ministry of Electricity and Water, to support the successful launch of the smart meters project, which we started back in 2017. This initiative is one of the first real results of Kuwait's digital transformation journey, and we cannot be prouder to be a part of it."

Roudhan added: "The smart meters project is one of the biggest in our nation's energy and ICT sectors, as it highlights the government's solid vision towards adopting more digital applications and e-government tools. It also reflects the importance of benefitting from the private sector's expertise to present citizens and the whole community with an added value."

Roudhan explained that the project would introduce flexibility and ease into consumer transactions within the ministry, while also presenting more data related to consumption rates and more control over energy conservation practices. The new system will also add great value to the country, allowing officials to monitor and encourage bill settlement via online payment channels with extreme ease. This is especially true as the Kuwaiti market is already mature when it comes to adopting and using digital applications and online payment methods. Roudhan noted: "Today we are reaping the fruits of partnering with the public sector into taking the digital transformation journey we started together in 2017."

Roudhan continued by saying: "As part of our belief in the integral role played by the partnership between the public and private sectors in progressing the nation's digital transformation, we started to make our tech resources available to serve the government's digital transformation goals long ago. This is because we strongly believe that technology continues to have a growing role in all aspects of life."

Roudhan added: "Being a leading provider of the latest digital services, we partnered with the public sector in many major projects across various sectors. Some of the top examples include our development of the 'Shlonik' platform to monitor home quarantine in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, offering safe cities solutions in partnership with local co-ops, as well as developing the unique Kuwait TV app in



Zain Kuwait CEO Eaman Al-Roudhan delivers her speech at the event.

collaboration with the Ministry of Information. In addition, we supported the country's efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19 by offering remote business solutions, and many other examples."

Roudhan further added: "I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the teams whom we worked with in the Ministry of Electricity and Water since the beginning of our partnership on this project. I would also like to stress that we will always be fully committed to make our expertise and human resources available to strengthen our partnership with the local community to serve the nation's wellbeing".



Real result of
Kuwait's digital
transformation

Roudhan concluded: "Zain is always ready to introduce the latest smart solutions that enable and empower the achievement of the country's developmental goals. We will surely play our role to raise the efficiency of the government's infrastructures and advance our country under the wise leadership of HH the Amir and HH the Crown Prince."

Zain's role in this project includes managing world-class smart meters, managing the meters' operating systems, as well as the development and management of a massive database specially developed for this project. Zain will also introduce a



KUWAIT: (From left) Zain's Waleed Al-Khashti, Malek Al-Sabah, Minister of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy Dr Mishan Al-Otaibi and Zain Kuwait CEO Eaman Al-Roudhan.



Zain Kuwait CEO Eaman Al-Roudhan, Minister of Electricity, Water, and Renewable Energy Dr Mishan Al-Otaibi and MEW officials attend the event.

secure e-payment system through MEW's official website and through the free MEW mobile app for iOS and Android devices, where consumers can monitor their smart meter's readings in real-time and receive bill reminder notifications and more. Zain also innovated payment systems similar to those the company offers to its customers, where citizens and residents will be able to pay electricity and water bills through prepaid or postpaid plans that fit their unique needs.

The smart meters project aims to eliminate the requirement for a manual process to obtain meter

readings, replaced instead by a state-of-the-art electronic platform that automatically collects meter readings, while also being able to inform MEW's support team of any failures within the system in real-time.

Zain continuously offers the latest and most advanced services and solutions to showcase its capabilities as an active partner in empowering a smart life, a safe community, and an efficient business sector. The company considers itself a main partner in the achievement of the country's developmental goals.

Foreign Ministry delegation visits labor shelter

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: A delegation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs visited the labor shelter of the Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) yesterday. Acting Assistant Foreign Minister for Consular Affairs Mishal Al-Mudhaf and Second Secretary for Consular Affairs Mohammad Al-Harz visited the shelter, where they met officials from PAM to review the conditions there.

PAM officials explained to the delegation the simplified procedures and the solutions provided for women housed at the shelter during the pandemic. They explained their cooperation with their embassies, the procedures of accepting workers in the shelter and the role of government institutions at the shelter.

During the visit, the delegation was also informed about services provided to the residents of the shelter, which includes health and the legal services. The officials answered all questions of the delegation, who also received all information and statistics on the number of inmates at the shelter. Mudhaf praised the humane treatment of residents, the great efforts of the staff working at the shelter and the services provided, including legal protection and a dignified stay.



KUWAIT: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Public Authority for Manpower officials are seen while touring the labor shelter.



Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Public Authority for Manpower officials pose for a group picture during the visit.

KDIPA promotes Kuwaiti investments in Expo 2020 Dubai

DUBAI: The Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority's (KDIPA) participation in the Kuwaiti pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai aims at encouraging and attracting global investors to endorse investments in Kuwait, said an official yesterday. KDIPA executive Bibi Marafi said that the authority was considered as the main source of investment promotion in Kuwait, adding that it facilitated entry procedures for investors worldwide. Marafi also added that KDIPA was contributing to new Kuwait Vision 2035 by offering jobs in the Kuwaiti market through the authority's website. She revealed that they offered their services throughout the period of the expo by answering any inquiries. Kuwait's participation in Expo 2020 Dubai is considered one of its largest contributions abroad with its pavilion covering an area of 5,500 square meters. The pavilion is designed to simulate Kuwait's water towers that represent renewable energy, which was the reflection of the official slogan 'New Kuwait, New Opportunities for Sustainability'. —KUNA



Bibi Marafi

NBK receives Lord Mayor of London

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) hosted William Russell, Lord Mayor of the City of London, and his accompanying delegation for a luncheon at its headquarters, on the sidelines of his annual visit to Kuwait, during which he is always keen to visit the bank.

Lord Russell and his accompanying delegation, including UK Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis, and a group of London City officials, were received by NBK Group Chairman, and a number of board members and executive management.

On this occasion, NBK Group Chairman Nasser Al-Sayer delivered a speech in which he welcomed the visitors, expressing his appreciation for the leading role played by the Lord Mayor of London in strengthening relations between Kuwait and the City hosting many major Kuwaiti financial institutions.

Sayer stressed that the strong, long-standing ties between the business communities in the two countries for decades yielded successful commercial and financial relations, extending to the exchange of expertise and visions, and significantly contributing



KUWAIT: Lord Mayor of the City of London William Russell poses for a group picture with National Bank of Kuwait officials during a visit to NBK headquarters yesterday.

to serve the mutual interests of the two countries.

NBK is keen to be present in the main financial markets, foremost of which is the City of London, in line with the bank's strategy to support trade exchange between developed economies and countries in the region, in addition to serving its customers around the world. It also aims to strengthen relations with major London-based international companies seeking to launch their business in Kuwait and the region, Sayer noted. NBK had established its branch in London back in the late 1970s, becoming the first Gulf bank to enter the British market, as part of its international expansion strategy.

During his visit to Kuwait, Lord Russell will meet with senior economic officials to discuss strengthening economic and trade relations between the two countries, in addition to exploring the prospects of investment opportunities and aspects of cooperation in many sectors, and reviewing the latest financial and economic developments on the local and global arenas.

National Bank of Kuwait enjoys a widespread international footprint with overseas branches and subsidiaries in China, Geneva, London, Paris, New York and Singapore, in addition to its regional presence in Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and UAE.



NBK Group Chairman Nasser Al-Sayer (left) presents a memento to Lord Mayor of London William Russell.

Local

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The First Daily in The Arabian Gulf

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News in brief

Kuwait oil at \$80 pb

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwait's crude oil broke the \$80 per barrel barrier for the first time since 2018, driven by optimism of the market's full recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The price of Kuwaiti oil went up by \$2.37 to \$80.76 per barrel Tuesday as opposed to \$78.39 pb the day before, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. As for the Brent crude and West Texas Intermediate, the global prices of both closed upward with the first gaining \$1.31 to reach \$78.93 per barrel and the latter going up \$1.30 to \$82.56 pb.

Domestic abuse

KUWAIT: A woman ran to her neighbor's house to escape from her husband, who beat her and threatened to kill her, Al-Rai Arabic daily reported yesterday quoting a security source. The neighbor called police and asked for an ambulance. Paramedics took the battered woman to hospital. The victim told police a domestic dispute took place that ended with her being beaten. The husband will be summoned as investigations are underway.

Search for 'thief'

KUWAIT: A woman told police that a man entered her house with intention to steal, but fled after she discovered him, Al-Rai Arabic daily reported yesterday. Detectives are searching for the man, and will check surveillance cameras of neighbors and those in the street in an attempt to identify him, said sources quoted in the report.

EU: GCC countries important partners in energy supply

BRUSSELS: The European Union yesterday said it is in contact with the Gulf Cooperation (GCC) countries regarding the energy issue saying they are important players in the energy sector. "This issue is very much in the center of the attention of EU," EU lead spokesperson for foreign affairs and security policy Peter Stano told a press conference in Brussels in reply to a question on energy cooperation. "EU High Representative is doing the necessary outreach to the (GCC) countries which have a role to play and which could be also very important partners with us in this issue, not only tackling the prices of energy but in general when it comes to Green transition, sustainable and renewable energy," he said.

He noted that this issue was raised by the EU High Representative Josep Borrell during his recent visit to Qatar, the UAE and Saudi Arabia. "These three countries are very important players when it comes to energy supply and the issue of energy supply, energy prices and the sustainability of the overall environment in this regard was also raised and discussed," he said. Stano said there are ongoing contacts between the 27-member bloc and partners in the Gulf region and these discussions will continue. — KUNA



Sheikh Yahia Al-Badri

Bohra Sultan's representative congratulates Amir

KUWAIT: Sheikh Yahia Al-Badri, Representative of Sultan of the Bohra Community in Kuwait, expressed his sincerest felicitations and congratulations to His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and the Kuwaiti peoples, on the anniversary of His Highness the Amir completing one year in office. He also voiced his heartedly wishes for all goodness to prevail during his rule, with remarkable achievements, prosperity and development in Kuwait. On this occasion, the Muslim Bohra Community residing in Kuwait felicitates the Kuwaiti peoples on this anniversary, beseeching Allah Almighty for all goodness, security, safety and advancement for the State of Kuwait.

Kuwait urges political backing to asylum-seekers, refugees worldwide

Nearly 20 million refugees worldwide under UNHCR's mandate

GENEVA: The State of Kuwait underlined yesterday that it is essential to throw much weight behind political tracks to address the crises of asylum-seekers and refugees worldwide in a bid to turn emergency relief into sustainable development. The remark was made by Kuwait's Permanent Representative at the United Nations (UN) and International Organizations in Geneva Ambassador Jamal Al-Ghunaim during the 72nd session of the Executive Committee of the Program of the United Nations High Commissioner's Program for Refugees, held between October 4-8.

Ghunaim elaborated that those political tracks could be supported by spurring preventive diplomacy and resolution of conflicts through political dialogue, and motivating mediation efforts as the sole way to attain peace and stability, thus moving from the phase of emergency relief to that of sustainable development. He sounded the alarm that prolonged humanitarian crises, failure to find solutions and in compliance with international human rights law put regional and international security and peace in jeopardy.

"The failure and reluctance of the international community to handle all these problems culminate in the deterioration and aggravation of political conditions, which necessitates closer joint cooperation in various fields targeting better conditions for internally displaced persons and refugees in host countries," the Kuwaiti diplomat said. He underscored that it is imperative to carry on concerted international efforts to fight the fallout of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), especially reflections on refugees and displaced persons. Given the enormous and intricate challenges worldwide, it is the responsibility of everyone to back the UN refugee agency's efforts, he emphasized.

'Step up coordination'

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has 20 million refugees world-



UKHIA: Rohingya refugees walk back home after collecting relief material at the Kutupalong refugee camp in Ukha yesterday. —AFP

wide under its mandate, while the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in



**UNRWA has
5.7 million
Palestinian
refugees**

the Near East (UNRWA) has nearly 5.7 million Palestinian refugees, not to mention 48 million internally displaced persons, he said, adding that there

are also 4.1 million asylum-seekers. Accordingly, the humanitarian community should step up coordination between regional and international agencies and nongovernmental organizations in response to such circumstances and challenges, Ghunaim added.

In this context, the Kuwaiti diplomat restated his country's commitment to backing the efforts of the UN refugee agency and other international humanitarian organizations. He pointed out Kuwait's total contributions of over \$327 million to the global fight against COVID-19. The Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Program (ExCom) meets in Geneva annually to review and approve the agency's programs and budget, advise on international protection and discuss a range of other issues with UNHCR and intergovernmental and non-governmental partners. — KUNA



RIYADH: Kuwait's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Sheikh Ali Al-Khaled Al-Jaber Al-Sabah tours the Riyadh International Book Fair 2021. — KUNA photos

Riyadh Int'l Book Fair rich cultural event: Ambassador

RIYADH: Kuwait's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Sheikh Ali Al-Khaled Al-Jaber Al-Sabah affirmed that the Riyadh International Book Fair 2021 is a diverse and rich cultural event to the Gulf and the Arab world. In remarks to the press yesterday on the sidelines of his visit to the fair, Sheikh Ali lauded the organizers of the event, thanking the Saudi Ministry of Culture for this great cultural gathering. The ambassador also pointed out that Saudi Arabia

has a rich and great cultural asset and bright minds that have influenced Gulf, Arab and Islamic culture and literature. Sheikh Ali stressed that Kuwaiti publishing houses and writers represent the bright-civilized Kuwaiti culture and literature. Last Thursday, the Saudi Minister of Culture, Prince Bader bin Farhan, inaugurated the Riyadh International Book Fair 2021 under the patronage of the Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz, with the participation of more than 1,000 publishing houses from 30 countries. The exhibition will be held on an area of more than 36,000 square meters and includes areas dedicated to the work of publishers, workshops, dialogue sessions, and training courses, as well as poetry and art gatherings, performances, and international plays presented in three external theaters. — KUNA



stc sponsors 'Safe Education' national campaign

KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced its sponsorship of the national campaign 'Safe Education'. The campaign aims to provide a safe and healthy environment for education in collaboration with the Ministries of Education, Health, Interior, and Information.

Launched under the slogan 'Safe Education', the national initiative corresponds with the return of students to schools. The campaign began on Thursday, September 30, 2021, and will run throughout the year while upholding the highest strict health protocols and procedures, in line with stc's corporate social responsibility framework.

The objective of the campaign is to support the Kuwaiti society by focusing on highlighting the precautionary health requirements and procedures that need to be followed by male and female students in their return back to school. After a break of almost 18 months due to the preventative measures applied to minimize the spread of the Coronavirus, the campaign was

launched as a reminder of the necessary safety protocols set by government bodies to manage the start of the new academic school year (2021-2022).

Through its role, stc collaborated with the Ministries of Education, Health, Interior, and Information by utilizing its various social and digital platforms to spread awareness on the safety measures applicable to students and parents in the return to school. As a telecom leader possessing the know-how of reaching customers, the Company launched an SMS campaign

with educational and instructive messages to inform parents and students on the different preventative safety measures that should be applied.

In addition to its contribution of sharing valuable information regarding preventative measures, stc will be scheduling field visits to different schools to meet with students. These field visits will help showcase firsthand some of the routine safety protocols that students can adopt to stay safe and healthy, while giving stc an opportunity to distribute gifts to the students as a form of encouragement.

Commenting on stc's participation in this initiative, Danah Al-Jasem, General Manager of Corporate Communications at stc, said, "stc is accustomed to participate in initiatives that support the community, therefore it is not new for the Company to participate in activities that focus on benefiting our society. Having said that, stc was keen to participate in an initiative



KUWAIT: stc honors Interior Ministry officials.

that focused on strengthening and confirming the commitments parents and students need to uphold in their return to school. It is essential that both parents and students apply the precautionary health requirements and procedures set by the Ministries of Health and Education from the moment they leave their homes up until they leave the school."

Jasem added, "At stc, we strive to participate in initiatives that aim to educate the community and spread awareness on various causes. When targeting specific groups within the community, such as parents and students, we launched our awareness campaign through stc's social media platforms as a reminder of the important health and safety measures we need to consider to protect our sons and daughters."

In appreciation of the unique initiative, Jasem commended the efforts of the participating government entities in organizing and launching an awareness campaign directed to protecting the students of Kuwait. In this regard,

Jasem expressed her deep gratitude and appreciation to the government institutions for initiating a campaign that aims to spread a positive impact in the community. The campaign not only aligns with the goals and vision of the Kuwaiti government, but also protects students and the Kuwaiti society as a whole.

Jasem concluded, "Based on stc's values and our CSR framework, we were keen to accept the invitation from the State's ministries to support their overall objective of protecting and empowering the Kuwaiti society. It is a critical step during this time to ensure that the appropriate safety and health measures are met in order to minimize the impacts caused by the pandemic, and as stc, we will continue to build on the role we play within the community. In this regard, we will spare no effort in progressively developing our CSR framework by participating and launching initiatives that support the community and assist the nation in overcoming the pandemic."



From insurgency to city beat: Police learn the ropes

Why did Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp shut down?

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OLOGA: A family rests at the entrance of their stilt home over the Maracaibo Lake in Ologa, Zulia state, Venezuela. —AFP

Illiteracy haunts isolated Venezuelan village

Eight years of economic crisis decimate Venezuela

OLOGA: Desks at the only school in the impoverished Venezuelan fishing village of Ologa are piled one on top of the other in a dark and dusty room. It has been four years since the classroom doors last opened at this remote school on the shores of Lake Maracaibo in the country's western Zulia state, and now the paint is peeling off the walls. And while the government has announced the reopening of schools closed for a year due to the coronavirus pandemic, Ologa's will remain shut.

"Of my eight (adult) children, only one knows how to read and write, we are all ignorant," fisherman Angel Villasmil, 58, told AFP before flinging his net into the water. According to UNESCO, literacy in Venezuela is over 97 percent but Ologa, home to 40 families, suffers from isolation. Eight years of economic crisis, including



It has been 4 years since the classroom doors last opened

four years of hyperinflation, has decimated Venezuela's crucial oil production industry.

And in oil-rich Zulia, fuel shortages have led to the collapse of public services and the increasing decline of villages like Ologa. "Children aren't going to school because they closed," said Villasmil as he laid out his catch while some of his 20 grandchildren played with oil-covered plastic debris on the lake's shore. Although the school was open during his youth, Villasmil never studied. Now he sets out every day on his fishing boat hoping to catch something to sell or feed his family with.

Teachers stranded

Many school teachers used to travel to work by hitching free rides on fishing or tourist boats, but the



OLOGA: A man stands in the doorway of his stilt home over the Maracaibo lake in Ologa, Zulia state, Venezuela. —AFP

fuel shortages made that impossible. The last remaining school teacher "stopped going because of the fuel problem," said another local teacher on the condition of anonymity. Before then, teachers had to make do on salaries of less than \$5 a month. Andrea, 12, remembers a time when she used to attend school on the crescent-shaped islet covered with mangroves and where the sounds of wild animals, such as tigrillos - small jungle cats - were constant.

What she misses the most is playing with her classmates. They used to play on a swing they made from rope and wood and hung between fruit trees. "I didn't learn to read," she says. Villasmil's daughter Maria, remembers her school years fondly. "The teacher taught me many things, writing, reading," said the 21-year-old mother. "I want my daughter to also learn. There are a lot of children here that want to study and can't do so because there's no school," she added, referring to her three-year-old Sheira.

A government tally recorded 929 COVID-19 deaths in the past 24 hours, Russia's highest daily virus death toll since the outbreak of the pandemic. Several Russia-made jabs have been available for months, but authorities have struggled to encourage its vaccine-sceptic population to get inoculated. Polls show that more than half of Russians do not plan to get a shot.

As of yesterday, just under 30 percent of Russia's 146 million population had been fully vaccinated, according to the Gogov website, which tallies COVID-19 data from the regions. Deputy Prime Minister Tatyana Golikova said earlier this week that death rates were high among unvaccinated Russians. The surging infections have come without any real pandemic restrictions to limit the spread, but several regions have re-introduced QR codes

for access to public places. Moscow - the epicenter of Russia's outbreak - has so far held back on reintroducing restrictions.

'Far from the peak'

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said yesterday lockdowns would be "an absolutely undesirable scenario for any region". He also poured cold water on any nationwide measures saying regions were "taking action individually". In the capital, authorities say that the highly contagious Delta variant now accounts for all of the cases. Speaking at a government meeting on Tuesday, Moscow mayor Sergei Sobyenin said his city was "far from peak numbers" and the growing infections are largely linked to high detection rates.

Two thirds of Moscow's hospital beds for coron-

'Our lungs hurt'

In Ologa, a village where aging houses are built on stilts, the closed school is far from its main problem. "We don't have electricity, we drink water when it rains, for the rest we have to take water from the river," said Francisco Romero, 67. That water is highly polluted and often covered by a coat of oil that escapes from the extraction centers in the north east of the lake. "Life has been tough recently" for Romero and his nine family members living in a small house above the water. The house is filled with smoke of wood burned for cooking due to the lack of gas. "Our lungs hurt ... we have failures on every side. Fuel, electricity, water." The only fuel they ever see is occasionally when merchants arrive and try to exchange it for fish, rice or corn flour. Many inhabitants left the area so they could "put their children in school," but the national crisis forced them to come back, said Romero. "Life inland is not the same to here where you can fish and eat. Inland, if you don't have money, you don't eat." —AFP

US senators call to expel 300 Russian diplomats over visas

WASHINGTON: Leading senators called Tuesday on the United States to consider expelling up to 300 Russian diplomats unless Moscow issues more visas for the US embassy. The United States protested when Moscow on August 1 barred embassies from hiring Russian or third-country staff, forcing Washington to lay off nearly 200 locals at missions across Russia. In a letter to President Joe Biden, two Democratic and two Republican senators said that Russia has long counted local staff when calculating the number of US diplomats allowed. As a result, some 400 Russian diplomats are now based in the United States and some 100 US diplomats are in Russia, they said.

"This disproportionality in diplomatic representation is unacceptable," wrote the senators who included Bob Menendez, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and Marco Rubio, a leading Republican. "Russia must issue enough visas to approach parity between the number of American diplomats serving in Russia and the number of Russian diplomats serving in the United States. If such action is not taken, we urge you to begin expelling Russian diplomats, to bring the US diplomatic presence to parity."

The senators said that the dismissal of local staff has hindered the embassy's ability to handle Americans' consular needs as well as US policy interests. The Biden administration in April expelled 10 Russian diplomats over what Washington alleged was Russian interference in the US election and a cyber-attack. Relations between the Cold War foes remain tense but have seen greater stability since Biden met Russian President Vladimir Putin in June in Geneva, tasking senior officials with further discussions on arms control and preventing miscalculations. —AFP

avirus patients are currently occupied, he said. In September, Russia's President Vladimir Putin, 68, self-isolated for two weeks after dozens of coronavirus cases were detected in his inner circle. Russian authorities have been accused of downplaying the severity of the outbreak and, after a tight first lockdown in 2020, have refrained from introducing restrictive new measures.

The new deaths bring Russia's total fatalities from coronavirus to 212,625 - the highest toll in Europe. However, the official figures only count virus fatalities where the virus was identified as the primary cause of death after an autopsy. Under a broader definition for deaths linked to the coronavirus, statistics agency Rosstat reported in August that Russia had seen more than 350,000 fatalities. —AFP

Russia reports record number of COVID deaths

MOSCOW: Russia reported a record high number of daily coronavirus deaths yesterday as the country struggles with stubbornly high infection rates and regions beyond Moscow cautiously bring back pandemic restrictions. The world's fifth worst-hit country with more than 7.5 million infections, Russia has seen cases climb since August driven by the contagious Delta variant and a sluggish vaccinations drive.

International

S African opposition ‘racist’
poll posters spark outrage

‘ANC called you racists (but) the DA calls you heroes’

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa's largest opposition party has sparked anger after putting up election posters deemed racially inflammatory in a town still reeling from the killings of dozens of mostly black people during July unrest. Thirty-six people were killed during a wave of rioting and looting largely blamed on South Africans of Indian descent in the southeastern town of Phoenix.

The Democratic Alliance early this week put up posters around Phoenix reading: “The ANC called you racists (but) the DA calls you heroes”. The posters have been widely criticized as racially divisive, sparking anger in a country still struggling with its apartheid past. The ruling ANC party described the posters as “shameful and fascist in nature”.

Ordinary South Africans are meanwhile express-

ing their disgust on social media. “Those posters are callous, incongruous with reality & the worst instance of weaponising tensions for short-term political gain,” tweeted author and political analyst Eusebius McKaiser. But the DA is unrepentant. “I’m never going to apologize for calling ordinary South Africans who stood up for law and order to protect the rule of law, I’m never going to apologize for calling them heroes,” DA leader John Steenhuisen told reporters in Johannesburg yesterday.



**Widely
criticized posters
sparking
anger**

“They are heroes, whether they be black, white Indian or Colored (because) they stepped up when government stepped away,” he said, referring to locals in the area who were protecting property during the unrest. South Africans go to the polls on November 1 to elect mayors and municipal councilors. The ANC party, which has ruled South Africa since the end of apartheid in 1994, is fighting to regain its popularity since suffering its worst electoral set-

back during the last local polls in 2016. It is now sullied by corruption scandals and riven by factionalism.

But its former leader, Jacob Zuma, whose July jailing for contempt sparked the riots, has made an unexpected call for people to vote for the ANC. “I have been listening and observing... there are a lot of people who say, because of different reasons, they have taken a decision not to vote,” Zuma said, in a recorded video message shared by his foundation on Tuesday. “I... call on those who intend not to vote, let’s all stand up and vote, and vote more especially for the party that brought us freedom, the ANC.” Zuma, who was placed on medical parole last month, was addressing the public for the first time since he left jail. —AFP

News in brief

Morocco breaks up IS-linked cell

RABAT: Moroccan police said yesterday they had broken up a cell linked to the Islamic State group in the port city of Tangiers, arresting five people suspected of planning cross-border attacks. The suspects were planning “to carry out remote-controlled explosions targeting security installations and personalities, as well as public buildings hosting Moroccan and foreign citizens,” said the Central Bureau of Judicial Investigation (BCIJ). The five, aged 22-28, had raised funds and “acquired several products used in the production of homemade bombs”, it added, in a statement carried by the official MAP news agency. Security forces seized “bottles containing nitric acid and other suspect liquids as well as nails, electric wires and six gas cylinders” which could be used for bomb-making, it added. —AFP

Ethiopia PM replaces ministers

ADDIS ABABA: Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed yesterday appointed the former head of war-hit Tigray’s interim administration as defense minister, one of several shake-ups in his new government’s 22-member cabinet. Abiy, who was sworn in for his first full five-year term on Monday, also tapped a new head of the peace ministry, which has often served as the public face of humanitarian operations in northern Ethiopia, where the UN estimates conflict has driven hundreds of thousands of people into famine-like conditions. The cabinet was approved by a majority vote in the lower house of parliament, with two votes against and 12 abstentions. Abiy’s office touted the fact that three new cabinet members hail from opposition parties, saying on Twitter this reflected a “commitment to inclusivity”. Abiy came to power in 2018 on the back of several years of anti-government protests. —AFP

Pope Francis expresses ‘shame’

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis yesterday expressed his personal shame and that of the Church at the sexual abuse of children by French Catholic clergy, after the scale of the problem was laid bare in a devastating report. “I wish to express to the victims my sadness and pain for the trauma they have suffered,” he said during his weekly audience at the Vatican. “And also my shame, our shame, my shame for the inability of the Church for too long to put them at the centre of its concerns. “I pray and we all pray together-to you Lord the glory, to us the shame. This is the time for shame.” An independent commission on Tuesday revealed that French Catholic clergy sexually abused around 216,000 minors over seven decades since 1950, a “massive phenomenon” that was covered up by a “veil of silence”. —AFP

Lanka probes president’s niece

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka President Gotabaya Rajapaksa ordered a probe yesterday into his niece’s overseas wealth after she and her husband were alleged in the Pandora Papers to have millions of dollars stashed abroad. The opposition immediately cried foul, saying that the investigation would amount to a cover-up by the Rajapaksa family which have been powerful in the island nation for decades. Cabinet spokesman Dulles Alahapperuma said the president asked the main anti-graft body to issue a report on the assets of Nirupama Rajapaksa and her husband Thirukumar Nadesan “within one month”. Nirupama Rajapaksa, 59, was a legislator in the previous governments of another uncle, Mahinda Rajapaksa, the current prime minister, between 2004 and 2015 and was a junior minister for five years. —AFP

Why did Facebook,
Instagram and
WhatsApp shut down?

PARIS: Hundreds of millions of people were unable to access Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp for more than six hours on Monday, underscoring the world’s reliance on platforms owned by the Silicon Valley giant. But what actually caused the outage?

What does Facebook say?

In an apologetic blog post, Santosh Janardhan, Facebook’s vice president of infrastructure, said that “configuration changes on the backbone routers that coordinate network traffic between our data centers caused issues that interrupted this communication”. Facebook explained Tuesday the outage was “caused not by malicious activity, but an error of our own making.”

Can you explain that?

Cyber experts think the problem boils down to something called BGP, or Border Gateway Protocol – the system the internet uses to pick the quickest route to move packets of information around. Sami Slim of data centre company Telehouse compared BGP to “the internet equivalent of air traffic control”. In the same way that air traffic controllers sometimes make changes to flight schedules, “Facebook did an update of these routes,” Slim said. But this update contained a crucial error. It’s not yet clear how or why, but Facebook’s routers essentially sent a message to the internet announcing that the company’s servers no longer existed.

Why did it take so long to fix?

Experts say Facebook’s technical infrastructure is unusually reliant on its own systems-and that proved disastrous on Monday. After Facebook sent the fateful routing update, its engineers got locked out of the system that would allow them to communicate that the update had, in fact, been an error. So they couldn’t fix the problem.

“Normally it’s good not to put all your eggs in one basket,” said Pierre Bonis of AFNIC, the association that manages domain names in France. “For security reasons, Facebook has had to very strongly concentrate its infrastructure,” he said. “That streamlines things on a daily basis – but because everything is in the same place, when that place has a problem, nothing

Air Info, the outlet
breaking news in
Niger’s Sahara

AGADEZ: From the outside, it doesn’t look like much: a two-storey building with a logo in the dusty streets of Agadez in northern Niger. But there has been plenty happening inside the building at Air Info-an ambitious media outlet that has been breaking exclusives in the Sahara Desert. A vast, sparsely-populated region, northern Niger is plagued by drugs and weapons trafficking, migration and violence by armed groups.

In 2002, Ibrahim Manzo Diallo, a young school teacher posted to the troubled region, was struck by the lack of media coverage. There was no outlet providing “news of the far north,” he told AFP. Using a newly-installed printing press in Agadez, Diallo launched a monthly publication, funding it from his meagre teaching salary. Today, Air Info has 13 full-time employees and in addition to the newspaper-whose rate of publication varies-boasts a popular website and Sahara FM, one of Agadez’s main radio stations bought in 2013. For those needing news on northern Niger, a crossroads between

North and sub-Saharan Africa, Air Info is now the go-to source. “We no longer go looking for scoops, they come to us,” Diallo said with a smile.

Threats and jail

One of Air Info’s exclusives was video footage it published last year of two Italians being held hostage by Al-Qaeda jihadists, the first proof they were alive after several years in detention. An Italian television station offered to buy the footage, but Diallo refused. As always, everyone wanted to know his sources. “The only thing that protects us is honesty and seriousness,” he said. “Our sources know that we will never reveal who is talking to us.”

An early scoop came during the abduction of several French citizens in 2010. Air Info was “one of the very first” to get witnesses to talk, Diallo says, adding that the story “helped establish our credibility”. But behind the man with a broad smile, wearing a boubou robe and eating braised mutton on the windy terrace of his organization’s headquarters, there is a journalist caught between the forces of national security and jihadist expansion. He said he “gets calls from everywhere” from “people ready to give us money to keep quiet about information.” He published the video about the



EAGLE MOUNTAIN: An employee walks into a newly completed data center in Eagle Mountain, Utah. Facebook was shut down yesterday for more than seven hours reportedly due in part to a major disruption in communication between the company’s data centers. —AFP

works.” The knock-on effects of the shutdown included some Facebook employees being unable to even enter their buildings because their security badges no longer worked, further slowing the response.

Is this unprecedented?

Social media outages are not uncommon: Instagram alone has experienced more than 80 in the past year in the United States, according to website builder ToolTester. This week’s Facebook outage was rare in its length and scale, however. There is also a precedent for BGP meddling being at the root of a social media shutdown. In 2008, when a Pakistani internet service provider was attempting to block YouTube for domestic users, it inadvertently shut down the global website for several hours.

And the outage’s impact?

Between Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger, “billions of users have been impacted by the services being entirely offline”, the Downdetector tracking service said. Facebook, whose shares fell nearly five percent over the outage, has

stressed there is “no evidence that user data was compromised as a result of this downtime”.

But even though it lasted just a few hours, the impact of the shutdown ran deep. Facebook’s services are crucial for many businesses around the world, and users complained of being cut off from their livelihoods. Facebook accounts are also commonly used to log in to other websites, which faced additional problems due to the company’s technical meltdown. Rival instant messaging services, meanwhile, reported that they had benefited from the fact that WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger were down.

Telegram went from the 56th-most downloaded free app in the United States to the fifth, according to monitoring firm SensorTower, while Signal tweeted that “millions” of new users had joined. And among the more curious side-effects, several domain name registration companies listed Facebook.com as available for purchase. “There was never any reason to believe Facebook.com would actually be sold as a result, but it’s fun to consider how many billions of dollars it could fetch on the open market,” said cyber security expert Brian Krebs. —AFP



AGADEZ, Niger: A woman is seen walking in the old city of Agadez. Air Info and Sahara.fm represents today the main source of information on the Nigerien Sahara. —AFP

Italian hostage without batting an eyelid. No one knows who gave it to him. But the freedom to publish predictably comes at a price-threats and sometimes jail. In 2007 Air Info was forced to close for three months and Diallo was imprisoned for four months after being accused of links to a rebellion by ethnic Tuaregs that was raging at the time.

Diallo said it was because earlier that

year Air Info published a story under the headline “Drama in Tizirzet” about the discovery of “civilians beheaded by those who were supposed to protect them”. “I was sure it was going to cost me dearly,” he said. But despite his time in prison-and that all copies of the newspaper were suspiciously bought up after only being on a sale a few hours-he said it remains the scoop he is most proud of. —AFP

Elderly couple find
safe haven from
Canaries volcano

TAZACORTE: Fleeing their home after the La Palma volcano erupted on September 19, one couple married nearly 60 years decided to seek safe haven aboard their tiny boat until the storm passed. When the evacuation order came, neither Margaretha Straates, 80, nor her 90-year-old husband Luis Rodriguez Diaz fancied the idea of staying in temporary accommodation. “It suddenly came to me, why

don’t we try the boat? It’s only an old boat, but we could take a few things and settle in,” Rodriguez Diaz, a retired gastrointestinal surgeon, told AFP. Just 6.4 meters (20 feet) long, the “Hamurabi” is a tough little boat that has only needed one engine change in 35 years, he says.

But it is big enough for him and his Dutch wife who sit with their backs to the volcano, which keeps up its endlessly explosive activity. Together, they pass the time on the boat’s tiny deck with a radio, her computer with Wi-Fi, a small fridge and an adopted cat they picked up while fleeing, and who bolts into the cabin when visitors arrive. The space is small and requires careful navigation, with Straates often forgetting to duck her head to enter the cabin. “I’ve banged my head three times,” she says.

The pair are residents of Todoque, a village almost totally wiped off the map by the lava. When the order

came, they had to leave very quickly. “The Guardia Civil police came and told us: ‘You need to evacuate right now, very quickly’ so we left in what we were wearing,” says Rodriguez Diaz.

They never thought the eruption would be so violent and destructive, lulled into a false sense of security by the eruption of La Palma’s Teneguia volcano 50 years ago “which was a friendly volcano that didn’t do much damage”, says Straates. Over the past 16 days, the erupting volcano has destroyed more than 1,000 properties, many of them homes. On Sunday, they heard that their house was still standing but that was not enough to ease their distress.

“We’re in a really bad way,” said Straates. Despite their situation, the pair are lively, chatty and in good spirits, perhaps helped by a lifetime of moving house. He is

from the northwestern tip of Spain, while she hails from Amsterdam. During the 1950s, Rodriguez Diaz went travelling around Europe on a trip that was paid for by his sister after he passed his medical studies. “I was in a park in Amsterdam with my best friend and we met the sexiest man I’d ever seen,” recalls Straates. She was 16 at the time.

They swapped addresses and got married a while later in Gibraltar because, at the time, only religious marriages existed in Spain. They lived in London for a while then in the British colony of Rhodesia – later Zimbabwe – where Rodriguez Diaz held a very senior health role. In 1977, they decided it was time to move back to Spain given the instability in the British colony, which would gain its independence three years later – and because the Spanish dictatorship had ended with the death in 1975 of Francisco Franco. —AFP

International

China military tensions highest in decades, Taiwan minister warns

150 Chinese warplanes made incursions into Taiwan defense zone

TAIPEI: Military tensions between China and Taiwan are at their highest in four decades, the island's defense minister warned yesterday, adding Beijing would be in a position to launch a full-scale invasion in 2025. Taiwan lives under the constant threat of invasion by China, which views the self-ruled democratic island as its territory to be seized one day, by force if necessary. Defense Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng offered his assessment after around 150 Chinese warplanes - a record number that included nuclear-capable bombers - made incursions into Taiwan's air defense zone starting Friday.

"For the military, the current situation is the grimmest in the more than 40 years since I joined the service," Chiu told parliament. He warned that even "slight carelessness" or "miscalculation" could spark a crisis, and that China would be able to launch an invasion of the island in four years. "It is capable now but it has to calculate what it would cost, and what kind of outcome it wishes to achieve," Chiu said. "After 2025, the cost and losses would be lowered to a minimum," he added, without providing further details.

Chinese President Xi Jinping, who has called the seizure of Taiwan "inevitable", also described relations with Taipei as "grim" in a letter to the island's newly elected main opposition leader last week. Beijing has ramped up military, diplomatic

and economic pressure since Tsai Ing-wen became Taiwan's president in 2016, as she views the island as "already independent" and not part of "one China".

"Actions taken by... (China) have seriously damaged peace and stability in the region," Tsai said yesterday. "I want to tell the authority in Beijing that it has to exercise restraint to avoid potential conflicts due to miscalculations or accidents." Tsai said recently that Taiwan will "do whatever it takes" to defend against threats, but seeks peaceful coexistence with China.

Chinese flights prompt criticism by Washington

Criticism by Washington

When asked about the situation, President Joe Biden told reporters Tuesday that he had discussed Taiwan with Xi. "We will abide by the Taiwan agreement. That's where we are and we made it clear that I don't think he should be doing anything other than abiding by the agreement," he said. US officials later clarified the president was not referring to a new conversation. Biden and Xi spoke last month and discussed a range of issues in their call. Biden appeared to be referring to the US policy in place since Washington switched diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing in 1979.

Under the arrangement, the United States provides Taiwan with military equipment to defend itself, in an unofficial, non-diplomatic relationship.



TAOYUAN: Taiwan's deputy foreign minister Harry Tseng (right) greets French Senator Alain Richard (2nd right) leading a delegation arriving at the Taoyuan international airport in Taoyuan yesterday. —AFP

Tsai's spokesman said Taiwan had reached out to Washington after Biden's remarks and was assured that US policy on the island "remained unchanged". Last year, a record 380 Chinese military jets made incursions into Taiwan's defense

zone. The number as of October this year has already exceeded 600. The zone is not the same as Taiwan's territorial airspace but includes a far greater area that overlaps with part of China's own air defense identification zone. —AFP

In Iraq vote, big blocs lurk behind 'independents'

BAGHDAD: When Iraqis go to the polls Sunday, they will vote for individual candidates rather than parties for the first time under a new electoral law meant to appease a youth-led protest movement fed up with the country's old-style politics. In theory, the changes will strengthen local voices as candidates can now run at the district level and as independents, allowing new hopefuls such as tribal leaders, business people and civil society activists to join the race.

But the shadow of Iraq's traditional political blocs, which are mostly defined by religious sect or ethnic group, still hovers over many of the candidates who claim to be non-aligned, raising questions about the impact of the reform. On campaign posters, many of the more than 3,200 hopefuls seeking office declare themselves to be free of affiliations with the powerful blocs in parliament but not everyone is convinced.

For many, it's simply an "electoral manoeuvre", argued political scientist Ihsan Al-Shammari, saying they don't want to be associated with the entrenched forces widely blamed for inept governance, graft and shady backroom deal-making. "The candidates want to distance themselves from

the failures of their parties and try to adopt a new image, far from corruption and mismanagement," said Shammari of the Baghdad-based Iraqi Centre for Political Thought.

Iraq is emerging from almost two decades of war and insurgency since the 2003 US-led invasion toppled dictator Saddam Hussein. Sunday's parliamentary election is the fifth since then. But there is little popular hope for major change through the ballot box, and widespread disillusionment persists over the political caste as most Iraqis worry more about a painful economic crisis.

More constituencies

Popular anger exploded in unprecedented street protests two years ago against youth joblessness, crumbling public services and a political class seen as more loyal to Iran or the US than to Iraqi citizens. Hundreds died in months of protest-related violence, and more activists have been murdered, kidnapped or intimidated since, with no accountability for the deaths. The activists have blamed Iranian armed groups—often part of the Hashed Al-Shaabi paramilitary coalition that helped defeat the Islamic State jihadist group, and whose lawmakers now wield huge influence in parliament.

The protests prompted Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi to move forward the ballot originally scheduled for 2022, and authorities to reform the election rules—but many of the activists and parties behind the uprising are boycotting the vote. The new electoral law theoretically favors local candidates—which means tribal figures or local poten-

those who drink wine", he tells AFP, which was allowed to accompany a patrol overseen by a more senior Taleban official. Some of his colleagues appear unsure of how to navigate their new role in a city far from their previous lives in the much more conservative countryside. "It's not our favorite job, but it's our responsibility," admits the Taleban commander overseeing the patrol.

Instead of the jackets and trousers formerly worn by officers, many Taleban forces don traditional Afghan dress, called shalwar kameez. Some have had new versions made from the blue-and-black camouflage material used in old Afghan uniforms. At one station, in Kabul's 10th district, the emblem of the previous police force can still be seen, near the Taleban's white and black banner. Taleban punishments have already been on display in some parts of Afghanistan - last week, the bodies of four suspected kidnappers were hung from a crane in the city of Herat.

Challenging transition

The old police force, created by the international powers that drove out the Taleban in 2001, no longer exists. It collapsed when the Taleban swept back into power on August 15, as former police and civil servants fearful of revenge and abuse scurried

push some candidate countries closer to Russia and China. "We want to send a very clear message and that message is that Western Balkans belong to the European Union, we want them in the European Union," said European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen as she arrived for the talks. "We are one European family... and I'm deeply convinced we share the same destiny," she said.

'Extend hand' or else

The EU's push for enlargement—once a key policy for the bloc—has ground to a halt in recent years. Some richer members fear sparking a new wave of migration and some applicants are struggling with the required reforms, especially on democratic norms. "In Latvia, the process of joining the European Union was the game changer in terms of enabling reform, and of course in the Western Balkans, they still have some ways to go," said Latvian Prime Minister Arturs Krisjanis Karins.

However, he cautioned, "either Europe extends the



BAGHDAD: Iraqi supporters of political movement Fatah alliance attend an election rally in Baghdad. —AFP

lates—as the number of electoral districts has been increased to 83. Previously, under the list-based system, Iraq's electorate was divided according to the 18 governorates. Now, all across the country, many candidates are calling themselves "independents", despite having had partisan affiliations in the past.

This is occurring across the political spectrum—from the movement of firebrand Shiite Muslim cleric Moqtada Sadr, to the coalition of secular former vice-president Iyad Allawi and to the State of Law Alliance of former prime minister Nuri al-Maliki. One candidate, Ines Naji al-Maksousi, standing for office in the city of Kut, said: "I was an independent candidate within the Sadrist. Today, I am an independent candidate". —AFP



KABUL: Taleban fighters sit outside the passport office after Taleban announced the reopening for passport applications yesterday. —AFP

into hiding or fled the country. The Taleban authorities are eager to keep their promise of strict law and order in the new Afghanistan, where the justice system under the US-backed government was plagued by corruption and inefficiency. "There is a training program underway, and there will be professionals at all levels," said interior ministry spokesman Qari Sayed Khosti, who has invited former police personnel to return. —AFP

hand, and pulls these countries towards us or someone else will extend the hand and pull the countries in a different direction". This reflected the EU's increasing concern over inroads being made by Moscow and Beijing, which have sent millions of coronavirus vaccines to the region. Moscow has deep cultural ties with fellow Orthodox nations while Beijing has extended major loans in the region, including a controversial \$1 billion for a road, which Montenegro is struggling to pay off.

The EU in response is touting an "unprecedented" 30 billion euros (\$35 billion) economic investment package for the region. Officials also promise "tangible" improvements for people in the Balkans, such as bolstering vaccine rates to match EU levels this year and ending phone roaming charges. This may be cold comfort to the candidate countries who are still smarting after France, Denmark and the Netherlands initially held up accession talks with Albania and North Macedonia in 2019. —AFP

News in brief

Sweden halts use of Moderna

STOCKHOLM: Sweden's Public Health Agency yesterday recommended a temporary halt to the use of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine among young adults, citing concerns over rare side effects to the heart. It said the pause should initially be in force until December 1, explaining that it had received evidence of an increased risk of side effects such as inflammation of the heart muscle (myocarditis) and inflammation of the pericardium (pericarditis). "The Public Health Agency has decided to pause the use of Moderna's vaccine Spikevax, for everyone born 1991 and after, for cautionary reasons," the agency said in a statement, adding that those groups should instead receive the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine. According to the agency, the risk seemed especially tied to the second dose of the Moderna vaccine and was more prevalent among young men and boys, and in the weeks just following the second jab. The symptoms usually pass by themselves, but should be evaluated by a doctor, it added. —AFP

Rebel attack kills 11 in CAR

BANGUI: Eleven civilians were killed by rebels in eastern Central African Republic (CAR), where government forces are battling armed groups, a senior official said yesterday. The attack occurred on Tuesday near Bambari, the CAR's fourth-biggest city, when three cars came under fire, leaving a "toll of 11 dead and six wounded," said Saturnin Nicaise Grepandet, the area's deputy prefect. A provisional toll earlier listed seven dead, while aid workers, speaking on condition of anonymity, said at least 15 had died. The CAR, a landlocked and poverty-stricken country in the heart of Africa, has been locked in a brutal conflict since 2013 when its then president, Francois Bozize, was overthrown by an armed group drawn mainly from the Muslim minority. The coup triggered a bloodbath with the so-called "anti-Balaka," a force drawn mainly from the Christian and animist communities. —AFP

Two priests cleared after trial

ROME: Two priests were acquitted yesterday of charges linked with sex abuse at a school for altar boys, after the Vatican's first criminal trial for such allegations. Gabriele Martinelli, a former pupil of the St Pius X pre-seminary and now a priest, was accused of assaulting a younger fellow altar boy, Martinelli, now in his late 20s, was tried alongside Father Enrico Radice, the former rector of the seminary, who was accused of shielding the alleged abuser from punishment. The case was the first criminal trial held in the Vatican over allegations of sex abuse or cover-ups within its territory. Earlier this year, it was announced that the pre-seminary, which educates boys interested in the priesthood, would be relocated from Vatican grounds. The school occupied a building near the back of St Peter's Basilica, close to the Santa Marta guesthouse where the pope lives. —AFP

Convicted murderer executed

WASHINGTON: A 61-year-old African-American man was executed in the US state of Missouri on Tuesday, despite pleas for clemency from the Vatican and his lawyers on the grounds that he was intellectually disabled. Ernest Lee Johnson was put to death by lethal injection for the 1994 murders of three convenience store workers during a botched robbery in Columbia, Missouri. He was pronounced dead at 6:11 pm, according to a statement from the Missouri Department of Corrections. Missouri Governor Mike Parson, a Republican, on Monday had rejected appeals to halt the execution, which took place in Bonne Terre, Missouri. "The state is prepared to deliver justice and carry out the lawful sentence Mr. Johnson received," Parson said in a statement. "The evidence showed Mr. Johnson went to great lengths to plan and conceal his crime," he said. "Three juries have reviewed Mr. Johnson's case and recommended a sentence of death." —AFP

From insurgency to city beat: Taleban's police learn the ropes

KABUL: After spending 13 years as a Taleban fighter waging an insurgency, Rahimullah is now slowly adjusting to the relatively ordinary role of a policeman in Afghanistan's capital. Like the rest of the Taleban, he is grappling with an awkward transition from rebel fighter to civilian patrolman, as the hardliners vow security and build a new police force.

Kabul residents say street crime has dropped, with widespread fear rooted in memories of the Taleban's brutal regime in the 1990s, infamous for harsh punishments such as public stoning, lashing and amputations. "This is not risky work," says Rahimullah, who joined the Taleban as a teenager "for Islam and for my country".

The 28-year-old from neighboring Wardak province, along with his team of eight men, has the task of managing security in a central Kabul district. His work involves "catching thieves, murderers and

EU 'family' reassures frustrated Balkans

BRDO CASTLE: EU leaders told frustrated Balkan counterparts at a summit yesterday the bloc remains committed to letting them join, but offered no concrete progress on their stalled membership bids. The 27-nation club talked up economic support worth billions of euros for its eastern neighbors at a rain-drenched gathering at Brdo castle in Slovenia, which currently holds the EU's rotating presidency. Brussels is keen to show it remains the region's best hope.

But there set to be no breakthroughs at the meeting with the leaders of Albania, Bosnia, Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Kosovo on the tortuous path towards membership. And concern is growing that frustration with years of waiting could

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 7, 2021

Business

Gulf Cable signs partnership agreement with Riyadh Cables

First-of-its-kind factory in Kuwait to produce high-voltage cables



KUWAIT: (From left): Feras Samir Al-Bayyat, Samer Hamdi Al-Zaeem, Eng Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi and Eng Abdulrazaq Zaid Al-Dhbayyan during the signing of the partnership agreement yesterday.

KUWAIT: Gulf Cable and Electrical Industries Company, the leading manufacturers of cables, power and telephone lines for more than 46 years in Kuwait, signed a partnership agreement with Riyadh Cables Group Company of Saudi Arabia in the presence of Chairman Eng Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi, Executive Director for Sales, Marketing and Business Development Eng Abdulrazaq Zaid Al-Dhbayyan and board members and owners of Riyadh Cables Group Company Samer Hamdi Al-Zaeem and Feras Samir Al-Bayyat. The partnership venture will build a local factory specialized in producing high-voltage cables, which is considered the first of its kind in Kuwait.

Eng Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi said the signing of this agreement meets the company's expansion strategy through joint cooperation, which aims at achieving the maximum benefit from the market's capabilities by diversifying the company's products and its revenue sources in a way that serves shareholders' interests and goals.

This type of industry will contribute to the development of the local industrial sector and raise productivity by using the most modern technology, besides raising the percentage of the industrial



KUWAIT: Eng Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi (right) and Samer Hamdi Al-Zaeem sign the partnership agreement.

sector's contribution to local output. It will also present an added value to local products by nearly KD 320 million during the first three years, with a promising launch for the industrial sector and support for human development by providing job opportunities for fresh Kuwaiti

graduates and well as scientific research training, activities and services.

These types of transformative industries are important for infrastructure projects and future constructions, especially those related to the Ministry of Electricity and Water and Renewable



KUWAIT: Eng Bader Nasser Al-Kharafi shakes hands with Samer Hamdi Al-Zaeem on the occasion.

Energy and the Housing Care Authority, as Kuwait is seeking to develop and build projects based on the partnership plan between the public and private sector as per Kuwait's 2035 "New Kuwait" vision.

Also, cooperation and partnership

between industrial sectors strengthens economic and commercial relations between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia through free trade and expansion in industries of mutual interest, which will be a main pillar of development in the region.

IMF projects global inflation nearing peak, stabilizing next year

WASHINGTON: The current inflation spike hitting countries across the world will peak in the months to come and stabilize by the middle of next year, the IMF predicted yesterday.

"Headline inflation is projected to peak in the final months of 2021, with inflation expected back to pre-pandemic levels by mid-2022 for both advanced economies and emerging markets country groups, and with risks tilted to the upside," the Washington-based crisis lender said in a chapter of its new World Economic Outlook. The full report will be published next Tuesday and updates the estimates the IMF made in July, when it predicted inflation would return to pre-pandemic levels at some point next year.

Prices worldwide have crept up throughout this year as economies bounce back from the sharp contraction the COVID-19 pandemic caused in 2020.

In its latest forecast, the IMF pointed to commodity shortages, supply chain snarls and the resumption of economic activity fueled by loose central bank policies and pent-up demand as spurring inflation. For richer countries, "headline inflation will peak in the final months of 2021 and will decline to about two percent by mid-2022," the IMF said. — AFP

UK's Johnson vows 'overdue' revamp of post-Brexit economy

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson rallied his Conservative party faithful yesterday, vowing a far-reaching overhaul to wean the UK economy off cheap foreign labor after Brexit.

Shrugging off panic buying at petrol stations, bare supermarket shelves and retailers' warnings of a bleak Christmas to come, the Tory leader said the short-term pain was worth it.

Closing the Conservatives' annual conference, their first in-person event since 2019 because of the coronavirus pandemic, Johnson was on characteristically bullish form with an array of partisan zingers hurled against the opposition Labour party. There was little new policy detail in the 45-minute speech, save for a "levelling up" premium to recruit maths and science teachers in disadvantaged areas, and promises of a new program of road and rail infrastructure in Labour's former stronghold in northern England.

More broadly, Johnson framed a narrative that the UK's departure from the European Union presents a historic

opportunity to remake the country. "We are dealing with the biggest underlying issues of our economy and society, the problems that no government has had the guts to tackle before," he said.

"We are embarking now on the change of direction that has been long overdue in the UK economy," he added, vowing no return to the pre-Brexit model of "uncontrolled immigration". Instead, British businesses will have to invest in their workers and technology to push the country "towards a high-wage, high-skill, high-productivity economy". But Johnson warned it will take time to transition.

In the meantime, the government has grudgingly agreed to a limited number of short-term visas to lure truckers and poultry workers from eastern Europe. For opposition parties and poverty campaigners, Johnson's commitment to "levelling up" unequal growth also jars with the ending of a weekly boost to benefits for the lowest-paid workers. Johnson's attempt to draw a line between his



MANCHESTER, UK: Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson delivers his keynote speech on the final day of the annual Conservative Party Conference at the Manchester Central convention center in Manchester, northwest England, yesterday. — AFP

administration and previous governments which lacked "guts" overlooks the fact that the Conservative party has been in power since 2010. In contrast, finance minister Rishi Sunak—seen by many observers as the heir apparent to 10 Downing Street—is stressing continuity with the Tory tradition of fiscal rectitude.

Sunak featured prominently in a pre-speech video played to the Conservative members awaiting Johnson's speech, and he has been mobbed by fans at this week's conference in Manchester, northern England.

The government blames the acute

labor shortages afflicting the UK economy not on its hardline approach to Brexit but on the coronavirus pandemic. But the supply crisis risks undermining themes that Johnson emphasized in his conference speech, including "Global Britain" after the EU divorce.

He touted a new defense alliance with Australia and the United States dubbed AUKUS, which has infuriated France after Canberra cancelled a lucrative contract for French submarines. "I know that there has been a certain raucous squawkus from the anti-AUKUS caucus," Johnson joked. — AFP

Business

Spain's rare earths pit greens against tech security and profit

Tensions rising between mining companies, environmentalists and farmers

MADRID: Spain's untapped rare earths are stoking tensions between mining companies and environmentalists and farmers who fear the devastating impact from extracting the minerals considered as essential for a high-tech and low-carbon economy. The group of 17 minerals are-despite their name-widely distributed across the globe, but exist in such thin concentrations that extracting even small quantities requires the processing of enormous quantities of ore.

Still, they are key ingredients in a range of high-tech and cutting-edge products, from wind turbines and electric vehicles to smart phones, medical devices and missile-guidance systems. With China having a stranglehold on global supply and demand surging to meet the transition to a low-carbon economy, the political pressure-and financial incentive-to put strategic interests ahead of the environment is growing.

"Spain has the largest amount of rare earths in Europe after Finland. There is real potential," said Vicente Gutierrez Peinador, president of the National Confederation of Mining and Metallurgy Companies (Confedem). Ninety-eight percent of the rare earths used in the EU are imported from China, prompting Brussels to recently urge member states to develop their own extraction capacities.

Spain's reserves are estimated at 70,000 tons, according to the Geological and Mining Institute of Spain. "On a global level this is not much, but on a European scale it is significant," said Roberto Martinez, head of mineral resources at the institute.

'Opportunity for Spain'

And it is enough to arouse the interest of investors as demand for the minerals continues to surge.

"It is an opportunity for Spain," said Confedem's Peinador, but also "for Europe". "Two sites in particular are considered interesting: One in Monte Galineiro, in Galicia," and the other in the province of Ciudad Real, in the Castilla y Leon region, said Martinez. Only the 240-hectare (590-acre) Matamulas site in Ciudad Real has so far been the subject of an application to mine.

The site is rich in monazite-an ore containing rare earth minerals including thorium, lanthanum and cerium. However, the project has been blocked: The region refused the mining permit filed by Madrid-based Quantum Minería in 2019 due to concerns about its environmental impact.

"This deposit is located in an area of great environmental value", between two protected areas, said Elena Solis, coordinator for mining issues of the NGO Ecologists in Action. It would involve "moving an astronomical amount of earth, which would put the whole area at risk", said Solis, who also pointed to the "enormous amount of water" needed for this operation and the risk of pollution by toxic or even radioactive dust.

Holes filled in

These arguments were rejected by the company, which lodged a legal appeal. The refusal of the permit "is incomprehensible" because "we are in a territory considered suitable for mining" by the administration, said Enrique Burkhalter, project director of Quantum Minería, who denounced "unfounded fears" around the proposal. According to the company, the extraction would take place on the surface, using a technique that limits the risk of toxic dust. The earth would be transported by truck to a factory, then sieved and finally returned to the site, once the minerals have been



MADRID: Spain's untapped rare earths are stoking tensions between mining companies and environmentalists and farmers.

removed. "It is not an open pit... The holes would be quickly filled in so that the crops could be cultivated again," said Burkhalter. These arguments are in turn rejected by Ecologists in Action, which believes that the land concerned will be permanently affected.

What will the courts say?

Beyond their differences, industrialists and environ-

mentalists agree on the importance of the court's decision, which could make or break the extraction projects. The ruling, expected in several months' time, will be "important" but "will not put an end to the debate", said Martinez, who pointed to a paradox inherent in mining: "On paper, everyone wants to reduce external dependence, but as soon as we talk about concrete projects, it's a different matter." — AFP



BRDO CASTLE, Slovenia: Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel leaves the EU-Western Balkans summit at Brdo Congress Centre, near Ljubljana yesterday. Western Balkan countries can expect reassurances but no concrete progress on their stalled bids for European Union membership. — AFP

EU 'family' looks to reassure frustrated Balkans

BRDO CASTLE, Slovenia: EU leaders told frustrated Balkan counterparts at a summit yesterday the bloc remains committed to letting them join, but offered no concrete progress on their stalled membership bids. The 27-nation club talked up economic support worth billions of euros for its eastern neighbors at a rain-drenched gathering at Brdo Castle in Slovenia, which currently holds the EU's rotating presidency.

Brussels is keen to show it remains the region's best hope. But there set to be no breakthroughs at the meeting with the leaders of Albania, Bosnia, Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Kosovo on the tortuous path towards membership.

And concern is growing that frustration with years of waiting could push some candidate countries closer to Russia and China. "We want to send a very clear message and that message is that Western Balkans belong to the European Union, we want them in the European Union," said European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen as she arrived for the talks.

"We are one European family... and I'm deeply convinced we share the same destiny," she said.

'Extend hand' or else

The EU's push for enlargement-once a key policy for the bloc-has ground to a halt in recent years. Some

richer members fear sparking a new wave of migration and some applicants are struggling with the required reforms, especially on democratic norms. "In Latvia, the process of joining the European Union was the game changer in terms of enabling reform, and of course in the Western Balkans, they still have some ways to go," said Latvian Prime Minister Arturs Krisjanis Karins. However, he cautioned, "either Europe extends the hand, and pulls these countries towards us or someone else will extend the hand and pull the countries in a different direction".

This reflected the EU's increasing concern over inroads being made by Moscow and Beijing, which have sent millions of coronavirus vaccines to the region. Moscow has deep cultural ties with fellow Orthodox nations while Beijing has extended major loans in the region, including a controversial \$1 billion for a road, which Montenegro is struggling to pay off.

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This may be cold comfort to the candidate countries who are still smarting after France, Denmark and the Netherlands initially held up accession talks with Albania and North Macedonia in 2019.

Bulgaria has since become the main obstacle to progress, refusing to let North Macedonia start the process because of a dispute over history and language. The leaders of the two countries met together with counterparts from France and Germany, but no advance was made ahead of elections in Bulgaria next month. — AFP

"We are facing an unprecedented crisis that requires extraordinary, innovative and forceful measures from the EU," he said. The European Commission is the EU's executive arm that will next week propose measures to mitigate the price surge for consumers.

The suggestions will then be discussed by the bloc's leaders at a summit in Brussels on October 21-22. Spain wants the EU to make "group purchases" of gas, much as the bloc did for vaccinations for COVID-19. Greece is asking for an EU fund to help governments weather the crisis. Other countries, led by Germany and the Netherlands, however urge caution. They argue that the energy crunch is short-term and related to the unprecedented supply shock in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte told reporters he had heard "wilder plans and also some quieter ones" from EU partners. While he did not "exclude that some more should be done at the European level", that would come only after "a thorough analysis".

Focus on clean energy

The German finance ministry last week also argued the surge was a unique effect of the "recovering world economy after the COVID crisis" and would eventually fade away. But Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban,

'Brick wall': Deadlocked efforts to regulate Facebook

WASHINGTON: US senators on Tuesday again promised to curb Facebook's power, driven this time by damning whistleblower revelations underpinned by the company's own research. Efforts to better regulate the tech behemoth's platforms, which see billions of users, have so far been slow and ineffective. Here is where efforts stand to regulate Facebook:

Little progress in Congress

Reducing Facebook's economic power and over-seeing its moderation policy are the two main issues for US elected officials keen on technology regulation. US lawmakers in June advanced blockbuster legislation that opens the way for potential dismantling of Google, Facebook, Apple and Amazon.

The proposed legislation would prohibit the largest groups from acquiring competitors. But no date has yet been set for a vote, and compatibility with current competition law is not guaranteed. "Without core law changes, we believe this antitrust momentum hits a brick wall," said independent analyst Dan Ives. In addition, elected officials are divided, especially on issues of free speech on the networks. Many want to reform "Section 230," a 1996 law that protects internet hosts from lawsuits related to content posted by third parties, a cornerstone of social networking. Common ground seems almost impossible to find between Democrats who favor stricter rules against misinformation and Republicans who cite worries over censorship.

Republican-controlled states like Florida and Texas are trying to pass laws to prevent networks from suspending political content or candidates. Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg has repeatedly declared himself in favor of amending Section 230. Authorities, however, have notched a success in pressuring the platform to pause its efforts to develop a version of photo-sharing app Instagram for kids under the age of 13.

Antitrust lawsuit muddle

US regulators at the Federal Trade Commission as well as an alliance of states have filed lawsuits accusing Facebook of being a social network monopoly that needs to be smashed. The suits argued that the tech titan not only dominates online social networking, it "buys or buries" startups it sees as rising threats. "For almost a decade, Facebook has had monopoly power in the personal social networking market in the United States,"

a bete noire for his EU counterparts, asserted that the price crunch was caused by new bloc-wide rules designed to bring the EU to zero-carbon emissions by 2050. "We have to change some regulations otherwise everybody will suffer," he said. Frans Timmermans, the EU commission's climate change supremo tasked with

contended a suit filed late last year by attorneys general from US states.

"Facebook illegally maintains that monopoly power by deploying a buy-or-bury strategy that thwarts competition." Those suits failed out of the starting gate, however, when a federal judge decided they lacked facts and didn't make clear exactly what market they contend Facebook is unfairly dominating.



WASHINGTON, US: Former Facebook employee and whistleblower Frances Haugen testifies before a Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation hearing on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC. — AFP

Facebook on Monday urged a federal judge to toss out an amended version of the FTC lawsuit, arguing that it is weak and that the regulator behind it has "an axe to grind." FTC chair Lina Khan cast the deciding vote in a decision to amend the case and try a second time, and she should have recused herself due to bias against the company, Facebook said in the filing.

European probes launched

The European Commission in June opened a formal antitrust investigation to assess whether Facebook abused its power when it came to advertising data gathered from advertisers and its classified ads service. "Facebook collects vast troves of data on the activities of users of its social network and beyond," commission executive vice-president Margrethe Vestager said in a release at the time. "We will look in detail at whether this data gives Facebook an undue competitive advantage."

Britain's Competition and Markets Authority at the same time announced a probe into whether Facebook has an unfair advantage in services for online classified ads and online dating, through how it gathers and uses certain data. "We will be working closely with the European Commission as we each investigate these issues, as well as continuing our coordination with other agencies to tackle these global issues," CMA chief Andrea Coscelli said in a release. — AFP

making the bloc's Green Deal happen, said the solution lay with quickly adopting clean-energy sources.

"The quicker we increase our renewable energy sources, the quicker we can protect our citizens against price hikes in the traditional energy area," Timmermans told reporters in Luxembourg. — AFP

Be 'bold' or wait-and-see: EU split on energy prices

BRDO CASTLE, Slovenia: European leaders are divided on how to respond to the record rise in energy prices, with France and Spain calling yesterday for bold EU-wide action, while others urged patience. With winter fast approaching, the cost of energy in Europe is shooting ever higher, putting pressure on national governments, some of which implemented emergency measures.

Spain, France and Greece are asking for the EU as a whole to respond and have mooted a wide range of proposals to overhaul the continent's highly fragmented energy market. "We have asked the (European) Commission to be bold in its response," said Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, as he arrived for an EU leaders' summit in Slovenia.



BRDO CASTLE, Slovenia: European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen (center) and Netherlands' Prime Minister Mark Rutte with Cyprus' President Nicos Anastasiades (second right) and Greece's Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis speak during the EU-Western Balkans summit at Brdo Congress Centre, near Ljubljana yesterday. — AFP

Business

Alessa: Over 28 automotive agencies and 44 brands under KFH Auto roof

Largest and most modern showroom in Mideast • Smart building comprising electric cars, charging stations

KUWAIT: KFH Executive Manager - Automotive & Equipment, Ahd Aleesa said that KFH experiment in the automotive field has started since incorporation and coped with all its development stages. He emphasized that KFH initially approached automotive agents to provide all types of customers' needs according to Islamic sales system and on a limited individual basis.

The relation with automotive agents developed and a small showroom was hired to exhibit new and used cars in Sharq area. Thereafter, KFH decided to establish a separate showroom to exhibit various types of cars in collaboration with the agents and named its "Grand Showroom" as it contained nearly all automotive agents under one roof. Later, the used cars showroom was annexed to the grand showroom. This style was the first of its kind in the region and the Middle East, thus saving customers the time and effort and giving them the chance to compare advantages and prices. Also, this service has gathered the customer "buyer", the agent "seller" and the financier "KFH".

KFH Auto

Alessa added, during an interview with Al-Masaref Magazine, that KFH Auto is the largest modernized showroom in the Middle East, covering an area of 38,000 square meters with an exhibition hall covering an area of 17,000 square meters to accommodate more than 200 cars. The showroom covers more than 28 auto agents and 44 brands including cars, motorcycles, and boats. The showroom represents an integrated city for the sale and purchase of new and used cars and other vehicles in addition to lease and estimation products, traffic services, insurance, and ladies' section. The building is operating based on smart buildings system and includes electric cars charging stations.

He mentioned that this unprecedented experiment was copied by many others who have made similar showrooms in the Gulf and the Middle East regions. However, KFH maintained its leading position in introducing and achieving this distinct idea which is considered as an added value and an unprecedented accomplishment in the Kuwait automotive market.

Alessa added that KFH has managed to create a landmark for itself in the field of car purchase and lease finance, where hundreds of thousands of customers benefited from this product. KFH managed to enhance Kuwaiti merchants and automotive agencies, move the wheel of economy, and provide customers with a significant commodity with highly distinguished and safe credit facilities. He emphasized that

KFH continued to develop its services and products, thus rendering KFH as the main market driver and taking the lead in the market despite increasing competition.

Electronic platform

Alessa noted that KFH is the only bank at the market level to provide an electronic platform comprising different distinguished options concerning cars in addition to several offers and advantages for new and used cars, both types of leasing "lease to own and lease with maintenance" in addition to several other related services e.g. insurance, customers self-offers, best available car offers and electronic instalment calculation. The platform achieved great success among customers and those interested in the automotive market and looking for the latest developments in this field.

He added that KFH has launched its electronic platform concerning automotive services and offers on its webpage kfh.com/auto. Customers are able through this platform to view the latest KFH automotive offers and take their pick. Also, they can make a purchase or lease request through an electronic form on the webpage. Accordingly, the platform is the first gate for all those who wish to own or lease a car. A specialized and qualified team updates information and follows up customers right from the beginning of the submission of the service request till the end of the sale or lease transaction.

Alessa mentioned that the platform represents KFH tendency to expand its electronic services to save time and effort. Access to the platform can be made through internet browser or mobile. The platform is designed to suit mobiles at the highest levels of safety, security, and accuracy to enhance the great value of the e-platform kfh.com/auto. The platform is an easy-to-use platform offering the best banking solutions to finance the purchase of new and used cars or to choose one of the leasing offers "lease to own or lease with maintenance" available at KFH auto showrooms. The customer can make the best decisions and pay easily and comfortably.

He added that KFH Auto is classified as one of the smart buildings that gather between sustainability elements and modern technology. Smart build-



Ahd Aleesa



ings play a basic role in the three sustainability factors (Humans, environment, and economy). However, the smartest move is represented in KFH success in putting all the pieces together under one roof, seller, buyer and financier, and providing all procedures related to the sale and purchase of cars as provided by official authorities including traffic, insurance and other services to make the purchase process enjoyable.

Services and products

Alessa said that the services provided through KFH Auto include sale of agents' new cars, maintained used cars, motorcycles, jet skis, boats, marine equipment, pay here and receive abroad facility, operational and finance lease (retail and corporate), ladies services, finance all types of cars offered by commercial offices and individuals, spare parts and accessories service.

Facilities and advantages

Alessa indicated that KFH fulfills customers' needs of car sale and lease finance through easy programs to suit their financial position according to the rules, regulations, terms and conditions. However, there are additional services which we provide to our customers (cash - finance - estimation - trust sale - leasing). He added that the most distinguished finance solutions and advantages provided by KFH are as follows: Agent's warranty and advantages - sale on cash or installments at competitive prices - appropriate settlement period - flexibility in payment (salary deduction - transfer to banks) - expat's guarantee accepted.

Concerning the finance of cars in Kuwait and receipt abroad, Alessa emphasized that this service includes new and used cars. Also it includes the serv-

ice "Pay in Kuwait and receive your car abroad" which is provided exclusively by KFH to several categories of customers to own the car of their choice and receive it in 4 countries: Egypt, Jordan, United States and Turkey, in cooperation with approved suppliers in Kuwait. The service is available for all Kuwait customers and expats. No salary transfer is required but credit terms and conditions must be fulfilled. The service is one of the most comfortable and easy finance solutions for customers. The service suits the citizens of the 4 countries working in Kuwait, Kuwaiti businessmen and investors in the said countries and Kuwaiti students studying there. Other advantages include a finance limit approximating KD 25 thousand on 5 years installment basis with competitive profit ratios and speedy completion of procedures.

Exclusive packages

Alessa said that KFH is the first bank to offer lease finance services in the market with advantages allowing KFH customers to drive their selected cars for a period of five years including comprehensive takaful insurance, factory warranty, alternative car in case of maintenance or repair of leased car. Also, the service includes the privilege of discount upon early settlement. The customer is given the choice either to purchase the car or return it to KFH upon expiry of the lease contract. KFH provides a wide variety of the most famous trademarks, nearly 80 models within its operational and finance lease programs.

KFH is distinguished for providing the best services to customers (retail and corporate) by providing a wide variety of the latest car models with a flexibility to estimate the lease value, lease contract period, comprehensive maintenance, comprehensive takaful insurance, alternative car, road assistance, and travelling in the lease car according to terms and conditions.

Democrats warn of looming downgrade as US faces default

WASHINGTON: Democratic Senate leader Chuck Schumer warned Tuesday that the United States was flirting with a disastrous downgrade in its credit rating as lawmakers remained deadlocked over how to stave off a debt default with just days to spare. Democrats say the Senate needs to act by the end of the week to raise the government's borrowing cap, but a vote set by Schumer for today looks doomed to fail as the Republicans refuse to allow a simple majority vote.

Faced with the deadlock, President Joe Biden told reporters there was a "real possibility" of changing the rules in Congress to circumvent Republicans. If the stalemate holds, the United States will not have the funds to meet its obligations to creditors and could default on its \$28 trillion debt by October 18, according to Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, who said Tuesday this could trigger another recession. "Unfortunately, sadly and confoundingly, too many Republicans seem proud of this moment where they're pushing us to the edge of default, and possible downgrade," Schumer told a news conference.

"Even now, the credit rating agencies are saying there's a possibility of downgrade way before the 18th, which would cost American consumers, American businesses, the American economy, a lot. After the last downgrade there were lasting effects for years."

Congress has raised the debt ceiling dozens of times over the decades since setting borrowing limits, and the votes are usually bipartisan and drama-free. But with one eye on the tax and spending debate that is expected to be the focus of next year's midterm elections, the Republicans have been saying for months they would refuse to help this time around. They are keen to cast White House proposals for a multi-trillion-dollar social spending package-on top of the \$1.2 trillion infrastructure bill backed by both parties-as reckless. The party has ruled out either voting for the borrowing cap extension themselves or allowing the Democrats to pass it with a straight majority vote.

Republican Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell is demanding Democrats use an arcane legislative tool called reconciliation to lift the borrowing cap on their own, with no help or consent from his side.

But Schumer has dismissed the reconciliation process, arguing that time was too short for the complex maneuver. He is forging ahead on a procedural vote Wednesday to start debate on raising the borrowing cap under normal procedure until December 2022.

"We do not have the luxury of using a drawn out, convoluted and risky process," he told a news conference in the Senate. President Joe Biden delivered a stark warning of American decline Tuesday in a speech urging Congress to vote through his ambitious infrastructure and social spending packages or lose out to the likes of China. "These bills are not about left versus right or moderate versus progressive, or anything that pits Americans against one another," he said at a trade union training center in Howell, Michigan. "These bills are about competitiveness versus complacency. They're about opportunity versus decay," he said. "To oppose these investments is to be complicit in America's decline." —AFP

No light at the end of the tunnel for Britain's HGV drivers

ASHFORD, UK: Sitting at a truck stop between London and the Channel Tunnel, Dean Arney, a British truck driver who has been behind the wheel for 40 years, sees little to recommend his work. "I'm separated from my wife, which goes with the job unfortunately, it is quite common," he told AFP from his cab in Ashford in Kent in southeastern England, a stopping point for heavy goods vehicle (HGV) drivers shuttling back and forth from the continent.

"My son asked me about getting on the road. I told him: Don't, it's not worth it," Arney said as he described hard working conditions, a difficult family life and meager compensation for the effort. In the face of a serious shortfall in HGV drivers that has sparked fuel shortages and fears of empty shelves in supermarkets over Christmas, the British government has offered thousands of temporary visa waivers to foreign lorry drivers.

But in the week since ministers introduced the scheme to help fill vacancies for as many as 100,000 drivers, a meager 27 applicants have come forward to drive tankers in the UK. In an industry where the average age of drivers is nearly 58, the visa scheme has, so far, proved insufficient to attract new recruits despite the clear and present need.

Steven Evans, the head of a transport company based in Liverpool in northwest England who had

got back behind the wheel to help out a friend, said the government's plans were a "good thing" for the industry.

Truck stop woes

While he bemoaned the poor state of British truck stop facilities and the frequency of nighttime thefts of cargo, he said he was delighted that drivers were earning higher wages. "I used to pay (my drivers) £1,000 (1,200 euros) a week normally, but with overtime it's become £1,400 (1,650 euros) per week," Evans said, adding that wages could rise further.

Arney was less optimistic about the prospects, however, saying he was paid more in the 1990s than he is currently. He also criticized the low level of security at British truck stops. "We're charged and in a lot of the truck parks, you get here and in the morning, your curtain is slashed, load stolen, diesel stolen. It does happen in Europe but it tends to be a problem here," Arney said.

For 35-year-old truck driver Steven Abbot, one of the most compelling reasons to work on the continent was the food. In the UK, drivers have to pay between £7 and £10 for standard fare like a lasagne and chips or a meat pie, he said. "In France, you get your starter, your main and your dessert for 10 euros or 11 euros. Big difference," he said. A younger man in the industry, Abbot chooses to only make relatively short trips that allow him to get home each evening. Truck stop shower facilities, where the water only comes "dribbling out", are not good enough to put up with five nights a week, he said.

Abbot said he turned down a contract with higher pay but where he would have had to spend most



ASHFORD, US: A driver eats a meal beside his lorry at Ashford International truck stop, in Ashford, south-east England on Tuesday. Sat at a truck stop between London and the Channel Tunnel, Dean Arney, who has worked as an HGV diver for 40 years sees little to recommend the work. —AFP

of his nights on the road. "I could earn £10,000 more, but I wouldn't see my kids grow up," he said.

Marian and Mariana-Loredana Aivanesei, a Romanian couple who are both drivers, alternate four-hour stints at the wheel of their truck on routes between Europe and North Africa. Temporarily stranded in Ashford by an administrative problem they said they would never consider applying to work in the UK. "It would mean: move in here, pay a British rent," Marian said while waiting for a pizza. Evans said that the UK needed to look at the fundamental reasons behind the shortage of drivers. "We're told foreign drivers are taking our jobs. Well, there are no Brits to take them," he said. —AFP

Google to invest \$1bn to lift Africa Internet access

JOHANNESBURG: Google yesterday said it will invest \$1 billion over the next five years to allow for faster and more affordable internet access and support entrepreneurship in Africa. Internet reliability is a problem in Africa where less than a third of the continent's 1.3 billion people are connected to broadband, according to the World Bank.

But the continent, where nearly half the population is under 18, is a promising market. According to Google and Alphabet boss, Sundar Pichai "huge strides" have been made in recent years, but more work is needed to make "Internet accessible, affordable and useful for every African".

The investment will support digital transformation by ensuring improved connectivity and access, he said in a statement. The funds will, among other things, go towards infrastructure development including the Equiano subsea cable that will connect South Africa, Namibia, Nigeria and St Helena with Europe.

The deal expands Google's pledge announced four years ago to train around 10 million young Africans and small-scale businesses in digital skills. "I am of the firm belief that no one is better placed to solve Africa's biggest problems than Africa's young developers and startup founders," said Google's Africa managing director Nitin Gajria. Internet access is also hampered by the affordability of smartphones. —AFP



vehicles spend idling at intersections. Carbon dioxide emission information is added to a Flights service for booking travel by air.

"We're putting these numbers in context by labeling flights that have significantly higher emissions, and adding a green badge to flights with significantly lower emissions," Google said in a post.

The metrics will also show how much more CO2 is attributed to business or first-class seats, which give passengers more room. In coming months, Google will start adding details about how eco-friendly hotels are so people can opt for lodging that is kinder to the planet. Google moves include weaving environmental impact information into its services for financial investing or shopping for appliances, and providing more insights into cost-benefits of electric vehicles. "Individually, these choices might feel small but when you multiply them together across our products, they equal big transformations for the planet," Pichai said. "It's going to take all of that to avert the worst consequences of climate change and there's no time to waste." —AFP

Google lets users factor climate change into life

SAN FRANCISCO: Google said it is tweaking widely used tools for getting around, shopping and more to let users factor climate change into daily routines. Google is among the Big Tech firms that have made pledges and investments to reduce the environmental impact of their operations with moves such as making power-hungry data centers carbon neutral. New features unveiled on Wednesday provide users with ways to help in the effort, whether it be driving routes that result in less exhaust being spewed from cars or shopping online for energy efficient appliances.

"In all these efforts, our goal is to make the sustainable choice an easier choice," Google chief executive Sundar Pichai said while briefing journalists on the latest features. Artificial intelligence was put to work in Google's free Maps service in the United States to show people the most fuel efficient routes to destinations even if they are not the quickest. "It defaults to the route that uses less fuel when the estimated time of arrival is similar," Pichai said.

"We believe the feature will have the same impact in the next year as taking over 200,000 cars off the road." The feature is to be rolled out in Europe in 2022. Google has also started work on a project to use AI to optimize the efficiency of traffic in cities to reduce time



Workers extract caviar from a sterlet at the Aquatir sturgeon complex in the town of Tiraspol, the capital of Transnistria - Moldova's pro-Russian breakaway region on the eastern border with Ukraine. — AFP photos



Photo shows a worker extracting caviar from a sterlet at the Aquatir sturgeon complex.



Fish swim in a pool at the Aquatir sturgeon complex in the town of Tiraspol.

Separatist Transnistria to sell rare \$20,000-a-kilo white caviar

At a sprawling complex on the site of a former Soviet collective farm in Moldova's breakaway region of Transnistria, workers are harvesting caviar - and striking it rich. Shooting out from behemoth beluga fish are glistening obsidian orbs that the firm Aquatir exports for hundreds of dollars around the world from the tiny pro-Russian enclave. But the real treasure is in the company's rare albino belugas, which are set next year to produce a gold-tinted white caviar tasted only by the wealthiest people on the planet. "We got very lucky," advertising manager Viorica Grimakovskaya tells AFP during a tour of the 30-acre (12-hectare) premises.

Worth some \$20,000 (\$17,000 euros) per kilogram, according to Grimakovskaya, the white caviar is packaged in containers made of pure gold to match the roe's color and sold only at auction set a year in advance. Aquatir - which was founded in 2006, 15 years after a brief civil war that saw Transnistria break away from Moldova in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse - stumbled on some 20 of the albinos when purchasing their first stocks.

"They had just arrived into the world and we immediately brought them here," Grimakovskaya recalls. "If we had waited just a little bit, they wouldn't have been sold to us." The company was founded to take advantage of the

newly lucrative business of farming the delicacy, after a 2005 ban on sales of wild beluga caviar from the Caspian and Black Seas. Now Aquatir's albino belugas are finally mature enough to start producing the exclusive roe, but in the meantime the company has been doing just fine.

From US to Japan

In vast air-conditioned buildings that look like plane hangars, 450 tons of belugas, Russian sturgeons, sterlets and besters churn water - and profits. The fish, which are not killed when their roe is harvested, produce some seven tons of black caviar each year, sold for \$22

to \$90 per 50 grams (1.75 ounces). With offices also in Germany, Aquatir exports the delicacy to countries ranging from Spain and Switzerland to Israel and Indonesia.

Shipments also reach as far as the United States and Japan, and are planned for Dubai. The company sells barely any of its products at home - a would-be state that has not been recognized internationally and is propped up by free Russian gas and some 1,500 troops. "It's not so easy to sell caviar to Transnistrians," Grimakovskaya says. That's because the separatist enclave in Europe's poorest country has an average wage of \$250-\$300 per month.

For those buying the caviar abroad, its taste comes with a hint of controversy. Aquatir is owned by Sheriff, a conglomerate with an economic and political monopoly on Transnistria, long described as a hotbed of smuggling and corruption. The group also owns the FC Sheriff football club which shocked Shakhtar Donetsk and European giants Real Madrid in its first two matches in this year's Champions League and faces former champions Inter Milan later this month. With its fish able to live more than a century, Sheriff has a long time before its gold rush slows. — AFP

No lovers allowed in top French book prize after ethics scandal

France's top literary prize, the Goncourt, will no longer allow lovers and family members of the jury to be entered for consideration, it was announced Tuesday, following a scandal last month. It was revealed in September that one of the jury members, Camille Laurens, was the girlfriend of philosopher Francois Noudelmann, who was shortlisted for his memoir "Les Enfants de Cadillac" ("The children of Cadillac"). Not only that, but it emerged that she had written a scathing review in Le Monde of one of its competitors for the prize, "La Carte postale", shortly after the shortlist was announced.

At the time, the Goncourt Academy defended its decision to include Noudelmann's book, saying they had discussed the relationship and decided it was "not a reason to penalize a good book." But they have since back-tracked, announcing a new rule that states: "Works by spouses, partners or close family cannot be considered." They also made clear that: "Jury members who hold a literary position in the media must absent themselves from writing on works in the selection."

The distaste with Laurens' review in Le Monde was already clear last month, with Didier Decoin, president of the Goncourt Academy, telling France Inter radio: "I didn't like that at all. And we will talk about it." Laurens has not been removed from the jury, but that will be the punishment for anyone breaking the rules in future, the academy stated. Noudelmann has, however, paid the price, with his book removed from the shortlist. The winner from the remaining nine books will be announced on November 3. They only get 10 euros, but a large amount of publicity. — AFP

Nobel Literature Prize yet to deliver its diversity promise

After almost a decade of exclusively Western authors, will the Nobel Literature Prize broaden its horizons? The bestowers of the prestigious award have a chance today to deliver on their diversity pledge. A #MeToo scandal caused the 2018 prize to be postponed, and there has been recurring criticism over the choice of male and Eurocentric laureates.

And it is two years since the Swedish Academy that awards the prize promised new criteria that would lead to a more global and gender-equal literature prize. Since then, two women have taken home the honor: Polish novelist Olga Tokarczuk for 2018, and the American poet Louise Glück last year. But the 2019 winner, Austria's Peter Handke, was a controversial pick. His pro-Serbia positions extended to backing Serbia's former president Slobodan Milosevic, who was on trial for genocide when he died in 2006.

The promise of a more geographic spread has so far gone unfulfilled. The most recent laureate who was neither European nor American was China's Mo Yan, back in 2012. "Is it time for the Nobel Literature Prize to get woke?" Sweden's leading daily Dagens Nyheter asked this weekend. The leanings of the Swedish Academy are largely impenetrable - the nominations and deliberations are kept secret for 50 years. But that doesn't stop literary circles from engaging in frenzied speculation about dozens of widely varying candidates.

Neglected areas

"They've realized that they have to be very discreet, very secretive, because that makes it more magical, more exciting," Hakan Bravinger, literary director of Swedish publisher Norstedts, told AFP. His own favorite this year was Canadian Margaret Atwood, he added. The Academy's five-member Nobel committee, elected for three years, is responsible for collecting and discussing the nominations before submitting a list of five names to the other 13 members of the Swedish Academy.

After deliberations, the 18 Academy members vote in early October to decide on a winner. "I do believe they really want to discover a genius from a previously neglected area," said Jonas Thente, literary critic at Swedish daily Dagens Nyheter. He predicted the Academy



Photo shows a worktable inside Bjoerkborn Manor, where Alfred Nobel lived during the summer periods of the last years of his life, in Karlskoga, Sweden. Alfred Nobel's last laboratory still exists, a stone's throw from a big explosives plant. In Sweden and around the world, the industrial legacy of the Nobel Prize founder is still making sparks fly. — AFP

would probably favour Hungary's Peter Nadas. But his own hopes are for Nigeria's Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and her novels on "cross-cultural experiences" - even if at 44 she is "probably too young" for a Nobel, he added. The youngest laureate to date was Rudyard Kipling, who was honored at the age of 41 in 1907.

Critics have pointed out that non-Western writers are not in short supply. Kenya's Ngugi wa Thiong'o is regularly mentioned as an African author worthy of the prize, as are Somalia's Nuruddin Farah or Mozambique's Mia Couto. South Korea's Ko Un's star may have faded following accusations of sexual assault, but India's Vikram Seth and China's Can Xue, Yan Lianke and Lao Yiwu (pen name Lao Wei) have also been cited as potential winners.

Major Western countries have all had several winners, France topping the list with 15. But the world's two most populous nations, India and China, have only one each, not counting the Chinese-born naturalized French citizen Gao Xingjian. Caribbean-American Jamaica Kincaid and Maryse Conde of Guadeloupe have also been mentioned. Should either of them win, it would be the first time a black woman was honored since American Toni Morrison in 1993.

Unpredictable

Maria Hymna Ramnehill, a critic for

the daily Goteborgs-Posten, said she was banking on a playwright, such as Norway's Jon Fosse. Canadian Anne Carson, Americans Joyce Carol Oates and Joan Didion, Russia's Ludmila Ulitskaya, French-Rwandan Scholastique Mukasonga and French novelist Annie Ernaux have all been tipped as the potential 17th female laureate out of 117 winners since 1901.

Syrian poet Adonis, long a favorite among bookies, has so far been ignored by the Academy, as has Japan's Haruki Murakami. Their admirers worry they may follow in the footsteps of writers such as American Philip Roth, who died without a Nobel. When it comes to an author such as France's Michel Houellebecq, his inflammatory style and persona may clash with the Academy's tastes.

The 1895 will of Swedish inventor Alfred Nobel creating the prizes specified the body of work should be in an "idealistic direction". However, Handke's example proves the Academy is still prepared to ruffle feathers if they think the body of work merits recognition. "One might have thought that the Academy would have wanted to stay away from scandal, but this only proves that the prize is more unpredictable than ever," Jonas Thente said. — AFP

Oldest Frenchman Theobald dies at 112

France's oldest man Jules Theobald has died at the age of 112, his family told AFP Tuesday. Theobald, who hailed from the Caribbean island of Martinique, a French overseas department, died at his home in the island's main city Fort-de-France. Born on April 17, 1909 - though family legend had it he was born two years earlier - the father of three worked as a docker and a fisherman. In a 2019 interview with AFP he insisted feistily that "if it were down to me I could live until I'm 200! I've had a good little life! I don't have any regrets."

As recently as March, residents had voted the keen dancer and domino player honorary president of his Pointe des Negres home district. "He will leave a great void, although his passing was rather expected," Fort-de-France deputy mayor Steve Moreau told AFP. "He loved his district. He knew everybody and everybody knew him - he was very close to people." The oldest man in the world is Spain's Saturnino de la Fuente Garcia, aged 112 years and 236 days as of Tuesday. He was born two months and one week before Theobald.

France was also home to the oldest person ever whose age has been independently verified - Jeanne Calment, who died in 1997 aged 122 years and 164 days. The oldest known living person is



In this file photo, Jules Theobald speaks during an interview after he was officially named the oldest man in France in Fort-de-France. — AFP

now Japanese woman Kane Tanaka of Japan, aged 118 years, 276 days. French nun Lucile Randon - who survived COVID earlier this year - is meanwhile the oldest known living European, aged 117 and 236 days. Japan's Jiroemon Kimura, who died in 2013 aged 116 years and 54 days, was the oldest man ever whose age has been verified. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features



Laborers take a break as they work at a private jute mill in Jagatdal. From the boutiques of Christian Dior to royal wedding favors, jute is growing in popularity worldwide as demand for alternatives to plastic soars, with experts predicting the bag industry alone will be worth more than \$3 billion by 2024. India is desperate to capitalize on this consumer shift and seize the opportunity to revive its flagging industry, expanding it from sacks and gunny bags to fashion. Also known as sack cloth, hessian, or burlap, the fibre is hailed by environmentalists because growing it can help with carbon capture, and it uses less natural resources than cotton.



A worker unloads raw jute from a truck at a private jute mill in Jagatdal. — AFP photos

Rice sacks to runway: India's battle to rebrand jute

From the boutiques of Christian Dior to royal wedding favors, jute is growing in popularity worldwide as demand for alternatives to plastic soars, with experts predicting the bag industry alone will be worth more than \$3 billion by 2024. India is desperate to capitalize on this consumer shift and seize the opportunity to revive its flagging industry, expanding it from sacks and gunny bags to fashion. Also known as sack cloth, hessian, or burlap, the fibre is hailed by environmentalists because growing it can help with carbon capture, and it uses less natural resources than cotton.

"One hectare of jute plant can soak up to nearly 15 tons of carbon-dioxide and discharge 11 tons of oxygen during a season, thereby reducing greenhouse effects," estimated Swati Singh Sambyal, a sustainability and circular economy expert based in New Delhi. She added that production takes about only four months and requires "minimal water and fertilizer" compared to cotton. During British rule, the jute industry was a key part of India's economy and the fabric was exported worldwide but by the 1990s it was struggling, unable to compete with cheaper synthetic substitutes and lower production costs of farmers in neighboring Bangladesh.

Today India is trying to promote jute as a fabric for a sustainable future, with the government issuing a mandate that all grains and 20 percent of sugar should be

packed in jute sacks. Leading home-grown designers such as Ashish Soni and Pawan Aswani also use jute blends for their fashion lines. But critics warn the country's rundown mills and outdated farming practices do not match up with such grand ambitions.

Billion dollar industry

"India can cater to global demand but for that two things are needed: Upgrading the skills of the people...to produce different types of products and upgrading the machinery," said Gouranga Kar, who heads the Central Research Institute for Jute and Allied Fibres. There are around 70 jute factories in West Bengal state, some of which were set up in the 19th century mainly to produce coarse sacks for packing coffee and food grains, but there has been little change to machinery and production methods since. At Meghna Jute Mills hundreds of barefoot workers labor in a vast dingy hall covered in fine, fibrous dust across eight-hour shifts, 24 hours a day.

"Jute has a potentially huge international market" said company president Supriya Das, as noisy machines rolled out long strands of shimmery yarn behind him. "If the machines are high-tech we can produce good yarn. For diversified end use, the quality of the fibre has to improve. The industry won't be viable unless we introduce value-added products like decorative items and rugs."



Workers load jute fibre waste onto a truck at a private jute mill in Jagatdal.

Nearly all of the world's jute is grown in this region or in Bangladesh, because of the conducive humid climate and availability of cheap labor.

According to a recent report by Research and Markets, the global jute bag market reached a value of \$2.07 billion in 2020 and is projected to touch \$3.1 billion by 2024 as consumers look for alternatives to single use plastic. The material's appeal has been boosted by brands such as Dior making jute sandals

and stars such as the Duchess of Sussex wearing jute footwear and using hessian gift bags for guests attending her wedding to Prince Harry.

Drowning in plastic pollution

Kar said India should seize the opportunity to invest in its industry and make diverse jute-based products such as rugs, lamps, shoes and shopping bags. India's scientists have developed high yielding varieties of jute to tap this

renewed interest, Kar explained, but unskilled labor and outdated farming practices meant this had yet to translate into economic returns. "This is a major cause of concern for us," he added.

The coronavirus pandemic has also thwarted hopes of restoring the lost glory of the industry - several mills have shut down and lockdowns have caused labor and raw material shortages. Environmentalists insist jute has vast economic and green potential, particularly as consumers voice concerns about fast fashion and more countries introduce legislation to ban single-use plastic. Every part of the jute plant can be used: The outer layer of the fibre, the woody stem for paper pulp, and the leaves can be cooked and eaten, Sambyal explained.

The UN Environment Program has said the planet is "drowning in plastic pollution", with about 300 million tons of plastic waste produced every year. India generates 3.3 million metric tons of plastic waste annually, according to a report in 2018-19 by the Central Pollution Control Board. Back at Meghna Mills, factory bosses are hopeful that if authorities invest, they can rebrand and reboot jute for the 21st century. Das said: "Jute has a great future. It can bring a lot of valuable foreign exchange to the country so the government must focus on this sector.—AFP

Hulking hulls of mighty warships greet divers off Turkey's western shore, testament to a World War I battle that gave birth to nations and is now an underwater museum. The British Royal Navy's "HMS Majestic" is just one of 14 shipwrecks at Gallipoli, a peninsula that has been the graveyard of navies stretching back to ancient times.

The last great battle for its adjoining Dardanelles Strait leading from the Mediterranean toward Russia was a fiasco for British and French forces, who beat a retreat after months of fighting that claimed tens of thousands of lives. And while the Allies eventually won the war, their sacrifices in the 1915 battle were a touchstone moment in the formation of national consciousness in modern Turkey, Australia and New Zealand.

Now Turkey, where history and politics seem inextricably interlinked, is opening the site up to the world's divers - just in time for the country's centenary celebrations in 2023. "It's like a time machine that takes you back to 1915 and World War I," says Savas Karakas, a diver and documentary maker who was one of the first to inspect the wrecks when they opened to the public this month. "It's a good opportunity for us to remember our past," says professional underwater photographer Ethem Keskin of the wrecks, some lying just a few meters under the sea and others up to 80 meters. "I thought about the moment they sank and you feel the stress of war."

'Emotional moment'

Turkey wants Gallipoli to be the new go-to destination for divers looking to connect with events that shaped the present world. Other hotspots include the Chuuk Lagoon in Papua New Guinea - famous for its World War II wrecks - and

the Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands, which still suffers the ills of US nuclear testing in the 1940s and 50s. "Now Gallipoli is becoming an alternative," Karakas said. "This is history, and each shipwreck is like a medal on our chest."

Allied troops waded ashore on the peninsula at the start of an ill-fated land

campaign to wrest the Dardanelles from the Ottoman Empire, which was already in its dying throes. The battle began on April 25, 1915, pitting Allied troops from France, Britain, Australia and New Zealand against the Ottomans and Germany. The Allies intended to secure a supply route to Russia and capture Constantinople, as Istanbul was known when it was the capital of the Ottoman and Byzantine empires.

They gave up after nearly nine months of grueling warfare in which more than 100,000 were killed on all sides, according to different estimates. April 25 is still honored as Anzac Day in Australia and New Zealand, whose joint Army Corps lost an estimated 11,000 lives in the campaign. "I dived into the remains with an Australian: A shipwreck which may not mean much to us aroused his interest," diving instructor Ercan Zeybek said. "It was an emotional moment for him."

'Holding grandfather's hand'

Access to the wrecks required a special permit until 2017, when Ismail Kasdemir, who heads the area's Canakkale Historical Site, began pushing the idea of opening the seabed to the broader public. "There was history and

treasure lying underwater for more than 100 years," he said. "The diving community was curious." Canakkale already attracts global tourists intrigued by rem-

nants of the legendary city of Troy, which rests on the Dardanelles' eastern bank. "You can already smell the history above the water," Derya Can, who has set multiple free-diving records, told AFP at the underwater park's unveiling. "Now, divers will be able to survey the underwater history."

For film maker Karakas, this history is also personal since his name Savas (meaning "war" in Turkish) honors the Gallipoli campaign, where his grandfather was wounded. "His hand was burnt and I was very scared when I was a child. Each time he was trying to touch me... I was looking at his hand and feeling a little bit weird," he recalled. "When I dive, I remember this hand. The rusted steel feels like the hand burnt by shells from those ships, so it's like holding my grandfather's hand." — AFP



A handout photograph released by the Gallipoli Historical Side Presidency Press service shows a diver visiting wreckage of a warship sunk in the World War I Gallipoli Campaign off the coast of Canakkale. — AFP photos



A diver visits wreckage of a warship sunk in the World War I Gallipoli Campaign off the coast of Canakkale.

Photo shows a diver visiting wreckage of a warship sunk in the World War I Gallipoli Campaign off the coast of Canakkale.

DIVING INTO HISTORY: GALLIPOLI SHIPWRECKS OPEN TO PUBLIC

The next fashion trend is clothes that don't exist

The online metaverse is coming and if we're going to be spending more time in virtual worlds, there's one crucial question: What are you going to wear? "When I first started talking about this, my friends were like, 'What are you talking about?'" said 27-year-old Daniella Loftus. "But my 14-year-old cousins understood it immediately."

For many, the idea of buying clothes that don't exist is a conceptual leap too far. But emerging digital fashion stores are tapping into a growing market-not actual clothes but digitally generated outfits that stores simply photoshop onto a customer's photos or videos to be posted onto Instagram and elsewhere. Soon they are likely to become a way to dress your avatar when interacting in online games and meeting places, all potentially while reclining in sweat pants in your own home.

British influencer Loftus sees so much potential that last month she gave up her job with a fashion consultancy to devote herself full-time to her website, This Outfit Does Not Exist. Her Instagram shows the potential of virtual clothing that doesn't need to obey the laws of physics-from a shimmering silver liquid pant suit with tentacles, to a wobbling pink creation with lasers firing out of her bustier. "Digital is coming to overtake physical. Kids are asking each other: 'What skin did you have in this game yesterday?'" said Loftus.

Eye-catching

Isabelle Boemeke, a Brazilian model and influencer, is already an avid buyer of digital outfits. Online, she is known as Isodope and merges high fashion with a serious commitment to clean energy and environmental activism. Her other-worldly style fits neatly with her

message. "I wanted to do something very eye-catching and bold. If my videos featured me wearing a T-shirt and jeans, they wouldn't have the same appeal," Boemeke told AFP.

"Models nowadays have the freedom to share more about their personal lives and personalities. I'm a big nerd and I love expressing myself in different ways through fashion or makeup." That's the demand, so the supply is coming fast. Outfits on digital fashion store DressX range from \$25 hats to strange jellyfish-like dresses for hundreds of dollars. "Every brand in the future will be on board with digital fashion," said DressX co-founder Daria Shapovalova.

Its own research says 15 percent of customers are doing so for Instagram posts, and almost a quarter found it satisfied their need for a new item of clothing. "You don't necessarily need physicality to experience the thrill of wearing

an extraordinary garment," said Michaela Larosse, of The Fabricant, which sold the first ever digital-only dress in May 2019 for \$9,500. "We will all have a digital self, we'll have an avatar and you'll be able to communicate something about yourself, who you are, what you're interested in, through the iteration of your avatar."

Reducing waste

Environmental concerns are also key to their appeal. The traditional fashion industry is one of the biggest pollutants and waste generators on the planet-a point made by Extinction Rebellion protesters who stormed the Louis Vuitton catwalk in Paris on Tuesday. "I know many women who buy an outfit, wear it once for a single photo and never again," said Boemeke. "They could reduce consumption and waste by using digital fashion for a few of those

posts." The pandemic was an obvious accelerator for these businesses. "People were stuck at home with nothing to do. They had nowhere to wear those beautiful clothes," said Loftus.

She is clear that digital fashion is not yet for everyone-and may never be. "I don't know if a lot of the people who do this stuff online actually want to meet people in person. I think that a lot of their needs and desires can be satisfied online," said Loftus. It may also prove a great leveler-a way for anti-social people to (almost literally) shed their skin and adopt another. "You might be an accountant with a wife, kids, and you're happy being quite mundane in real life, but then the way you want to express yourself in these virtual worlds is totally different," she said. — AFP



A model presents a creation by Louis Vuitton.



A demonstrator is being evicted by security members as models present a creation by Louis Vuitton during the Women's Spring-Summer 2022 Ready-to-Wear collection fashion show.



A demonstrator holds a banner as models present creations by Louis Vuitton during the Women's Spring-Summer 2022 Ready-to-Wear collection fashion show.



Models present creations by Louis Vuitton during the Women's Spring-Summer 2022 Ready-to-Wear collection fashion show as part of Paris Fashion Week at the Louvre in Paris yesterday.

Climate demonstrators invade *Louis Vuitton catwalk show*

Extinction Rebellion climate activists burst onto the catwalk at Louis Vuitton's Tuesday Paris Fashion Week show to blast the industry's impact on the environment. "Overconsumption = extinction", a banner brandished by one demonstrator from the international civil disobedience movement against climate change read.



A model presents a creation by Louis Vuitton during the Women's Spring-Summer 2022 Ready-to-Wear collection fashion show.

She climbed onto the catwalk set up in the Louvre art gallery even as models were showing off the latest styles, before being hustled away by security guards, an AFP photographer saw. Extinction Rebellion, Friends of the Earth and Youth For Climate said in a statement that around 30 people were involved in planning the protest, with two arrested.

They called on the government to enforce "an immediate cut in production levels in the sector, given that 42 items of clothing were sold per person in France in 2019". Louis Vuitton did not immediately comment on the incident when contacted by AFP. - AFP



A demonstrator is being evicted by a security member as a model presents a creation by Louis Vuitton during the Women's Spring-Summer 2022 Ready-to-Wear collection fashion show as part of Paris Fashion Week at the Louvre in Paris yesterday. — AFP photos

Sports

Bogaerts blast as Red Sox dump Yankees out of playoffs

Boston to face top-seeded Tampa Bay in divisional series

BOSTON: Xander Bogaerts smashed a two-run homer as the Boston Red Sox dumped the New York Yankees out of the postseason with a 6-2 victory in their American League wild card clash at Fenway Park on Tuesday.

Bogaerts' blast and a Kyle Schwarber homer helped knock Yankees ace Gerrit Cole out of the game after only 50 pitches as the Red Sox advanced to a divisional series against the top-seeded Tampa Bay Rays.

It was a miserable outing for Cole, who joined the Bronx Bombers in 2019 on a whopping \$324 million deal — the richest contract for a pitcher in MLB history. Red Sox starter Nathan Eovaldi meanwhile struck out eight over 5.1 innings before Ryan Brasier, Tanner Houck and Hansel Robles combined for three scoreless innings to smother the Yankees bats.

Boston attacked Cole early on, with shortstop Bogaerts clubbing a 427-foot homer to center field to put the Red Sox 2-0 up. The Sox extended their lead in the bottom of the third when Schwarber smoked a 435ft monster to right field to make it 3-0.

That was followed by a single from Enrique Hernandez and another walk from Rafael Devers, enough to prompt Yankees manager Aaron Boone to make a pitching change, yanking Cole for Clay Holmes. New York stopped the bleeding momentarily, and when Anthony Rizzo blasted a 408-foot

breaking ball to right-field in the top of the sixth inning, the Yankees were finally in business.

Aaron Judge then singled to build pressure for New York, and Red Sox skipper Alex Cora responded by abruptly yanking Eovaldi for Brasier. But just as it looked as if momentum might have swung back to New York, the Yankees let the Red Sox off the hook.

Giancarlo Stanton's sharp line drive sent Judge hurtling around the bases from first, but a superb



Cole knocked out after 50 pitches

relay throw from Hernandez to Bogaerts to catcher Kevin Plawewski saw the New York slugger out at home plate. Stanton swore in frustration and in the bottom of the inning the Red Sox restored their three-run lead when Alex Verdugo's double into right field sent Bogaerts scurrying home for 4-1.



BOSTON: Manager Aaron Boone #17 takes out Gerrit Cole #45 of the New York Yankees against the Boston Red Sox during the third inning of the American League Wild Card game at Fenway Park on Tuesday in Boston, Massachusetts. — AFP

Verdugo then struck again in the bottom of the seventh, singling to score Schwarber and Hernandez. Stanton homered at the top of the ninth to give the

Yankees hope but Red Sox closer Garrett Whitlock shut it down and mopped up Joey Gallo and Gleyber Torres to wrap up the win. — AFP

News in brief

Amir Cup final Dec 21; push for capacity crowd

KUWAIT: The Amir Cup final between Kuwait SC and Qadsiya SC is set to take place on December 21, 2021 at Jaber International Stadium, Kuwait Football Association announced yesterday. The final was postponed from its original November 23 date for technical reasons, while efforts are currently ongoing to have the match held in front of a full capacity crowd. Kuwait had banned fans in stadiums after reported violations of mandatory health protocols in the stands during a semi-final match between archrivals Qadsiya SC and Arabi SC earlier this month.

Bowling Open underway

KUWAIT: Qualifier for the Kuwait Bowling Open Tournament, organized by Kuwait Bowling Club, are taking place currently with daily matches starting at 10:00 am. The top 16 bowlers who will qualify in the trials will enter the competition, which concludes October 23. Bowlers of both genders from Kuwait and GCC are participating in large numbers. The organizing committee seeks to prepare the atmosphere for participants in the tournament, which is considered a preparation for the upcoming championship to be held in UAE in November. All health protocols for the prevention of coronavirus are being observed.

Alpine to join Le Mans

PARIS: Alpine will rejoin the top class of endurance racing including at the 24 Hours of Le Mans as of the 2024 season, the French sports car manufacturer confirmed on Tuesday. Already present on the Formula 1 circuit the re-branded Renault team Alpine also raced on the endurance circuit this season with a prototype sports model. "Contesting both Formula 1 and on the Endurance circuit, Alpine will be one of the rare brands present in the two top racing disciplines in motor racing," said Alpine Racing chief Laurent Rossi. The Alpine will join Peugeot, Porsche, Audi, Cadillac, Acura, BMW and others in a growing field of competitors. — AFP

Second most watched

LOS ANGELES: Tom Brady's return to face his former NFL team, the New England Patriots, racked up enormous American viewing numbers making it one of the most watched 'Sunday Night Football' games in history. The Tampa Bay quarterback, now 44, led the Buccaneers to a 19-17 win over the Patriots in a game that was watched by 28.5 million viewers, once the people watching across all platforms, NBC, Peacock, NBC Sports Digital and NFL Digital have been factored in. That is the second highest total for a 'Sunday Night Football' contest behind only the record 30.3 million viewers for a regular-season-ending Dallas Cowboys-Washington Redskins game in 2012. The broadcast from Foxborough, Massachusetts was also viewed by 34 percent of all households watching TV that were tuned to NBC. That is the highest total in the 16 years of 'Sunday Night Football'. The online stream drew approximately 1.3 million viewers, the largest ever for an NBC broadcast of an NFL contest. — AFP

France face Belgium hoping to banish Euro flop memories

MILAN: France will take to the field for tonight's Nations League semi-final against Belgium in Turin with something to prove following their shock early exit from Euro 2020. World champions France were among the favorites to win the summer's European Championship but failed to set the tournament alight despite having a squad packed with world-class talent. Their elimination on penalties at the hands of Switzerland in the last 16 — after leading 3-1 with 15 minutes of normal time remaining — was a particular shock, and led to some fallout within the French camp.

On Tuesday sports daily L'Equipe published a lengthy interview with star forward Kylian Mbappe, whose missed spot-kick handed the Swiss a memorable win in one of the matches of the tournament. He said he would have liked "more support" following his shoot-out error. "What shocked me, once again, was being called a monkey for a penalty," Mbappe said. "That's

why I wanted support, not because I shot the penalty to the left and (Yann) Sommer saved it."

Mbappe also said that he could have had more support from his teammates on the field right after missing the penalty, but on Tuesday vice-captain Raphael Varane insisted the squad supports one another. "We are together when things are going well as well as when things are not going so well," Manchester United defender Varane told reporters. "We take on things together, we don't leave anyone behind. That's our philosophy, and that's not going to change."

Euro flops meet

France go into the match on an unconvincing run of form, with the 2-0 World Cup qualifying win over Finland last month their first victory after a run of five draws. They will be missing midfield dynamo N'Golo Kante after he contracted COVID-19 in the run up to Chelsea's 1-0 defeat at Juventus last week. "We shouldn't play down this competition, it's replaced friendly fixtures which weren't very popular," said France coach Didier Deschamps. "We know we're here with an aim and unlike other competitions we're already in the semi-finals."

Belgium too will be looking to bounce back from their Euro campaign on the turf of the team which knocked them out of the tournament in the quar-



TUBIZE: Belgium's midfielder Hans Vanaken (left) challenges Belgium's forward Eden Hazard during a training session in Tubize on Tuesday in preparations for their UEFA Nations League semifinal football match against France. — AFP

ter-finals. Roberto Martinez's side may have gone one better than France in the summer but it was more disappointment for the team ranked number one in the world. The Red Devils' only major sporting honor is gold at the 1920 Olympics, which were held in Antwerp, and a golden generation of players has fallen short both at the Euro and the last World Cup, where they were eliminated by France in the semis.

"They have six or seven players with

more than 100 caps, who have been there for a very long time," said Deschamps. "It's not for nothing that they're ranked the best team in the world. They're well organized, have young players who stand out but also a core of very experienced players which makes them one of the best teams in Europe and the world. It's a very, very good generation of players which has not yet experienced the joy of winning a tournament." — AFP

Ozil to address lack of South Asians in football

LONDON: Former Arsenal star Mesut Ozil hopes to boost the numbers of British South Asians breaking into professional football after helping launch a development center in Bradford. The United Kingdom has a South Asian population of more than three million people, which amounts to seven per cent of the population.

Yet only 11 British South Asians have played the professional game in England. In a bid to redress that stark imbalance, Fenerbahce midfielder Ozil joined forces with the Football Association and the Football for Peace organization.

Football for Peace, led by former British South Asian player Kashif Siddiqi and the FA, are co-



Mesut Ozil

launching the Mesut Ozil Development Centre in Bradford, which has a large South Asian community. The center will run football and life skill sessions at League Two side Bradford City's training ground.

Several Premier League and Football League clubs have also signed up to the initiative and it is

hoped the Bradford center will be the first of many to open nationwide. Ozil has Turkish roots but represented Germany, the country of his birth, before quitting the international stage in 2018 in protest at "racism and disrespect".

"I have always been surprised why the South Asian Community are only allowed to be fans of the game, why are we not seeing more players or managers breaking into professional football?" Ozil said. "I want to support them, give them an opportunity to be successful both on and off the pitch. I am from an ethnically diverse background and understand the challenges. I hope the Football for Peace Mesut Ozil Centre will become the platform they need."

The center will also provide workshops for parents to help build the relationship between South Asians and the wider football community. Siddiqi, who co-founded Football for Peace said: "Football has given me so much and working with Mesut we want to create a platform that will provide a framework inside the football pyramid between professional clubs and also our community." — AFP

Barca make winning start in Women's Champions League

PARIS: Holders Barcelona got the defense of their Women's Champions League title off to an impressive start on Tuesday with a crushing 4-1 win over Arsenal while former women's Ballon d'Or winner Ada Hegerberg made her long-awaited return for seven-time champions Lyon.

Crowned champions after thrashing Chelsea in a clash of first-time finalists last May, Barcelona made short work of another London team as Mariona Caldentey and Alexia Putellas, the reigning UEFA women's player of the year, put them 2-0 up by halftime. Two minutes into the second half Asisat Oshoala latched on to a raking through ball and calmly slotted past the advancing Manuela Zinsberger in the Arsenal goal. Frida Manuum got on the end of a setpiece cross to pull one back for the Gunners in the 74th minute but six minutes

from time substitute Lieke Martens lifted the ball over Zinsberger to make it four.

The Austrian goalkeeper had some late comfort when she saved a penalty from Putellas in added time. The other game in Group C saw Belgian international Tine De Caigny scoring twice as Hoffenheim thrashed Danish side Koge 5-0.

In Group D, Lyon cruised to a comfortable 3-0 win against Hacken in Sweden. Melvine Malard put the French side ahead in the tenth minute with Catarina Macario adding a second three minutes after the break. An own goal from Stine Larsen secured the points. The most significant moment of the match, though, came in the 78th minute when Hegerberg, the inaugural women's Ballon d'Or winner in 2018, ended a 20-month injury absence, coming on for Macario.



GOTHENBURG: Lyon's Ada Hegerberg (left) enters the pitch during the UEFA Women's Champions League Group D match against Hacken at Bravida Arena in Gothenburg, Sweden, on Tuesday. — AFP

With 53 goals, Hegerberg is the all-time top-scorer in the competition but the 26-year-old Norway attacker has been out of action since January 2020 after rupturing a cruciate ligament in her right knee and then suffering a left tibia stress fracture.

Lyon's streak of five straight

Champions League titles was ended in the quarter-finals last season by Paris Saint-Germain, who also pipped Lyon to the French crown. In the other game in the group, Benfica goalkeeper Leticia put in a star performance to frustrate Bayern Munich who had to settle for a 0-0 draw. — AFP

Sports

Premier League scrambles to convince stars to get vaccinated

Only seven clubs have more than 50% of squad fully vaccinated

LONDON: Premier League matches are once again being played in packed stadiums after Britain's successful coronavirus vaccine rollout — but the reluctance of many players to get jabbed is proving a headache for football authorities.

The UK has one of the highest overall virus death tolls in the world, at more than 137,000, but more than 82 percent of over-16s have had two doses of the vaccine, according to the latest government figures. The rapid rollout has enabled the easing of restrictions on large gatherings, with a welcome return of supporters to football grounds.

However, although no official figures have been offered by the Premier League, reports suggest only seven of England's 20 top-flight clubs have more than 50 percent of their squad fully vaccinated. "It's low, not just in the Premier League but in the Football League as well. It's very low," said former Manchester United captain Gary Neville, who has an ownership stake in League Two club Salford City.

"We have to accept and understand why that is, but I think it is also time for the players or the PFA (Professional Footballers' Association) to come out and explain what the concerns are that the players have and why they are not taking these vaccinations."

Incentives have been discussed as an option by clubs to get more players to come forward to have the jab, including a potential relaxing of stringent coronavirus protocols. A bespoke quarantine exemption has been granted by the government to allow players to represent their nations in countries

on Britain's travel red-list, leaving them able to return to train and play with their clubs — but only if they have been fully vaccinated.

Hesitancy

The most prominent reasons put forward for the hesitancy are that players are young, healthy individuals less likely to suffer the worst effects of COVID-19, and the influence of anti-vaccination propaganda on social media.

Newcastle goalkeeper Karl Darlow encouraged his team-mates to get jabbed after he was hospitalized by the virus in July. "It felt worse than razor blades. It was like someone had just shut my throat off," the 30-year-old told The Times.

Newcastle pair Jamaal Lascelles and Allan Saint-Maximin were also sidelined for weeks by the long-term effects of COVID last season. Yet Magpies manager Steve Bruce confirmed that had not been enough to convince all of his players.

"We've got a lot of players who haven't had the jab. It's their prerogative," Bruce said in August. "We've had two or three players really sick with COVID here and Karl Darlow spent the best part of a week in hospital with it, so we've seen the severity of it first-hand. But there are a lot of conspiracy theories out there."

British Health Secretary Sajid Javid has expressed his "disappointment" and concern at the potential impact of vaccine hesitancy among Premier League stars on children and young people. And England's deputy chief medical officer Jonathan Van-Tam has

wouldn't force people to do it, it's your choice and your body."

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp last week expressed his frustration at the Premier League's low vaccine uptake, comparing not taking the jab to drink-driving. But Chelsea boss Thomas Tuchel said he was not "angry" with N'Golo Kante after the France midfielder tested positive last month, although his vaccination status is unconfirmed.

Ireland manager Stephen Kenny acknowledged he could not force players to get vaccinated but underlined his trust in medical advice. "It would be quite a radical viewpoint to just say, 'Whoever is not vaccinated is not being selected in the future,'" he said. "There are a lot of myths and issues around virility that people are concerned about. It is complex. I am not a medical expert, but I do trust the experts and I do think it is better to be double-vaccinated."

Winless Ireland sit fourth in their World Cup qualifying group with two points from five matches.

games. Irving would need proof of at least one vaccine shot in order to practice at the Barclays Center arena.

"No further update," Nets coach Steve Nash said at practice on Tuesday. "We support him. We are here for him. Things change. When there's a resolution, we're here for him." If Irving continues to shun the vaccine, he would start missing Brooklyn's home games. Irving could end up losing millions of dollars if he does not play home games this season.

"I'm not really worried about anything," Nash said. "We're just trying to work every day. We came in today and had a great practice and we'll do the same tomorrow, and that's kind of where I leave it." The Nets next preseason game is Friday against Milwaukee at Barclays Center. Brooklyn's regular season home opener is October 24 against Charlotte. —AFP



LONDON: In this file photo taken on August 13, 2021 a general view shows the English Premier League football match between Brentford and Arsenal at Brentford Community Stadium in London. —AFP

addressed Premier League captains in a bid to reassure them on any health concerns.

Footballing authorities have so far allowed for personal choice, without any sanctions for the unvaccinated. By contrast, NBA stars in the United States face docked pay and missing matches if they are not vaccinated in states where indoor events require full vaccination.

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp came out strongly in favor of vaccination last week, comparing not getting vaccinated to drink-driving. The German boss, who said his squad were "99 percent" vac-

nated, said: "I don't understand how that is a limitation of freedom."

Middlesbrough manager Neil Warnock branded his own players who refuse to get jabbed "irresponsible". However, Neville believes education and encouragement are a better solution than a hard-line stance.

"I don't agree with forced vaccination and the idea of taking wages off players who aren't vaccinated is beyond a step too far, it's absolutely wrong," he said. "We can encourage players to be vaccinated but we can't force them in my opinion." —AFP

Ireland's Robinson unvaccinated despite double COVID infection

LONDON: Ireland striker Callum Robinson revealed he has not had a COVID vaccine despite contracting the virus twice, insisting players had the right to choose what to do with their bodies. Robinson, who plays for West Bromwich Albion in England's second tier, first tested positive in November 2020 and caught COVID-19 again in August 2021, missing a World Cup qualifier against Portugal on September 1.

"It's annoying that I've caught it twice, but I haven't been vaccinated. Further down the line I could change my mind," the 26-year-old said on Tuesday. "There are managers and people that will want you to do it, which is right in their way, but everyone has their choice on what they want to do. I

Unvaccinated Irving misses Nets' first practice in New York

LOS ANGELES: Brooklyn point guard Kyrie Irving, who has been staunchly against getting vaccinated for the coronavirus, missed the Nets' practice on Tuesday. Irving practiced with his teammates last week in San Diego but did not attend the team's first practice in New York City as a result of the city's strict COVID-19 protocols.

Because of the ongoing global pandemic, New York has implemented new health and safety regulations which do not allow unvaccinated athletes to take part in practices and



Callum Robinson

Kenny's team play Azerbaijan in Baku in their next World Cup qualifier on Saturday before welcoming Qatar to Dublin for a friendly on October 12. —AFP



LOS ANGELES: Kyrie Irving of the Brooklyn Nets cheers from the bench during a preseason game against the Los Angeles Lakers at Staples Center on Sunday in Los Angeles, California. —AFP

Hertha Berlin tell unvaccinated players to pay for COVID tests

BERLIN: Hertha Berlin are to insist players and backroom staff who refuse to be vaccinated pay for their own COVID-19 tests in the future, the Bundesliga club confirmed yesterday. A club spokesman told AFP subsidiary SID that players or staff who refuse a coronavirus vaccine will soon have to pay for their own PCR testing, which costs around 70 euros (\$80) each time.

Under German Football League (DFL) rules, players must have a PCR test twice a week, but Hertha have their personnel tested six times every week. Hertha sports director Fredi Bobic told German daily Bild that "90 percent" of their playing squad and staff are vaccinated.

Around 82 percent of all players in the Bundesliga are reportedly vaccinated. The Hertha squad has already been quarantined twice this year due to outbreaks of the coronavirus. Hertha Berlin has made a poor start to the Bundesliga season by losing five of their first seven league games. —AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075

Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	

22532265	
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Jose Mathew holder of Indian Passport No. U0196249 having permanent address VIII-79, Vattoly (H), Near East Church, Angamaly, Ernakulam, Kerala - 683572. Residing in Kuwait at present Mangaf, Block-4, Street 23, Bldg-123 Kuwait, hereby declare that henceforth my name will be read as under: Given name - Jose Mathew and Surname - Jovi. (C 0958)

I, FARUK SULAIMAN Sulaiman DOB: 01.06.1980 residing at 161A 1102, Pallivasal Street 1 Kalamarudur, Villupuram, Tamilnadu - 606102, declare that I have changed my name and hereafter I shall be known and called as MUBARAK SULAINAN only. (C 0957) 5-10-2021

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Race for World Cup berths heats up in Europe

Five of 10 automatic qualifying spots could be secured next week



HAMBURG: Germany's head coach Hans-Dieter Flick (center) overseas a training session yesterday Hamburg, northern Germany, before their football 2022 World Cup qualifier 1st round group J match Germany v Romania scheduled tomorrow. — AFP

PARIS: While a select quartet of Europe's heavy-weights battle for the Nations League crown this week, Germany, England, Portugal and Denmark will train their sights on locking down a place at next year's World Cup in Qatar. European champions Italy, Spain, France and Belgium take center stage contesting the Final Four in Milan and Turin, but five of the 10 automatic World Cup qualifying spots could be secured come next Tuesday.

Denmark appear the most likely to complete the job, knowing wins over Moldova and Austria will secure top spot in Group F. Kasper Hjulmand's Euro 2020 semi-finalists are the only country with a 100 percent record. Denmark have scored 22 goals in six games without reply, and thrashed Moldova 8-0 at home in the reverse fixture.

Four-time world champions Germany have bounced back from a shock loss to North Macedonia in March, surging four points clear in Group J after Hansi Flick began his reign last month with three wins from three, including a 6-0 thumping of Armenia.

"The games I've seen have been super. I was in Stuttgart for the game against Armenia, and the game, the goals and the atmosphere were all top tier," said Bayern Munich forward Thomas Mueller. "We've got some good momentum going into these games, so we want to keep that going."

Germany can avenge their defeat by the Macedonians on October 11 in Skopje, three days after the visit of Romania — one of four teams realistically still in contention. Home and away victories for the Germans would effectively seal their place at the 2022 World Cup unless second-placed Armenia secure maximum

points from games in Iceland and Romania.

England, semi-finalists and runners-up at the past two major tournaments, could clinch qualification by beating Andorra and Hungary if other results in Group I go their way. Gareth Southgate's side conceded a stoppage-time equalizer in Poland last time out, snapping a run of five straight wins in the section. England haven't failed to win back-to-back qualifiers since losing to Russia and Croatia in November 2007, results that saw them miss out on Euro 2008.



Germany, England, Portugal, Denmark poised to qualify

Ronaldo returns

Manchester City forward Raheem Sterling says wrapping up a place in Qatar, whether it be this month or in November, would just be the first step towards the ultimate goal of lifting the trophy. "We're not happy with doing well and putting on a show for the country, we genuinely wanted to come home with that trophy (at Euro 2020) and that's the mentality in the squad now," Sterling told Sky Sports. "It was class, we went to the final but we want to win, we want to make his-

tory, and I think that's the message since day one when Gareth came in."

Cristiano Ronaldo returns from suspension as Portugal attempt to keep Serbia at bay in Group A. The all-time top scorer in men's international football, Ronaldo will lead his side against Luxembourg after Portugal host Qatar in a friendly this Friday.

The inaugural Nations League winners could theoretically qualify for the World Cup with two games to spare, but only if Serbia slip up against both Luxembourg and Azerbaijan. Belgium's attention will be on a Nations League semi-final clash with France, although the world's top-ranked team could also punch their ticket to Qatar pending the fortunes of Czech Republic and Wales in Group E.

Sweden can leapfrog Spain with victories over Greece and Kosovo in Group B, while Switzerland could move level on points with Italy in Group C if they overcome Northern Ireland and Lithuania. Finland stand the best chance of catching France in Group D. They trail the world champions by seven points but have game in hand against Ukraine and Kazakhstan. The Finns then host Les Bleus in the final round of matches on November 16.

Norway must do without the injured Erling Haaland in key games against Turkey and Montenegro. Stale Solbakken's side are tied with the Netherlands atop Group G on 13 points as they target a first World Cup since 1998. Turkey have replaced coach Senol Gunes with former Germany international Stefan Kuntz after a crushing 6-1 loss to the Netherlands. Croatia, the 2018 World Cup runners-up, and Russia are the pacesetters in Group H, but Slovakia cannot be discounted either. — AFP

China suffer familiar sinking feeling in World Cup pursuit

HONG KONG: A familiar sense of crisis threatens to envelop Chinese football with the men's national team heading into crunch 2022 World Cup qualifiers still looking for their first point and first goal. China under President Xi Jinping have grand plans to become a leading football power, with ambitions to host and even win the World Cup one day.

But the country of 1.4 billion people has reached the World Cup only once, in 2002, and Li Tie's side were soundly beaten 3-0 by Australia in their opening match of this final round of Asian qualifying for Qatar, then lost 1-0 to old rivals Japan.

Despite boasting Espanyol's Wu Lei and Brazilian-born Elkeson in attack, the side failed to register an attempt on goal in 180 minutes of football and the pressure is building on former Everton midfielder Li. That pressure will ratchet up significantly if they do not beat Vietnam today in the United Arab Emirates, where the match is taking place because of the coronavirus. China then face Saudi Arabia next week.

China and Vietnam occupy the bottom two places of the six-nation Group B table — Vietnam have at least scored one goal. Only the teams that finish in the top two in Group A and Group B are guaranteed to reach Qatar. Two rounds of matches over the next two weeks will go a long way to deciding who books their tickets for 2022.

China's talisman Wu came on as a substitute in Espanyol's 2-1 win over Real Madrid in La Liga and then jetted over to the UAE to join his international team-mates. "It's an important win for my club and I hope to bring the momentum to the national team," the 29-year-old said, according to Xinhua news agency.

Wu's team-mates have been training in Sharjah for nearly one month and under strict measures to avoid coronavirus infections. "I know it's a difficult time for the team since the long closed training period could affect the players' mentality," Wu added. "But all of us have the same goal — which is to win this game, and we are confident that we will achieve it."

In-form Australia, who top the group with a perfect six points, face Oman and then have an eye-catching clash with Japan in Saitama. "We don't look too far ahead," said Australia coach Graham Arnold. "Yes it's been a great start, but I expect that to continue."

Japan, who impressed in reaching the last 16 at the 2018 World Cup, suffered a shock 1-0 defeat to Oman in their opening match of the third qualifying stage and veteran defender Yuto Nagatomo says that "we don't have any margin for error". Today they face a Saudi side who have won both matches so far. "They tend to have more of the possession but that leaves gaps in behind," said Nagatomo. In Group A, Iran lead the way with six points, with South Korea second on four. They meet next week. —AFP

Focused Brazil have one eye on World Cup qualification

MONTEVIDEO: After last month's turbulent round of World Cup qualification matches, for their next games Brazil can boast a full squad and a clear objective: Booking their ticket for Qatar. The Selecao have a perfect record of eight wins from their eight qualifiers so far ahead of today's trip to Venezuela, followed by a clash away to Colombia on Sunday and the visit of Uruguay next week.

Three more victories could possibly secure Brazil's qualification in record time. "Obviously it's always good to qualify as soon as possible," said Juventus's 30-year-old fullback Alex Sandro. "However, we always think about playing to win, playing our best, showing everything we've been working on. In the next games we're going to do our best to secure qualification."

Brazil will also hope to avoid the chaos of last month's qualifiers when coach Tite was shorn of nine members of his original squad — including the likes of Chelsea's Thiago Silva, Liverpool trio Alisson, Roberto Firmino and Fabinho, Manchester City duo Ederson and Gabriel Jesus, and Manchester United's Fred — and saw their clash with Argentina abandoned after just 10 minutes by Brazilian public health officials.

COVID was largely to blame for both issues, with English clubs refusing to release their players due to quarantine obligations — a matter that has since been resolved between the British and Brazilian governments. Likewise, Brazil's COVID regulations were behind the health officials' actions after Argentina



EZEIZA: Argentina's forward Lionel Messi (center) eyes the ball during a training session in Ezeiza, Buenos Aires yesterday, ahead of a FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 qualifier football match against Paraguay to be held in Asuncion today. — AFP

fielded four English-based players despite them being required to quarantine for two weeks upon arrival in Brazil.

'Frustrated'

Those issues have now been confined to the past, although there is still no news on when the match will be replayed. And for Leeds United winger Raphinha it's a major relief after his first call-up to the Brazilian squad was aborted by his club's refusal to release him. "I was very difficult, I was very frustrated. Of course, I was hoping until the last minute that I could come," Raphinha said about the experience. "All I could do was keep calm, keep working hard, because I knew there would be another call-up in a few weeks time."

It has all worked out well for Raphinha, who has been in fine form in the English Premier League. "It's a very happy moment in my career and in my life," he added. Despite their depleted squad last time out, Brazil still won 1-0 away to Chile and beat Peru 2-0 at home with a goal from Neymar, who is suspended against Venezuela.

Brazil lead the single South American qualifying table by six points from Argentina and their in-form Lionel Messi, who last week opened his account for Paris Saint-Germain with a wonder goal to seal a 2-0 Champions League win over Manchester City. Unbeaten Argentina travel to Paraguay today, host Uruguay on Sunday and then entertain Peru next week. —AFP