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Up to 200 women expected to join Kuwait armed forces

Registrations begin in December • Women exempt from living on military bases



KUWAIT: Defense ministry officials hold a press conference at the ministry yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti women will be able to register for military service from December, with 150 to 200 female volunteers expected to enlist. They are also exempt from living on military bases. This was announced during a press conference held yesterday at the ministry of defense, after the decision to allow women to serve in the army was criticized by some MPs and Islamists.

The decision was based on a previous study that was activated by ministry decree 657/2021, based on law 32/1967. According to this decision, women can join military service with ranks of specialty officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers. They will work in medical, paramedical and technical fields, according to the army's needs.

At yesterday's press conference, the ministry clarified the conditions for registration and the fields in which women will serve. Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Army, Maj Gen Khaled Al-Kandari, explained that the conditions for women who volunteer to join the military are the same as those for men.

"Applicants will have to register online, and will receive a text message or email with the documents required, followed by the admission process, technical and medical checkups and personal interviews.

We expect training courses to start at the beginning of next year," Kandari said, adding female volunteers will not stay overnight in camps.

"Lectures and training will differ depending on the field selected. The courses are similar to those for males, excluding those that do not conform with the nature of women. Also, special training that requires female teachers will be provided by female teachers and trainers to respect religious sentiments and our traditions," added Kandari.

The main goal of this decision is to allow female employees of the ministry of defense to join the army as volunteers. All Kuwaiti women can volunteer to work in the army in certain specializations. These female officers will get the same financial benefits as male officers. Shortages in some fields was behind the decision to allow women to join the army.

"There are some fields in which women are necessary, such as medical and paramedical fields. Also, women inspectors are needed to work as Amiri guards at palaces and personal guards for delegations of women visiting Kuwait. In addition, they are important in the technical, engineering, electronics, air force, air defense and administrative fields as well," highlighted Kandari.

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News in brief

Cabinet defers return to normalcy

KUWAIT: Despite sources in the Cabinet earlier yesterday revealing that ministers had decided to end social distancing in mosques, scrap a ban on weddings and social gatherings, end mask mandates in open spaces, open the airport to all flights and issue visas to all nationalities, the Cabinet decided to wait until its next meeting before making a decision on returning to normal life.

Hezbollah has 100,000 fighters

BEIRUT: The head of Lebanon's Hezbollah said yesterday that his Iran-backed movement had 100,000 "trained" and "armed" fighters at its disposal, speaking after deadly violence in Beirut last week. Hassan Nasrallah accused the Lebanese Forces party of being behind the killing of seven members of his movement and ally Amal at a rally on Thursday, and warned it against sparking any "civil war". — AFP

150 Houthis killed in strikes

MARIB, Yemen: The Saudi-led coalition in Yemen said yesterday it had killed 150 Houthi rebels near Marib, as fierce fighting raged for the strategic city in a war that has lasted seven years. Air strikes "destroyed 13 military vehicles and killed 150 terrorist elements" in Abdiya within the past 24 hours, the coalition said in a statement. In a televised speech yesterday, rebel leader Abdelmalek Al-Houthi called for continued fighting. — AFP

Investors launch Fly Aqaba

AMMAN: Jordan announced Sunday the signing of an accord to launch an airline financed by investors in the kingdom and Saudi Arabia to serve the Red Sea resort area of Aqaba. The new airline, Fly Aqaba, was set up with \$20 million in private sector investment, said Nayef Bakhit, president of the Aqaba Special Economic Zone. — AFP

Residents face loss of driving licenses under new rules

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Authorities in Kuwait are planning to withdraw driving licenses of expatriates whose employment designation changed when they changed jobs. Residents may be required to hand over their driving licenses upon renewal of their

residencies as a condition for renewal. If their new job/role doesn't meet the requirements for the license, they will lose it.

The interior ministry however didn't specify when the new regulations will be issued or enforced. The plan hasn't been finalized yet and the legal mechanism to withdraw licenses still needs final approval. But the plan could result in thousands, if not tens of thousands, of foreigners losing the right to drive in Kuwait. The interior ministry announced last week that new regulations would be issued that allows the government to even seize valid driving licenses should a resident's visa status change.

Continued on Page 2

Fire contained at Mina Ahmadi oil refinery

KUWAIT: A fire broke out yesterday at Kuwait's largest oil refinery, causing several injuries but no interruptions to site operations or petrol exports. Plumes of smoke rose above the Mina Al-Ahmadi facility, around 40 km south of Kuwait City, after an explosion in the sulfur removal unit. The Kuwait National Petroleum Company, after initially

stating that there were no casualties, later tweeted that there were a number of injuries and cases of smoke inhalation among workers.

It said that those injured had received first aid at the site or been transported to a hospital and were in a "stable condition". Approximately two hours after the company reported firefighters were at the scene, it tweeted that the blaze was under "full control". Minister of Oil, Electricity and Water Mohammad Al-Fares and KPC Executive Director Hashem Hashem with company officials were immediately at the site to oversee the ground efforts and check on the safety of workers. — Agencies



KUWAIT: Oil Minister Mohammad Al-Fares coordinates with firefighters at the Mina Al-Ahmadi refinery yesterday. — AFP

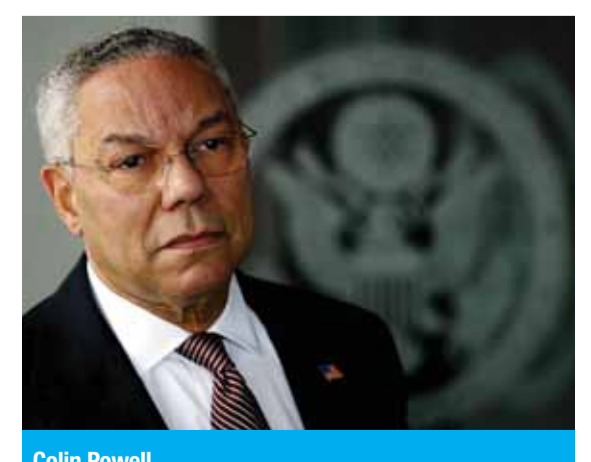
Gulf War hero Colin Powell dies aged 84

WASHINGTON: Colin Powell, a US war hero and the first black secretary of state who saw his trail-blazing legacy tarnished when he made the case for war in Iraq in 2003, died yesterday from complications from COVID-19. The 84-year-old retired four-star general was fully vaccinated, his family said in a statement, making him one of the most high-profile US public figures to die of a breakthrough infection.

President Joe Biden led an outpouring of tributes from home and abroad, describing the officer-turned-statesman as a breaker of racial barriers who believed in "the promise of America" and always put country before self. "Colin embodied the highest ideals of both warrior and diplomat. He was committed to our nation's strength and security above all," said Biden, who spent decades in the Senate and worked frequently with Powell.

"Having fought in wars, he understood better than anyone that military might alone was not enough to maintain our peace and prosperity. From his front-seat view of history, advising presidents and shaping our nation's policies, Colin led with his personal commitment to the democratic values that make our country strong."

Continued on Page 2



Colin Powell

Local

Kuwait's Amir receives senior state officials



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — Amiri Diwan photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Ministers of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah, Interior Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah and Foreign Affairs Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah.

First Kuwait PPP Conference convenes virtually Nov 15 and 16

KUWAIT: The 'First Kuwait PPP Conference' (PPPKW) will convene under the motto of 'Partnership towards Growth and Prosperity' for the first time in the State of Kuwait, President of KFECH Badr Al-Salman announced yesterday. KFECH calls for PPPKW in cooperation with and organization by NoufEXPO. The event will take place virtually on 15 and 16 November. His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Prime Minister of the State of Kuwait, will patronize PPPKW. Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, will represent His Highness the Prime Minister during the opening ceremony. NoufEXPO will provide the necessary organizational and logistics services for PPPKW.

Remarkable presence

The conference will witness the remarkable presence of many leaders of public-private partnership institutions. Notably, leaders from the United Nations and Gulf, Arab, and foreign countries will be present. In addition, many industry experts and Kuwaiti government agencies will contribute to PPPKW.

Commenting on the support of KFECH, Salman said, "the support of the Federation of Kuwait Engineering Offices and Consultant

Houses of Kuwait's first public-private partnership conference reflects our belief in the need for public and private sector cooperation in implementing Kuwait's development and projects. The resort of various countries to this cooperation equation aims to make the most of each sector's possibilities enjoyed and provided. The vitality, transparency, and experience of the private sector complement and integrate with the governance, keenness, and experience of the public sector to help Kuwait achieve its development goals."

Salman commented on the value of partnerships and said, "Kuwait has been aware of the importance of public-private partnership for a long time. Kuwait developed its related legislations that kept it in pace with global trends in this area. The most recent is Law No 116 of 2014 and the related executive regulation issued by Decree No 78 of 2015. Through this Law, the regulator aimed to establish an integrated system for the tendering and execution of strategic partnership projects. Kuwait laws noted its plans to diversify the economy and direct it towards involving the private sector in development projects and create an investment climate that allows the attraction of private capital, modern technology, and knowledge."



Badr Al-Salman

PPPKW Objectives

Salman explained that PPPKW aims to assess the experience of Kuwait and neighboring countries in the field of public-private partnerships to identify the obstacles facing partnership projects and benefit from the successful experiences in these countries. It also aims at presenting the technical and legislative aspects of partnership contracts and the requirements of their success. And finally, PPPKW will come up with appropriate recommendations to push Kuwait's partnership program forward.

The press release confirmed that the conference coincides with Kuwait's 2035 Vision that aims to "transform Kuwait into a financial and trade hub, attractive to investors, where the private sector leads the economy, creating competition and promoting production efficiency, under the umbrella of enabling government institutions, which accentuates values, safeguards social identity, and achieves human resource development as well as balanced development, providing adequate infrastructure, advanced legislation, and inspiring business environment." Doing so supports Kuwait's tendency to actively engage with the private sector and provide the right environment, mainly since development plan 2035 includes many mega-infrastructure projects.

Speaking about PPPKW themes, Salman said that the conference will discuss partnership contracts' legislative and institutional framework and their financial and financing aspects. In addition, PPPKW will discuss the best practices and successful experiences in partner-

ships, the impact of Public-Private risk distribution on contractual issues, and finally, the practical applications and international experiences of public sector engagement with the private sector.

Advanced platform

NoufEXPO, in turn, announced that it has collaborated with Vmeets to run PPPKW virtually through cyberspace. Vmeets platform provides a one-stop-shop for virtual events, including a 3D interactive auditorium for presentation, panel discussions, workshops, an exhibition hall to host exhibition pavilions for participants, and advanced technologies to manage the course of the forum electronically, including registrations and confirmations.

The electronic platform also provides sponsoring companies with advanced capabilities to display their projects, services, and technical capabilities through their display pavilions. They can speak directly with the audience and collect their contact details. They can also show videos, reports, and brochures of their companies. Sponsoring companies and attendees will have access to a full recording of PPPKW after it is over.

In conclusion, the press release urged all interested companies and institutions to present their specialized capabilities, expertise, and services to contact NoufEXPO on +965 22469924 or send their email messages to info@noufexpo.com.kw to reserve their spot in this unique and new event. More about PPPKW on its website www.noufexpo.com.kw/pppkw.

Residents face loss of driving licenses...

Continued from Page 1

Obtaining a driving license in Kuwait is already a difficult and lengthy process. Currently, driving licenses are issued to expatriates who meet a highly selective list of criteria, including being 18 years of age or older, having a college degree (attested) and earning at least KD 600 a month. They also must have lived in Kuwait for at least two years and hold a valid driving license from their country of origin.

For exemption from the abovementioned criteria, the driver must have one of the following job titles or roles: Engineer, journalist, doctor, lawyer, professor, mandoub, judge, prosecutor, university faculty

staff, librarian, pharmacist, teacher, social worker and a few other designations. Housewives who have children in school, university students and drivers (on domestic help visas) are also exempt.

Residents who do not meet the criteria or who have changed jobs/roles since their driving license was issued will lose their license (even if it is still unexpired). Under the new regulations, those caught driving with an expired or 'invalid' driving license won't be subject to the usual KD 5 fine, but instead may be deported for driving without a license.

How many people this regulation could impact remains unclear. Statistics quoted by interior ministry officials in local Arabic dailies in 2019 and 2020 claimed approximately 800,000 to 1.6 million driving licenses have been issued to foreign residents. Tawheed Al-Kandari, the Interior Ministry's PR and Media Director, told Kuwait Times that probably around one million driving licenses are held by foreign residents.

be announced later," Sabr said.

The courses are one to three months long, depending on the chosen field. "After concluding the course, female graduates will receive ranks depending on their degree. For non-commissioned officers, university graduates will receive the rank of staff sergeant, diploma holders will receive the rank of sergeant plus two allowances, and high school graduates will receive the rank of sergeant. For soldiers, those who have passed 11th grade will receive the rank of corporal with two allowances, those who have passed 10th grade will receive the rank of corporal and one allowance, those who have passed 9th grade will receive the rank of corporal, and those who have passed 8th grade or less will receive the rank of soldier," said Sabr.

Sabr also explained the steps for registration of women on the army's official website kuwaitarmy.gov.kw. The main conditions for enlistment include having Kuwaiti nationality, good health and good reputation (no criminal record), and passing the personal interview.

Gulf War hero Colin Powell...

Continued from Page 1

HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of condolences yesterday to Biden on the demise of Powell. HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables.

After engineering military victory in the 1991 Gulf War, Powell was so widely popular and respected that he was considered a strong candidate to become the first ever black US president. He ultimately decided against running for the White House, although he later broke with his Republican Party to endorse Barack Obama.

A son of Jamaican immigrants, Powell frequently shattered glass ceilings in a pioneering career that took him from combat in Vietnam to becoming America's first black national security advisor under then-president Ronald Reagan. He was also the first African American and youngest chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff under Reagan's successor, George H W Bush. Serving four presidents, Powell made his reputation as a man of honor distant from the political fray - an asset in the corridors of power.

George W Bush described Powell as "an American hero, an American example, and a great American story" when he nominated the professional soldier to be secretary of state in 2000, making him fourth in the presidential line and, up to then, the highest-ranking black US public official ever. "He was highly respected at home and abroad. And, most important, Colin was a family man and a friend," the 43rd president said yesterday.

Powell had a reputation for bipartisanship, straight talk and integrity, and was praised for his officer's instincts of duty and honor. Former US president Jimmy Carter called the soldier a "true patriot" whose courage "will be an inspiration for generations to

come". US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin told reporters Powell was among the "greatest leaders that we have ever witnessed", lamenting the loss of "a tremendous personal friend and mentor".

But Powell found it hard to live down his infamous February 2003 speech to the United Nations Security Council about the alleged existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq - evidence which was later proven to be false. "It's a blot... and will always be a part of my record. It was painful. It's painful now," Powell said in a 2005 interview with ABC News.

Tributes nevertheless poured in from Congress, where Democratic Senator Mark Warner praised Powell as "a patriot and a public servant", while centrist Republican Senator Mitt Romney mourned the loss of "a man of undaunted courage and a champion of character". Former British prime minister Tony Blair, who stood firmly behind US actions in Iraq and gave military backing to the war effort, described Powell as a "towering figure in American military and political leadership."

Born April 5, 1937 in Harlem, Colin Luther Powell's "American Journey" - the title of his autobiography - started in New York, where he grew up and earned a degree in geology. He received a commission as a second lieutenant in the US Army, and was posted in what was then West Germany. Powell completed two tours of duty in Vietnam - in 1962-63 as one of John F Kennedy's thousands of military advisors, and again in 1968-69 to investigate the My Lai massacre.

He earned a Purple Heart, but also faced questions about the tone of his report into the hundreds of deaths at My Lai, which to some seemed to dismiss any claims of wrongdoing. Back in Washington, he quickly rose through the ranks to the pinnacle of the national security establishment, serving Reagan as national security advisor, and both George H W Bush and Bill Clinton as Joint Chiefs chairman from 1989 to 1993.

Powell freely admitted his liberal social views made him a strange bedfellow for many Republicans, though the party was often happy to hold him up as an example of its inclusivity. But from 2008, he endorsed Democrats for the presidency, twice backing Obama, and then Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden. — Agencies

Up to 200 women expected to join...

Continued from Page 1

Col Tareq Al-Sabr, Director of the Public Mobilization Directorate, noted that the decision was accompanied by a media campaign spread over multiple phases. "Be one of them" is the slogan of the campaign. "The first phase was of registering Kuwaiti men in the army, which took place at The Avenues. The second phase was of registering children of Kuwaiti mothers as professional soldiers," he said.

"Currently, we are in the third phase of the campaign, which is for registering Kuwaiti women in the military's medical and paramedical fields. The fourth and final phase will be registering those listed in the 1965 or earlier censuses and children of officers as professional soldiers in special professions. This will

Local

Kuwait sport needs tangible improvements to flourish: Speaker

High-level talks discuss efforts to propel Kuwaiti sports forward

KUWAIT: Kuwait's top lawmaker said yesterday that the local sports scene needs "tangible and practical" action on the ground to take off, subsequently boding well for his compatriot athletes. "We need to transform plans and suggestions into palpable realities," National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said amid parliament-hosted talks over efforts to propel the Kuwaiti sports sector to greater levels, in which a bevy of athletes were in attendance. Countries with vibrant sports scenes often rely on "meticulous plans" to keep the sector



National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem



Kuwait Olympic Committee President Sheikh Fahad



KUWAIT: Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi (second from left) speaks during a meeting to discuss efforts to improve the sports sector in Kuwait. —KUNA photos



Transition to pro sports 'progressing steadily'

afloat, added the chief lawmaker, saying that similar procedures would "save Kuwait's sports sector". He went on to express confidence in the abilities of athletes and sports officials, whom he said were more than capable of transforming the industry.

Meanwhile, Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi affirmed keenness to upgrading the

sports sector in accordance with a clear strategy to develop Kuwaiti sports and create an environment that helps young athletes face global challenges.

Speaking during the conference, the minister indicated that achieving this kind of development requires collective efforts of the Public Authority for Sports and the National Assembly. He explained that a "legislative environment" is required to enable athletes, while noting at the same time that the authority prepares to launch a sports strategy soon after hosting several meetings recently, including meetings with international sports institutions. Minister Mutairi further pointed out that efforts to adopt the professional sports system in Kuwait are "progressing steadily", without giving a timeline for when the transition could be completed.

Director-General of the Public Authority for

Sports Hmoud Flaiteh spoke in the meantime about developing "Kuwait's competitive sports industry", noting that there are plans to reduce the number of games played in sports clubs to six: football, basketball, handball, volleyball, athletics and swimming. Meanwhile, individual games under the plan can be practiced in private clubs established for this purpose "following the success of this experiment in Kuwait," he added.

Kuwait Olympic Committee President Sheikh Fahad Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah spoke during the conference on the committee's role in "developing the Olympic movement in Kuwait in accordance with the Olympic Charter". He added on the other hand that the committee is currently "unable to support clubs and federations" in terms of providing them with necessary facilities due to lack of budget. — KUNA

Kuwait bowling open prepares players for world championship

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Competition is getting more intense at the Kuwait Open bowling competition, as the finals are drawing near, while delegations are lauding the tournament because of its high standard and timing. Most participants said the tournament is the best way to prepare for the world championship to be held in the UAE next month.

Head of UAE's delegation Hind Al-Hammadi said competitions help players gain more experience after two years of inactivity due to the coronavirus pandemic. She said the Kuwait Open is on the agenda of UAE athletes of both genders, as "we are counting on making a strong achievement during the world tournament in the UAE".

Hammadi lauded the organization and hospitality of the tournament and thanked the President of



Head of UAE's delegation Hind Al-Hammadi

International, Asian and Kuwait Bowling Federations Sheikh Talal Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, who is keen on presenting everything that promotes the game at all levels.

Meanwhile, Head of Qatar's delegation Khalifa Al-Kubaisi said he was happy with how the competitions are being conducted, and preparations by athletes for upcoming international events. Kubaisi said Qatar's participation is limited due to various reasons, including those who faced difficulty traveling and those in universities. "We hope that Qatari athletes benefit from participating, especially since the Kuwait Open is being held at an opportune time," he added. He said such events give confidence to athletes to get used to a competitive atmosphere, adding that Kuwait Bowling Center deserves to host more international events.

News in brief

Kuwait departs 2,739 people

KUWAIT: The Interior Ministry said yesterday that 2,739 people were deported from the country from Sept 1 until Oct 17 (47 days). This was done at the instructions of Interior Minister Thamer Al-Ali Al-Sabah and follow up by Undersecretary Lt Gen Sheikh Faisal Al-Nawaf Al-Sabah to hasten legal action against violators and deport them, the ministry said in a press statement.

Kuwait, Japan discuss ties

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah yesterday had a phone call with his Japanese counterpart Toshimitsu Motegi. Both sides discussed the close bilateral relations between the two friendly countries and the latest development in the region.

Para team returns to Kuwait

KUWAIT: Kuwait national para table tennis team arrived in Kuwait with two medals, a gold and a bronze, won by player Yaqoub Al-Khalifa during the Costa Brava Spanish Open F20. The tournament saw the participation of France, Britain, Spain, Ireland, Germany, Russia, Netherland, Belgium and China. Chairman of the Paralympic Table Tennis Committee and head of the delegation Duaij Al-Hajiri said the participation in this tournament was successful, as Khalifa was able to win two medals, in addition to the positive performance of juniors Mohammad Al-Rashidi and Fahad Al-Otaibi, as they gained more experience that will help them during the West Asia Competition to be held in Bahrain next month. He said Costa Brava put an end to the long absence from participation in international events.

Shooting team's training camp

KUWAIT: Kuwait's clay target delegation, which is currently in Larnaca in Cyprus, participated in a training camp from Oct 12-18 in preparation for a tournament in which the best shooters of the world are participating. President of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations Duaij Khalaf Al-Otaibi said three shooters from Kuwait, who are among the top 10 shooters in the world, were selected: Abdullah Al-Rashidi, Talal Al-Rashidi and Abdulrahman Al-Faihan. The competition is considered the tournament of the world elite based on their achievements, be it at the Olympics or tournaments during the year. But Otaibi said Faihan will not be able to participate due to personal reasons. The camp is also considered the start of serious preparations for the 2024 Paris Olympics.



Heritage Protectors, an exhibition to support people of Palestine

KUWAIT: The Center for Palestinian Culture opened yesterday its 54th exhibition of the Palestinian heritage at Dar Al-Fonon (gallery of arts). The exhibition, dubbed 'Heritage Protectors', was put together to support the people of Palestine and preserve the Palestinian heritage. The exposition, which lasts until October 21st, includes several embroideries, pottery products, frames and colorful silk cloaks. It also displayed the traditional Palestinian food, in addition to a corner for books' enthusiasts which offered the latest book editions concerning the Palestinian cause around the world.



Ooredoo supports ministries with 'Safe Education' campaign

KUWAIT: As part of its constant support to the efforts of the state and governmental bodies in the country, and the 'Safe Education' campaign, Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, visited Maria Alqubtiya High School to ensure a safe return of students to schools in a healthy educational environment, along with encouraging students to continue adhering to the health instructions to protect themselves and others. Thus, the company distributed facemask masks and sterilization tools.

The 'Safe Education' campaign aims to educate all students and their families about the importance of adhering to the instructions of the Ministry of Health and the application of health requirements such as: maintaining a physical distancing inside and outside school classrooms and the need to wear



Mijbil Al-Ayoub

masks, in addition to their cooperation with school administrations in implementing precautionary measures to achieve security, safety and community prevention. It is noteworthy that the "Safe Education" campaign came as a result of a collaboration of the Ministries of Education, Interior, Health and Information, with the participation of Ooredoo Kuwait and other prestigious companies in the country, hence, the campaign will continue throughout the academic year 2021-2022.

Commenting on the school visit, Senior Director, Corporate Communications at Ooredoo Kuwait, Mijbil Al-Ayoub, said: "Successful companies must seek creativity and sophistication in adapting social responsibility initiatives. Creative responsible companies are committed companies that contribute to creating better societies, and this is what we always strive for in Ooredoo. Ensuring the safety of differ-



ent society members is everyone's responsibility, it is a shared vision that all must work towards achieving it, and we will continue supporting the governmental efforts in such initiatives."

"The school visit came as part of our constant support for the governmental efforts since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic until today. Further, our visit aimed to ensure a safe educational environment, which reflects Ooredoo's keenness in sustaining its leading position among the telecom companies in the country through its constant com-

mitment to completely support different social initiatives that fall under various areas including: education, healthcare, social and more," Ayoub added.

The campaign came in line with the start of the academic year 2021-2022 and the return of students to schools after the stabilization of the epidemiological situation as a result of the spread of the COVID-19, as the Ministry of Education is working in cooperation with the relevant ministries to establish all means to ensure the safe conduct of the educational process.

Local

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UN hosts webinar on promoting mental health in Kuwait schools

KUWAIT: The United Nations in the State of Kuwait represented by the Resident Coordinator Office, the WHO Office in Kuwait and UNICEF in partnership with the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education organized an expert-led webinar to highlight the needs and opportunities for a mental health strategy to be considered, adopted and actioned by all schools in Kuwait. This webinar also aimed to build consensus into the mental health needs and interests of children and adolescents whilst highlighting the responsibility and respective contribution of a wide range of stakeholders. The webinar will form an early stage of a mental health policy planning exercise for schools by identifying the need for and key features of a school mental health policy.

Mental health problems can manifest in children as sadness or worry, attention deficits, behavioral difficulties, and deterioration in school performance. Early screening and deployment of effective interventions can reduce the likelihood of continuity and exacerbation of mental health associated impairments into adulthood. The rise in violence, drug addiction and depression amongst adolescents in Kuwait over the past few years has been alarming. A number of contributory factors have been found to exert impact on mental health; these include stressful events in early life such as child abuse and neglect, social isolation and negative lifestyle habits including increased passive screen time and lack of physical activity. The pandemic has underscored the urgency of putting in place collective action plans and policies that protect those most vulnerable and promote their wellbeing. Plans must recognize that children's and adolescents' development stage can influence his/her degree of vulnerability to mental health disorders. Accordingly, schools must be well positioned and prepared to identify the need for early interventions to reduce risk factors for mental health disorders and promote protective factors.

Dr Tarek El-Sheikh, Representative of United Nations Secretary-General Resident Coordinator noted that "schools need to adopt innovative solutions to keep linkages open with students, particularly in states of emergencies," further emphasizing that every school should be a mental health-promoting school through a holistic approach that builds on relationships with students, families and teachers.

Dr Assad Hafeez, WHO Representative in Kuwait called all stakeholders to attend to the global statistics which reaffirm a need for urgent action. Dr Hafeez followed that "globally the largest burden of mental health falls in young people."

The Ministry of Health was represented by Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad, who left a vivid image of friendships of early childhood and their formative impact on a child's development. He stressed that "schools are central to nurturing a child's skills of social connection and emotional regulation," and that the Ministry of Health in Kuwait in partnership with the Departments of School Health and Primary Healthcare are in the midst of preparing a mental health plan for school aged pupils.

Schools are one of several critical systems of care that ensure the delivery of essential health services to children including protection, and psycho-social support. The unprecedented length of school closures imposed because of COVID-19 may have thus contributed to significant imperils to children's overall wellbeing and development, not just their learning. With school reopening plans and the focus on accelerating learning to remediate losses, it is crucial that effective mental health and wellbeing plans are put in place so as not to lose sight of the unequivocal link between mental health and educational attainment. Equally so, these plans must necessarily factor in teacher preparedness to take on this responsibility and their personal wellbeing by mainstreaming into them the requisite capacity building exercises, tools, and modalities for the sharing of best practices by educational psychologists, and considerations to the appropriate strategies to mitigate teacher burnout. Indeed, teachers are important role models to students and formative agents in shaping their developmental experience and motivation.

Global statistics and evidence-based interventions guided the discussion thereafter, highlighting potential opportunities to tap into the promise of innovative technologies such as technology assisted teachers' training platforms, Chatbots that aid the implementation of interventions and a games-based platform to promote the uptake of life skills and participation in students. The webinar ended with a call to continue the conversation towards actional mental health strategies for schools across the nation.

Speakers in the webinar were: Dr Bibi Alamiri, MD, ScD Kuwait Center for Mental Health Adult, Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist; Shaimaa Allami Psychologist at Ministry of Education Department of Mental Health and Wellbeing; Dr Tatjana Colin Head of UNICEF Office in Kuwait, Chief, Early Childhood Development UNICEF; Professor Atif Rahman Professor of Child Psychiatry, University of Liverpool 5; Fatema Albader Middle School English Teacher, Bayan Bilingual School Kuwait.



KUWAIT: Vehicles stopped at a traffic light as Kuwait City high-rise buildings are seen in the background. - Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh
(To have your picture featured in the Kuwait Times' 'Photo of the Day' section, please send your horizontal, high resolution and unedited photos to local@kuwaittimes.com, along with the full name and Instagram account, in addition to a description showing the picture's location and date taken)

Sheikh Mubarak meets Spanish ambassador to Kuwait

KUWAIT: Sheikh Mubarak Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah received recently the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Spain to Kuwait Miguel Jose Moro Aguilar. At the beginning of the meeting, Sheikh Mubarak welcomed Ambassador Aguilar, and offered his congratulations on the occasion of the National Day of the Kingdom of Spain, which falls on October 12 each year. Sheikh Mubarak also emphasized the distinguished historical relations between the two friendly countries in various fields, including the economic and investment relations, especially in the field of tourism and hospi-

talities. He stressed the need to exercise more effort to enhance the dual relationship by increasing the volume of trade and investment partnerships.

Ambassador Aguilar thanked Sheikh Mubarak for the generous hospitality and said that Kuwaiti investments in Spain cover many fields, including renewable energy, services, tourism, real estate and various industries. He also stressed that Spain is a popular tourist destination for Kuwaitis, and that Spain hosts approximately 30,000 Kuwaiti tourists annually. He stated that Kuwait is a country characterized by economic stability, as trade exchange between the two friendly countries has witnessed a remarkable development.

Sheikh Mubarak Al-Sabah hoped that the coming period would witness more cooperation, strengthening and supporting bilateral relations between the two friendly countries. At the end of the meeting, souvenirs were exchanged.



KUWAIT: Sheikh Mubarak Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah presents a souvenir to Ambassador of Spain Miguel Jose Moro Aguilar.

Gulf Bank launches first padel tournament for local youth



KUWAIT: The winners in a group photo with Gulf Bank's team.

KUWAIT: On Friday and Saturday, Gulf Bank held a padel tournament at the Oasis Courts in Bneid Al-Gar for a group of young male and female fans of the sport which has quickly gained worldwide popularity. The bank launched the padel tournament as part of its keenness to engage directly with members of the local community by organizing fun-filled events in which both young men and women can participate.

The tournament took place on Friday and Saturday, from 4:00 pm to 10:00 pm each day, with a total of 48 teams participating, of which 16 were female doubles. The tournament was open to all those who wished to participate, including both customers and non-customers of Gulf Bank. At the end of the tournament, Gulf Bank presented cash prizes to the winners, with the winning team receiving KD 1,000, the second place winners receiving KD 500, and the third place winners taking home KD 300, in addition to trophies for all the players.

The first place male winners were Abdulrahman Al Awadhi and Dawood Hashem, second place winners were Hassan Al-Ghareeb and Mohammad Al-Qattan, and the third place prize was earned by Abdulhameed Al-Shatti and Ahmed Qasem. On the females' side, the first place winning team was Mariam Seraj and Dana Al-Fulaij, the second place winners were Dana Khajah and Yasmeen Sultan, and the third place winners were Maryam Al-Sadhan and Reem Al-Ajeel.

Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its



Ahmed Al-Amir

Commenting on the tournament, the Assistant General Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, Ahmed Al-Amir, said: "We were pleased with the success of Gulf Bank's padel tournament, which we organized for 48 teams of local youth. The tournament is one of many initiatives we have planned under 'GB Community', a set of activities through which Gulf Bank is keen to engage with the local community and general public.



Reem Hasan

Reem Hasan, Manager of Corporate Communications at Gulf Bank, added: "We are very proud to be the first establishment to organize a women's padel championship, in which 16 young female teams participated this year. We hope that they enjoyed the tournament, and we invite them to stay tuned and participate in the many activities that Gulf Bank is planning for the future."

extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience. Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining a robust sustainability program

at the community, economic, and environmental levels through sustainability initiatives that are strategically selected to benefit both the country and the Bank. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties and stakeholders in service of the vision.



Russia cuts ties with NATO in latest row

Malala sends letter to Taliban after girls' school ban

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BAGHDAD: Iraqis pass by a poster of Shiite cleric Muqtada Al-Sadr in Sadr City in Baghdad, where the Sadrist movement has made remarkable progress. — AFP

Pro-Iran Hashed punished in Iraq vote

Voters desperate for economic recovery - not shows of military muscle

BAGHDAD: Iraq's election was a disaster for the pro-Iranian former paramilitary force Hashed Al-Shaabi, with voters desperate for an economic recovery rather than shows of military muscle. According to preliminary results the Conquest (Fatah) Alliance, the political arm of the multi-party Hashed, emerged with only around 15 MPs from the October 10 vote. In the last parliament it had 48, which made it the second largest bloc.

The big winner, with more than 70 seats according to the initial count, was the movement of Muqtada Sadr, a Shiite Muslim preacher who campaigned as a nationalist and critic of Iran. Hashed leaders have rejected the results as a "scam" and said they will appeal, ahead of a final tally expected in the next few weeks. Analysts say the results show that the mainly Shiite Hashed alliance has failed to live up to the political expectations of Iraqis after entering parliament for the first time in 2018, following their major role in defeating the Islamic State jihadist group.

Opposition activists accuse Hashed's armed groups - whose 160,000 fighters are now integrated into Iraq's state security forces - of being beholden to Iran and acting as an instrument of

oppression against critics. The Fatah MPs are also seen as having a lack of vision for economic development in an oil-rich country plagued by failing public services and endemic corruption - the very complaints behind a youth-led anti-government

protest movement that began two years ago and led to this month's elections.



Hashed leaders reject results as a 'scam'

protest movement that began two years ago and led to this month's elections.

Maliki surprise

Unlike in the 2018 polls, Salwa, 22, said she did not vote for the alliance this time. "All they came up with were hollow slogans," said the student, who

did not give her last name. "My father insisted my mother and I vote for the Conquest," but Salwa opted for former prime minister Nuri Al-Maliki, who held the post between 2006 and 2014.

In the election's biggest surprise, Maliki, an ally of Hashed and a figure close to Iran, won more than 30 seats in the 329-seat parliament. For political scientist Ihsan Al-Shamari, the Hashed's weaponry was "a main cause" of its poor showing. Its close ties with Iran and several instances of "appearing to be above the state" have also damaged its popularity, according to Shamari. Since the October 2019 revolt, dozens of activists have been kidnapped or assassinated, and their movement blames the pro-Iranian camp.

'Country in free-fall'

Jalal Mohamed, a 45-year-old grocer, said he also did not vote for the Hashed. "The country is in free-fall, while their leaders live in the (high security) Green Zone" insulated from everyday life, he said. According to a source from within the pro-Iran camp, Hashed leaders have quarreled and blamed each other for the debacle over having rival candidates, thus fragmenting the vote. "The different

parties (in Hashed) tried to impose their own candidate in the same constituency and the votes were lost," said the source, on condition of anonymity.

Analysts say Sadr will have to come to terms with the Hashed alliance in the negotiating process to form a government and name the new prime minister. The Hashed is still expected to carry weight in parliament through the support of members who say they are independent, and arrangements with Maliki. Harith Hasan, a nonresident senior fellow at the Carnegie Middle East Center, puts Maliki's success down to running "strong candidates who resonated with the Shiite electorate, associating (him) with a strong Shiite state, rather than a state dominated by militias".

Maliki "attracted votes from social categories that benefited from his government's employment and patronage largesse when oil prices were at their highest," Hasan wrote in an analysis published by the Center. On Saturday, a coalition of Shiite parties to which the Hashed belongs took a harder line, blaming the electoral commission for "the failure of the electoral process" and warning against "the negative repercussions on the democratic path". — AFP

Kidnapping: Latest test for Haiti govt in turmoil

PORT-AU-PRINCE: Haiti's already fragile government faces a serious new crisis after one of the island nation's increasingly brazen criminal gangs kidnapped a large US and Canadian missionary group. There has been little official reaction in Haiti, and local police did not immediately respond to an AFP request for comment. But civil groups called Sunday for the immediate release of the group of 17 missionaries, family members and staff abducted a day earlier while returning from an orphanage visit.

"We call for the liberation of the persons kidnapped, whether American citizens or of other nationalities," said Gedeon Jean, Director of the Center for Analysis and Research in Human Rights, based in the capital Port-au-Prince. He said the current situation was "detrimental to human dignity." The missionary group, including children and one Canadian, was traveling in several vehicles when stopped by members of a criminal gang some 30 kilometers east of the capital, a Haitian security source told AFP.

'Pray for us!'

One member of the group posted a desperate call for help in a WhatsApp group even as the attack unfolded. The Washington Post reported. "Please pray for us!!" the message read. "We are being held hostage, they kidnapped our driver. Pray pray pray. We don't know where they are taking us." The Ohio-based Christian Aid Ministries said the group of 16 US citizens and one Canadian included five men, seven women and five children. "Join us in praying for those who are being held hostage, the kidnapers, and the families, friends, and churches of those affected," the group said in a statement. "Pray for those who are seeking God's direction and making decisions regarding this matter."

The abduction was the work of the so-called "400 Mawozo" gang, which for months has carried



PORT-AU-PRINCE: In this file photo, Haitians demonstrate in Port-au-Prince - demanding their right to life in the face of an upsurge in kidnappings perpetrated by gangs. — AFP

out kidnappings and robberies in the area between Port-au-Prince and the Dominican Republic border, said a Haitian security source, who spoke on grounds of anonymity. The gang has hijacked several vehicles - even entire busloads of victims - on roads it controls, kidnapping both Haitians and foreigners and holding them for ransoms often many times a Haitian's yearly earnings.

Such armed gangs have been steadily extending their reach, taking advantage of spreading insecurity and a political crisis aggravated by the assassination in July of President Jovenel Moise. "The police have proven incapable of confronting the gangs, which have become better organized and which control more and more territory" around the capital and in provincial cities, Gedeon Jean said. His group

has tallied an alarming increase in kidnappings in Haiti: more than 600 occurred in the first three months of 2021, up sharply from 231 in the corresponding period of 2020. The US State Department offered no details on the situation.

A spokesperson said only: "The welfare and safety of US citizens abroad is one of the highest priorities of the Department of State. We are aware of these reports and have nothing additional to offer at this time." Officials are typically close-mouthed about abductions, given the extraordinary sensitivity of such situations. The State Department had issued a "Level 4: Do Not Travel" advisory for Haiti in August due to "kidnapping, crime, civil unrest, and COVID-19." "Kidnapping is widespread and victims regularly include US citizens," the advisory warned. — AFP

Belarus expels French envoy

MOSCOW: France's ambassador to Belarus has left the country after the authorities in Minsk demanded he leave yesterday, the embassy said. The spokeswoman who made the announcement did not say why the Belarusian authorities told him to leave. But according to reports in the Belarusian media, the ambassador Nicolas de Lacoste was expelled because he never met President Alexander Lukashenko to give him copies of his credentials. Instead he gave them to Belarusian Foreign Minister Vladimir Makei, according to the French embassy. Lukashenko, according to reports in the Belarus media, took that as a snub.

"The Belarusian foreign ministry demanded that the ambassador leave before October 18," the embassy spokeswoman told AFP. "Ambassador Nicolas de Lacoste left Belarus today," she added. "He said goodbye to the staff of the embassy and recorded a video message to the Belarusian people, which will appear tomorrow morning on the embassy's website." France, like other EU countries, has not recognised Lukashenko claim to a sixth presidential term in disputed elections in August last year.

The European Union and the United States have imposed waves of sanctions on the Belarusian strongman's regime over a post-vote crackdown on dissent in Belarus after the country erupted in historic protests against his rule. But the 67-year-old leader, who has accused Western governments of having instigated the protests in the hope of fomenting a revolution, has so far withstood the penalties with the backing of ally and creditor Moscow. — AFP

International

With nuke talks on hold, Iran president tours countryside

Ultraconservative leader turns his sights inward

TEHRAN: While the world impatiently awaits Iran's return to nuclear talks, ultraconservative new President Ebrahim Raisi has instead turned his sights inward, campaigning to build support in the provinces. Elected in a vote marked by a record low turnout, the former judiciary chief has taken a step back from the international stage in a bid to win the hearts and minds of his people.

Since taken office in August, he has made seven domestic trips in what state media has hailed as an outreach campaign to the common people. On a visit to the southern province of Bushehr last week, Raisi declared he had come to "get to know the problems of the local people". "In the provinces, we want to find solutions for creating jobs, restarting production and resolving problems, particularly those of the most deprived," he said.

Appearing unphased by growing pressure over the resumption of nuclear talks in Vienna, he has delegated this issue to his foreign minister. Indirect negotiations had begun in April to restore a 2015 nuclear deal that offered Tehran relief from crippling sanctions in exchange for major curbs on its nuclear program, but which was abandoned by Washington under former president Donald Trump.

Raisi's election in June put those talks on hold, and pressure has since been mounting for Iran to go back to the negotiating table. In the interim, Raisi has cultivated his image as a leader on the ground, close to the people - in contrast with his predecessor Hassan Rouhani, who was favored by the west but sometimes viewed as detached from the populace. Raisi "travels to the provinces because he wants to project an image of a pragmatic senior official looking for solutions on the ground," Iran specialist Bernard Hourcade told AFP.

'Feel the temperature'

If Iranian television painted a picture of Rouhani as a technocrat who mainly met allies in Tehran, Raisi is by contrast shown as being in dialogue with different segments of society. "He knows that a nuclear deal risks taking a long time because there is no unanimity among those in charge of the issue in Iran," said a western diplomat who asked to remain anonymous.

"He prefers to prove himself in domestic politics." Raisi's tour has taken him from the western province



Raisi tries to win hearts and minds of his people



TEHRAN: A handout picture provided by the Iranian presidency yesterday shows Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi (right) meeting with Venezuela's Foreign Minister Felix Plasencia in Tehran. — AFP

of Khuzestan, where tensions have run high due to water shortages, to Sistan-Baluchistan province in the east, which has long suffered from poor infrastructure. His domestic endeavours are backed by supreme leader Ali Khamenei, who upon Raisi's inauguration in August charged him with restoring the people's "damaged" trust in the government.

The crushing toll of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country, coupled with mounting economic pressures and political crackdowns, all contributed to voter apathy. "His primary preoccupation is to put out fires before they start," said Hourcade of

the National Center for Scientific Research in Paris. "And he knows that in an economically tenuous situation, fires start with local sparks that spread if we're not careful. He must therefore be very attentive and visit those places to get a feel of the temperature."

Deliver on promises

Khamenei praised Raisi for visiting Khuzestan in September, a sentiment echoed by many of the state's media mouthpieces. Official news agency IRNA carried a poll on its website, showing the "positive impact" of Raisi's tours. The conservative

daily Kayhan also celebrated Raisi's common touch. "We see today a president who doesn't need an armored vehicle to understand the situation in the country," it said.

"He goes from province to province to familiarize himself with the realities and problems of the people." But praise for the new leader is not unanimous. Majid Nasserinejad, an MP from Khuzestan, described the trips as mere "spectacle", noting that "a day-long trip will not solve the problems of the province". Reformist paper Etamad similarly suggested that such tours are the bare minimum, but alone are "insufficient for governing". — AFP

Zionists expect 2,000 rockets a day in any war with Hezbollah

RAMLA: Zionist entity does not want war with Lebanon's Hezbollah but is prepared to face about 2,000 rockets a day from the armed group if conflict breaks out, a senior Zionist military official told AFP. In May this year, the Zionist army fought an 11-day war against Palestinian armed groups in the Gaza Strip, who fired around 4,400 projectiles towards the Jewish state.

Zionist entity says its Iron Dome defense system, which has been in use for around a decade, intercepted around 90 percent of the rockets headed for populated areas, while just under 300 hit inhabited districts. The rate of fire surpassed that seen in Zionists' 2006 war against Hezbollah, when a similar number of rockets were launched from Lebanon-but over the course of around a month-the Zionist army said.

In May, cities like Tel Aviv and Ashdod experienced the "highest number of fire towards them in the history of Zionist entity", said Uri Gordin, chief of the army's Home Front Command. "We saw a pace of more than 400 rockets fired towards Zionist entity on a daily basis." He said that in the case of "conflict or a war with Hezbollah, we expect more than five times the number of rockets fired every day from Lebanon to Zionist entity". "Basically we are looking between 1,500 and 2,500 rockets fired daily towards Zionist entity," he told AFP.

'Wake-up call'

Set up in 1992 after the first Gulf War, Gordin's Home Front Command is in charge of civil defense, meaning it is responsible for readying the country in case of threat, conflict or disaster. The unit was criticized for its response to the 2006 war with Hezbollah, which killed more than 1,200 Lebanese, mostly civilians, and 160 Zionists, the majority of them soldiers. That war was a "wake-up call" for the Home Front Command, Gordin said, adding that it had since beefed up its liaison units, which are now active across 250 municipalities to provide assistance in case of any attack.

The Home Front Command uses computer projections to predict a rocket's trajectory after it has been launched, and advises the public, within a specific range, to head to bomb shelters. During the Gaza conflict in May, this allowed emergency services to "go to every incident within less than five minutes", Gordin said from the control room of the unit's headquarters in Ramla, near Tel Aviv. He said preparations had been made for any incidents on the border with Lebanon.

A Zionist security source said the army hoped for "stability" in its northern neighbor, which is mired in a crippling economic crisis and on Thursday saw deadly sectarian clashes in the capital Beirut that left seven dead, including Hezbollah members. Iran-backed Hezbollah was "the source of instability in Lebanon", the security source said, adding that the group "exploits the state's resources for Iranian interests". Iran is "closer to creating fissile material for nuclear weapons than they ever were in the past" but would still need two years to obtain a bomb, the source said, echoing a timeframe cited by other Zionist officials. — AFP

A year after EndSARS, Nigeria police brutality, harassments 'resume'

LAGOS: Monsurat Ojuade had just turned 18 when she was killed by a police officer, her sister Omolara said in a trembling voice. News of her death, during a raid in her neighborhood of Nigeria's Lagos last month, shocked many in a country preparing to commemorate the first anniversary of EndSARS, a protest movement against police brutality that rocked major cities in the south.

The protests came to a grinding halt after October 20, 2020, the date of a brutal crackdown on peaceful protesters at the Lekki tollgate, the epicenter of the demonstrations. Monsurat's death in September was for many a sign that police brutality has continued in Africa's most populous country. And for the youth that mobilized massively for the first time in decades, her death was also a reminder that their demands for change have not been heard, and pervasive impunity and corruption still exists.

"It was a Friday night, we were about to lock the shop. Monsurat saw some guys running," said her sister Omolara Ojuade, speaking to AFP by phone. "We were scared... someone started hitting the door - he didn't identify as a policeman - and he shot

through the gate at Monsurat," the young woman recalled. The officer in charge was suspended and is facing trial for murder but for the Ojuade family, much more is needed. "They are not giving them (police) proper training," said the sister. "As a police officer you cannot just come to someone's gate and start shooting."

Nothing changed

Last year's protest movement, named after the social media hashtag #EndSARS, was first a campaign to end the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) unit, notorious for extortion, torture and extrajudicial killings. After it snowballed into wider protests against bad governance, the authorities suspended the unit and promised reforms. But the country's youth were sceptical and continued to protest - until the Lekki crackdown.

A year later, many wonder if their efforts had any impact. "Nothing has really changed," said Amnesty International researcher Damian Ugwu. "SARS may have been disbanded, but there were only cosmetic changes." "All the things people complained about, extortion, extrajudicial



LAGOS: 'Flag Boy' Akinwunmi Ibrahim Adebajo waves the national green and white flag together with EndSars flag as youth prepare to commemorate the first anniversary of the protest movement in Lagos. — AFP

killings, torture, ill-treatment, all those things are still within the police force," said Ugwu. Police training was given, but there were no in-depth reforms, and security forces remain under-resourced and poorly paid.

Harassment from corrupt police officers on the streets of Lagos has resumed, according to Femi, a taxi driver. "You have to give them money, or you have problems with them." Outside the economic capital, some security agents do not wear an official uniform and use clubs or whips to threaten drivers, an AFP journalist witnessed. After last year's protests, police violence initially "decreased"

said Rinu Oduala, one of the leading figures of EndSARS, but in recent months it "resumed with more brutality than ever before".

The 22-year-old has launched Connect Hub, an NGO that works to document police violence, "to show the world why we are fighting". "We have in the space of a month, close to 100 cases reported. We get cases ranging from extrajudicial killings to extortions, harassment, profiling, arbitrary arrests, rape and other crimes committed by the Nigerian Police." Neither the government nor the police responded to AFP's request for comment on her claims. — AFP



MOSCOW: A security guard patrols outside a building that houses the NATO information office in Moscow yesterday. — AFP

Russia cuts diplomatic ties with NATO in latest row

MOSCOW: Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said yesterday that Moscow was suspending its mission to NATO and closing the Western military bloc's liaison mission in Russia, in a new diplomatic row. "We are suspending the work of our official mission to NATO, including the work of our military representative from November 1 or it could take a few more days," Lavrov told reporters. Lavrov said that Russia would also be ending the alliance's liaison mission-established in 2002 and hosted at the Belgian embassy-and information office in Moscow. The bloc's information office was established in Moscow in 2001 to improve understanding between NATO and Russia.

The latest row comes after NATO earlier this month stripped accreditations of eight members of the Russian mission to the alliance, describing them as "undeclared Russian intelligence officers". NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said at the time that the decision to kick out the Russian representatives was not "linked to any particular event"-but gave no more details over the move. Yesterday, Lavrov cited "recent moves" by NATO, saying there were no longer "basic conditions for common work."

He said that in case of urgent matters, NATO could liaise via the Russian ambassador in Belgium. Russia has long had an observer mission to NATO as part of a two-decade-old NATO-Russia Council meant to promote cooperation in common security areas, but it is not a member of the US-led alliance. The Russian mission has been downsized once before, when seven of its members were ejected after the 2018 poisoning by the Novichok nerve agent on a Russian former double agent, Sergei Skripal, and his daughter in Britain. — AFP

4 dead, 19 missing; migrant boat sinks

TUNIS: Four Tunisian migrants died and 19 were missing after their boat capsized, a judicial source told AFP, the latest deadly mishap in waters off North Africa. A total of 30 Tunisians, most of them young men, had set off in the small vessel, said Farid Ben Jha, spokesman for the Mahdia and Monastir court on the country's east coast. One of them managed to swim to shore and raise the alarm after their boat sank at dawn off the coast of Mahdia governorate, which is only around 140 kilometers from the Italian island of Lampedusa.

"Seven were able to be rescued" and four bodies were found, Ben Jha said, adding that the other passengers were missing. "The boat was too small to carry 30 people," he said. Those rescued did not say where exactly the boat had set off from. Four people were arrested for helping to organize the attempted sea crossing, Ben Jha added. He said an investigation had been opened to identify those responsible.

Also Sunday, the defense ministry in neighboring Algeria said that country's coastguards had recovered four bodies from the Mediterranean Sea and rescued 13 migrants after a boat capsized in its waters. On Tuesday the United Nations refugee agency said 15 migrants drowned after two boats capsized off Libya, adding to the toll on the perilous sea route to Europe. Libya is a major point of departure for desperate migrants seeking to reach Europe, many of them from sub-Saharan African countries. — AFP

International

Myanmar to free over 5,000 protesters after ASEAN snub

Regional bloc delivers a major snub to the military regime

YANGON: Myanmar's junta chief yesterday announced the release of more than 5,000 people jailed for protesting against a February coup, days after a regional bloc delivered a major snub to the military regime. There has been chaos in Myanmar since the coup, with more than 1,100 civilians killed in a bloody crackdown on dissent and more than 8,000 arrested, according to a local monitoring group. More than 7,300 are currently behind bars, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP).



More than
7,300 are
behind bars

Junta head Min Aung Hlaing said a total of 5,636 prisoners will be freed to mark the Thadingyut festival later in October, without providing details on when they would be freed. The announcement comes on the heels of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' decision to exclude Min Aung Hlaing from an upcoming summit of the 10-country bloc over his administration's commitment to defusing the bloody crisis.

Min Aung Hlaing gave no details on who would be included in the list and prison authorities did not respond to AFP requests for comment. The Democratic Voice of Burma news website said three of its journalists, all held for around six months, had been freed. Myanmar authorities released more than 2,000 anti-coup protest-

ers from prisons across the country in June, including journalists critical of the military government.

Those still in custody include the American journalist Danny Fenster, who has been held since being arrested on May 24. Mya Nu, who said her daughter was arrested in April, was one of dozens waiting outside Yangon's Insein prison after the latest announcement in the hope their loved ones would be among those set free. "I didn't get a chance to meet her yet," she told AFP. "It's only through her lawyer that I know she's in good health."

More than 1,300 of those due to be released would be freed on the condition they sign agreements promising not to re-offend, according to the junta's yesterday statement. Such agreements were "basically a form of parole that entails constant menacing surveillance", David Mathieson, an analyst formerly based in Myanmar said. "It doesn't absolve the SAC (State Administration Council, as the junta dubs itself) of nine months of extreme violence." The AAPP monitoring group slammed the release as a "form of distraction" aimed at foreign governments. "The intention is not to relax repression," it said in a statement posted on Twitter.

Junta shunned

Foreign ministers from the ASEAN bloc on Friday decided to exclude Min Aung Hlaing, instead choosing to invite a "non-political representative" for Myanmar to the October 26-28 summit. The organization, widely criticised as toothless, took a stand after the junta rebuffed requests for a special envoy to meet "all stakeholders" in Myanmar - a phrase seen to include ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi. The junta slammed the decision, accusing ASEAN of breaching its policy of non-interference in the domestic affairs of member states.



YANGON: Newly-released prisoners wave from a bus as they depart the Insein Prison in Yangon yesterday after authorities announced more than 5,000 people jailed for protesting against a February coup which ousted the civilian government would be released. — AFP

Myanmar, mostly ruled by the military since a 1962 coup, has been a thorn in ASEAN's side since it joined in 1997. Min Aung Hlaing's administration has justified its power grab citing alleged vote rigging in last year's elections, which Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party won convincingly. The coup snuffed out Myanmar's short-lived dalliance with democracy and the 76-year-old Suu Kyi now faces a raft of charges in a junta court that could see her jailed for decades.

Last week, her chief lawyer said he had been banned by the junta from speaking to journalists, diplomats or international organizations. The other lawyers on her legal team also faced a similar ban - effectively muzzling the key sources of information on court proceedings, from which journalists are barred. Nobel laureate Suu Kyi, who has spent much of her life resisting Myanmar's generals, is scheduled to testify in court for the first time later this month.—AFP

South Africa weighs need to save climate and keep lights on

JOHANNESBURG: When you fly into Johannesburg, solar panels seem to gleam everywhere, from the roofs of mansions and small township homes alike. But those glittering 21st-century panels mask South Africa's dependence on a dirty 19th-century energy source: coal. Like many developing countries, South Africa is struggling to meet growing energy needs yet avoid deepening Earth's carbon crisis - one of the many dilemmas besetting the UN climate talks, which resume in Glasgow on October 31.

South Africa's continuing addiction to coal has to be seen in the context of rolling blackouts that have been a part of life since 2007. Schedules for power cuts are shared on apps and in news reports, along with quotidian news like weather and traffic jams. "As a young South African I am scared," environmental activist Ditebogo Lebea said during a webinar organized by the think-tank South African Institute of International Affairs. "Our country is facing an energy crisis that needs urgent attention."

The power cuts are a headache for residents and disastrous for businesses, undermining efforts to bring down a 34 percent unemployment rate. When the crisis first erupted, entire cities were unexpectedly plunged into darkness, prompting angry finger-pointing. The government sifted through every conceivable solution to try to resolve the problem. Steep discounts - up to 100 percent - were offered for homes to adopt solar water heating. Wind farms sprouted up. A desert blossomed into Africa's largest solar farm.

But the country also decided to build not one, but two gargantuan coal-powered plants, each producing about 4,800 Megawatts. Operating as a unit, they will form the biggest coal power complex in the world, topping even China's massive coal expansion. By comparison, the solar farm produces 50 megawatts of power. The first new plant has come online in fits and starts, dogged by design flaws and corruption at the state power company Eskom. The second is still under construction.

Zuma effect

Coal already provides 80 percent of South Africa's power, making it the world's 12th largest greenhouse gas emitter in 2019, according to Global Carbon Atlas. Yet South Africa enjoys 2,500 hours of sunshine per year on average - around 600 more than solar power champion Germany. "Everyone acknowledges renewable energy is a massive opportunity in South Africa," said energy analyst Argon Poorum of the non-profit GreenCape. The country has tried to tap that opportunity. In 2010, South Africa launched an avant-garde renewable power auction system to attract private investors. Five years later, Eskom unexpectedly pulled the plug, claiming renewable power was too pricey. Chaos in energy policy was fuelled by former president Jacob Zuma, who took office in 2009. He tossed out solar plans and tried to negotiate a back-channel, one-trillion-rand (67-billion-dollar) nuclear energy deal with Russia.

That plan was thwarted by activists, the opposition and a rebellion within Zuma's own cabinet, but the damage was done. Greenhouse gases rose 10 percent from 2000 to 2017, according to government figures. Zuma's successor Cyril Ramaphosa is steering a new course. He revived the renewable energy scheme last year, and made it easier for companies to generate their own solar and wind power. Nuclear remains part of the mix, and three licences have been approved for floating power plants that use natural gas, a fossil energy that is far more fuel-efficient than coal.

Eskom has meanwhile set out to gradually decommission old coal plants over the next three decades, aiming to balance the new plants' emissions. Coal retains some political heft. Energy Minister Gwede Mantashe has championed controversial "clean coal" technologies, partly to retain badly needed mining jobs, in a sector that overall employs around 500,000 people, according to latest official figures.—AFP



GOMA: Photo shows an aerial view of debris engulfing buildings in Bushara village after a volcanic eruption of Mount Nyiragongo that sent thousands fleeing during the night in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. — AFP

People try to rebuild lives after DR Congo volcanic eruption

GOMA: Residents are trying to rebuild their homes and communities five months after the deadly volcanic eruption in eastern DR Congo, and despite the ever-present threat of a repeat performance by Mount Nyiragongo. Sixty-year-old Edmond's family plot in Buhene, a working-class village to the north of the city of Goma, once included two houses.

When the family returned to the area two weeks after the disaster they found one of the wooden homes completely looted but intact. The other dwelling had disappeared, like so many others, under a huge blanket of lava. Nyiragongo's eruption on May 22-23 spewed out lava that buried homes in its wake, stopping just short of the north of Goma, the capital of North Kivu province in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

An estimated 400,000 of the 600,000 residents of Goma left the city after the eruption of Nyiragongo, a strato-volcano nearly 3,500 meters tall that straddles the East African Rift tectonic divide. Over 30 people died from lava burns or asphyxiation, and in accidents during the panicked exodus from the area as the eruption destroyed hundreds of homes. Most of those who evacuated have returned to their homes and been able to resume their former lives, although others have not.

'Took us by surprise'

"What happened is natural," said Edmond, a small man wearing oversized clothes donated by neighbors. But he, like many others, is upset that the population did not receive sufficient warning which could have prevented deaths and allowed residents to save some belongings. "The volcano took us by surprise," admits Adalbert Muhindo, director general of the Goma Volcanological Observatory (OVG). From his window, the majestic cone of Nyiragongo is visible 15 kilometers away as the crow flies, as is Nyamuragira, another

volcano whose activity is monitored by the OVG.

However Muhindo denies that the equipment used to measure tectonic movement was faulty. "To say that we didn't have any equipment is false," he insisted, rejecting claims that the volcano hadn't been monitored for months before the eruption due to a lack of resources. In another OVG building, Honore Ciraba, head of the geodesy (Earth measurement) department, shows off the panoply of measuring and monitoring equipment available to the observatory, including inclinometers, satellite data, and laser beams.

'No such thing as zero risk'

One problem for those monitoring Nyiragongo was that, unlike eruptions there in 1977 and 2002, the 2021 eruption was not preceded by any earthquakes. This time they came afterwards. According to Muhindo, the data collected before the disaster in May did not point to an imminent risk of eruption. Some OVG scientists note that an internet blackout from October 2020 to April 2021, due to the end of World Bank funding, prevented real-time collection of data from sensors on the volcano during that period.

Since the events of May monitoring has been stepped up, with additional equipment sent to the observatory. "A modern laboratory is going to be built" said Muhindo, who plans to host an international conference of volcanologists next month. "The aim is for our observatory to work to international standards," he says. "To monitor, warn the population, but also to advise the authorities on land use," on where and how to build structures. But "there is no such thing as zero risk in Goma," he warns. "No part of the city is 100 percent certain to escape a future eruption."

In Buhene, five months after the eruption, the lava layer is still hot in places. Men, women and children wearing simple plastic flip-flops collect small lava aggregate to sell as building material, an activity that has become a source of income for the volcano's victims. Building on the lava field is officially prohibited. But low walls are already going up, as residents wait for the authorities to give the green light for full construction. Like the house that Edmond and his family plan to build, on the exact site where the old one was swept away.—AFP



GOMA: Lava from the Mount Nyiragongo surrounds a house in Goma, in Democratic Republic of Congo. — AFP

Kinshasa cleanup: Plastic means money, a mission

KINSHASA: A basin of plastic waste on her head, Jeanne Bopena places it on the scales. They show six kilos. Smiling, she comes out with 1,500 Congolese francs - or 75 US cents. "Today, I didn't sell much," says the 39-year-old mother of two. "Since this factory opened, I come to sell them all kinds of plastic waste. It helps me to feed my family."

Beneath the large hangar of the Clean Plast company in Kinshasa, about 20 men wearing green T-shirts and red gloves sift through the waste and sort it by type of plastic and color. A teeming city of at least 12 million people, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo is notorious for heaps of garbage and rivers choked by plastic bottles. So much so that its nickname "Kin the beautiful" has turned to "Kin the trash can".

"We collect, we treat, we recycle all types of plastic waste from Kinshasa, with the objective of cleaning up the city," says Alexander Bamanisa, managing director of the company established in 2018. Located in the working-class and deprived neighborhood of Kingabwa. Clean Plast employs about 100 people and its plastic recycling plant is still operating "at only 20 percent of capacity", according to technical director Jagdeep Pandya. In partnership with Kinshasa City Hall, the company has set up 15 plastic waste collection sites in the city, taking in about 10 tons every day.

Garbage mountain

The goal is to set up at least two sites in each of the capital's 24 communes and collect 4,000 tons of waste per month, says Bamanisa. Like Bopena, other local residents come to sell plastic waste in relatively small amounts that they carry by hand or push on carts. Behind the factory, a huge pile of waste has been brought in by vehicle.

Everything is there: bottles, bags, chairs, tables, cans, dolls. In the enclosure, mountains of compacted plastic bottles stand next to giant bales of crushed waste. On the right side of the plant, a worker operates a shredder. Another dumps bags of new plastic bottles into a compactor. "This is factory waste sent in by a local manufacturer. We have partnerships with major plastic manufacturers. They send us their waste, and we make reclaimed material from it," Pandya says.

'Sustainable'

"Our goal is to have a range of 100 percent recycled products made in Kinshasa," adds Bamanisa. The crushed and compacted materials are in turn driven on a metal conveyor belt to the cleaning plant. They are then melted and poured into a granulator. Depending on the color, the regenerated material is placed in white bags and stored, ready to be sold to the plastic manufacturing industry. In Kinshasa, there have been many private initiatives by environmental protection organizations, but the problem has not been solved.

From 2008 to August 2015, the European Union had injected \$1 million a month into a project to dispose of household waste. In October 2019, President Felix Tshisekedi launched "Kin Bopeto" (Clean Kinshasa). Since then, only a few garbage cans have been installed in some neighborhoods of Kinshasa, where 9,000 tons of waste are produced daily, according to the city council. "It was important for us to contribute to finding a sustainable solution to this waste management problem," says Bamanisa.—AFP

International

Under the Taleban regime, drug addicts forced into withdrawal

Afghanistan provides 90% of world's production of heroin

KABUL: With shaved heads, oversized tunics and the terrified gaze of the hunted, the drug addicts rounded up by the Taleban brace for 45 days of painful withdrawal. For some, the hardliners' raids may potentially help them cast off the yoke of addiction. But for many the stay at Kabul's Ibn Sina centre will just mark a short change of scene, marked by a brutal approach to forcing users off their powerful dependence.

Before the Taleban marched into Kabul on August 15, police in the capital would sometimes arrest addicts and transfer them to the centre. But since the hardline Islamists took control, the frequency of raids on areas where addicts gather appears to have increased. Hundreds of users shelter in squalid conditions at Pul-e-Sukhta, under a bridge in western Kabul synonymous with hard drugs and violent crime.

They recognize the rehab clinic's ambulance, and those who can lift themselves off the fetid ground stagger down the rubbish-strewn Paghman River to avoid capture, while many are too intoxicated to wake up. Two Taleban fighters, armed with M16 and AK-47 rifles, prod the comatose heroin and methamphetamine users with their gun barrels as outreach workers wrestle with men before forcing them to the vehicle.

Raw sewage runs straight into the boggy river bed, and the stench of urine, faeces and vomit in the crowded drug den is overwhelming. Cushions, blankets, sandbags and tarpaulins make up the ramshackle camp, which is littered with the addicts' paraphernalia: syringes, wraps, foil and pipes. The gunmen fire a few shots into the air to assert their authority and shock the addicts, before about 20 are rounded up and whisked away.

Searches and checks

During their 45-day rehabilitation stay at the 1,000-bed centre, the men spend their time lying on cots in large dormitories or crouched in the yard, soaking up the autumn sun. There is little methadone available to help wean the opium and heroin addicts,

and nothing to remove the withdrawal pains for those being weaned off of meth, doctors say.

This morning, Emal, 36, shuffles into the registration room. - A volunteer, who like many others working here is a former addict, opens his logbook. Name? Emal. Your father's name? Abdul Matin. Married? Yes. I have three children, two girls and one boy. Working? Not currently. What drugs do you take? Crystal (meth). Have you been here before? Yes, three times. This is my fourth. I was discharged 10 days ago. As Emal leaves, 22-year-old Bilal Ahmad, skinny and jittery, takes a seat.

He is also addicted to meth, and has been through the program before, "one or one and a half year years ago". "I am happy to be here," he tells AFP, casting fearful, furtive glances around the room that indicate he is not. "In 45 days, God will



11% of Afghans are drug users

ing, we can go home." The men are searched carefully when they arrive. "Open your mouth. Wider. Lift your tongue," another member of staff at the clinic tells the new arrivals, before checking their shoes and clothes for traces of drugs. In groups of six, they then shuffle to the tiled building that houses the showers.

There their baggy khaki tunics and trousers are removed and they are handed a packet of shampoo, but no towel. When they emerge, dripping, they are handed over to a team of barbers who shave their heads to prevent the spread of lice, but leave their scraggy beards. Some are taken to rooms lined with



KABUL: Drug addicts wait to register at the Avicenna Medical Hospital for Drug Treatment in Kabul. — AFP

five beds, while others are ushered into a dormitory where around 30 men of all ages are already lying on top of their covers. One childishly plays a bamboo flute. Another gestures to his mouth indicating that he is hungry.

'Terrible problem'

Poppy cultivation was banned under the Taleban's last rule in the 1990s, but the export of heroin from Taleban-controlled areas provided the hardliners with billions of dollars during their insurgency against the United States and the Western-backed government. With poppies cheap and easy to grow, Afghanistan provides around 90 percent of the world's production of heroin. Crystal methamphetamine production has also surged, created from the ephedra plant which grows wild in the country.

According to anti-narcotics experts, 11 percent of Afghanistan's 34 million population are drug users,

with four to six percent addicted. Since sweeping back into power, the Taleban have promised not to allow narcotics production. "It is the policy of the Islamic Emirate," said Doctor Ahmad Zohar Sultani, who heads the centre located in an old US army base. For now, the staff in the centre are all working without pay. Salaries have not been paid out for four months as Afghanistan's economy teeters on the verge of collapse.

Sultani says he was worried that the Taleban would shut his clinic when they first seized power. "Their intentions towards us were not clear," he told AFP, adding though that the country's new rulers had "quickly told us they wanted us to continue." In signs he is adapting to the new regime, the doctor has since mid-August swapped out his Western suit and tie for the traditional shalwar kameez, and has removed all of the photographs that once filled the walls of his office. "Drugs are a terrible problem," he said. — AFP

News in brief

'Miracle' pair found alive

SYDNEY: Two people have survived days without water in Australia's hot and dusty outback, police said yesterday, ending a frenzied five-day air and land rescue effort. Twenty-one-year-old Shaun Emitja and 14-year-old Mahesh Patrick were reported missing on Tuesday in the Harts Range area of central Australia. They had failed to return to the remote community of Hermannsburg after a weekend away. After their blue Nissan Navara was found abandoned and bogged down in a dirt track, police scoured the countryside using a helicopter and expert trackers. The pair were feared to be in grave danger given a lack of water and the area's extreme temperatures of more than 40 degrees Celsius in what is still the southern hemisphere's spring. But Northern Territory police said Monday that the two men who had become separated-were found alive and well by an "absolute miracle". — AFP

Two shootings in a week

WASHINGTON: One person was killed and another seven injured at a US university shooting early Sunday, police said, just days after another firearm incident at the same school left one dead. A student was among those wounded in the attack at around 1:30am (local) at Grambling State University, Louisiana State Police said, with one person in critical condition at hospital. The school tweeted the student was "treated for non-life-threatening injuries", and the person killed was not enrolled at the university. It is the second shooting in less than a week - although the incidents are not believed to be connected - at the historically Black college in the southern US state. Homecoming activities - an annual football game accompanied by parties - were canceled as were yesterday and today classes, the school said. — AFP

Sudanese protesters rally

KHARTOUM: Dozens of pro-army demonstrators in Sudan marched for a third consecutive day in the capital Khartoum yesterday, demanding Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok step down, AFP journalists said. Hamdok, who gathered his cabinet for an "urgent" meeting, has called recent unrest the "worst and most dangerous crisis" of the country's precarious two-year transition since the fall of hardline ruler Omar al-Bashir. "Down with Hamdok!" the pro-military protesters cried, their demonstration unhindered by security forces. The protesters demand the dissolution of Sudan's post-dictatorship interim government, which is mired in both political and economic crises. "The civilian government has failed," said Tahir Fadl al-Mawla, a 52-year-old tribal elder, speaking at a tent erected at the gates of the presidential palace. — AFP

Two more laborers killed in Kashmir in spate of shootings

SRINAGAR: Two laborers were killed by gunmen in Indian-administered Kashmir Sunday, police said, the latest victims of a fresh outbreak of violence that has sent jitters through the disputed Muslim-majority region. The two laborers, who were Hindus from Bihar, a state outside the Himalayan territory, were shot in the southern Wanpoh area of Kashmir valley. A third was critically injured, police said. The killings came a day after a street vendor and a laborer, also from Bihar, were killed in separate shootings. One was Muslim, the other was Hindu.

No group has immediately claimed responsibility for the four deaths, which have sent shockwaves through minority communities in the region. Tensions have risen in Kashmir since August 2019 when Hindu-nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government scrapped the region's semi-autonomy and brought it under New Delhi's direct rule. This was accompanied by a huge security operation and

communications blackout with tens of thousands of extra soldiers joining the estimated half a million already on the ground.

Modi said the change was to end decades of violence and bring prosperity to Kashmir. But locals said the laws enacted since then favored Indians from outside the territory. The latest killings come hard on the heels of a series of street shootings last week that left seven more civilians dead, among them three members of the local Hindu and Sikh communities. Those shootings were claimed by The Resistance Front (TRF) rebel group, which accused them of working for India's security agencies.

In total, 32 civilians have been shot dead this year so far, a majority of them local Muslims. Meanwhile deadly clashes between insurgents and government forces have claimed roughly 30 lives - including soldiers and rebels - in the past two weeks. Police said five TRF militants have been killed since last week, including



SRINAGAR: A woman paramilitary trooper stands guard during a random search in Srinagar yesterday as security has been beefed-up a day after two laborers from Bihar were killed by gunmen. — AFP

two on Saturday. Two soldiers died in a firefight near the ceasefire line between India- and Pakistan-controlled Kashmir on Saturday, the military said.

Kashmir was divided between India and Pakistan since their independence from British rule in 1947. The nuclear-armed rivals have fought

two wars over its control. An armed rebellion against Indian rule of Kashmir started in 1989 with groups demanding independence or merger of the region with Pakistan. Tens of thousands of people, mostly civilians, have died in the fighting. Pakistan denies India's repeated accusations that it supports the rebels. — AFP

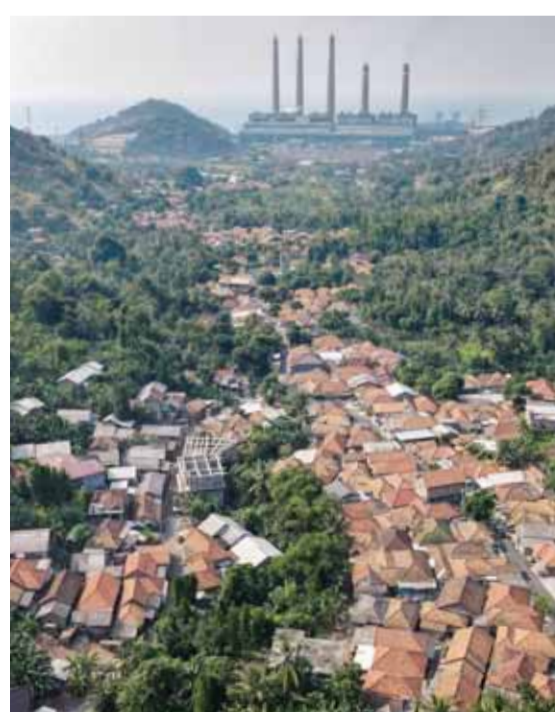
'Running out of time': Asia struggles to kick coal addiction

CILEGON: Smokestacks belch noxious fumes into the air from a massive coal-fired power plant on the Indonesian coast, a stark illustration of Asia's addiction to the fossil fuel which is threatening climate targets. Asia-Pacific accounts for about three-quarters of global coal consumption - even as the region struggles with the environmental and public health impacts of global warming, from deadly levels of air pollution in India to extreme heatwaves and wildfires in Australia.

Hopes for a cleaner future have been fired by pledges from top coal consumer China and other countries to go carbon neutral but much of the region is making a painfully slow transition to renewable sources. "We are moving much slower than the impact of climate change. We are running out of time," warned Tata Mustasya, a Greenpeace energy campaigner in Indonesia.

Change is hard in one of the last bastions of the dirtiest fossil fuel, however - five Asian countries are responsible for 80 percent of new coal power stations planned worldwide, according to a report from Carbon Tracker. Commitments that have been made are too weak, analysts say, with promises to halt construction of plants and tighten overseas funding from key financing countries often not covering projects already planned.

And critics say that rich nations are not providing enough help, in terms of financing or technical know-how, to help poorer countries make the transition. The challenge is illustrated by the enormous Suralaya coal plant on Indonesia's Java island, one of the biggest in Southeast Asia, which can power



CILEGON: Photo shows village houses as smoke rises from the chimneys at the Suralaya coal power plant in Cilegon. — AFP

about 14 million homes a year. Indonesia has committed to be carbon neutral by 2060, and to stop building new coal-fired plants from 2023, but despite this - the facility is undergoing a \$3.5 billion expansion that will boost its capacity. Burning coal is responsible for a massive chunk of carbon dioxide emissions, making it a major threat to limiting global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius, as agreed in the 2015 Paris climate deal. But beyond its contribution to global warming, it also exacts a heavy toll on local communities. — AFP

Malala sends letter to Taleban after girls' school ban

KABUL: Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai, who was shot by the Pakistani Taleban as a schoolgirl, has urged Afghanistan's new rulers to let girls return to school. It has been one month since the hardline Islamist Taleban, which seized power in August, excluded girls from returning to secondary school while ordering boys back to class. The Taleban have claimed they will allow girls to return once they have ensured security and stricter segregation under their interpretation of Islamic law-but many are sceptical.

"To the Taleban authorities...reverse the de facto ban on girls' education and re-open girls' secondary schools immediately," Yousafzai and a number of Afghan women's rights activists said in an open letter published on Sunday. Yousafzai called on the leaders of Muslim nations to make it clear to the Taleban that "religion does not justify preventing girls from going to school". "Afghanistan is now the only country in the world that forbids girls' education," said the writers, who included the head of the Afghan human rights commission under the last US-backed government Shaharazad Akbar.

The authors called on G20 world leaders to provide urgent funding for an education plan for Afghan children. A petition alongside the letter had yesterday received more than 640,000 signatures. Education activist Yousafzai was shot by militants from the Tehreek-e-Taleban Pakistan, an offshoot of the Afghan Taleban, in her home town in the Swat valley while on a school bus in 2012. Now 24 years old, she advocates for girls' education, with her non-profit Malala Fund having invested \$2 million in Afghanistan. — AFP

Business

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2021

NBK announces net profit of KD 254.8 million for 9M2021

Net operating income reaches KD 681.1 million, an increase by 7.7%

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait ("NBK", the "Bank" or the "Group") has announced its financial results for the nine-month period ended 30 September 2021. NBK reported a net profit of KD 254.8 million (\$844.8 million), compared to KD 168.7 million (\$559.2 million), improving by 51.1 percent year-on-year.

Net profit for the three-months ended 30 September 2021 reached KD 94.1 million (\$311.8 million), a year-on-year increase of 63.3 percent from KD 57.6 million (\$190.9 million).

Performance and operating highlights 9M 2021:

- Net operating income of KD 681.1 million (\$2.3 billion), increasing by 7.7 percent compared to 9M 2020
- Total assets grew by 7.0 percent year-on-year, to KD 32.5 billion (\$107.8 billion)
- Total loans and advances grew by 7.5 percent year-on-year to KD 19.0 billion (\$62.9 billion)
- Customer deposits decreased by 0.8 percent year-on-year to KD 17.4 billion (\$57.6 billion)
- Strong asset quality metrics, with NPL/gross loans ratio at 1.43 percent and an NPL coverage ratio of 230 percent
- Robust Capital Adequacy Ratio of 18.1 percent, comfortably in excess of regulatory requirements

Commenting on the results, NBK Group Chairman Nasser Al-Sayer said: "During the third quarter, we saw a gradual improvement in the macroeconomic environment with restrictions to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continuing to ease. Movement and travel restrictions continue to be relaxed, and governments across the



Al-Sayer

- Gradual economic recovery has had a positive effect on business confidence and activity levels
- Ongoing commitment to prudent balance sheet management and conservative approach to risk, while maintaining agility in response to short-term challenges
- Integrating ESG principles across the business will help us identify and quantify risks and opportunities

region have delivered a comprehensive vaccination program which has had a positive effect on business confidence and activity levels. Rising consumer spending and growth in household credit continues to be one of the main drivers of Kuwait's economic recovery, with this trend expected to gradually continue alongside authorities envisaging greater business participation in executing the national development plan as

the virus gets contained. Higher oil prices have also contributed positively to government revenues and to the business environment. Moreover, the currently ongoing National Dialogue between the government and the parliament in a bid to lessen tensions and resolve legislative impasse may improve economic reform prospects: including restructuring the public sector, expediting the privatization process and paving the way for crucial approval of several laws.

We remain cautiously optimistic that these trends will continue, and result in continuous improvements in Kuwait's economy and the banking sector. The future of the pandemic on economic activity remains uncertain, however we expect gradual improvements to continue, an expectation that has also been reflected in our outlook for growth and potential risks.

Our alignment to ESG principles remains core to the way we conduct business and how we operate and deliver on our social and economic responsibilities. As a Group, we continue to integrate ESG principles across the business strategies, and we are beginning to identify and quantify risks and opportunities vis-a-vis climate change and social trends. Our environmental commitment is ongoing, with initiatives to further reduce energy use and water consumption being rolled out, as well as looking after the health and development of our staff.

In the context of a shifting macroeconomic environment, we remain agile in our response to short-term challenges, while continuing to focus on our fundamentals and institutional strength. We continue to drive excellence in performance by maintaining a



Al-Sager

- Group performance demonstrating solid growth in line with supportive macroeconomic environment
- Strategy remains focused on diversity of operations including breadth of services and digital excellence
- The successful issuance of four bonds in the past 10 months confirms investors' confidence in NBK

conservative approach to risk and prudent balance sheet management."

NBK Group Chief Executive Officer Issam J Al-Sager commented: "Our performance in the first nine months continues to build on the significant strides made during the period and on a supportive macroeconomic environment characterized by lower cost of risk and improved income generation. As the effects of the COVID-19

pandemic continue to ease, we are seeing signs of improvement across the economy as demonstrated by an increase in consumer spending and borrowing, including for housing and personal consumption. A gradual increase in business credit growth is also evident as business activity continues to normalize and the acceleration of project activity in Kuwait continues into 2022.

NBK proved once again the institutional strength and capabilities embedded in the Bank's business model: to be the largest beneficiary from the gradual recovery of the operating environment, supported by digitalization excellence. NBK maintained a strong position including robust asset growth, driven by increasing loans and advances in line with macroeconomic trends whilst sustaining margin levels despite challenges presented by the low interest environment.

Our strategy remains focused on digitalization and on diversifying our operations, through our geographic footprint and breadth of services. Our various segments continue to make significant contributions to our bottom line, with wealth management and digital services making significant strides.

The bank also continued to enhance its capitalization & liquidity levels and further diversified its funding profile. Within a period of 10 months, NBK succeeded in issuing four different bonds, asserting itself as the only global financial institution issuer in the region; that marked as a milestone for the bank and further endorsed investors' continuous confidence in the bank's prudent management and confidence in overcoming crises."

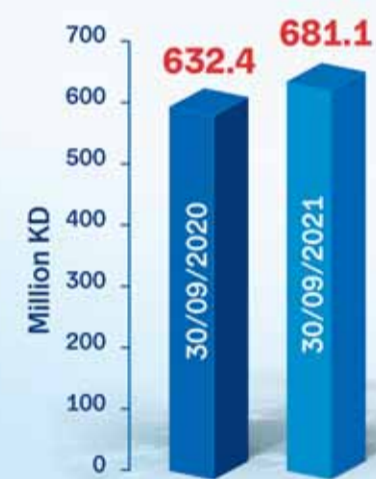


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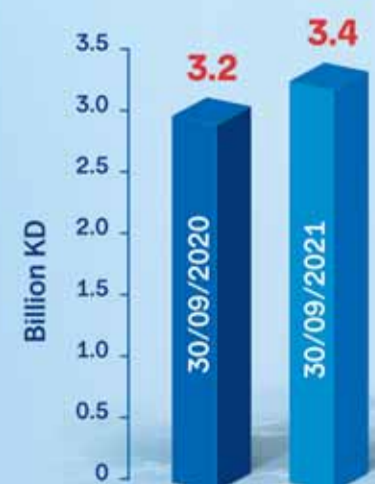
Million KWD
Net Profit
for the 9
Months, 2021



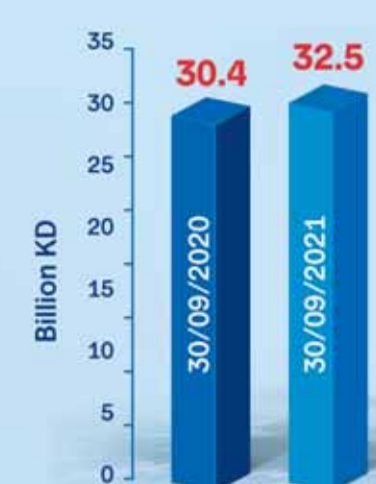
+51.1% Net Profit



+7.7% Net Operating Income



+8.5% Shareholders' Equity



+7.0% Total Assets

Business

Bahrah Trading Company to supply 100 Ashok Leyland Oyster buses

BTC signs deal with Al-Owaid for MoH project



KUWAIT: The symbolic key handover ceremony at Al-Owaid headquarters in the presence of its top management team including Yousef Al-Owaid, Mohammad Al-Dughaim and Elie Andraos and from BTC Biju Gangadharan and Shajehan Kandoth from BTC.

KUWAIT: Bahrah Trading Company (BTC), a subsidiary of Al-Sayer Holding, has announced its partnership deal with one of their key accounts Yousef Al-Owaid & Sons Automotive Co, for the delivery of 100 units of Ashok Leyland 33-seater Oyster buses. Al-Owaid will be operating for shuttle service for medical staffs of Ministry of Health.

A symbolic key handover ceremony was held at Al-Owaid headquarters in the presence of their top management including Yousef Al-Owaid, Chief Executive Officer, Mohammad Al-Dughaim, General Manager along with Elie Andraos, General Manager, Biju Gangadharan, Sales Manager and Shajehan Kandoth, Assistant Manager from BTC.

According to Elie Andraos "I thank the management and staff of Al-Owaid for their trust. Over the recent years we have seen strong growth in market share for Ashok Leyland specially after the introduction of Falcon and Oyster buses, a reassurance of the outstanding value for money from a B2B standpoint. We are upbeat about Ashok Leyland's next range of products in Light commercial vehicle space and Al-Sayer brand stands for customer profitability".

Buses from Ashok Leyland have successfully penetrated construction segment, leasing companies and in school to win the hearts of customers with its

higher earning per seat and lowest cost of operation. The passengers are also equally delighted with its ergonomic seats with powerful air conditioning much need in this high ambient environment. We provide the most innovative and cost-effective transport solutions in Kuwait, working closely with the government of Kuwait and its ministerial divisions, which has earned our name and reputation for delivering valuable service during critical times of need. We are confident of our new partnership with Bahrah Trading and Ashok Leyland to further strengthen our fleet buses," commented Yousef Al-Owaid.

In 2020 Ashok Leyland had achieved a remarkable milestone rolling out its 2000th Oyster into GCC market from its Ras Al-Khaimah factory in the UAE. The third largest global bus manufacturer launched three variants of Oyster in staff, school, and luxury category in 2017. Since then, the Oyster bus has attracted customers with its positioning of 33 seats with uncompromising reliability and unmatched durability.

Ashok Leyland Oyster is endowed with plush, luxurious interiors and strong exteriors, giving you a vehicle that is both comfortable and safe, making every journey an unforgettable experience. Having durable aggregates and lowest cost of ownership,



Oyster comes from a world of contemporary elegance and comfort. Spacious and premium interiors with clear aisle space and ample legroom helps passenger travel in comfort and luxury. Oyster has been put through rigorous safety testing, is equipped with fire retardant interiors and many more safety features. GCC's first rollover compliant

bus, Oyster is perfectly designed to protect the passengers under all conditions.

BTC is proud to have Oyster buses operating with leading business houses in Kuwait. Now, Oyster bus has become ubiquitous in Kuwait's city, add beauty to the landscape and strength to the operators' balance sheet.



Burgan Bank concludes Arrows program in collaboration with AUK

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank has concluded the Arrows team training in collaboration with the American University of Kuwait (AUK). This training is part of the Bank's Ro2ya Program designed to develop the skills and expertise of the promising banking professionals and contribute to empowering the future leaders of the banking sector.

Ro2ya Program was launched in February 2020 in support of the Central Bank of Kuwait's initiative urging all the banking sector's players to actively engage in preparing the next generation of Kuwaiti leaders. Ro2ya aims at preparing the future senior Kuwaiti bankers at Burgan by supporting talented employees and enabling them to acquire advanced banking and leadership skills. The talent in the program are divided into the Eagles, the Arrows and the Sprouts teams, and each group follows special trainings designed to develop the participants skills and knowledge in their various fields of specialization.

The Arrows team training program, started in January 2021 and completed in October 2021, has made considerable progress under the strategic collaboration with the AUK. The learning journey of the 21 Arrow team members was composed of 6

programs organized in a combination of virtual and in-person learning. It focused on the objectives of boosting the participants competencies with the required banking knowledge and technical skills. The trainees engaged in workshops, group work and post-module projects following the completion of the training's modules designed to empower and enable them to deliver outstanding performance and prepare to assume senior executive positions in the future.

Commenting the successful conclusion of the Arrows program, Ghada El-Kady, Unit Head-Learning and Talent Development, said "Ro2ya is gaining ongoing momentum by achieving its strategic objective of upskilling Burgan Kuwaiti talents, growing them into becoming more modern holistic bankers ready to assume higher leadership roles in the Bank. The dynamic collaboration between Burgan's Learning and Talent Development and AUK's Center for Continuing Education is projecting increased strategic association under the KIP-CO Group. We are aiming to increase learning impact and add the best possible value to our talent and the future of our business."

Bashar Al-Qattan, Talent Manger- Learning and Talent Development, said "It has been a privilege working closely with our sister company AUK in designing, developing and implementing our strategic initiative for the Arrows segment under Ro2ya program. The program was designed to develop our future leaders and help them cope successfully with

the current and emerging global market challenges. They have shown great commitment towards the program and made considerable progress. We will continue supporting the learning and growth journey of our talents to further advance their potential so they can be fully prepared for higher roles and responsibilities."

Burgan Bank will continue supporting the learning and development journey of the Arrows and the other talent in Ro2ya Program. The Bank relies on both the expertise of its Learning and Talent Development specialists as well as on the impactful collaborations with organizations sharing the Bank's commitment to be a driving force of change and sustainable development by promoting continuous learning opportunities as well as knowledge and capacity building among the younger generations.

CBK bonds and related Tawarruq

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the most recent issues of CBK bonds and related Tawarruq at a total value of KD 240 million for six months with a rate of return at 1.250 percent.

tainties are mounting and the domestic economic recovery is still unstable and uneven."

The economy grew only 0.2 percent from the previous three months, the weakest since a historic contraction in the first quarter last year. "Growth was dragged down by a slowdown in real estate, amplified recently by spillover from Evergrande's travails," said Oxford Economics' head of Asia economics Louis Kuijs. The struggles of property giant China Evergrande-which is drowning in more than \$300 billion of debt-has battered sentiment among prospective buyers.

A government regulatory clampdown on the real estate sector-particularly the tightening of lending rules-has dealt a severe blow to a crucial driver of economic growth, with a knock-on effect for other parts industries including construction. Investors are now keeping a worried eye on developments in the Evergrande saga on concerns it could impact the wider economy.

However, China's central bank at the weekend reassured that any financial sector fallout would be controllable, while governor Yi Gang told a seminar

Sunday that authorities were watching for problems like default risks "due to mismanagement and breakneck expansion" at some firms.

In a sign of the ongoing weakness in the property market, home sales by value slumped 16.9 percent on-year last month, following a 19.7 percent fall in August, AFP calculations based on official data showed.

Kuijs also noted there was an "additional hit in September" from electricity shortages and production cuts caused by strict implementation of climate and safety targets by local governments.

The added damage, he said, was visible in weaker industrial output, which slowed to 3.1 percent on-year. "The weak third quarter GDP print reflected a combination of negative factors," said Rajiv Biswas, Asia-Pacific chief economist at IHS Markit, including supply chain disruptions. Analysts at Fidelity International said that while property fears were the "epicenter of the shock", economic drag was being exacerbated by the power crunch, regional lockdowns and a "zero COVID" strategy that hit the services sector and disposable income. — AFP

KFH Capital includes US stock markets in KFH Trade service

KUWAIT: KFH Capital has included US stock markets to "KFH Trade" service in an initiative to provide more investment opportunities to customers through a fast and secured trading platform. KFH Capital has expanded the scope of service to provide new investment fields considering the volume and diversity of the business fields of US companies, thus giving customers the opportunity to participate in various sectors and enhance their opportunities.

Chief Asset Management Officer at KFH Capital Abdullah Essa Al-Ali, said that the e-trading service in US stock markets covers Sharia-compliant companies and shares only. The addition of global market to the service is considered as a major qualitative development in the trading services "KFH Trade". The e-trade service in US stock markets comes after the remarkable success achieved in providing the e-trade service in the Kuwait and GCC stock markets. He expressed his trust that the new service shall contribute to the diversification of investment opportunities for customers of "KFH Trade" and grant them the opportunity to trade the shares of companies working in various fields. Also, the service covers part of the significant interest which local market traders have in the US market. He indicated that the number of Sharia compliant US companies is very high, thus giving the traders the opportunity to invest in several sectors.

Al-Ali added that the new service shall provide customers with several advantages through "KFH Trade", namely, trading in several markets through one platform. KFH Trade systems are distinguished for speed, security and easy usage. Customer support is provided through a highly specialized team of dealers through KFH Trade call center 1842000.

Al-Ali mentioned the several advantages which traders enjoys through this service including easy trading through KFH Trade, bank account linked to trading account, trading in several markets through one screen, instant transfer of currencies, viewing several market watch lists on one screen, customer's ability to create his own favorable watch lists, easy access of orders, portfolio details display, and display performances of sectors and indices in addition to several other advantages.



Abdullah Al-Ali

Business

Zain, Huawei sign MoU to advance 5G infrastructure

Al-Roudhan: Zain implements latest tech innovations within 5G network

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with its global partner Huawei to advance its 5G infrastructure for achieving the best user experience and enhancing the network's quality. The announcement comes as part of Zain's efforts to reinforce its leadership as the first operator to commercially launch this revolutionary technology in the Kuwaiti market.



Company expands technology partnerships during GITEX

The MoU was signed during Zain's participation at the Gulf Information Technology Exhibition (GITEX Technology Week 2021) with the presence of Chief Executive Officer of Zain Kuwait Eaman Al-Roudhan and President of Huawei Middle East Carrier Business An Jian. GITEX, hosted in the UAE, is organized by the Dubai World Trade Center, and features the biggest global technology companies, organizations, and enti-



DUBAI: Zain Kuwait Chief Executive Officer Eaman Al-Roudhan and President of Huawei Middle East Carrier Business An Jian sign the memorandum of understanding at GITEX Technology Week 2021, Dubai.

ties from the Telecom and IT industry.

Commenting on the partnership, Zain Kuwait's Chief Executive Officer Eaman Al-Roudhan said: "Today we expand our strategic partnerships in technology to affirm our utmost commitment in offering the most advanced services to our customers. Zain always aspires to offer world-class solutions that live up to our customers' needs, both consumers and businesses".

Al-Roudhan continued: "Through this agreement, we

explore implementing many technological innovations, including those that are related to 5G solutions, to enhance network coverage, capacity, and to improve 5G consumer experience, fixed wireless access (FWA) user experience, and accelerate creating the development of 5G Stand-Alone network (SA). The MoU also explores upgrading our 5G network's infrastructure to better empower the digital transformation plans of many vital sectors and industries that Zain serves in the nation".

Al-Roudhan added: "This MoU not only focuses on operational and technical advancements, but also extends to making sure we achieve sustainable growth, something that we believe in very strongly. Together we will explore how we can reduce our environmental footprint by implementing energy saving solutions, improving network energy efficiency, building a green 5G network, and supporting green solutions for Telecom operations within the private and public sectors".

Al-Roudhan concluded: "The main aim of this collaboration is to invest our joint efforts and expertise with our technology partners to empower the digital transformation that technologies like 5G enable within Kuwait's business community". Recently, Zain shared its 5G deployment success story during a keynote as part of the 12th edition of the Global Mobile Broadband Forum (MMBF), hosted by global tech leader Huawei in Dubai, featuring the presence of many of the world's biggest names in the global ICT sector.

Zain's strategy is centered around digital transformation leadership and empowering the community to enjoy a smarter portable lifestyle, as well as using advanced technology to enable an easier and more flexible life. The company places itself as an active partner in creating the future of smart life in Kuwait. Today's launch contributes to proving the company's full potential in triggering the digital community, and will enrich its collaborations in Telecom and IT areas with its strategic partners on multiple levels.



SHETLAND, UK: A general view of Lerwick in the Shetland Islands, north of Scotland. — AFP

From oil to renewables, winds of change blow on Scottish islands

LERWICK, UK: In the far north of the United Kingdom, where the wind blows and the sea rages, the islands of Orkney and Shetland have long relied on oil and gas for prosperity. But as supplies dwindle and the fight against climate change becomes more urgent, the islands off the northeast coast of Scotland are increasingly turning to renewables.

Daniel Wise is head of offshore operations at Orbital Marine Power, a start-up that is testing its O2 tidal energy generator off Orkney. The submerged propellers turn with the current, producing enough electricity to power some 2,000 homes.

"Half a billion tons of seawater moves per hour on this site, so it's very good for testing these turbines," Wise told AFP. On Orkney and Shetland, which are nearer to Norway than London, giant standing stones are a visual reminder of the ancient Neolithic past. Now, gleaming white wind turbines are seen as symbols of a brighter, more sustainable future.

"A lot of people describe Orkney as a living laboratory," said Jerry Gibson, operations technician at the European Marine Energy Centre (EMEC), which tests wave and tidal energy converters on Orkney.

"And we have lots of test sites and various different companies that are all working together... in this sort of green economy that we've got going on." EMEC itself produces "green" hydrogen from renewable sources via a tidal turbine and electrolysis using seawater from Eday, one of Orkney's 20 inhabited islands.

The hydrogen is pressurized and transported 16 miles (26 kilometers) south to the port of Kirkwall, where it is transformed into electricity to power the ferries at the quayside.

Reliability

Given its plentiful natural resources from wind and waves, Orkney-home to some 22,000 people-produces more energy than it uses. "Hydrogen is important because it's another means of storing energy rather than using batteries or going straight to the electricity grid," said Gibson.

EMEC is also testing wave energy generators in the laboratory, which is more complex to model than tidal energy. On the island of Yell, some 100 miles northeast on the former Viking stronghold of Shetland, another company, Nova Innovation, is also betting on the ebb and flow of tides.

"The beauty of tidal energy is that it's totally predictable," said Tom Wills, offshore manager at the company. "So I can tell you tomorrow or 2,000 years from now, how much tide is going to be flowing through that channel out there, our energy resources are not dependent on the weather."

That predictability is crucial for the stability of energy supply as economies try to move away from high-polluting hydrocarbons. Nova has set up a charging point in the village of Cullivoe on Yell for electric vehicles, powered by its underwater turbines.

Fiona Nicholson, who lives nearby, is a regular user. "Where we live, we look out on the sea and we hear it every day and we know the power of it," she said. "So, it's nice to be able to use it to charge the car for all my long commutes." The Sullom Voe oil terminal on the

main island of Shetland is one of the largest in Europe. Locals acknowledge that North Sea drilling and infrastructure have brought benefits.

Revenue from the operations have funded roads, schools and sports centers, as well as supported thousands of jobs for the Shetlands' nearly 23,000 inhabitants. But equally, residents know time is running out and renewables offer a potential solution, even if some projects are contested.

Worse than oil?

One such project is the giant Viking Wind Farm, a partnership between SSE Renewables and the Shetland authorities. It is scheduled to come on stream in 2023 and will have 103 turbines generating enough low-carbon energy to power nearly 476,000 homes.

The project could save half a million tons of carbon dioxide emissions each year, the company says, and make Shetland a net exporter of electricity. But many locals are critical and have fought a long legal battle against it since planning permission was first approved in 2012. "If they had come originally with a reasonably sized wind farm, I don't think anybody would have objected," said Donnie Morrison, whose hillside home will soon be surrounded by roaring turbines.

"But it's so huge, it's ridiculous," Laurie Goodlad, a tour guide, said the project would see the removal of hundreds of thousands of tons of peatland—a recognized carbon sink.

"They're basically digging up the lungs of the planet," she said. Despite assurances that excavated peat will be reused, and no construction on pristine peat bogs, opponents even say Viking will be more environmentally destructive than the controversial drilling of new oil fields such as Cambo, northwest of Shetland. "I see Cambo as less of a threat than what Viking Energy is," said Goodlad.

"Cambo and Viking Energy, ultimately, are doing the same thing: they're removing fossil fuels from the ground." Residents also fear they will not benefit from electricity exports, despite assurances the community will receive dividends, as it does from oil.

Transferable skills

At the Shetland Islands Council, energy project manager Joe Najdich acknowledged that the Viking project had divided public opinion. "Obviously, developing an onshore wind farm can be quite disruptive to the island but the benefits seems to outweigh the costs," he said.

Another issue, trade unions say, is a lack of employment prospects, with the thousands of well-paid oil jobs unlikely to be all replaced by renewables. Viking Energy says about 140 people will be needed to work on the project and some 35 permanent jobs will be created, but unions say that is not enough.

EMEC's Gibson is more optimistic, seeing oil and gas industry skills as transferable.

At the same time, not switching to renewables would cause its own problems, said Najdich.

"Oil and gas could last in Shetland until roughly 2050," he said. "If we don't develop it (renewables), we'll rely more on imports." — AFP

Toyota to invest \$3.4bn into US battery production

TOKYO: The world's biggest carmaker Toyota unveiled plans yesterday to invest \$3.4 billion into automotive batteries in the United States and build a factory in the country for their production. The 10-year investment is part of a project announced last month by the Japanese firm to pour 1.5 trillion yen (\$13.1 billion) into the development and supply of batteries for electric vehicles as it pushes to make its production carbon-neutral.

"Toyota's commitment to electrification is about

achieving long-term sustainability for the environment, American jobs and consumers," said Ted Ogawa, chief executive officer at Toyota Motor North America. The company did not specify further details such as a site and production capacity but said it would establish a new company for the US project.

In June, Toyota said it aimed to make its production carbon-neutral by 2035, replacing the previous target date of 2050. Toyota is a pioneer of hybrid vehicles and autos using hydrogen fuel and is also stepping up its development of battery-powered electric cars.

Last year Japan's former prime minister Yoshihide Suga set a 2050 deadline for the world's third-largest economy to become carbon neutral, significantly firming up the country's climate-change commitments. The nation has struggled to cut carbon emissions after shutting down reactors following the 2011 meltdown at the Fukushima nuclear power plant. — AFP



US supply chain woes to stretch into 2022, Biden admin warns

WASHINGTON: The US transportation secretary warned that America's supply chain woes including clogged ports will drag into next year, potentially cramping the upcoming holiday shopping season in the world's largest economy. Pete Buttigieg did the rounds on US political talk shows to stress that President Joe Biden's administration was doing everything it could to alleviate congestion at the country's overloaded ports, railways and roads, and that the government will "re-evaluate all of our options" to relieve the bottlenecks.

But "a lot of the challenges that we have been experiencing this year will continue into next year," the transport chief and former presidential candidate told CNN's "State of the Union" show. Buttigieg added that the supply side crunch was being exacerbated by extraordinary pent-up demand in the United States. "Demand is off the charts, retail sales are through the roof," he said, and the country's transportation and shipping infrastructure has been unable to keep up.

With the Christmas holiday season gearing up as America's coronavirus-battered economy rebounds, US retailers are taking unprecedented steps to try to navigate around myriad supply chain obstacles.

Biden recently announced a commitment by the Port of Los Angeles to begin 24-hour operations in an effort to ease congestion which has seen multiple cargo ships anchored off the coast awaiting opportunities to unload. Analysts have pointed to knock-on effects through the US economy. Allianz chief economic advisor Mohamed El-Erian, speaking to "Fox News Sunday" about the supply chain crunch, called it "the everything shortage."

"Things will get worse before they get better," he said. "So we're going to have more shortages of goods, we're going to have higher prices, inflation will remain in the four-to-five percent level. And it's just going to take time to sort these things out."

Congress meanwhile is grappling with passing two huge portions of Biden's domestic agenda: a \$1.2 trillion infrastructure bill to upgrade roads, bridges and ports, and his even bigger Build Back Better social spending program.

"We've got to get this done," Buttigieg said on NBC's "Meet the Press." The infrastructure bill has bipartisan support. But the massive package that expands the social safety net and addresses the climate crisis faces opposition from within the president's own Democratic camp as well as from Republicans, pushing Biden to consider paring it back. — AFP



The US transportation secretary warned that America's supply chain woes including clogged ports will drag into next year.

Lifestyle | Features



This picture shows shogi piece is pictured at Japan Shogi Association headquarters in Tokyo.



Shogi pieces are placed on a shogi board at Japan Shogi Association headquarters in Tokyo.



This picture shows shogi player Taichi Nakamura placing a shogi piece during an interview with AFP at Japan Shogi Association headquarters in Tokyo.

Gawky teen star wins new fans for Japan's 'game of generals'

Shogi, the Japanese chess variant known as the "game of generals", is enjoying a wave of popularity in its homeland thanks to a gawky teenage prodigy with a rock-star following. Sota Fujii's incredible success and quirky charm have made him a household name in Japan, dusting off the traditional board game's musty image and taking it to a new audience. The 19-year-old became the youngest player ever to reach shogi's highest rank of ninth dan this summer and last month became the youngest to hold three of the sport's eight major titles.

Fujii launched his bid to capture a fourth in the best-of-seven "Ryuo" championship series earlier this month, and his fellow professionals credit him with breathing new life into the chess-like game. "It used to be only shogi fans who would follow it, but now general news programs have shogi stories and that has attracted new fans," professional shogi player Taichi Nakamura told AFP. "There never used to be many female shogi fans. But since Sota Fujii came along, a lot of women have taken an interest." With his unruly mop of hair, goofy grin and high-pitched, lilting voice, Fujii may appear an unlikely pin-up.

But his face beams out from magazines, billboards and TV screens all over Japan, and his favorite cakes sell out at convenience stores within hours of him eating them during games. His pronouncements to the media are typically



This picture shows Japan's professional shogi player Sota Fujii posing for a photo call during a press conference of a competition between Masayuki Toyoshima, in Tokyo.

understated. "I don't pay so much attention to the titles themselves," Fujii said after his latest victory. "The most important thing for me is how strong I can become."

Ancient mercenaries

Shogi is played on a plain wooden board with pieces distinguished by painted Chinese characters. It has existed in its current form for about 400 years. The rules are similar to chess, with the main difference that captured pieces can switch

sides and return to the board—a practice said to stem from the mercenaries of 15th century Japan. "I've been playing shogi for more than 50 years now and I've never got bored of it," said retired professional Kazuo Ishida, ranked ninth dan. "That's because it's a game with infinite variety. You never get the same game twice."

Shogi apprentices must reach first dan by the age of 21 and fourth dan by 26 if they want to turn professional. There are currently around 160 active professional players in Japan. Professionals receive a salary from the association and can earn extra from prize money and commenting on matches. Pro player Nakamura says Fujii's high profile has attracted casual fans who are less interested in the intricacies of the game and more in the players themselves.

"There has been a marked increase in the number of people who don't play shogi but watch professional matches," he said. "People have started enjoying contests in terms of the personal storyline between the two players."

'Everyone knows him'

Popular shogi-themed manga and anime have also helped stoke interest, but Fujii is not the first superstar the sport has produced. Yoshiharu Habu was the original shogi prodigy, winning his first major title as a 19-year-old in 1989 before going on to hold them all at the same time—a feat yet to be repeated. Habu was lauded with



This picture shows shogi teacher Kazuo Ishida (right) teaching a student during a shogi class at a shogi Center in Kashiwa. — AFP photos

Japan's People's Honour Award in 2018 and has won 99 titles over the course of his career. The retired player Ishida believes Fujii is stronger than Habu was in his prime, but says it remains to be seen if he can match his sustained success.

He thinks there has been a "dramatic" change in the way people enjoy shogi. "I think there were probably more people playing in Habu's era, but there are now a lot more fans who watch matches," he said. "'Habu fever' was something to behold, but I think everyone in the whole country knows who Fujii is." Fujii's influ-

ence can certainly be seen in the Sunday morning kids class that Ishida teaches in Kashiwa, near Tokyo. He says more children have taken up the sport since Fujii's rise to prominence—and there is no doubt who their favorite player is. "Sota Fujii is really cool," said seven-year-old Soichi Ishikawa, struggling to make himself heard over the clack of pieces. "I want to become a professional shogi player when I'm older." — AFP



Britain's Prince William, Duke of Cambridge, (left) and Britain's Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, (right) arrive on the green carpet to attend the inaugural Earthshot Prize awards ceremony at Alexandra Palace in London. — AFP photos



British actress Emma Watson arrives on the green carpet.



British actress Emma Thompson arrives on the green carpet.

Hilton's Alice in Wonderland themed bridal shower

Paris Hilton had an 'Alice in Wonderland'-themed bridal shower over the weekend. After the 40-year-old heiress and her fiancé, Carter Reum, enjoyed a lavish joint bachelor and bachelorette party in Las Vegas last weekend, Paris was joined by her mom, Kathy Hilton, and sister, Nicky Hilton Rothschild, plus Kris Jenner, Kyle Richards, and Lisa Rinna, at the 'Paris in Wonderland' extravaganza. The lavish party featured a number of sweet treats, including cakes and cookies themed around the fantasy tale. Guests could grab a mini bottle of Moët & Chandon champagne from a vending machine, and on arrival, they were greeted by The Mad Hatter himself.



'The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills' star Kyle - who was joined by several of her fellow cast members - captioned a carousel of snaps from the bash: "Celebrating @parishilton bridal shower today #parisinlove." Paris has dressed up as Alice a number of times for Halloween. And, in 2012, the socialite and her then-boyfriend, River Viiperi, dressed as Alice and The Mad Hatter. The bridal shower comes after the former 'Simple Life' star and the 40-year-old author - who got engaged in February - jetted to Sin City from Los Angeles to celebrate their forthcoming nuptials in style. The couple hit up a number of nightlife spots after flying in on a private jet, including ResortsWorld Las Vegas, where the couple stayed, and Paris took to her Instagram Story to show off the decorations, including a balloon and floral arch and a "Paris Carter" sign by the pool, which the soon-to-be husband and wife posed for pictures next to. — Bang Showbiz

AS COP LOOMS, PRINCE WILLIAM AWARDS DEBUT EARTHSHOT PRIZE

Queen Elizabeth II's grandson Prince William presented the inaugural Earthshot prizes at a ceremony in London on Sunday, with projects from Costa Rica, Italy, the Bahamas and India picking up prizes. The new annual awards were created by Prince William to reward efforts to save the planet in the face of climate change and global warming. Five winners were announced, each receiving a million pounds (\$1.4 million). The build-up to the televised event - featuring the renowned naturalist David Attenborough and performances by Coldplay, Ed Sheeran and others - was marked by royal displeasure at world leaders' inaction on climate change.

William hopes it will help propel the fight against climate change leading up to the COP26 summit, which opens in Scotland at the end of the month, calling those on the shortlist "innovators, leaders and visionaries". In a short film recorded for the ceremony in the London Eye and released ahead of the event on Sunday, William warns that the "actions we choose or choose not to take in the next 10 years will determine the fate of the planet for the next thousand". "A decade doesn't seem long, but humankind has an outstanding record of being able to solve the unsolvable," he says. "The future is ours to

determine. And if we set our minds to it, nothing is impossible."

Winning initiatives

The Republic of Costa Rica was one of the winners on Sunday picking up the "Protect and Restore Nature" award for its efforts to protect forests, plant trees and restore ecosystems. "We receive this recognition with pride but humility, what we have achieved in this small country in Central America can be done anywhere," said Costa Rican President Carlos Alvarado.

Indian company Takachar won the "Clean our Air" prize for the creation of a portable machine which turns agricultural waste into fertiliser so that farmers do not burn the waste and cause air pollution



Liverpool's Egyptian football player Mo Salah arrives on the green carpet to attend the inaugural Earthshot Prize awards ceremony.

The other winners included Coral Vita, from the Bahamas, for a project to grow coral in tanks, 50 times quicker than coral normally grows. The northern Italian city of Milan won the "Food Waste Hubs" award for collecting unused food and giving it to people who need it most.

The "Fix our Climate" laureate went to a joint Thai-German-Italian team for the AEM Electrolyzer, which uses renewable energy to make clean hydrogen by splitting water into its constituent elements. Each of the finalists—chosen by experts from more than 750 nominations—will be given help from companies to develop their projects. Prince William announced that the 2022 edition of the Earthshot Prize will be held in the United States. In a BBC interview this week, William took a potshot at wealthy space tourists, for neglecting problems closer to Earth, while his father and grandmother have also weighed in this week on climate change.

Opening the Welsh legislature in Cardiff on Thursday, the 95-year-old monarch was overheard upbraiding world leaders who "talk" but "don't do" enough about the planetary crisis. The queen complained that not enough leaders had confirmed their attendance at COP26, with Chinese President Xi Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi

among the key players in doubt.

Royal double standards?

William's father, long-time environmentalist Prince Charles, meanwhile told the BBC that he worried the leaders coming would "just talk", rather than implement "action on the ground". However, campaigners alleged climate hypocrisy from the royal family, which is Britain's biggest landowner, including large tracts of Scotland given over to hunting and farming. Last weekend, TV presenter and environmentalist Chris Packham led a children's march to Buckingham Palace in London to deliver a petition with more than 100,000 signatures asking the queen to rewind royal lands.

"If they were to do so it would be a very powerful message that would resonate with people all over the world," he said. The Earthshot Prize, launched in October last year, was inspired by US president John F. Kennedy's "Moonshot" project in the 1960s to put a man on the moon. It covers five areas: how to protect and restore nature; clean our air; revive our oceans; build a waste-free world; and fix our climate. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features



In this aerial view, lights and decorations ornate the remains of the war-ravaged landmark Al-Nuri mosque, as Iraqis gather to celebrate the birth of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), known in Arabic as the 'Mawlid Al-Nabawi' holiday, in the northern city of Mosul. — AFP photos



In this aerial view, lights and decorations ornate the remains of the war-ravaged landmark Al-Nuri mosque, as Iraqis gather to celebrate the birth of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), known in Arabic as the 'Mawlid Al-Nabawi' holiday, in the northern city of Mosul. — AFP photos



Iraqis kneel to pray during the celebrations of the birth of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), known in Arabic as the 'Mawlid Al-Nabawi' holiday, in the courtyard of the war-ravaged landmark Al-Nuri mosque. — AFP photos

SYMBOL OF REBIRTH AT IRAQ'S HISTORIC AL-NURI MOSQUE

To the sound of drums, religious chants resounded on Sunday evening for the first ceremony of its kind at Iraq's historic Al-Nuri mosque, which is being rebuilt after damage by jihadists. The city of Mosul's 12th-century mosque, known for its leaning minaret, was severely damaged in 2017. Iraq's army accused the Islamic State group of blowing it up. It is now being rebuilt under a project from the United Nations cultural

agency, UNESCO. "For me it's an extraordinary day. I am joyful," said Marwan Muafak, 45, a teaching administrator. "This celebration symbolizes the return of the chant of the muezzin and prayer in this place," he added. "The residents of Mosul want to get their old lives back."

Several hundred people gathered at the site to mark the birthday of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), in a courtyard decorated with multicolored lights

between the mosque with its gaping windows, surrounded by scaffolding, and the minaret-only the base of which survived. It was there, on a stage, that five men in traditional robes banged on their daf, a traditional drum, and chanted to the glory of the Prophet after the celebration began with a communal prayer. "It's the first celebration organized in Al-Nuri mosque on the occasion of the Prophet's birthday," said Abu Bakr Kanaan, head of Sunni reli-

gious properties in Nineveh province.

"Our joy is immense. Our feelings are indescribable in seeing all these people here." Abu Bakr Baghdadi made his only confirmed public appearance in July 2014 at the Al-Nuri mosque, declaring the establishment of a "caliphate". Iraq's army and an international coalition forced them out of the northern city in 2017. Eight Egyptian architects won an international competition to reconstruct the mosque as

part of UNESCO's "Revive the Spirit of Mosul" initiative for rehabilitating Iraq's second city and its cultural life. UNESCO raised more than \$100 million for the project, half of it pledged by the United Arab Emirates. The restoration is to be finished by 2023. "The minaret and the prayer room will be rebuilt just as they were," a local antiquities official told AFP. — AFP



French writer and designer Jean-Yves Ferri poses with French writer Anne Goscinny (right), daughter of late Rene Goscinny, during the presentation of the new 'Asterix' album at the Hachette Livre publishing house in Vanves, near Paris. — AFP

Draft 'Asterix' story revealed by author's daughter

The daughter of Rene Goscinny, one of the duo behind indomitable French comic-book star Asterix, has revealed that her father left a draft story featuring the Roman-bashing Gaulish warrior unfinished. "I often think about it, it's 20 pages, half a comic book," Anne Goscinny told German weekly Der Spiegel in a weekend interview. Typewritten by Rene Goscinny, the script

titled "Asterix at the Circus" was found in the family archives, looked after by Anne.

But she said that completing the story without her father would be a "very complicated" task. "We'd have to get a lot of people around the table, immerse ourselves in the story and find (Rene's) voice again," she said, adding, "it's as if there were a hole in a painting by Goya". "One day we'll give it a try, it would be an extraordinary adventure," Anne added. Asterix-defender of the last Gaulish village holding out against the Roman empire was dreamed up in 1959 by Rene Goscinny, who died in 1977, and Albert Uderzo, who died last year. The comic books have sold hundreds of millions of copies worldwide. Before the Asterix series, there was no history of comics having a scriptwriter.-AFP

Elton John: 'I'm more excited about music than ever'

Elton John might be 74 and struggling with a dodgy hip, but his musical taste remains far cooler than most guys half his age. While most ageing rockstars are happy to rehash the sounds of their glory days, Sir Elton is more likely to be found in a studio with the likes of Young Thug, Nicki Minaj and Lil Nas X. Admittedly, many of the collaborations for "The Lockdown Sessions", his new album out Friday, had to happen over Zoom due to the pandemic, but it remains a testament to his omnivorous taste for new sounds. "If you're my age and still learning from other musicians, that's the greatest gift of all," said John.

He was speaking in a press call last month ahead of a hip operation that has forced him to postpone several dates from his long-running farewell tour. "If you shut your mind off and say you can't learn anything more... that's the dead end," he said. "I'm more excited about music now than I've ever been."

'A thrill'

The new album spans the generations, featuring everyone from Stevie Wonder to Pearl Jam's Eddie Vedder to his latest hit



"Cold Heart" with Dua Lipa. That approach is why the Rocketman has achieved the unparalleled feat of at least one single in the British top 10 in each of the last six decades — 33 in total. "It gave me a thrill to see Young Thug come into a studio and freestyle. He just sat down at the microphone and off he went. I was blown away," John said.

It's an attitude that also means he doesn't want any deference from his young collaborators, despite them knowing they are working with a guy who has sold more than 300 million albums. "When (27-year-old dance star SJ Lewis) gave me the first version of our song, it was too Elton John-ish. I said 'Just obliterate it - turn it into an SG Lewis track', and he did," John said. "I think he was frightened to insult me. But I wanted to be insulted! And he got there in the end. He didn't insult me at all - he made the record that I wanted to make with him."

"The Lockdown Sessions" brings together new tracks as well as recent collaborations for albums by other artists,

including his song for the last Gorillaz album and his cover of "Nothing Else Matters" that he recorded with Miley Cyrus for the 30th anniversary of Metallica's "Black Album". In some ways it marks a return to his roots. "I was a session musician before I became Elton," said the British star, who was born Reginald Dwight. The Lil Nas X track, he said, was recorded in the same Abbey Road studio where he played backing piano for The Holly's 'He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother' 54 years earlier. "I thought 'I've come full circle here and I'm really loving what I'm doing'."

Having never lost his love of record stores, keeping his finger on the pulse comes naturally. He rattled off a list of emerging artists that have barely registered with the mainstream media yet, including Trinidadian rapper Berwyn to teenage singer-songwriter Morgen. "She's 16!" he said of Morgen. "When I was 16 I was still picking my nose."

'Friendship and authenticity'

He has also used his radio show "Rocket Hour" on Apple Music to feed his habit. "It's given me access. When I play a record I love, I interview them on the show or phone them up. "It's important to me to offer friendship and authenticity," he said, recalling how musicians like The Beach Boys and The Band reached out and encouraged him when he first went to the United States in the 1970s. Having worked with almost every major popstar of the past half-century, is there anyone left on his bucket list? "Something with Billie Eilish one day," he said. "But not yet, because she's still forging her own path. — AFP

Barker and Kardashian are engaged

The Blink-182 drummer and the Poosh founder started dating earlier this year, and over the weekend, the 45-year-old rocker got down on one knee inside a circle of red roses on the beachfront of the Rosewood Miramar Hotel in Montecito, California. Kourtney's sisters, Khloe Kardashian and Kim Kardashian West, and Tristan Thompson were among those present as the pair took the next step in their relationship. An onlooker told E! News: "Travis escorted Kourtney down to the beach, where he had red and white florals set up in the shape of a heart."

"It looked very romantic. I could see Kourtney smiling from ear to ear and put her hand over her mouth looking surprised. The family cheered for them and went back into the hotel." Kourtney, 42, shared a picture of the romantic proposal on Instagram and captioned the post: "forever @travisbarker. (sic)" Kim, 40, took to her Instagram Story to share a video of the pair kissing and showed off her sibling's

huge dazzling diamond ring. The clip was soundtracked by Bruno Mars' 'Marry You' and was also shared by Travis' 15-year-old daughter Alabama on her Instagram Story. She wrote: "So happy for you guys I love you both!"

The 'Feeling This' hitmaker also has an 18-year-old son called Landon with his second wife Shanna Moakler. He's been married twice before, however, his first marriage to Melissa Kennedy lasted just nine months. Kourtney, meanwhile, has Mason, 11, Reign, six, and nine-year-old Penelope with ex-partner Scott Disick, and this will be her first marriage. Travis recently admitted he feels "invincible" when he's alongside the 'Keeping Up with the Kardashians' star.

And Kourtney even convinced him to overcome his fear of flying. He said: "I made a deal with her that she had just said to me, 'I would love to do so much travelling with you. I want to go to Italy with you. I want to go to Cabo with you. I want to go

to Paris with you. I want to go to Bora Bora with you.' And I said, 'Well, when the day comes you want to fly, I'm telling you I'll do it with you. I would do anything with you. And just give me 24 hours notice.' And that's what she did." Kourtney's support led to him having a change of heart about flying, and Travis conceded that she's transformed his life over recent months.

The punk rock star - who was involved in a plane crash in 2008 - said: "It's still something very new to me, but having something that gives me the strength and hope to be able to overcome things that were so traumatic in my life, it just says a ton. "She's definitely that for me. I'm invincible when I'm with her. It's just like I never dreamed, I never even considered flying again." The pair - who have been nicknamed Kravis - have splashed their romance all over social media, sharing intimate PDA-filled snaps with their millions of followers.-AFP



Sports

Norrie beats Basilashvili to claim Indian Wells title

First Briton to win the ATP Indian Wells crown



INDIAN WELLS: Cameron Norrie of Great Britain kisses his winners trophy after his victory against Nikoloz Basilashvili of Georgia in the men's final match of the BNP Paribas Open at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden on Sunday in Indian Wells, California. — AFP

INDIAN WELLS: Cameron Norrie's breakthrough season reached a high point in the California desert on Sunday with a 3-6, 6-4, 6-1 win over Nikoloz Basilashvili to become the first Briton to win the ATP Indian Wells title.

Norrie rallied from a set down to earn his career best 47th win of the season and is the first player from Great Britain to lift the trophy, achieving what former finalists Andy Murray, Tim Henman and Greg Rusedski failed to do.

This is Norrie's second title in his sixth ATP final of the season after winning his maiden crown earlier this year in Los Cabos. The victory will also propel him into the top 20 in the world for the first time in his career, and move him past Daniel Evans to become the new British No. 1. "I am so happy, this is my biggest title," said Norrie, who clinched the crown when Basilashvili belted a forehand long on the first match point.

Norrie hit just one ace had two double faults but won 77 percent of his first serve points and played better in the crucial moments than Basilashvili. "It has been an incredible week. I was expecting it to be a longer match and he made a couple of errors at the end," said Norrie.

Murray was the most recent British finalist in 2009 when he lost to Spaniard Rafael Nadal. Henman made

the final twice, in 2002 and 2004 when he lost in straight sets to Roger Federer 6-3, 6-3. Canadian-born Brit Rusedski was runner-up in 1998.

Norrie was born in Johannesburg, South Africa, grew up in New Zealand before becoming the top collegiate player in the United States at Texas Christian University. He has represented Great Britain for the



Norrie's second title in sixth ATP final

past eight years.

The 29-year-old Basilashvili was going for his third title of the season. He has a reputation of being a streaky player capable of looking unbeatable one day and vulnerable the next. Unfortunately, the Georgian did not bring his A game against Norrie unlike the quarter-finals where he upset second seeded Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece. Basilashvili said he had some health issues Sunday which sapped his energy in the

final set, but declined to go into detail.

Health issues

"I was very tight. I had some health problems in the third set. I tried to go out and take a breath but could not recover. I didn't have anything left," said Basilashvili, who left the court after the fifth game of the third set to go to the bathroom and try and regroup.

Basilashvili, the son of a former dancer with the Georgian National Ballet, blasted two aces and won just 56 percent of his first serves and 59 percent of his second serves in the one hour, 49 minute match. Basilashvili won the last five games of the first set to take it 6-3. Norrie got the early break and took a 3-1 lead but the Georgian held serve in the fifth game to begin his hot streak.

Norrie fought back in a tight second set that saw both players record service breaks early. Norrie got the upper hand with another service break in the 10th game to go on and level the sets at one each. Norrie got another early break in the second game of the third set, but Basilashvili won a six-minute long fourth game to cut the deficit to 3-1. That was the last hurrah for Basilashvili, who then lost the final three games of the match, in part due to the sloppy forehands and an apparent lack of focus. — AFP

News in brief

Norrie climbs rankings

PARIS: Roger Federer dropped out of the top 10 in the ATP rankings yesterday for the first time in almost five years, as newly-crowned Indian Wells champion Cameron Norrie jumped 11 spots. Federer, 40, has not played due to a right knee injury since losing in the Wimbledon quarter-finals to Hubert Hurkacz in July. Poland's Hurkacz climbed two places to 10th after making the Indian Wells last eight last week, knocking Federer down to 11th. It is the first time the 20-time Grand Slam champion has been ranked outside the top 10 since January 2017, when he went on to win the Australian Open following a knee injury. Norrie broke into the top 20 at world number 15, while his compatriot Andy Murray dramatically slid down the rankings, though, falling 51 places to 172nd. — AFP

First Arab in top 10

PARIS: Tunisia's Ons Jabeur became the first Arab tennis player to break into the world's top 10 yesterday, while Indian Wells champion Paula Badosa gained 14 places in the WTA rankings. Jabeur, a Wimbledon quarter-finalist earlier this year, was beaten by Spain's Badosa in the Indian Wells semi-finals last Friday. Before the tournament, 14th place was the highest achieved by Arab players, a record which was jointly held by Jabeur and former Moroccan star Younes El Aynaoui. The 23-year-old Badosa, who beat Victoria Azarenka in Saturday's final in California, started the year as the world number 70 but has now climbed to 13th. Four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka moved up two places and back into the top 10 despite not playing last week. — AFP

Napoli reclaim top spot

ROME: Napoli returned to the top of Serie A on Sunday after Nigerian international Victor Osimhen scored the only goal in a hard-fought 1-0 win against Torino. AC Milan had moved to the top of the table after battling back from two goals down to beat Hellas Verona 3-2 at the San Siro on Saturday. But Napoli moved back to the summit after Osimhen, who had scored for his country in a 2-0 win against the Central African Republic in World Cup qualifying last week, headed the 81st-minute winner. Elsewhere, Juventus continued their climb following a disastrous start as Moise Kean's first-half goal clinched a 1-0 win over Jose Mourinho's Roma. — AFP

Ansu inspires Barca

MADRID: Ansu Fati came to the rescue again on Sunday by scoring a sensational goal and earning a penalty in a 3-1 victory over Valencia as Barcelona got a big week off to a winning start. Memphis Depay slammed in the spot-kick and Philippe Coutinho, who came on for Fati on the hour, added a late third to give a comfortable complexion to a game that Valencia had led after just five minutes. Ansu went off with Valencia still chasing an equalizer, an indication of how important Ronald Koeman considers his involvement in Wednesday's Champions League game against Dynamo Kiev, with the season's first Clasico against Real Madrid coming four days later. — AFP

Ireland thrash Netherlands in T20 World Cup

ABU DHABI: Fast bowler Curtis Campher took four wickets in four balls to help Ireland thrash Netherlands by seven wickets in a first round match of the Twenty20 World Cup yesterday. Campher took a hat-trick and then struck again to return figures of 4-26 as Netherlands were dismissed for 106

Spain's Badosa beats Azarenka to capture Indian Wells title

INDIAN WELLS: Paula Badosa demonstrated her mental toughness to become the WTA Indian Wells champion in her desert debut on Sunday with a hard-fought, three-set victory over two-time champion Victoria Azarenka.

The Spaniard, who had not lost a set since her first match of the tournament, needed three hours and four minutes to out-muscle Azarenka 7-6 (7/5), 2-6, 7-6 (7/2). "Every morning I wake up and my dream is to win a tournament like this," Badosa said. "I have to keep working hard and always believe. The key is to enjoy the journey."

Badosa won her only previous WTA final earlier this season in Belgrade but she did it via a retirement over Ana Konjuh. This one was sweeter because Badosa got to close out the championship point on the court, hammering a forehand winner to the open side that Azarenka could only watch sail in.

Badosa celebrated the biggest win of her career by falling face first to the court, both hands covering her face while the crowd cheered. "This is a dream come true," said Badosa during the post-match festivities on the court. She then turned to Azarenka, saying "I remember when I was 14 or 15 years old seeing you win Grand Slams and hoping one day I can play like that." Two-time Australian Open winner Azarenka was trying to become the first three-time WTA winner in Indian Wells. She battled back several times on Sunday, digging in after dropping the first set in a tightly-contested tiebreaker. But the 32-year-old Belarussian fell behind early in the final set tiebreaker and couldn't recover.

Badosa got the first break of the match in the seventh game of the opening set but Azarenka immediately broke back to level at 4-4. Azarenka used an ace to win the fifth game of the opening set



OLYMPIA, Greece: Greek actress Xanthi Georgiou, playing the role of the High Priestess, holds the lit Olympic Flame during the flame lighting ceremony for the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics at the Ancient Olympia archeological site yesterday. — AFP

in the Group A opener in Abu Dhabi.

In reply, Ireland lost two early wickets but veteran opener Paul Stirling, who made an unbeaten 30, and Gareth Delany, who scored 44, put on 59 runs for the third wicket to ease into their chase. Ireland achieved their target with 4.5 overs to spare as Campher hit the winning runs for his team's first win over the Netherlands in a World Cup.

"(We wanted) just to attack the stumps as much as possible and, obviously, with Curtis' four-wicket over he did exactly that," skipper Andy Balbirnie said after the win. "We've had a slow but good build-up, I think we're peaking at the right time."

Campher became only the third bowler in T20 International history to claim four wickets in four



INDIAN WELLS: Paula Badosa of Spain reacts after defeating Victoria Azarenka in the Women's Singles Final match of the BNP Paribas Open on Sunday in Indian Wells, California. — AFP

and then used another ace to set up the winning point in the ninth game to take a 5-4 lead. The first set took one hour and 20 minutes including the tightly-contested tiebreaker.

Badosa jumped out to a 4-0 lead but Azarenka clawed her way back in to level it 5-5. An unforced error by Azarenka created set point and Badosa overpowered her with a blistering cross court forehand winner to end the marathon set.

Shorter rallies

Despite losing a grueling first set in a tiebreaker, Azarenka looked the fresher of the two in at the beginning of the second set. Azarenka started coming into the net more which shortened the rallies.

Olympic flame lit for 2022 Beijing Winter Games

OLYMPIA, Greece: The Olympic flame for the 2022 Beijing Winter Games was lit in Olympia yesterday in the presence of IOC president Thomas Bach. Following tradition, the flame was lit from the rays of the sun at the ancient Temple of Hera, the cradle of the Ancient Games. But activists grabbed the spotlight by unfurling a Tibetan flag and a banner that said "no genocide" at the Games.

The demonstrators pulled out the flag and banner during the ceremony in Olympia attended by International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Thomas Bach and several dozen dignitaries including Chinese officials. Greek police forced the demonstrators, who had appeared in the ruins of the site of the Ancient Olympics, to take down the flag and the banner before detaining them. A spokesperson for the London-based Free Tibet organization identified the protesters as Chemi Lhamo, Jason Leith and Fern MacDougall.

'Beijing to write history'

"Beijing will write history as the first city ever to host

balls after Afghanistan's Rashid Khan and Lasith Malinga of Sri Lanka in 2019. Campher sent back Colin Ackermann (11), Ryan ten Doeschate (0) and Scott Edwards (0) for a hat-trick and then bowled Roelof van der Merwe (0) in a sensational over.

The Johannesburg-born Campher is also just the second player with a hat-trick in the men's T20 World Cup after Australia fast bowler Brett Lee, who achieved the feat against Bangladesh in the inaugural edition in 2007.

Campher, 22, had a T20 best of 3-19 from his previous four matches since making his debut in August against Zimbabwe in Dublin. He switched ends in the match yesterday and got instant success after Ireland reviewed a caught behind for

Azarenka won the first three games of the second to set the tone and then served out the set with some solid placements and a few aces sprinkled in.

Azarenka smacked an ace to get to set point then closed it out when Badosa hit a backhand long. Azarenka held serve in the eighth game of the third set as the two painted the lines in one of the longest rallies of the match. Azarenka blasted a backhand winner down the line to level the set at 4-4.

Azarenka broke in the ninth game but Badosa returned the favor in the very next game as the third set, like the entire match, went back and forth. The tiebreak was pretty much all Badosa as the veteran Azarenka appeared to run out of gas, losing four of the final five points of the match. — AFP

both the summer and winter editions of the Olympic Games," Bach said in a speech. "The Olympic Games cannot address all the challenges in our world. But they set an example for a world where everyone respects the same rules and one another," he said.

"In these difficult times we are still living through, the Olympic Winter Games Beijing 2022 will be an important moment to bring the world together in a spirit of peace, friendship and solidarity. We need more solidarity. More solidarity within societies, and more solidarity among societies."

Due to coronavirus restrictions, the ceremony was held in front of an audience limited to IOC members, the Greek and Chinese Olympic committees, Greek President Katerina Sakellariopoulou and the media. In a break with tradition, there will be no torch relay on Greek soil.

Instead, the flame is due to be carried to the Panathenaic Stadium in Athens, a second-century AD arena used in both the 1896 and 2004 Games, and on Tuesday it will be handed over to the delegation from Beijing 2022 to be flown to China.

Pro-Tibet activists, as well as representatives of China's Uyghur community and human rights experts, are scheduled to hold a press conference in an Athens hotel today. They say they will "denounce the severe failure of the International Olympic Committee" in awarding the Winter Games to China. A police spokesman said three protesters arrested at the Acropolis on Sunday would be freed pending a trial in January. — AFP

Ackermann with the ultra edge technology showing a spike when the ball passed the batsman's gloves.

Technology helped Campher once again on the hat-trick ball when Edwards was given not out for an lbw call by the on-field official but replays suggested the ball would have hit the leg stump. Earlier this season, Campher underwent ankle surgery. "I didn't feel the best, coming back from injury," he said. "First over didn't go as planned but Bal (Balbirnie) kept faith with me."

Skipper Pieter Seelaar scored 21 to take Netherlands past the 100-run mark before quick bowler Mark Adair ran through the tail to return impressive figures of 3-9 — Ireland's most economical bowling ever in T20 World Cup. — AFP

Sports

No room for niceties as Suarez and Liverpool reunite again

Atletico Madrid, Liverpool face off in Champions League

MADRID: Luis Suarez reunites with Liverpool in the Champions League tonight and for another 90 minutes, a fans' favorite and cherished former club will have to be enemies again. The last time Suarez met Liverpool in Spain was also the first time since he left the club five years earlier in 2014 and it was the Uruguayan who set the tone. He slid in studs up, not for a tackle but a finish, and without a moment's hesitation celebrated, circling around the back of Liverpool's goal, his arms outstretched, grinning.



Defiant Suarez plays with something to prove

He had scored 82 goals in 133 games for them, won a cup with them, been defended through racism and biting scandals by them, and earned their adoration as one of their greatest ever players. But there at Camp Nou, in the crackle of a Champions League last-16 tie, there was no sign of restraint, let alone remorse. Suarez had given Barcelona the lead against Liverpool and nobody could say he was not relishing every second of it.

In the build-up to the second leg at Anfield, he switched back. He spoke of his close relationship with Liverpool's staff and how his children learned the excitement of football in the city. He posed for a photo, giving a thumbs up next to the club's crest on a wall.

None of that was insincere. Liverpool was the club that raised Suarez from a precocious talent at Ajax to one of the most feared strikers in the world. With them he had shared joy and despair. When Liverpool missed out on winning the Premier League in 2014, a pivotal defeat by Crystal Palace left him crying under his shirt.

But now Suarez was celebrating their disappointment and the Liverpool fans remembered. In the second leg they booed and heckled as Suarez got to work again. He flicked the ball away as Liverpool tried to take a throw. He confronted Fabinho, hoping to stir a reaction. Fabinho was booked for the challenge that followed, Suarez rolling on the floor, hands clasped around his leg. "I just can't get enough," the Liverpool fans once sang. Now it was: "Cheat, cheat, cheat".

Liverpool triumphed, an historic comeback turning a 3-0 first-leg defeat into a 4-3 win on aggregate. Suarez's anguish only adding to the satisfaction. They adored Suarez playing for them but despised him playing against them and at the Wanda Metropolitano tomorrow, they will expect nothing different.

'Crush anyone'

In an interview with the BBC last year, Steven Gerrard talked about Suarez agitating even his teammates in training. "He went against them, he struggled with them, he raised his elbows and I thought, 'This is not what you normally see in training,'" Gerrard said. "Normally, you see a lot of respect, but Luis would crush anyone."

It was that same drive and defiance that made Suarez join Atletico Madrid after being cast off by Barcelona. Suarez told Diario Sport this month he was "treated like



MADRID: Atletico Madrid's Uruguayan forward Luis Suarez (center) and teammates take part in a training session in Madrid yesterday, on the eve of their UEFA Champions League first round group B football match against Liverpool. — AFP

he was 15" by Ronald Koeman and the club president, Josep Maria Bartomeu, "leaked that he was damaging the dressing room".

Suarez had not enjoyed his best season for Barca and there was an argument to say his style was depriving the team of a more mobile, free-flowing attack. But he wanted to show he still belonged to the elite and wanted to show Barcelona close

up. He scored 21 goals in 38 games for Atletico last term and the one goal that won them the title.

Diego Simeone called it "the Suarez Zone", a tendency to deliver when it matters most, and before the international break, there he was again, scoring in 2-0 win over Barcelona. He celebrated by making a phone gesture in the direction of Koeman,

seemingly in reference to their 40-second goodbye call.

It was also his fourth goal in as many games for Atletico, easing concerns that a 34-year-old with an aching knee might not burn so brightly in his second season. But Suarez is at his best when defiant, with an opponent to prove wrong and a moment to seize. Liverpool remember it well. — AFP



SAINT-GERMAIN-EN-LAYE: Paris Saint-Germain's forward Neymar (center) controls the ball next to forward Lionel Messi (right) and defender Marquinhos during a training session at the club's Camp des Loges training ground in Saint-Germain-en-Laye yesterday, on the eve of their UEFA Champions League first round group A football match against RB Leipzig. — AFP

Neymar ruled out of Champions League clash against Leipzig

PARIS: Neymar has been ruled out of Paris Saint-Germain's Champions League Group A clash with RB Leipzig tonight with an adductor muscle injury, his club said. PSG said in a medical bulletin yesterday that Neymar "had some pain in his groin since returning from international duty and will undergo more treatment over the next few days before returning to full training." The world's most expensive player scored for Brazil in their 4-1 World Cup qualifying win against Uruguay last Thursday, playing 90 minutes in that game having also featured in their 0-0 draw in Colombia the previous weekend. He didn't play for PSG as they beat Angers 2-1 in Ligue 1 last Friday, a game also missed by Lionel Messi.

The Argentine should return against Leipzig at the Parc des Princes as PSG

look to build on their 2-0 win over Manchester City in their previous Champions League outing last month. Neymar, meanwhile, will hope to recover in time to play Marseille next weekend. "The priority is always the health of the players. 'Ney' has a small issue which we hope will only keep him out for a few days," PSG coach Mauricio Pochettino told reporters yesterday.

Despite his injury, Neymar did take part in training yesterday, unlike Mauro Icardi, who was absent due to what Pochettino called "personal problems". Media reports in France said former Inter striker Icardi had gone to Milan to try to resolve relationship troubles with his partner Wanda Nara, who is also his agent. PSG are without the suspended Angel di Maria as well as the unfit duo Leandro Paredes and Sergio Ramos for the meeting with the Germans.

"They are a super team with some of the best attacking players in the world. Maybe we will have to play with a seven-man defense," smiled Leipzig's American coach Jesse Marsch. Leipzig are currently bottom of Group A without a point, while PSG and Club Brugge are level on four points and Manchester City have three before playing in Belgium tonight. — AFP

and take a 2-0 lead in the best-of-seven series. The reigning World Series champion Dodgers will try to regroup when they host game three tonight. Atlanta scored in each of the last two innings, Rosario leading off the eighth against Dodgers pitcher Julio Urias — a regular starter who was sent in as a reliever — with a single.

Rosario advanced to second on Freddie Freeman's fly out and scored on a single from Ozzie Albies — the sliding Rosario managing to avoid the attempted tag at home plate by Dodgers catcher Will Smith to pull the Braves within 4-3.

Austin Riley, who delivered a walk-off hit in game one on Saturday, then belted a double over the head of Mookie Betts and off the centerfield wall that saw Albies

Gritty Chiefs rally in Washington, Cardinals stay unbeaten

LOS ANGELES: The Kansas City Chiefs "dug down deep" for a 31-13 come-from-behind NFL victory over the Washington Football Team that moved them back to .500 for the NFL season on Sunday. A week after the Chiefs fell to the Buffalo Bills in a rematch of last season's American Conference title game, quarterback Patrick Mahomes completed 32-of-47 passes for a season-high 397 yards and put together three second-half touchdown drives.

Mahomes threw for two touchdowns — atoning for two first-half interceptions — and Darrell Williams ran for 62 yards and two touchdowns as the Chiefs scored 21 unanswered points in the second half "Guys just dug down deep," Mahomes said. "We've been battling adversity all season long. The first half was like that, but guys dug down deep in that second half. We just stopped pressing. We stopped trying so hard. We have to do like we did in that second half, play tight and play gritty."

The Chiefs defense also showed up, holding an opponent to fewer than 29 points for the first time this season. They forced one fumble and intercepted Taylor Heinicke to clinch the victory and leave Washington at 2-4 for the season.

The Arizona Cardinals improved their perfect record to 6-0 with a 37-14 victory over the Browns in Cleveland. Despite the absence of head coach Kliff Kingsbury, quarterbacks coach Cam Turner, defensive line coach Zach Allen, and top edge rusher Chandler Jones because of positive COVID-19 tests, the Cardinals didn't miss a beat. Quarterback Kyler Murray connected on 20 of 30 passing attempts for 229 yards and four touchdowns and the Cardinals defense came up with three takeaways. Arizona scored on all five of their possessions in the first half to build a 23-7 lead.

The Browns trimmed the deficit on

Baker Mayfield's "Hail Mary" completion as time expired in the opening half. But Cleveland wouldn't score after the break, Mayfield finishing the day with two lost fumbles and an interception.

He also aggravated a left shoulder injury when he was sacked by defensive lineman J.J. Watt in the second half. Possibly worse for Cleveland, running back Kareem Hunt exited with a calf injury in the second half.

The Las Vegas Raiders shook off the departure of head coach Jon Gruden to dominate the Broncos 34-24 in Denver. Gruden resigned on Monday over emails exchanged with former Washington Football Team president Bruce Allen between 2011 and 2017 in which he Gruden used homophobic slurs and a racist trope to describe players union chief DeMaurice Smith.

Gruden was critical of the NFL's employment of women officials, player demonstrations during the national anthem and the league's efforts to curtail concussions in the emails, the affair casting an ugly shadow over week six. But the Raiders responded with possibly their best game of the season under interim coach Rich Bisaccia. Quarterback Derek Carr threw for 341 yards and two touchdowns.

A change of scene proved refreshing for the Jacksonville Jaguars, who snapped

a 20-game losing streak when Matthew Wright kicked a 53-yard field goal as time expired to give them a 23-20 victory over Miami in London.

'Just crazy'

Wright became the first kicker in NFL history with multiple field goals beyond 50 yards in the last four minutes of regulation time in a game. He had also connected from 54 yards to lift the Jaguars level with 3:40 to play before his game-winner left both clubs 1-5.

Wright, recently of the practice squad, was playing just his third game for the Jaguars, getting the starting nod over Josh Lambo. "He was telling me he was, like, a software engineer like a month and a half ago," Jags quarterback Trevor Lawrence said. "Just crazy, you can't even make it up." Elsewhere, Baltimore quarterback Lamar Jackson threw for 167 yards and a touchdown while Devonta Freeman, Le'Veon Bell and Latavius Murray each ran for a touchdown to power the Ravens to a 34-6 rout over the visiting Los Angeles Chargers.

Dallas quarterback Dak Prescott connected with CeeDee Lamb on a touchdown pass to give the Cowboys a 35-29 overtime victory over the New England Patriots. The Minnesota Vikings also won in overtime, edging Carolina 34-28. — AFP



LANDOVER: Patrick Mahomes #15 of the Kansas City Chiefs runs with the ball against Khaleke Hudson #47 of the Washington Football Team during the first half at FedExField on Sunday in Landover, Maryland. — AFP

Ian Anderson before an out had been recorded.

Former Dodger Joc Pederson answered with a two-run blast off a curveball from Dodgers starter Max Scherzer to tie the game in the fourth inning. Chris Taylor put the Dodgers up again in the seventh with a double that scored two runs before the Braves rallied in the final frame. Cy Young Award contender Scherzer didn't make it out of the fifth inning, with Roberts going to his bullpen with one out in the frame.

'Fun challenge'

For the second year in a row the Braves now take a 2-0 lead in the NLCS into game three against the Dodgers. "That's absolutely huge," Riley said of gaining two

home wins before heading to Dodger Stadium. "That's a tough atmosphere, but I feel like it's going to be a fun challenge."

The Braves have lost seven straight games and 10 of their last 11 at Dodger Stadium. They were swept in a three-game regular-season series there in August-September. The Dodgers won 15 straight home games at the end of the regular season and have won two of three at home this post-season.

"I don't have to remind them of anything," Braves manager Brian Snitker said of what he will tell his team about the task that awaits. "I think that they're going to realize, and we all do, last year when we were up 3-1, how hard it is to win a baseball game." — AFP

Braves walk off again to take 2-0 series lead over Dodgers

LOS ANGELES: Eddie Rosario cracked a line-drive single up the middle to score Dansby Swanson and give the Atlanta Braves their second straight walk-off win over the Los Angeles Dodgers in baseball's National League Championship Series on Sunday. The Braves, who twice trailed by two runs, rallied to beat the Dodgers 5-4

Bucks celebrate title, Nets go without Irving as NBA opens



MILWAUKEE: Giannis Antetokounmpo of the Milwaukee Bucks is introduced before a preseason game against the Dallas Mavericks on October 15, 2021 at the Fiserv Forum Center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. — AFP

WASHINGTON: Giannis Antetokounmpo chases another title, the Brooklyn Nets move on without Kyrie Irving and LeBron James unveils his new supporting cast when the 2021-22 NBA season begins today. The NBA's 75th anniversary campaign tips off with the Brooklyn Nets at Milwaukee as NBA Finals Most Valuable Player (MVP) Antetokounmpo and the rest of the Bucks raise the club's first championship banner since 1971.

The Greek superstar, a two-time NBA MVP, averaged 30.2 points, 12.8 rebounds, 5.1 assists, 1.2 blocked shots and 1.0 steals a game last year in the playoffs as the Bucks ended a half-century title drought.

Milwaukee will try to become the first NBA champion from the Eastern Conference to repeat since James led Miami to titles in 2012 and 2013 as the league aims for its first full 82-game per club campaign since 2018-19 after consecutive seasons shortened due to COVID-19.

The Nets have been part of the NBA off-season's biggest drama with the loss of Irving for refusing to have a COVID-19 vaccination. City regulations in New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco forbid attending large indoor public gatherings without being vaccinated, meaning Irving could not play in Nets home games and would miss most of Brooklyn's regular-season contests.

"I chose to be unvaccinated and that was my choice and I ask y'all just to respect that choice,"

Irving said. "I'm going to stay in shape, be ready to play, be ready to rock out with my teammates and just be part of this whole thing."

As a result, the Nets decided the star guard will not be part of the team at all rather than be available on a part-time basis. Brooklyn still offers formidable talent with two-time NBA champion and 2014 NBA MVP Kevin Durant up front and 2018 MVP and three-time scoring champion James Harden in the Nets backcourt.

Patty Mills, an NBA champion with San Antonio in 2014, signed with the Nets in August after sparking the Australia Boomers to a bronze medal at the Tokyo Olympics. The 33-year-old guard from Canberra could see more minutes with Irving absent.

"When you lose a talent as great as Kyrie, we have to be tighter, we have to be more connected, we have to have guys play bigger roles and be more responsible with the details," Nets coach Steve Nash said. "No one is going to come in and imitate Kyrie. So how can we make up for his loss as best as possible? Through all the collective work we do... coming together and really building a team."

— the first time the 36-year-old has missed so many games in a single season. James, however, is confident that the extra rest since last season will benefit the Lakers more than most.

"Last year after coming off the bubble it literally took everything away from you," James said during the Lakers' recent pre-season training camp. "Any little bit of energy that you had, it was completely gone when we left there. To come back into the season with the quick start that we had, kind of the life of the party was just kind of stale. You know, rightfully so. Guys just didn't have an opportunity to get a mental break."

Oldest roster

James says he has noticed a marked transformation in energy levels during the Lakers' preparations for this season. "You could definitely feel the energy shift a lot more in this season the first two practices compared to last," James said as training camp got underway. The extra rest may prove decisive for a Lakers roster which has the oldest average age of any team in the NBA, coming in at around 30.9 years per player.

That's due to a summer rebuilding process which has seen the Lakers bring in a raft of seasoned professionals headed by 32-year-old Russell Westbrook, who joined the team in a blockbuster trade with the Washington Wizards in August that sent Kentavious Caldwell-Pope, Montrezl Harrell and Kyle Kuzma in the opposite direction. Other new signings include Rajon Rondo (35), DeAndre

'Going to take a minute'

The NBA season's opening night also features James and the revamped Los Angeles Lakers playing host to the Golden State Warriors. Stephen Curry, Draymond Green, Andrew Wiggins and the rest of the Warriors hope to welcome back guard Klay Thompson from an Achilles tendon injury in December or January.

First 82-game season since pandemic

The Lakers have surrounded James and Anthony Davis with a new collection of talent, including Russell Westbrook, Dwight Howard, Rajon Rondo, Trevor Ariza, Malik Monk, Kendrick Nunn and Carmelo Anthony.

The hope is to try and recapture the magic that produced a championship in the COVID-19 bubble last year. The Lakers lost to Phoenix in the first round of last season's playoffs. "It's going to take a minute for us to become the team we know we're capable of being," James said. "It's all about being patient with the process, understanding that we're going to have frustrating moments. Nothing is worth having if it's not worth working for."

James, a four-time NBA MVP, is chasing his fifth NBA crown. He will turn 37 in December but remains a skilled scorer and passing threat.

"Nothing he does surprises me," Lakers coach Frank Vogel said.

Simmons back with 76ers

The Philadelphia 76ers, last season's Eastern Conference top seeds, lost to Atlanta in the second round of the playoffs and have had to contend with Australian guard Ben Simmons sitting out pre-season workouts until Sunday. "The next step is getting him integrated with the team," said 76ers coach Doc Rivers, who declared Simmons in "decent shape" but not "game shape."

With Simmons back in the fold alongside star big man Joel Embiid, Philadelphia again figures to be a team to beat in the East. The 76ers open tomorrow at New Orleans with the host Pelicans troubled by their own missing star in Zion Williamson, out with a broken right foot suffered in the off-season. Williamson averaged 27.0 points, 7.2 rebounds and 3.7 assists a game last season for the Pelicans, who plan to give the big man more tests in two weeks to determine his status.

Utah and Phoenix, the only teams to win 50 games last season, improved in the off-season. The Jazz added swingman Rudy Gay and center Hassan Whiteside while the Suns, who lost to Milwaukee in the NBA Finals, kept star guard Chris Paul and added forward JaVale McGee to go alongside Bahamas big man Deandre Ayton. The NBA Finals are set to return to their typical June timeframe. — AFP

Rejuvenated LeBron, Lakers eye return to NBA summit

LOS ANGELES: LeBron James and the Los Angeles Lakers launch their bid to return to the summit of the NBA today with a new roster and a rejuvenated mindset after a badly needed first full off-season in two years.

A year ago, James had only just finished leading the Lakers to their 16th NBA championship with a 4-2 series victory over the Miami Heat after a grueling season upended by the pandemic. The purple and gold confetti that greeted that victory had barely been swept up, however, before James and his teammates were hauling their weary bodies into another season just 72 days later.

While the NBA has rejected suggestions that injuries had spiked as a result of the compressed off-season, what is not in dispute is that injuries affected the Lakers last term more than others. After a strong start to the season, the Lakers were derailed after both James and Anthony Davis suffered long-term injuries, with the team eventually bowing out in the opening round of the post-season.

Davis played only 36 of 72 games in 2020-2021, while James made only 45 appearances due to injury

Jordan (33), Kent Bazemore (32), Carmelo Anthony (37) and Trevor Ariza (36).

While some have wondered whether the relatively advanced years of the Lakers roster might be the team's undoing, Lakers head coach Frank Vogel prefers instead to emphasize the squad's basketball IQ. "Age does equal experience," Vogel said. "IQ and intelligence help you win, and in terms of motivation, the motivation for us is that trophy, not what people are saying. This group is highly driven to get back on top and I don't really think about anything about what anybody's saying about our age. But I do agree that the experience will be necessary and help us win."

James also brushes off the viral jokes that have been made about the Lakers' merry band of thirtysomethings. "The narrative about our age," James said. "I kind of laugh at it. I actually do really laugh. I'm not just saying that."

Anthony, meanwhile, a close friend of James' since the duo played on opposing teams in high school, is now two decades later a teammate and confident that the accumulated mileage and knowhow of the Lakers' roster could return the team to the pinnacle of the NBA.

"A lot of times when you put a group of players together, a group of talent like we have, it doesn't work out," Anthony said. "But I think where we're at in our careers and understanding what we have to do, understanding the sacrifices that we all have to make in order for us to work, that's the beauty of the actual journey that we're about to go on." — AFP



LOS ANGELES: In this file photo taken on May 25, 2021, Los Angeles Lakers' US player LeBron James stands during the second half of Game Two of the Western Conference first-round playoff series at the Phoenix Suns Arena, in Phoenix, Arizona. — AFP