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Saudi Arabia targets zero carbon emissions by 2060

Kuwait hails 'leap' in region's climate efforts • Aramco sets 2050 net zero target



RIYADH: Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman delivers a speech during the opening ceremony of the Saudi Green Initiative forum yesterday in the Saudi capital. — AFP

RIYADH: Top crude exporter Saudi Arabia will aim to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2060, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said yesterday, days before the COP26 global climate summit. The kingdom said it would also join a global effort to cut methane emissions by 30 percent by 2030. The UN says more than 130 countries have set or are considering a target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050, an objective it says is "imperative" to safeguard a livable climate.

"I announce today Saudi Arabia's target to reach net zero emissions by 2060," Prince Mohammed told the "Saudi Green Initiative" forum. "I am pleased to launch initiatives in the energy sector that will reduce carbon emissions by 278 million tons annually by 2030, thus voluntarily more than doubling the target announced," he said. "We also announce the kingdom's accession to the Global Methane Pledge."

A statement said Saudi Arabia would "contribute to cutting global methane emissions by 30 percent by 2030, as part of its commitment to deliver a cleaner, greener future". The 2060 target would "enable us to have a smooth and viable transition, without risking economic or social impacts", Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman said.

Kuwaiti Oil Minister Mohammad Al-Fares said yesterday that the Saudi and Middle East Green Initiatives represented a leap in the region's efforts

to combat the effects of climate change. "We will contribute and support our brothers in these initiatives and participate in any initiative that uses renewable power sources and hydrogen as a new technology," said Fares.

"We will also hold meetings with Saudi Minister of Energy Abdulaziz bin Salman to discuss these initiatives which we will have a role in, to support Saudi Arabia and to benefit from their experiences," he said. "Any Saudi triumph is a Kuwaiti triumph," he noted. Al-Fares expressed his appreciation to King Salman, Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman and to all the Saudi youth who partook in this initiative, "which will lead their future".

COP26 President Alok Sharma also welcomed the announcement. "I hope this landmark announcement... will galvanize ambition from others ahead of #COP26," Sharma tweeted, adding he was looking forward to seeing more details on the Saudi plan.

Shortly after, energy giant Saudi Aramco said it committed to being a net zero enterprise by 2050. "Saudi Aramco will achieve an ambition of being also a net zero from our operation by 2050," Aramco chief executive Amin Nasser said at the forum. "We understand that the road will be complex, the transition will have its challenges, but we are confident we can meet them and accelerate our efforts to a low emission future."

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News in brief

Turkey to expel 10 envoys

ANKARA: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday told his foreign minister to expel the ambassadors of 10 countries including Germany and the US who appealed for the release of a jailed civil society leader. "I have ordered our foreign minister to declare these 10 ambassadors as persona non grata as soon as possible," he said. — AFP

Russia reports record deaths, cases

MOSCOW: Russia yesterday reported a record 1,075 COVID deaths in 24 hours as Europe's hardest hit country with dramatically low vaccination rates braces for nationwide curbs from next week. According to fresh government figures, the country saw a record 37,678 new virus cases yesterday. This brings the official death toll to 229,528 - the highest on the continent. — AFP

UK probes Delta subvariant

LONDON: British health officials on Friday said they were formally looking into a subvariant of the Delta strain of the coronavirus, after it was seen in a growing number of cases. The UK Health Security Agency said AY.4.2, which was last week seen in six percent of cases, had been "designated as a variant under investigation" but not yet a "variant of concern". — AFP

Pfizer jab 90% effective in children

WASHINGTON: Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine is more than 90 percent effective in preventing symptomatic disease among children aged 5-11, the company said in a document released Friday. The vaccine was tested with a 10-microgram dose, while older age groups have received 30 micrograms. The doses were administered three weeks apart. — AFP

Baldwin shooting inquiry focuses on custody of gun

LOS ANGELES: The police investigation into a fatal shooting with a prop gun fired by actor Alec Baldwin on a film set was focusing yesterday on the specialist in charge of the weapon and the assistant director who handed it to Baldwin. Ukraine-born cinematographer Halyna Hutchins, 42, was struck in the chest and died shortly after the incident

Rising tide of new leaks threatens to inundate Facebook

SAN FRANCISCO: Facebook held back from doing all it could to stop users from being radicalized and US election misinformation from flooding

Activists set sights on Lebanon polls

BEIRUT: Two years after a now-defunct protest movement shook Lebanon, opposition activists are hoping parliamentary polls will challenge the ruling elite's stranglehold on the country. Hundreds of thousands of Lebanese took to the streets from Oct 17, 2019 in an unprecedented countrywide and cross-sectarian uprising. Their demands were for basic services and the wholesale removal of

a political class they accused of mismanagement and corruption since the end of the 1975-1990 civil war. But as the country sank further into economic turmoil, made worse by the coronavirus pandemic, what demonstrators called their "revolution" petered out.

Many then saw a probe into the cataclysmic 2020 Beirut port blast as the best chance to bring down Lebanon's hereditary political barons, but even intense international pressure in the explosion's aftermath failed to make them change their ways. Last week, feuding parties turned Beirut into a war zone, with heavy exchanges of fire killing seven people in a flare-up sparked by a rally against the main investigating judge.

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Thursday in New Mexico, while director Joel Souza, 48, who was standing behind her, was wounded and hospitalized, then released. Police interviewed Baldwin, who willingly cooperated, but have pressed no charges.

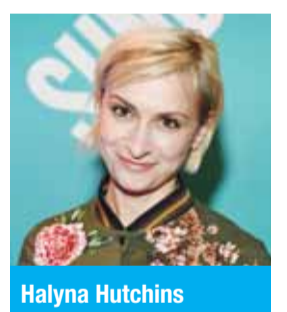
The gun, which was supposed to be loaded with a blank charge, instead had a live round, according to the affidavit submitted by the sheriff's office to obtain a search warrant, local media reported. The affidavit said that Assistant Director Dave Halls, identified as the man who handed the gun to Baldwin, called out "cold gun" as he did so - industry talk to indicate the weapon had only a blank charge. Police are focusing intently on the exact sequence of events that allowed the live round to be introduced to the film set of 19th-century

the social network, according to media reports Friday. An array of US news outlets cited documents from former Facebook worker Frances Haugen, adding to a series of critical revelations already published based on information she provided.

Articles in the New York Times, Washington Post and elsewhere on Friday focused on how Facebook apparently intensified political division. Examples included an internal finding that 10 percent of political content viewed by US users in the days after the election perpetuated the falsehood that the vote



Alec Baldwin



Halyna Hutchins

Western "Rust". A 911 call to police immediately after the shooting conveyed the shock and anger felt on the set.

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had been rigged. What has come to be known as the "Big Lie" has been repeated relentlessly by former President Donald Trump and enraged his supporters, who stormed the US Capital in a deadly attack on Jan 6.

Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms banned Trump from their platforms for encouraging the violent effort to thwart the democratic process. Revelations published Friday indicated that Facebook could have anticipated such trouble.

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JAL AL-DIB, Lebanon: In this file photo taken on Oct 27, 2019, Lebanese protesters take part in a human chain as a symbol of unity during anti-government demonstrations. — AFP

Local

Kuwait reiterates backing for Libya's unity, stability

Kuwait's Foreign Minister discusses Libyan updates with UN official

TRIPOLI: Kuwait's foreign minister reaffirmed his country's unwavering and principled position based on backing Libya's national unity authority, supporting Libya's security and stability and fulfilling the Libyan people's expectations.

Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah made this statement during an international meeting held in Tripoli on Thursday to support Libya's stability. Sheikh Dr Ahmad, who chairs the 156th session of the Arab ministerial council, co-chaired the meeting with Libyan Foreign Minister Najla Al-Manqoush and UN Under-Secretary for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo.

Addressing the event, Sheikh Dr Ahmad called on Libyans to give top priority to the country's supreme interests, find peaceful solutions, decry all forms of violence, abide by relevant UN Security Council resolutions and support the action plan of the 5+5 Joint Military Commission, which was adopted in Geneva and called for pulling all mercenaries and foreign fighters and forces out of Libyan territories in a gradual and balanced way that ensures proper preparations for parliamentary and presidential elections as sched-

uled on December 24, 2021.

The Kuwaiti minister also reiterated that Arab countries are keen on Libya's security and stability and that the Arab League's Council, during its 156th ordinary session in September, approved Resolution 8675 that was adopted on September 9, 2021, at the ministerial level. He elaborated that the resolution stressed commitment to Libya's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity, objection to all types of foreign interference, and total support for the new authority, including the presidential council and national unity government, in its tasks enshrined in the roadmap, leading up to parliamentary and presidential elections on December 24, 2021, backing Libya's stability initiative and implementing UNSC Resolutions 2510, 2670 and 2571 and the outcomes of Berlin conferences.

Earlier, Sheikh Dr Ahmad held a meeting with DiCarlo in which they discussed updates on the Libyan front as well as means to support Government of National Unity so that it could ensure security and stability in Libya, and accomplish aspirations of holding the elections coming December. UN's envoy to Libya Jan Kubis attended the meeting. — KUNA



TRIPOLI: Kuwait's foreign minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah (left) speaks during a joint press conference with Libyan Foreign Minister Najla Al-Manqoush (right) following the opening session of an international conference aimed at supporting stability in Libya at a hotel in the capital Tripoli on Thursday. — AFP

Tunisian President meets Kuwait's Foreign Minister



TUNIS: Tunisian President Kais Saied meets Kuwaiti Foreign Minister and State Minister for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah in Tunis, Tunisia. — KUNA

TUNIS: Tunisian President Kais Saied met with Kuwaiti Foreign Minister and State Minister for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah on

Friday. During the meeting held in Tunis, both sides discussed the deep ties between the two countries, and ways of enhancing them in all fields. — KUNA

NBK extends cybercrime awareness campaign

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has extended its partnership with the Ministry of Interior (MoI), to raise awareness on social media for combating cybercrimes and protecting the society from the related challenges. The partnership ran a successful cybercrime awareness campaign, which has achieved high engagement rates on the bank's social channels.

On this occasion, NBK GCEO, Isam Al-Sager honored the Technical Support Section in the Cybercrime Department who took part in the campaign, in appreciation for their efforts to raise social awareness against cybercrime. The awarding ceremony was attended by NBK officials.

As part of this campaign, NBK and MoI social media platforms will be posting awareness messages aiming to raise social awareness of the basics of cybersecurity, including videos by a group of experts and specialists from the Cybercrime Department of the MoI. This sponsorship comes in support of



anti-cybercrime efforts and the Central Bank of Kuwait's "Let's Be Aware" campaign. Awareness messages cover key topics in this area including protection from fraudulent banking messages, hacking of banking applications and other topics directly related to the security of customers and their accounts.

As part of its efforts to support the anti-cybercrime in Kuwait, NBK saves no effort in educating the community about

the risks of these crimes and supporting the efforts of governmental institutions in Kuwait in this regard.

NBK frequently organizes various activities that contribute to raising awareness about all topics related to the banking sector. It also organizes a wide range of training courses in the areas of combating fraud and financial crime, and frequently posts related awareness material on its social platforms.

Saudi Arabia targets zero...

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Saudi Arabia is estimated to emit about 600 million tons of carbon dioxide per year - more than France and slightly less than Germany. The year 2050 has become a focus for carbon neutrality, defined as achieving a balance between emitting carbon and absorbing carbon from the atmosphere. As COP26 approaches, a string of countries have pledged to aim for net zero emissions by 2050, and global airlines and banks are also targeting the mid-century goal.

UN chief Antonio Guterres said Friday the current climate situation was "a one-way ticket for disaster", stressing the need to "avoid a failure" at COP26 in Glasgow. Held between Oct 31 and Nov 12, the gathering is seen as a crucial step in setting worldwide emission targets to slow global warming.

In March, Saudi Arabia unveiled a campaign to tackle climate change and reduce carbon emissions,

including a plan to plant billions of trees in the coming decades. The OPEC kingpin aims to reduce emissions by generating half of its energy from renewables by 2030. Prince Mohammed said at the time. The prince announced yesterday that the first phase would include planting more than 450 million trees and the rehabilitation of eight million hectares (nearly 20 million acres) of degraded land.

Saudi Arabia also said it would designate new "protected areas". The move brings "the total protected areas in the kingdom to more than 30 percent of its total area", Prince Mohammed said, adding the first set of green initiatives would cost more than 700 billion riyals (\$186.6 billion).

Princess Reema bint Bandar Al-Saud, Saudi Arabia's ambassador to the United States, said the land conservation move was critical. "We want to diversify our economy. Hospitality and tourism are key to that, but so is preserving our environment," she said at the forum. Saudi Arabia currently draws on oil and natural gas to both meet its own fast-growing power demand and desalinate its water - which consumes huge quantities of oil. The initiatives come as energy giant Saudi Aramco, the kingdom's cash cow, faces scrutiny from investors over its emissions. — Agencies

Faced with the mounting criticism, Facebook on Friday detailed anew steps it has taken to protect the election and keep the social network safe. "Our comprehensive strategy to protect the US 2020 elections began years before the election cycle even began and was designed to last through the inauguration," Facebook vice president of integrity Guy Rosen said in a blog post. "Responsibility for the insurrection itself falls squarely on the insurrectionists who broke the law and those who incited them."

Facebook's tenacious efforts to fend off critics is not likely to appease elected officials openly calling for action against the tech giant. More revelations from leaked documents appear in store, and a former member of Facebook's integrity team emerged Friday as another whistleblower. The former employee reportedly told US regulators that Facebook dismissed controversy over Russian meddling in the 2016 presidential election as a "flash in the pan" and that managers undermined efforts to fight disinformation for fear of angering Trump or his fans.

The unnamed new whistleblower filed a complaint with US financial regulator Securities and Exchange Commission that could add to the company's woes, said a Washington Post report. "It will be a flash in the pan. Some legislators will get pissed. And then in a few weeks they will move onto something else. Meanwhile we are printing money in the basement, and we are fine," Tucker Bounds, a member of Facebook's communications team, was quoted in the complaint as saying. The Washington Post reported. The second whistleblower signed the complaint on Oct 13, a week after Haugen's scathing testimony before a Senate panel, according to the report. — AFP

Baldwin shooting inquiry focuses...

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"We've had two people accidentally shot by a prop gun; we need help immediately," the caller tells a police dispatcher. "Was it loaded with a real bullet?" the dispatcher asks. "I don't - I can't tell you that," the caller replies. "And this (expletive) AD that yelled at me at lunch ... this mother (expletive) - he's supposed to check the guns, he's responsible for what happens on the set."

Baldwin has said he was heartbroken and was cooperating fully with the inquiry into "how this tragedy occurred". He retweeted a story from trade journal Variety headlined "Alec Baldwin Was Told Prop Gun Was Safe Before Fatal Shooting, Affidavit Says". "There are no words to convey my shock and sadness regarding the tragic accident that took the life of Halyna Hutchins, a wife, mother and deeply admired colleague of ours," Baldwin tweeted on Friday. The actor and producer said he was "fully cooperating" with a police investigation, as law enforcement officials carried out a search warrant, and reports emerged of allegedly danger-

ous working conditions on the set.

Performing a rehearsal scene, Baldwin fired the gun, striking Hutchins in the chest, and Souza in the shoulder. Hutchins was transported to hospital by helicopter but died of her wounds. "My heart is broken for her husband, their son, and all who knew and loved Halyna," wrote Baldwin. The gun used, and two others, were provided by the film's weapons master, or armorer, who has been identified as 24-year-old Hannah Gutierrez-Reed, the daughter of longtime film-industry armorer Thell Reed.

In a September podcast, the young Gutierrez-Reed said she had some trepidation about taking on the role of lead armorer for the first time for the previous movie she worked on, "The Old Way". "I was really nervous about it at first and I almost didn't take the job 'cause I wasn't sure if I was ready," she said on the "Voices of the West" podcast, before adding, "But doing it, like, it went really smoothly."

Meanwhile, the Los Angeles Times reported that around six crewmembers had walked off set before the shooting to protest working conditions, including long hours. It said Hutchins was among those who had called for safer working conditions. There had been at least three prop gun misfires prior to the fatal accident, the LA Times report said, citing anonymous crewmembers who were on set. — AFP

Rising tide of new leaks threatens to...

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The information was reportedly found in the thousands of internal documents Haugen provided to regulators at the US Securities and Exchange Commission.

Haugen told US lawmakers early this month that the social media giant fuels division, harms children and urgently needs to be regulated, drawing pledges Congress would take up long-delayed action. The testimony by Haugen has fueled one of Facebook's most serious crises yet, and prompted a denial from CEO Mark Zuckerberg, who said in a post on his account that he claim the company prioritizes profit over safety was "just not true".

A common theme in revelations is that Facebook knew about problems hurting users and society but chose, in large part, to ignore them. Articles Friday referred to a report compiled by Facebook's own internal researchers titled "Carol's Journey to QAnon". Facebook's security team in 2019 reportedly created a fake account for a "conservative mother from North Carolina" given the profile name Carol Smith. The social network software quickly offered Smith a "barrage of extreme, conspiratorial and graphic content" including from the QAnon movement known for unfounded conspiracy theories, according to the researchers.

Activists set sights on...

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Lawyer and activist Firas Hamdan is one of many to say that the elections, set for next year, will be a new opportunity for people to raise their voices against the authorities. "We tried everything - protests in a single location and across regions, demonstrations outside the central bank and near the homes of officials, following lawmakers and officials into restaurants and coffee shops, and blocking roads - but all to no avail," he said.

Instead now "the parliamentary elections will be a pivotal moment in confronting the system - even if not the final battle," he added. Hamdan said the polls would allow people to choose between those who want to actually "build a state", and a tired ruling class "that only knows the language of arms, destruction and blood".

It will be a "face-off between thieves and murderers, and citizens who deserve a chance at state building", said the lawyer, who was hit in the heart by a lead pellet at a demonstration last year demanding justice over the port blast. The protest movement has given birth to a clutch of new political parties, as well

as attracting support from more traditional ones such as the Christian Kataeb party. Each has its own vision of how to achieve change, but all largely agree on the importance of the upcoming elections.

Zeina El-Helou, a member of new political party "Lana" (For Us), said it was time to "move on from the nostalgia of throngs of people in the streets chanting" for change. Activists needed instead to work on "managing frustrations and expectations" for the future, she said. The political battle would be tough, as it opposed two sides of "unequal means", she said, referring to her side's limited financing or access to the traditional media for campaigning, and to gerrymandering giving establishment parties the advantage.

The various opposition groups have yet to decide how they will take part in the upcoming polls, and some observers have criticized them for failing to coordinate their efforts effectively. Voters, meanwhile, are busy battling to get by on deeply diminished incomes, amid endless power cuts, price hikes and shortages of everything from medicine to petrol.

Maher Abu Chakra, from the new grouping "Li Haqqi" (For My Right), said the polls would likely not change a thing but it was "important to take part". "It's a first step on the path to lasting change." But he too acknowledged the challenges. "When people's priority becomes making sure they can provide basic needs, they're less ready for confrontation" in politics, he said. — AFP

Local

Kuwait University to receive 36,000 students after halt due to COVID-19

Airport at full capacity as Kuwait transitions back to normal

KUWAIT: More than 36,000 enrolled students at Kuwait University (KU) will attend classes at facilities after a year and half break due to COVID-19 precautionary measures, said an official yesterday. The university has implemented all health requirements and precautionary measures recommended by the Ministry of Health (MoH) related to the return of students at the first semester of the academic year 2021/2022, added the Secretary-General of the University and the official spokesman Dr Mardi Obaid Al-Ayyash in a statement.

Ayyash stated those unvaccinated against COVID-19 need to submit a PCR test every week for them to enter KU facilities. As for unvaccinated visitors' they must submit PCR test within a period not exceeding 72 hours before entering the university campus, he noted. He stated that the Security and Safety Department has provided thermal cameras to detect temperatures before entering buildings, as well as nurse staff provided in all medical clinics.

Based on the directives and decisions of the health authorities, campus visitors must have Immune or Kuwait Mobile ID applications as well as virus free PCR on a weekly basis, Ayyash added. He further noted that the MoH allocated headquarters to conduct tests to detect COVID-19 for university employees on a regular basis, and provided vaccination. He pointed out that this comes within the university's preventive plan, which aims to secure the academic year of 2021/2022 environment and guarantees the safety of students and all.

Ayyash added that the university administrations represented by the Security and Safety,

Construction and Maintenance, the General Services and Nutrition departments have launched a service to communicate through emergency numbers in event of any emergencies in university.

Full capacity

Separately, Kuwait's Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) announced that it is ready to operate Kuwait International Airport at full capacity, starting today. Kuwait International Airport will gradually operate commercial flights for all aviation companies in accordance with the Cabinet's deci-



Mosques host first prayer without distancing

sion in this regard, DGCA Director General Yousif Al-Fozan said.

The directorate succeeded in operating under the challenges and requirements of the coronavirus pandemic crisis, calling on aviation companies and passengers to abide by the COVID-19 safety restrictions needed to enter Kuwait. The Cabinet had on Wednesday announced that Kuwait International Airport would return to operate in full capacity, as part of its plan to return to normal life



KUWAIT: Worshipper perform the Friday prayers in Kuwait City on Friday, after authorities eased measures put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

after the coronavirus pandemic.

Mosques meanwhile hosted on Friday their first prayers without social distancing since the pandemic started, following a Cabinet decision to end social distancing restrictions between worshippers at mosques as of this past Friday. As part of the new instructions, Kuwait ends the mask mandate out-

doors as of today, while fully vaccinated people are allowed to attend conferences, weddings, and social gatherings as of today as well. Kuwait also reopens today issuing visas for those wishing to enter the country who already received two doses of COVID-19 vaccines certified by Kuwait's health ministry. — KUNA

Evangelical Church, Holy Family Cathedral to increase venue capacity within 'weeks'

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Social distancing has ended at all mosques in Kuwait, but churches in Kuwait, headed by the National Evangelical Church of Kuwait (NECK) and the Catholic Church in Kuwait are still awaiting instructions to return to full capacity. "Months ago, we were only allowed a venue capacity of 20 percent; this was

then increased to 30 percent and later 50 percent. We will be increasing attendance in the coming weeks," said Bishop Jun Nones of NECK. "Church members are almost all vaccinated and few of us have already gotten third shots, so we are awaiting the advice of our church leadership to completely remove health restrictions," he added.

On Wednesday, the Cabinet asked the Ministry of Islamic Affairs to end social distancing in mosques from Friday, Oct 22, provided that worshippers are vaccinated, bring their own prayer mats and continue to wear facemasks. The government also announced a "cautious" return to pre-pandemic life, ending 20 months of closures. From today, the airport will resume operations at full capacity and all types of visas will be issued.

HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah also announced the cancellation of almost all restrictions which the government began to impose in late February last year to contain the

spread of the coronavirus, which has claimed more than 2,400 lives in the country. The Cabinet also allowed the return of conferences and wedding parties, provided only vaccinated people are allowed to attend and should wear masks.

On Friday, Catholic worshippers heard from a priest about a return 'soon' to pre-pandemic attendance. "I was there on Friday. We still have to register online to attend church services, although the church is not very strict. We can come even without registration, but to get priority for reserved seats, we have to register," said Alice Mercado, a regular at the Holy Family Cathedral in Kuwait City. "Hopefully, we can see masses of churchgoers again. I miss the crowd of worshippers inside the church. It's been two years now - we cannot sit next to each other even if we are a family," she said.

Churches in Kuwait of all denominations and sects follow rules set by the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs.

KOC eyes higher production capacity

KUWAIT: Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) is actively working towards increasing crude production capacity, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) CEO Hashem Hashem said on Friday. In a statement to the press, Hashem said the information regarding Kuwait Oil Company's production capacity's decline doesn't provide a complete picture of the Kuwaiti oil sector's performance in general nor KOC's performance. He clarified that there are 500,000 barrels per day of potential capacity that is pending to be unlocked as associated capital projects and drilling and workover programs are completed in the coming two years.

The KPC CEO clarified that KOC is currently implementing numerous strategic projects that are directly linked to increasing sustainable production capacity to reach 3.2 million barrels per day gradually in 2025, where the Divided Zone capacity will contribute the additional 350,000 barrels per day to reach overall Kuwait production capacity of 3.5 million barrels per day. The main projects can be summarized as follows: Commissioning of two new gathering centers and complete revamp of several existing gathering centers; Building water handling facilities; Building water injection facilities to increase production and maintain reservoir pressure; Upgrading current Jurassic production facilities and establish two additional facilities to increase light crude production. This plan will be implemented in combination with an integrated drilling program of 500 wells per year annually on average and around 2,000 wells workover, he said, adding that this will be through 71 drilling rigs and 62 workover rigs working in the different areas.

Furthermore, Hashem pointed out that activities in the divided zone are progressing positively after the agreement between the partners, where it is expected to reach pre-ceasing the production level in 2022. The KPC CEO explained that KOC is exerting all efforts to achieve the targeted production capacity, where these efforts were recognized during the wide-spread of COVID-19 virus, as KOC has successfully commissioned Lower Fars Heavy Oil facilities and achieved its targeted production of 60,000 barrels. He concluded by saying that despite the close-down and the contractors' abilities to implement projects, GC-31 has recently commissioned with a design capacity of 100,000 barrels per day, while reiterating that the State of Kuwait is always committed to fulfilling its customers' needs and continuing its role as a secure and reliable crude and petroleum product supplier to the international markets. — KUNA

Defense Minister highlights collaboration for national security

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah stressed Friday cooperation between the personnel of both defense and interior ministries is essential to safeguard national security, stability and territorial integrity. The minister made the remark while making an inspection tour of various military and police sites in the northern part of the country, the Ministry of Defense said in a press release. He conveyed the greetings and appreciation of His Highness the Amir, His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness

the Prime Minister to the staff for their dedication, devotion and sacrifice for the sake of their homeland. During the tour, the defense minister listened to an articulate explanation on the personnel's duties, tasks and preparedness, and military-police joint coordination, cooperation and exercises. He appreciated the great role and sincere efforts of all military and security units in preserving the country's national security, stability and territorial integrity, while underlining that it is crucial to remain vigilant and prepared to defend the homeland. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah poses for a group photo during the tour. — Defense Ministry photo

Q8 delivers 1st SAF supply to Gatwick Airport

LONDON: Kuwait Petroleum International, known by its trademark Q8, said yesterday its marketing arm Q8Aviation has delivered the first sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) supply to Gatwick Airport in south London. In a statement to the press, the company said this important milestone marks the first time a departing flight at Gatwick has used sustainable aviation fuel (SAF). The SAF supply will be used by the British easyJet company to operate 39 flights from Gatwick to Glasgow throughout the COP26 Climate Change Conference, which runs from October 31 to November 12, according to the statement.

The used fuel, which was developed by the Finnish

Neste company, is produced from 100 percent renewable and sustainable waste and residue raw materials, such as used cooking oil and animal fat waste, it said. In its neat form and over its life cycle, SAF can achieve a reduction of up to 80 percent of greenhouse gas emissions compared to fossil jet fuel use.

Kuwait Petroleum International's CEO Sheikh Nawaf Saud Al-Sabah told KUNA that delivering the first SAF supply to Gatwick Airport reflected the company's commitment to meeting customers' low emission fuel and cutting carbon impacts. Sheikh Nawaf added that his company is proud of working with its partners in order to deliver various products, including traditional and renewable fuel, vowing that the company would continue backing the ultimate global goal of reducing hazardous gas emissions.

Meanwhile, the company's Vice CEO for Marketing Azzam Al-Mutawa said Q8Aviation has developed a strong partnership with easyJet, Neste and Gatwick over several years, and has become a fuel supplier to several easyJet sites in European airports. He commended

that delivering the first SAF supply to Gatwick Airport is considered one of several success stories that reflect the company's ability to build long-term relations with its partners. SAF is produced from sustainable feedstocks and is very similar in its chemistry to traditional fossil jet fuel. Using SAF results in a reduction in carbon emissions compared to the traditional jet fuel.

Kuwait Petroleum International, known by its trademark Q8, was established in 1983. Its main focus is to refine and market fuel, lubricants and other various petroleum derivatives globally. Q8 is the international subsidiary of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation, which combines elements of Kuwait oil sector under one corporate umbrella and is recognized as one of the world's top ten energy conglomerates. Q8Aviation is one of the world's leading jet fuel marketers, providing fuel to well over 200 airlines at more than 60 airports across Europe, Africa, the Middle East and the Far East. In addition to serving major international airports, Q8Aviation also has a presence at a growing network of smaller regional airports. — KUNA

Kuwaiti youth participate with space project at Expo Dubai 2020

DUBAI: A team of Kuwaiti youth participated in Expo Dubai 2020 with an ambitious space rocket project, as a step towards exploring space technology and proving their capabilities. "Our participation in this global event is to introduce the world to Kuwait's achievements and to represent it in an honorable way," founder of Kuwait Space Rocket (KSR) project Naser Ashknani said.

The KSR space rocket project is a Kuwaiti project to build and launch a

liquid-propellant rocket into space. Ashknani said, adding, it is "the first of its kind in the Arab world," expected to be launched at the end of this year. The launching of the rocket will be through three stages, starting with a trial stage (KSR-1A), which aims to confirm the rocket readiness without any problem with travel distance of about five kilometers, he said. The second stage is the construction of (KSR-1B) rocket with a new engine that aims to reach space, a step that also seeks to develop the first rocket over a distance of about 30 km, he added.

As for the last and future stage (KSR-2) the launch of the rocket will be with a range of 116 km, through which it will cross outer space and "achieve the dream," Ashknani said. The Kuwaiti Space Rocket project started in January 2018 by Kuwaiti youth Ashknani, engineers Sulieman Al-Fuhaid and Fahad



DUBAI: The team of Kuwaiti youth participating in Expo Dubai 2020 with their space rocket project. — KUNA

Al-Fahad. They devoted the first year of the project on the initial designs and in 2019, the team began manufacturing

KSR-1 and the project was fully completed in January 2020. — KUNA

Local

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Electronic bracelets to keep track of persons under house arrest

KUWAIT: The public prosecution is preparing a list of 17 prisoners who were approved to complete their jail sentences at their homes wearing electronic bracelets, Al-Anbaa Arabic daily reported. A source quoted in the report said the beneficiaries are of different nationalities - all males - who were sentenced for less than three years for beating, breach of trust and other offenses that do not qualify as dangerous criminal offenses. The source said the list is the start of the e-bracelet project, and beneficiaries were selected based on certain criteria such as good behavior, adding the success of this trial will lead to approving other names. The prisoner will be monitored in the house of his choice, and if he leaves, he will be taken back to prison.

Ex-convict rearrested

A man who was recently released from the central prison was arrested after he was caught breaking the traffic law. Police arrested the citizen in his 30s for driving in the wrong way. When his car was searched, drugs and cash were found. Police patrols noticed two vehicles being driven in the wrong way in Kaifan. The suspect was arrested after he uttered strange and incomprehensible words. He then told the police he was recently released from prison and did not want any problems, and handed them a bag of drugs. Police searched the second car, which was driven by a woman, and found 37 bags of a white substance, three bags containing an herbal material and four bags containing a dark material. An unused joint was also found along with six white tablets, two yellow tablets and two pink tablets. The woman was also arrested.

Residency violators

Residency affairs detectives arrested a man for running a bogus domestic help office. Detectives received information about the office which sheltered residency law violators and absconders and employed them on a temporary basis. Ten men and women were arrested, including those without IDs and some with article 20 visas who did not work for their sponsors. One woman was referred to criminal detectives for having a child out of wedlock. Residency affairs stats show that 20 bogus offices have been busted and 60 residency violators arrested.

KD 66,000 gone

A man told police he gave a person some money but he did not return it. He said he gave the suspect KD 66,000 to buy medical equipment for a project. The citizen said he attempted to call the man who took the money several times to no avail, and this is what prompted him to file a complaint.

DWC organizes breast cancer awareness day

KUWAIT: The Diplomatic Women's Committee in Kuwait, in collaboration with Dar Al-Shifa Hospital, organized a breast cancer awareness day in the presence of Shiekha Halah Bader Mohamad Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al Sabah, as well as Ambassador of the Republic of Sierra Leone, Head of the Committee Ishata Thomas, and President of DWC Madam Ruba Ouro, spouse of the Ambassador of the Republic of Togo.

Among the attendees were Narjis Al-Shatti, the

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: People compete in a motosurf tournament held in Kuwait yesterday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KFH renews memorandum of understanding with GUST

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has renewed the Memorandum of Understanding with Gulf University for Science and Technology's (GUST) aiming to continue cooperation and execution of joint programs including training courses, provision of academic and research expertise, internships, attraction of creative and distinguished youth within "Forsa" program and other employment programs to work at KFH as well as the organizing of social and educational activities and events.

The signing ceremony took place at KFH head office in presence of Acting Group CEO, AbdulWahab Essa Al-Rushood, Group Chief HR Officer Zeyad Abdullah Al-Omar, Group Deputy General Manager - Public Relations and Media, Yousef Abdullah Al-Ruwaieh and from GUST Chairman - Board of Trustees, Nawaf A. Arhama and several university officials.

Alongside the signing ceremony, the Group Chief Human Resources Officer, Zeyad Abdullah AlOmar affirmed KFH keenness to enhance partnership with academic institutions as part of its care for students and the educational process as well as supporting national talents. He expressed his pleasure for the renewal of the Memorandum of Understanding with GUST thus highlighting the deep-rooted relationship with the university as the first memorandum of understanding was signed in 2014.

Also, he valued and appreciated GUST role in qualifying and empowering national cadets to work in the private sector environment and reiterated the need to continue this partnership to enhance and develop communication channels between GUST and KFH through various initiatives that would stand as an added value for both parties.

Omar said "We are fully committed towards our society, students and human cadets. We have made



KUWAIT: Abdulwahab Al-Rushood in between KFH and GUST senior officials.

significant achievements in the field of student support and cooperation with public and private educational institutions. We shall continue our commitment and provide the best ways to support all occupational and development efforts and enhance KFH position in this respect."

He added that KFH supports GUST efforts in directing the students powers to develop their innovations through specialized programs in Islamic economy applications and Islamic banks activities in addition to the specialized programs in connection with information technology, banking tendencies and IT applications which have gained tremendous momentum.

Also, he stated that universities have a major responsibility in achieving very high calibers in their educational outcome. He mentioned that this responsibility is born jointly with institutions that attract these graduates to support them, increase their efficiency level and qualify them occupationally.

He added that KFH is distinguished in the field of manpower training and orientation as it provides advanced and integrated programs in cooperation with major global academic institutions, thus aiming to fulfil the modern requirements of the banking

industry. In this respect he referred to "Forsa" program for Kuwaiti newly graduated toppers who join KFH. The program provides participants with rich information and expertise according to global standards applied by highly reputable organizations in the field of technology e.g., Google, Apple and Microsoft.

From his side, the Chairman - Board of Trustees - GUST, Nawaf Arhama expressed his deep appreciation for KFH initiatives and continuous support to the development of GUST students' abilities. This strategic partnership comprises several aspects including employment of distinguished youth at KFH, developing graduates' abilities in the field work, cooperation in the field of internships, exchange of research, supporting students conferences and clubs and other aspects of cooperation. Also, he praised KFH economic tendency being a pioneer in Islamic banking and one of the highly reputable institutions. Furthermore, he indicated that KFH plays a major role in supporting education and fostering students' events and activities. He added that the main priority on GUST list is to prepare students for the business market fully equipped with science and talents that would enable them to face all challenges.



Nawaf Arhama (left) and Zeyad Al-Omar sign the agreement.



Nawaf Arhama (left) and Zeyad Al-Omar pose for a picture after signing the agreement.

Advisor of DWC, Narjis Al-Yousifi, member of the board of directors of Dar Al-Shifa hospital, Dr Ahmad Nasrallah, CEO of Dar Al-Shifa Hospital and a number of spouses of ambassadors, in addition to Fouzia Abdul Basit, Media and Public Relations Officer, Nadra from the Kyrgyz Embassy and many other members of DWC.

The awareness seminar included several activities such as blood pressure and blood sugar tests, skin health checkups, as well as several breast cancer medical and nutrition lectures conducted by the specialist doctors and consultants.

The participants expressed their admiration for the role of the hospital and diversity to raise awareness among women to perform medical examination for breast cancer prevention. DWC presented a shield of appreciation to the management of the hospital. The event concluded with gifts presentation ceremony and guests' luncheon.





Sudan mass protests back civilian rule but army remains strong

Two Americas: How US left and right stopped communicating

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Islamic defense consultancy takes on West

SADAT gains growing scrutiny over US allegations

ISTANBUL: Turkish businessman Melih Tanriverdi seethes at the suggestion that his private defense consultancy has become Ankara's secret weapon in wars across North Africa and the Middle East. SADAT International Defense Consultancy has gained growing scrutiny over US allegations that it trains Syrians who then get dispatched to support pro-Turkish forces in war zones such as Libya. The company's manifesto says SADAT "aims to assist the Islamic world to take the role among the super global powers as a self-sufficient global power".

But Tanriverdi tells AFP those accusations are part of a Western disinformation campaign designed to tarnish the image of Turkey and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. "Our company has nothing to do with being a mercenary organization," he said in a written interview. "SADAT's entry into the field of action as an unexpected actor against the global powers... explains the reason for this disinformation," he said in English.

The firm was established in 2012 by Tanriverdi's father Adnan—a brigadier general whose service ended during a purge of Islamic influence from the traditionally secular military in 1996. Its stealth role in promoting Turkey's interests across the Muslim world has gained renewed attention as Erdogan seeks to secure a foothold in Afghanistan following the US troop withdrawal. Turkey proposed using private contractors to protect Kabul's airport so that it can fully reopen to international flights—a role theoretically tailor-made for SADAT.

Tanriverdi says only that SADAT "can provide consultancy and training services to security and military units that will ensure the security of the air-

port". Its span of proposed operations—colored green on a company logo showing a world map—stretches from North Africa to the Middle East and parts of central and southeast Asia. In 2020, the US Department of Defense said SADAT sent teams to Libya to train Syrian fighters on behalf of Turkish-backed forces of the Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli.

SADAT "maintains supervision and payment of the estimated 5,000 pro-GNA Syrian fighters in Libya," a Pentagon report said at the time. Tanriverdi dismissed this and claims that SADAT funneled fighters to Azerbaijan in last year's war with Armenia over disputed Nagorno-Karabakh as a "conspiracy theory".

"SADAT has never been in Syria, Libya or Azerbaijan," he said. "Do you really think we are professional enough to fool the global powers?" Some analysts think they are.

'Facilitator'

"There are credible sources that suggest SADAT plays a key role in training and mobilizing proxies in Syria and using them as mercenaries," American University and Orion Policy Institute terrorism expert Suat Cubukcu told AFP. The elder Tanriverdi initially became Erdogan's senior security adviser after the Turkish leader survived a coup attempt in 2016. Some believe SADAT offers the Turkish government plausible deniability about its role abroad.

A report by US Joint Chiefs of Staff Army officer Matt Powers called SADAT a "facilitator between Ankara and Syrian proxy fighters" that Turkey then sends to other war zones. "There is a lot of speculation that Turkish intelligence uses cut outs to pay for proxies, giving a veneer of legitimacy to the use of Syrians in operations abroad," the Foreign Policy Research Institute's Middle East program director Aaron Stein told AFP. "However,

hosting a reception on Tuesday for global business leaders at Windsor Castle.

Royals author Robert Hardman told the BBC there would be "a mild degree of irritation at the palace this morning" that news of the queen's hospital stay had become public. "There's a concern to maintain the dignity of the office," Hardman said, adding officials had likely feared "huge banks of cameras and 24-hour news setting up outside the hospital". However, veteran BBC royal correspondent Nicholas Witchell said royal officials "have not been giving us a complete, reasonable picture of what has been occurring".

"Rumors and misinformation proliferate (and) thrive when there is an absence of good, proportionate, trustworthy information. "We must hope that we can rely on what the palace is now telling us," he added, calling assurances that the queen was in good spirits "a handy phrase that the palace dusts off at moments such as this". Richard Palmer, royal correspondent at the Daily Express, also called the phrase a "palace cliché". "Royal sources had been keen to encourage the impression that she had just overdone it but may struggle to convince the public now," he said.

No fuss

The queen is head of state in the UK and 15 other realms around the world, including Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Preparations are already under way to celebrate her Platinum Jubilee next year, marking her 70 years on the throne. The palace said she was back at her desk on Thursday afternoon undertaking "light duties". The disclosure, however, will inevitably raise fears for her health and the toll of her public duties given her advanced age. Her late husband, Prince Philip, died in April just a few weeks before his 100th birthday, months after spending four weeks in hospital. The monarch, who still rides and drives on her private estates, has been especially active since returning from her Balmoral estate in northeast Scotland at the start of October.

Last week, she was seen for the first time at a major public event using a walking stick, but royal officials said it was not linked to any specific health condition. She is still expected to attend a series of events linked to the upcoming UN climate summit in Glasgow next month. — AFP



SADAT 'aims to assist' the Islamic world



ISTANBUL: This handout photograph released by SADAT International shows Melih Tanriverdi, CEO of SADAT International Defense Consultancy as he poses in Istanbul. SADAT boss Melih Tanriverdi seethes at the suggestion that his private defense consultancy has become Turkey's secret weapon in wars across North Africa and the Middle East. — AFP

we have no idea how this actually works." Tanriverdi refused to name any clients. "We operate on every continent, including Africa," he said.

Ideological drive

Cubukcu said SADAT's overtly political view of the world and lack of its own armed units distinguished it from Wagner—a Russian firm associated closely with the Kremlin that is also pushing into resource-rich Africa—or its US counterparts. "SADAT has ideology-oriented and much more intertwined relations with its home government," Cubukcu said.

But Tanriverdi rejected speculation that his firm has grown into an informal part of the Turkish state. He said SADAT needed state approval to "export services or defense industry products" but did not take instructions from ministries or Turkey's MIT intelligence agency. Although the elder Tanriverdi no longer serves as Erdogan's security adviser—the company's anger at the West lives on. "Countries that come from thousands of kilometers away... spread fake news to accuse our president and his former chief adviser, Adnan Tanriverdi," the younger Tanriverdi said. — AFP

Confusion reigns over British Queen's health

LONDON: Questions mounted on Friday about the health of 95-year-old Queen Elizabeth II after she had tests and spent a night in hospital, despite royal officials saying she was resting at home. Buckingham Palace said on Wednesday morning that she pulled out of a planned engagement in Northern Ireland and had been advised to rest on medical advice. But royal officials conceded late on Thursday that she had in fact had "some preliminary investigations" in hospital on Wednesday, and stayed overnight, after The Sun newspaper broke the news. She returned from King Edward VII's Hospital in central London to her Windsor Castle home west of the capital and was said to be "in good spirits".

Prime Minister Boris Johnson sent his best wishes, his spokesman said, while members of the public near her Buckingham Palace home in central London said they were unperturbed. Kirsty Duffield, an operations manager, told AFP health checks were "quite normal" at the Queen's age and it was "really positive" that she was released so quickly. Housewife Katie Lavin pointed out the monarch was still riding horses and appeared strong and independent, even though it was clear she was "getting a little bit fragile". Visiting US theatre director Charles Fee said she would be described as "a tough broad" across the Atlantic.

'Rumors and misinformation'

Britain's Press Association news agency said the hospital visit and stay was not initially disclosed because it was expected to be short, and to protect her privacy. She stayed overnight for "practical reasons", said to be because it was too late to make the 26-mile trip back to Windsor. The Queen has previously been treated at the exclusive private clinic, which is known for treating the royal family, including in 2013 for gastroenteritis, when she also stayed for one night. The development follows several busy weeks during which the monarch undertook more than a dozen public engagements, including



LONDON: Police officers stand on duty outside King Edward VII's Hospital in central London. Queen Elizabeth II spent a night in the private King Edward VII's Hospital after being advised to rest. — AFP

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21ST SEPT TO 31ST DEC - 3 MONTHS & 10 DAYS

International

Arrests in UK as fears grow of nightclub needle attacks

Revelers 'injected with drug-filled syringes' at clubs

News in brief

Senior Qaeda leader killed

WASHINGTON: A senior Al-Qaeda leader was killed in a US drone strike in Syria, the Pentagon said Friday. The strike comes two days after a base in southern Syria, used by the US-led coalition fighting the Islamic State group, was assaulted. "A US airstrike today in northwest Syria killed senior al-Qaeda leader Abdul Hamid Al-Matar," said Central Command spokesman Army Major John Rigsbee in a statement. There were no known casualties from the strike, he said, adding it was conducted using an MQ-9 aircraft. "The removal of this Al-Qaeda senior leader will disrupt the terrorist organization's ability to further plot and carry out global attacks," he said. At the end of September the Pentagon killed Salim Abu-Ahmad, another senior Al-Qaeda commander in Syria, in an airstrike near Idlib in the country's northwest. — AFP

German infections soar

FRANKFURT: Germany's seven-day coronavirus incidence rate reached 100 infections per 100,000 people on Saturday for the first time since May, following a surge in cases in recent weeks. The number hit 100 after rising from 68.7 just eight days ago, the Robert Koch health institute (RKI) said. The milestone comes a day after the German health ministry warned that "we are seeing an escalation of the situation". The upwards trend "became visible in almost all age groups over the past week and it is to be expected that the increase in case numbers will pick up speed in the further course of autumn and winter," health ministry spokesman Oliver Ewald said. Germany recorded 86 new Covid-19 deaths on Saturday, with the country's total toll rising to 95,077, official figures said. There were also 15,145 new infections recorded over 24 hours, the figure having risen 31 percent over the last eight days. — AFP

JFK assassination files

WASHINGTON: The White House said Friday it would delay the release of long-classified documents related to the assassination of US President John F. Kennedy. President Joe Biden wrote in a statement that the remaining files "shall be withheld from full public disclosure" until December 15 next year - nearly 60 years after Kennedy's assassination in Dallas, Texas in 1963. In 2018, former president Donald Trump released several thousand secret files on the assassination, but withheld others on national security grounds. The White House said the national archivist needs more time for a review into that redaction, which was slowed by the pandemic. Biden also said the delay was "necessary to protect against identifiable harm to the military defense, intelligence operations, law enforcement, or the conduct of foreign relations" and that this "outweighs the public interest in immediate disclosure." — AFP

Eswatini bans protests

MANZINI: A ban on protests silenced Eswatini's pro-democracy movement Friday, as regional mediators sought to resolve the deadly unrest that enflamed the kingdom this week. Formerly known as Swaziland, Africa's last absolute monarchy has been rocked by demonstrations that prompted authorities to deploy the army and throttle the internet. At least two people were killed and dozens injured in clashes with security forces, who fired tear gas, live rounds and rubber bullets to disperse crowds. After the government stopped issuing protest permits, Friday saw shops reopen in the main cities of Mbabane and Manzini, with residents walking on the streets peacefully, according to an AFP correspondent. Mediators from the 16-nation Southern African Development Community met King Mswati III on Thursday and are scheduled to engage with various political parties on Friday. — AFP

Peru's death hits 200,000

LIMA: Peru, which has the world's highest COVID-19 death rate per capita, has surpassed 200,000 deaths from the coronavirus, the health ministry said on Friday. The ministry announced 25 new deaths over the previous 24 hours, taking the South American country over the symbolic threshold with 200,003 deaths since the pandemic started in March 2020. The Andean country of 33 million has also recorded 2.2 million infections. With 6,065 deaths per million population, Peru's COVID mortality rate is the highest in the world, according to an AFP count based on official data. The news comes at a time of falling daily cases and deaths attributed to the increase in vaccinations, although authorities remain worried about a potential new wave of infections due to the Delta variant that is now predominant in the country. "We're maintaining a high level of control," health minister Hernando Cevallos said recently. — AFP

LONDON: Police in England said they have arrested three men, after several days of increasing alarm at reports that revellers had been injected with needles at nightclubs. Young women and men, mostly students, have said they believe they were injected with drug-filled syringes at clubs and bars. Women have for years been warned to be alert to their drinks being spiked with alcohol or sedative drugs while on nights out.

Longstanding fears about the safety of women in public places have also come under renewed focus after the high-profile murder of a London woman by a rogue police officer earlier this year. Police have said there had been around 140 confirmed reports of drink spiking in September and October and 24 reports of injection. Senior officer Jason Harwin of coordinating body the National Police Chiefs' Council said the reports were "very concerning" and the council was "working at pace" to "understand the scale of offending".

Arrests

Police in Nottinghamshire county in central

England said on Friday they had made two arrests in an ongoing investigation into "spiking" incidents. The pair were suspected of conspiring to administer poison "with intent to injure, annoy or aggrieve". The force said the arrests were not linked to any specific recent report of drink spiking or use of a

needle. Police in neighboring Lincolnshire arrested a man on suspicion of possessing drugs with intent to administer them, though officers said no needle was involved. Nottinghamshire Police said they had 15 reports of "alleged spiking by something sharp"

'Vile crimes'

Students in dozens of university towns and cities have responded with plans to boycott nightlife venues next week, calling for tighter entrance security and better safeguarding. More than 163,000 have signed a petition urging the government to make it compulsory for nightclubs to thoroughly search guests on entry.

Victims have reported passing out or feeling woozy shortly after experiencing a sharp pain, and later finding apparent puncture marks on their skin. Their accounts were discussed by the House of Commons home affairs committee on Wednesday, with its chair, Yvette Cooper, describing the alleged attacks as "vile crimes". Some medics and drugs experts, though, have questioned what powerful sedative substance could be administered in such a way without the victim immediately noticing. — AFP

“ Intent to injure, annoy, aggrieve ”

needle. Police in neighboring Lincolnshire arrested a man on suspicion of possessing drugs with intent to administer them, though officers said no needle was involved. Nottinghamshire Police said they had 15 reports of "alleged spiking by something sharp"

Two Americas: How US left and right stopped communicating

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump may have lost last year's US presidential election but within his own dominion he remains the undisputed leader of the free world. The entirely false notion that Democrats stole the presidency from Trump is likely to be a hot topic on "TRUTH Social," a conservative platform he is adding to the already hyper-polarized US media ecosystem.

Wednesday's announcement of the launch planned for early next year is noteworthy because it bolsters speculation that Trump - who is banned from Twitter - is gearing up for another presidential run in 2024. More profoundly, it demonstrates how the former reality TV star is able to capitalize on deep fractures in American society that are being intensified like never before through the echo chambers of social and traditional media.

Where once Americans could agree on a shared set of facts, now two implacable tribes eye each other suspiciously from their respective siloes, each armed with their own version of reality served up by their favorite media outlet or smartphone app. Investigative journalist Carl

Bernstein, whose reporting on the Watergate affair alongside Bob Woodward helped bring down Richard Nixon, has called for media and politicians to pay more attention to countering misinformation splitting the country.

"The division that is separating and polarizing us in this country is vicious. It is deep," he said. "It is full of hate and anger. And most of that hate and anger is resting on big lies." Watch conservative Fox News on any given evening, and you could almost be convinced that it is reporting on an entirely different country from the one covered by left-leaning MSNBC, often with almost no overlap in the news agenda.

'Owning the libs'

Depending on whether Americans hone their opinions on Parler or Twitter, Trump is either the last bulwark against a woke cultural tide presaging a socialist takeover - or the biggest threat to democracy since the Civil War. The inhabitants of these two competing bubbles rarely encounter information that might challenge their world view or show them what their opponents are think-



LOS ANGELES: A person checks the app store on a smartphone for 'Truth Social,' with a photo of former US President Donald Trump on a computer screen in the background. — AFP

ing. Put more simply, no one talks to the other side anymore.

It's not just last year's election that gets completely contradictory coverage from right-wing and progressive media sources. Reporting on the nationwide demonstrations that followed the murder by police of African American George Floyd offered the same dichotomy, with the left being fed images of noble protest for racial justice and the right told the country was on the verge of a violent takeover by communist thugs.

This bifurcation has reached the point where someone's views on a

range of hot-button issues - from abortion, LGBT rights and immigration to gun control and health care - can be reliably inferred from their choice of cable news channel. Division has been a hallmark of the Trump era. A record 81 million people voted for Joe Biden in 2020, but the 74 million that voted for Trump marked the second-highest figure ever posted by a candidate. On the right, figures like the former president's son Donald Trump Jr prioritize "owning the libs" - sparking outrage and hand-wringing among progressives - over serious debates about ideology. — AFP

Trapped migrant regrets Belarus-EU crossing

KLESZCZELE: Exhausted and trapped in a cold, "cruel" forest, Lebanese barber Ali Abd Alwareth said he regretted his week-long bid to enter the European Union via the Belarus-Poland border. "It's miserable. Something that you don't wish for your worst enemy... A nightmare," the soft-spoken 24-year-old with Crohn's disease told AFP.

Sitting cross-legged on a bed of pine needles and dead leaves near the border town of Kleszczele in eastern Poland, Abd Alwareth described being a ping-pong ball for the guards. "I tried crossing like five, six times, and every time I got caught and deported back to the border" by Poland, he said in English. The Belarusian side meanwhile refused to let him return to Minsk to fly home. Abd Alwareth said security forces told him: "You have only two choices: either you die here or you die in Poland. That's it."

One of thousands of migrants - mostly from the Middle East - who have tried to penetrate the 400-



KLESZCZELE: 24-year-old Ali Abd Alwareth from Lebanon sits in the woods outside the Emergency State zone at the Polish-Belarusian border and waits for arrival of Border Guard patrol. — AFP

kilometre border since August, Abd Alwareth said he left the financial crisis in Lebanon in search of a better life. The whole journey from his home region of Bekaa cost \$4,000 and involved help from a Minsk-based company he found on social media. The EU suspects Belarus is masterminding the unprecedented influx of migrants into Poland as a

form of retaliation against EU sanctions, but the regime has put the blame on the West.

'I feel like a puppet'

Poland has sent thousands of troops, built a razor-wire fence and implemented a three-month state of emergency that bans journalists and charity workers along the immediate border area. During his gruelling time in the woods, Abd Alwareth said he drank water off of leaves, was too cold to sleep, and was once hit on the head by either the Polish army or police. Though "exhausted" and "devastated," he said he understood that the border guards "are doing their job. They are protecting their country. We are illegal."

On Friday, Abd Alwareth and his Syrian walking companions managed to get in touch with Polish activists, who met them in the forest with warm clothes and food as well as offering support when the guards arrived. His fate up in the air, Abd Alwareth hopes to receive asylum in Poland - or at the very least, to return to Lebanon. "Okay, you don't want me here, you don't want me in Belarus. Just depict me back home. That's all I'm asking for," he said. "What is happening in the forest is cruel... I feel like a puppet. It was my decision, I came this way - but not to be treated like this," he added. "I refuse to die at the border. I just want to see my mum." — AFP

'Monument' Merkel gets standing ovation at last EU summit

BRUSSELS: European leaders gave German Chancellor Angela Merkel a standing ovation on Friday at her last EU summit after a 16-year reign that helped guide the bloc through major ups and downs. Merkel has attended a staggering 107 EU summits that saw some of the biggest twists in recent European history, including the euro-zone debt crisis, an inflow of Syrian refugees, Brexit and the creation of the bloc's landmark pandemic recovery fund.

"You are a monument," the host of the summits, European Council chief Charles Michel, said in the closed-door homage to her, according to an official in the room. An EU summit "without Angela is like Rome without the Vatican or Paris without the Eiffel tower", Michel said. He handed Merkel a perspex cube with a globe described as an "artistic impression" of the Europa

building where EU summits are hosted.

Merkel, with characteristic lack of fanfare, thanked journalists for their long nights at summits, though she offered a strong word of caution on the challenges still facing the EU, and her German successor. "I am leaving the European Union, as far as my responsibility of Federal Chancellor is concerned, at a point in time where there is cause for concern," she said. "We have overcome many crises but we have a series of unresolved problems," she said, citing disputes on migration, the bloc's economy, and rule of law in EU countries.

'Compromise machine'

Luxembourg's Prime Minister Xavier Bettel called Merkel a "compromise machine" who "usually did find something to unite us" through



BRUSSELS: (Left to right) Poland's Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel, France's President Emmanuel Macron and Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban arrive on the second day of a European Union (EU) summit on October 22, 2021. — AFP

marathon intra-EU negotiations. "Europe will miss her," he said. Austrian Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg called her "undoubtedly a great European" and "a haven of peace, if you like, within the European Union". Her departure, he said, "will leave a

hole". Her final summit, a two-day affair in Brussels, leaned once again on her soft-power skills to ease a burning row with Poland over its rejection of the EU's legal order - something many believed could be the next existential threat to the European Union. — AFP

International

US seeks to contain Beijing anger after Biden vows Taiwan defense

Biden vows to defend the island from attack by Beijing

WASHINGTON: The United States on Friday sought to prevent an escalation with China, saying there was no change in Taiwan policy after President Joe Biden promised to defend the island from attack by Beijing. Tensions have soared in recent months as Beijing steps up air incursions near Taiwan, a self-ruling democracy that the growing Asian power has vowed one day to take over, by force if necessary.

At a CNN televised forum in Baltimore on Thursday evening, Biden was asked whether the United States would come to Taiwan's defense if China invaded. "Yes," he responded. "We have a commitment to that." Biden's statement appeared at odds with the long-held US policy of "strategic ambiguity," where Washington helps build Taiwan's defenses but does not explicitly promise to come to the island's help in the event of war.



Tensions soar as Beijing steps up air incursions

The United States clarified Friday that it was still guided by the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act, in which Congress required the United States to provide weaponry to "enable Taiwan to maintain sufficient self-defense capabilities." "The president was not announcing any change in our policy and there is no change in our policy," State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters, reiterating earlier White House comment.

"We will uphold our commitments under the act, we will continue to support Taiwan's self-defense and will continue to oppose any unilateral changes to the status

quo," Price said. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, on a visit to NATO headquarters in Brussels, declined to discuss "hypotheticals" but said the United States "will continue to help Taiwan with the sorts of capabilities that it needs to defend itself."

New firmness?

Beijing said that Biden's comments risked "damaging Sino-US relations," warning Washington on Friday to "act and speak cautiously on the Taiwan issue." "China has no room for compromise on issues involving its core interests," foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said at a press briefing. The US should not underestimate China's "staunch determination, firm will and strong ability" to defend against what it sees as threats to its sovereignty, Wang added.

Price declined to reply to Wang's remarks, saying, "We have been nothing but clear when it comes to where we stand." Strategic ambiguity is designed to deter a Chinese invasion but also discourage Taiwan from formally declaring independence—something Beijing regards as a red line.

Biden's comments were welcomed by Taiwan, which has pushed to bolster international alliances to protect itself from Beijing. "The US government has demonstrated, through actual actions, their rock solid support for Taiwan," Presidential Office spokesman Xavier Chang said in a statement. Biden made similar remarks in August during an interview with ABC, insisting that the US would always defend key allies, naming Taiwan among them, despite the withdrawal from Afghanistan in the face of the victorious Taliban.

Biden's remarks were unlikely to come out of ignorance. The veteran politician himself was serving on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1979 and voted to approve the Taiwan Relations Act. Richard McGregor, a senior fellow for East Asia at the Lowy Institute, said

formance as reason to dissolve the government," said Jonas Horner of the International Crisis Group. Even ministers within Hamdok's cabinet have expressed support for rival camps. On Thursday, Industry Minister Ibrahim al-Sheikh joined in Thursday's mass rallies backing civilian rule.

On Friday, Finance Minister Gibril Ibrahim - an ex-rebel leader from Darfur, who joined the government after a landmark 2020 peace deal - took part in Friday prayers at the pro-military sit-in. Volker Perthes, UN Special Representative to Sudan, stressed "the need to maintain the constitutional partnership between the military and civilian component" after meeting Thursday with the leader of Sudan's ruling Sovereign Council, military chief General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan. Perthes urged for a "return to dialogue and (to) build on achievements of the transitional period."

'Keep the military at bay'

Tensions between the two sides have long simmered, but divisions ratcheted up after a failed coup on September 21. Popular support for the government led by Hamdok, who was picked in 2019 by a once-united FFC, has also waned over a tough raft of economic reforms that took a toll on ordinary Sudanese.

Delays in delivering justice to the families of those killed under Bashir, and even during the 2019 protests following his ouster, have left Hamdok vulnerable to criticism. And since mid-September, the government has been criticized for its handling of anti-government protests in the east - resulting in a blockade of the country's key maritime trade hub of Port Sudan, triggering shortages nationwide. "Hamdok and the FFC have failed to meet people's expectations," said Mirghani. "Thursday's protests were not particularly backing them, as much as simply asserting revolutionary goals."

The security forces - including the regular Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the much-feared paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) - have maintained a powerful hold, and are heavily involved in everything from outlining foreign policy to running lucrative companies. "The military - both SAF and RSF - are newly determined not to relinquish their political and economic power," said Horner, but added that the main protests can still be a counterweight to their strength. "Popular opposition has, and can continue, to keep the military at bay," Horner said. —AFP

Sudan mass protests back civilian rule but army remains strong

KHARTOUM: Mass protests in Sudan show strong support for a civilian-led democracy, but analysts warn street demonstrations may have little impact on powerful factions pushing a return to military rule. Under a 2019 power-sharing deal after the ouster of long-time dictator Omar al-Bashir, Sudan is ruled by a sovereign council of civilian and military representatives tasked with overseeing a transition to a full civilian government. But cracks in the leadership are growing wider.

On Thursday, tens of thousands of Sudanese marched in several cities to back the full transfer of power to civilians, and to counter a rival days-long sit-in outside the presidential palace in the capital Khartoum demanding a return to "military rule". The two sides represent opposing factions of the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC), the civilian umbrella group which spearheaded demonstrations that led to the army's overthrow and jailing of Bashir. "The protests were an explicit rejection of the prospect of a military rule, and an emphasis that the transition to civilian rule remains the goal," Sudanese analyst Othman Mirghani told AFP. But, "despite their size, they have little impact on the political reality at play," he added.

'Divisions'

Critics have charged that the rival sit-in has been orchestrated by senior figures in the security forces, Bashir sympathizers and other "counter-revolutionaries". But it has drawn support from some of those hit hard by tough International Monetary Fund-backed economic reforms implemented by Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, a former UN economist. Sudan's precarious transition has been marred by political splits and power struggles among factions at the helm of the transition.

"The FFC's own divisions, that detract from their ability to govern, are making it easy for the military and the FFC breakaway group to point to poor per-



KHARTOUM: Sudanese pro-military protesters listen to prayers sermon, with the attendance of the Minister of Finance, in front of the presidential palace in the capital Khartoum. — AFP

7 killed in Bangladesh Rohingya camp attack

BALUKHALI: Gunmen killed seven people and wounded at least 20 Friday in a Rohingya refugee camp in Bangladesh, police and a medic said, an attack that heightens tensions after the recent shooting of a prominent community leader. The attackers shot and stabbed people attending an Islamic school in the camp, a regional police chief said.

Four people died instantly. Three others died at a hospital in one of the camps in the Balukhali refugee complex, part of a bigger network of squalid settlements housing 900,000 people. Police did not say how many were wounded but a medic with Doctors Without Borders (MSF) who requested anonymity said about 20 people were badly hurt. "About 20 seriously injured people came to our hospital, many with no arms, no legs or no eyes. Their condition is very bad," the doctor said.

Police official Kamran Hossain said "Rohingya miscreants" entered the Darul Ulum Nadwatul Ulama al-Islamia madrasa before dawn and "randomly hacked and shot people inside". Security forces immediately sealed off the camp, which houses more than 27,000 people. Camp residents shared images on social media of bodies on the floor of the madrasa. The images



IN THE AIR: This file handout picture taken and released by Taiwan's Defense Ministry shows a Taiwan F-16 fighter (left) jet monitoring one of two Chinese H-6 bombers that flew over the Bashi Channel south of Taiwan and the Miyako Strait, near Japan's Okinawa Island. — AFP

Biden may have wanted to show greater firmness. "I suspect Biden was not trying to announce any change. So it was either loose language, or perhaps a slightly harder tone, deliberately adopted because of the way Beijing has increased the tempo of its military harassment of Taiwan recently," he said.

Warplane incursions

China has ramped up economic, diplomatic and military pressure on Taiwan since the 2016 election of President Tsai Ing-wen, who views Taiwan as already sovereign and not part of "one China." Military pressure has escalated in the last year with China sending waves of fighter jets and nuclear-capable bombers into Taiwan's air defense zone. According to an AFP tally, more than 800 flights

have been made into the zone since September last year - 170 just this month. Defending Taiwan, one of Asia's most progressive democracies, has become a rare bipartisan issue in Washington's otherwise deeply polarized landscape.

At Thursday's live town hall, Biden was also asked by an audience member whether the United States would be able to keep up with China's rapid military development. Biden responded with "Yes." "Don't worry about whether... they're going to be more powerful," he said. "China, Russia and the rest of the world knows we have the most powerful military in the history of the world." Biden's comments come in the wake of a Financial Times report that China has tested a state-of-the-art hypersonic missile with nuclear capacity that flew around the planet before landing, albeit not on target. — AFP

UN fears 'mass atrocity crimes' in Myanmar as troops gather in north

UNITED NATIONS: The UN said Friday it feared an even greater human rights catastrophe in Myanmar amid reports of thousands of troops massing in the north of the Southeast Asian country, which has been in chaos since a February coup. "We should all be prepared, as the people in this part of Myanmar are prepared, for even more mass atrocity crimes. I desperately hope that I am wrong," said UN Special Rapporteur on Myanmar Tom Andrews. More than 1,100 civilians have been killed in the country's bloody crackdown on dissent and more than 8,000 arrested since the coup, according to a local monitoring group.

Andrews, who was presenting the findings of an annual human rights report on Myanmar to the General Assembly, said that he had received information that tens of thousands of troops and heavy weapons were being moved into restive regions in the north and northwest. The findings, he said, also indicated that the junta had engaged in probable crimes against humanity and war crimes. "These tactics are ominously reminiscent of those employed by the military before its genocidal attacks against the Rohingya in Rakhine State in 2016 and 2017," Andrews said.

About 740,000 Rohingya fled Myanmar's Rakhine state in 2017 after security forces launched a clampdown that the UN has said may amount to genocide. Andrews urged countries to deny Myanmar's military junta the money, weapons and legitimacy it desired, citing a prisoner release earlier in the week as evidence that pressure was working. On Monday, Myanmar's junta chief Min Aung Hlaing announced the release of more than 5,000 people jailed for protesting against the coup.

Haiti gang threatens to execute hostages

PORT-AU-PRINCE: The leader of a Haitian gang who kidnapped a group of North Americans over the weekend has threatened to execute them, according to video seen by AFP. The footage shot Wednesday but released Thursday on social media showed Wilson Joseph, wearing a suit and surrounded by armed men, in front of coffins containing the bodies of five members of his gang.

"Since I'm not getting what I need, I'll kill these Americans," Joseph said, speaking in Haitian Creole. A senior US official speaking on condition of anonymity said the video appeared to be genuine. "As far as I know, the video that appeared online today is legitimate," the official told reporters late Thursday. "It's not a fake video as far as we can tell right now."

"We are in contact with the Christian Aid Missionaries. We are in contact constantly with Haitian National Police. The FBI is on the ground in Haiti and in contact with all the parties involved," the official added. The kidnappers are demanding \$17 million ransom for the hostages' freedom, security sources have

could not be independently verified. "We arrested one attacker immediately after the incident," local police chief Shihab Kaiser Khan told reporters. The man was found with a gun, six rounds of ammunition and a knife, he added.

Refugees fear violence

Many Rohingya activists have gone into hiding or sought protection from the police and UN agencies since the killing of community representative Mohib Ullah in the nearby Balukhali camp on September 29. The 48-year-old teacher had become a leading voice for the stateless community. He met then US president Donald Trump at the White House in 2019. Some activists blamed the killing on the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), though the armed group

told AFP. On Saturday the group of 17 US and Canadian missionaries and their children were kidnapped in broad daylight while on a visit to an orphanage in the heart of an area in eastern Port-au-Prince, which is under control of the gang.

The Ohio-based Christian Aid Ministries, to which the abducted missionaries belong, said the group included 12 adults aged 18-48, along with five children aged eight months, three, six, 13 and 15. The United States has advised Americans not to travel to Haiti, in particular due to kidnappings they say regularly include American citizens. Since December 2020, Haitian police have sought Joseph for crimes including assassination, kidnapping, vehicle theft and hijacking of cargo trucks.

Meanwhile on Thursday motor taxi drivers blocked roads and snared traffic in the Haitian capital to protest against fuel shortages caused by gangs controlling oil access. Across the city, demonstrators have voiced outrage over being forced to buy gasoline on the black market. Gangs' tightening grip on Port-au-Prince since June has prevented secure access to two of Haiti's three oil terminals. Armed groups hijacked more than a dozen tankers at the third, located in the Cite Soleil slum, in early September. On Thursday, near one barricade of flaming tires, protestors accused authorities of favoring fuel imports over renewable energy. —AFP

denied involvement. ARSA is the militant group accused of being behind attacks on Myanmar security forces in 2017 that set off a military clampdown and a mass exodus into Bangladesh by 740,000 Rohingya. It is also involved in drug smuggling and other illegal activities and is trying to increase its control in the Bangladesh camps.

A prominent Rohingya expatriate who knew the madrasa teachers blamed ARSA for the shooting, saying the school had refused to pay the group. "Since last year ARSA has ordered all madrasas to pay them 10,000 taka (\$120) a month and every teacher 500 taka a month. But the madrasa which was attacked today refused," he said, speaking on condition of anonymity as he fears his relatives in the camps could be targeted. —AFP



YANGON: Police patrol in a truck in downtown Yangon. — AFP

Business

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 24, 2021

COP26 climate deal harder than Paris: Summit president

EU says it needs nuclear and gas for climate fight

LONDON: Success at the upcoming COP26 climate summit is "definitely harder" than the 2015 Paris talks which resulted in a landmark accord, the British minister presiding over the gathering warned yesterday. The October 31-November 12 gathering in Glasgow is the biggest climate conference since the Paris summit and is seen as crucial in setting worldwide emission targets to slow global warming.

Alok Sharma, the British minister in charge of the talks, told the Guardian newspaper that getting nearly 200 countries to commit to the emission targets to limit global temperature rises to less than 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels was a daunting task. "What we're trying to do here in Glasgow is actually really tough," he said.

"It was brilliant what they did in Paris" but "a lot of the detailed rules were left for the future," he added. "It's like, we've got to the end of the exam paper and the most difficult questions are left and you're running out of time. "This is definitely harder than Paris on lots of levels."

The task will be made all the more difficult as Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian leader Vladimir Putin are not attending but sending delegations. More than 120 world leaders and around 25,000 delegates are expected in Glasgow. The Paris accord saw 197 nations agree to limit global heating to

below 2 degrees but their "nationally determined contributions" (NDCs) — national plans drawn up to implement the deal—have been deemed inadequate. Strengthening those plans will be a key part of negotiations.

"What we're potentially saying to countries is that if your NDC isn't good enough, you're going to have to come back to the table," said Sharma. He called on the world's biggest emitter China, whose fractious relationship with the West is another obstacle to agreement, to present its NDC.

"They signed up to the communique in July that we negotiated in Naples, that all the G20 would come up with enhanced NDCs before COP-I reminded them they needed to deliver on that," he said. UN chief Antonio Guterres said Thursday that the current climate situation was "a one-way ticket for disaster" as he stressed the need to "avoid a failure" at COP26.

The EU needs nuclear power and gas as stable sources of energy while it manages the transition to a low-carbon economy, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said on Friday.

While the European Union must drastically reduce its CO2 emissions to combat climate change, "it is obvious that we need more renewable and clean energy," she said at the end of a summit of the bloc's 27 members. Renewables such as



Alok Sharma

wind and solar have tumbled in cost and do not depend on imports, she told a press conference, adding that they will offer "a lot of independence" to the EU.

However, alongside renewables "we need a stable source, nuclear; and during the transition, of course, natural gas", the head of the European Union's executive body said.

Nuclear power plants have the advantage of emitting almost no CO2 into the atmosphere, while gas—the least polluting major hydrocarbon fuel—provides a stop-gap fuel source while alternatives are developed. The European Commission must propose before the end of the year its so-called green taxonomy—a list of energies considered beneficial for the climate.

This will open up access to green finance that will give these technologies a crucial competitive advantage. "Never



before has such clear and broad support been expressed for the need to use nuclear energy to achieve our climate goals," French President Emmanuel Macron said on Friday. France, which gets about 70 percent of its power from nuclear and is a major exporter of electricity, is preparing to restart construction of atomic power plants.

"A very large majority of member states" wanted to include both gas and nuclear in the taxonomy, a European diplomat told AFP on Thursday evening. Two other officials confirmed the level of support.

In the context of the current gas price crisis 10 EU states, led by France, published a statement in mid-October supporting nuclear power. But other countries, including Germany, Austria and Luxembourg, are fiercely opposed, pointing to the problem of very long-term storage of radioactive waste.

At the beginning of October, Commission Vice-President Valdis Dombrovskis, defended nuclear power at a meeting of EU finance ministers, calling for recognition of its role "as a low-carbon energy source in our effort" to reduce emissions. —AFP

Britain set for £7bn transport investment

LONDON: Britain's upcoming budget will invest almost £7.0 billion (\$9.6 billion, 8.3 billion euros) on transport outside London, the Treasury said yesterday, as part of plans to cut economic inequality. Finance minister Rishi Sunak will unveil the transport initiative during his autumn budget and spending review due on Wednesday.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson's so-called "levelling up" program is seen as vital to keeping voters in former strongholds of the main opposition Labor party who backed him in the 2019 general election. His Conservative party won a swathe of seats in northern England on a promise to deliver Britain's Brexit divorce from the European Union, as well as boost jobs and growth.

Recipients of the transport project cash include regions in the former Labour "red wall" that turned Tory blue two years ago and will be seen as pay-back for their support. According to the finance ministry, the government will invest £5.7 billion in city regions to boost productivity via train and station upgrades, and tram network expansion.

It will also inject £1.2 billion into overhauling bus services. The government wants to quicken journey times, simplify fares and increase services outside



LONDON: In this file photo taken on October 16, 2021, a bus is driven on Westminster Bridge past the Houses of Parliament in central London. —AFP

London, after repeated complaints that regions outside the British capital were ill-served by transport links, affecting business. "Great cities need great transport and that is why we're investing billions to improve connections in our city regions as we level up opportunities across the country," said Sunak in the statement. "This transport revolution will help redress that imbalance as we modernize our local transport networks so they are fit for our great cities and those people who live and work in them."

Transport policy is set separately in Scotland,

Wales and Northern Ireland by the nations' devolved administrations in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast. The government said the extra investment for England would mean additional cash for the three other UK nations under weighted public expenditure adjustments.

Chancellor of the Exchequer Sunak will also announce the latest growth forecasts for the economy, which is battling high inflation due largely to surging energy prices and a supply chain crisis that was sparked by Brexit and COVID. —AFP

US budget gap falls in 2021 to \$2.8tn as economy recovers

WASHINGTON: The US budget deficit narrowed slightly in the past year as the economy recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic, falling \$360 billion to \$2.8 trillion, the government reported Friday. The result for the fiscal year ended September 30 was far better than expected a few months ago, but just shy of the record set in 2020 during the worst of the health crisis that shuttered businesses nationwide and caused millions of layoffs.

The improvement reflected a more than \$600 billion increase in tax revenues as the economy was able to restart following the pandemic shutdowns, according to data from the Treasury Department and White House budget office. "Today's joint budget statement is further evidence that America's economy is in the midst of a recovery," Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said, crediting the huge American Rescue Plan stimulus package approved early this year. Government outlays increased \$266 billion to \$6.8 trillion in the fiscal year just ended, partly due to ongoing spending from the massive aid bills passed in 2020, when the pandemic was at its worst. But Yellen cautioned that "while the nation's economic recovery is stronger than those of other wealthy nations, it is still fragile."

President Joe Biden's Democratic party is currently working to pass two huge legislative packages but are divided on their size and scope as well as how they will be paid for. Yellen said passing the social and infrastructure spending proposals "will grow the



WASHINGTON: In this file photo taken on September 28, 2021, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen speaks during a Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee hearing in Washington, DC. — AFP

economy, help workers and families and strengthen our nation's long-term fiscal outlook."

Meanwhile, the clock is ticking on the deadline for lawmakers to increase or suspend the federal debt limit and avert a historic default before a temporary pause expires December 3. That day also marks the end of a temporary budget authorization that allows the government to operate while debate continues. Yellen has said failing to act before Treasury runs out of funds to pay its expenses, including military and retiree payments, would be "catastrophic." Total federal borrowing in the fiscal year increased by \$1.3 trillion to \$22.3 trillion, nearly matching the size of the world's largest economy which had a GDP of \$22.7 trillion at the end of June. In the breakdown of the budget totals, the report said individuals paid \$2 trillion in taxes, while corporations paid \$371.8 billion. The Health and Human Services Department spent \$1.5 trillion, and the Defense Department spent \$718 billion, while foreign aid totaled \$20 billion. —AFP

The climate project that changed how we understand extreme weather

PARIS: When a handful of scientists tried to publish rapid research into the role of climate change in record rainfall that lashed Britain in 2015, they were told their high-speed approach was "not science".

As extreme heat scorched North America, the same scientists from the World Weather Attribution (WWA) group concluded that the record-shattering temperatures would have been "virtually impossible" without human-caused climate change. This time people paid attention.

The finding made headlines worldwide and news stories replaced vague references to the impact of global heating on extreme weather with precise details. And that was exactly the idea of WWA, a network of scientists who wanted to shift understanding of how climate change impacts the real world. "We wanted to change the conversation, but we never expected that it would be so successful," said climatologist Friederike Otto, who conceived WWA with Dutch scientist Geert Jan van Oldenborgh in 2014.

In September, Otto and van Oldenborgh, who worked for the Royal Dutch Meteorological Institute (KNMI), were among Time magazine's 100 most influential people of 2021. Their work "means that people reading about our accelerating string of disasters increasingly get the most important information of all: it's coming from us", Time said. —AFP

Evergrande pays overdue interest on offshore bond

BEIJING: China's troubled property giant Evergrande has made a key offshore interest payment a day ahead of a weekend deadline, state media said Friday, averting a default and buying the embattled company a reprieve as it struggles under a mountain of debt. The crisis at one of the nation's biggest property developers has hammered investor sentiment, rattled the key real estate market and fuelled fears of a spillover into the wider economy.

Evergrande is reported to have missed at least \$150 million in offshore bond payments and while it had a 30-day grace period on some of them, there had been a general expectation it would not be able to meet its obligations. However, on Friday the state-backed Securities Times said the developer had wired \$83.5 million for an overseas payment first due on September 23, citing "relevant channels". It said bondholders would receive the payout before Saturday—the end of the grace period.

The news comes just a day after the company said the planned sale of its property services arm for \$2.58 billion had fallen through and warned it could not guarantee it would meet its debt obligations, putting it on course for a default and possible restructuring. Fears about an Evergrande failure have rattled markets, and shares in the firm have collapsed more than 80 percent since the start of the year. It rose more than four percent Friday in Hong Kong.

But observers warned the firm was still teetering, with several other dollar bond payments still to navigate before the end of the year. "They may be able to pay this interest, and maybe they can pay another interest—basically they have an interest payment every two weeks or so—but at some point...there's going to be an amount of principal maturing, and that one's multibillion," Chen Long, partner at research firm Plenum, told AFP.

"If you look at the fundamentals of the company, that hasn't changed." Beijing began last year clamping down on the country's colossal property sector—estimates say it accounts for a quarter of the economy—in a bid to rein in excessive debt, with measures to restrict borrowing cutting off companies' ability to complete projects. While Evergrande is the standout, the moves have hit several other developers, with several including Sinic and Fantasia among those failing to make debt payments. Still, Chinese leaders insist any fallout can be contained, but the crisis has prompted rare public anger and protests from anxious homebuyers, suppliers and investors. But Chuanyi Zhou, credit analyst at Lucror Analytics in Singapore, said the latest news would give a short-term boost to the market but Beijing was not expected to step in to prop the firm up. "Based on recent soundings from regulators it seems the government, while keen for Evergrande to meet its obligations, is unlikely to provide any support," she said. —AFP

Business

A US default could send shockwaves across global markets: US banker

Dr Hani Findakly speaks in an exclusive interview with Reconnaissance Research

KUWAIT: A US default, directly or indirectly through inflation, can emit shockwaves throughout the global markets, disrupting trade, finance, and investments. For as long as the dollar is at the center of global finance, the risk of contagion is high, confirming the old maxim that when the US sneezes, the rest of the world catches a cold, said Dr Hani Findakly, an investment banker and Vice Chairman and Director of Clinton Group Inc, New York, in an interview with Reconnaissance Research. "The dearth of exit options creates a Hobson's choice as many financial indicators of US debt are fast approaching a red zone. The numbers are alarming, the trends are disconcerting, and the solutions are elusive," Dr Findakly said during the interview. Excerpts from the interview.

Question: How serious is the US Federal budgeting process on the US and the Global markets?

Dr Hani Findakly: The US budgeting process is a very serious issue that has become increasingly intensely political reflecting the deep ideological fissures within the US. These divisions have rendered economic and fiscal policy fully dysfunctional. By 2001 Fiscal Year (which runs from October 1st to September 30th), the Afghanistan and Iraq wars forced the Government to drop all pretense of disclosing the cost of the wars.

Instead, it submitted a 'continuing budget resolution', an arcane provisional gimmick, based on prior budgets, which can be violated at will. Under this budgeting process, the equivalent of the military's 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell', both the Administration and Congress pretend to be fulfilling their constitutional mandates. Incredibly, this charade has continued for 20 years as the world's biggest economy ran without a formal budget.

Q: The world's biggest economy ran without a formal budget?

Dr Findakly: Yes. Meanwhile, profligate spending continued, as Congress approved successive budget ceilings to allow the government to operate. In October 2021, Congress approved a stop gap measure to extend the debt ceiling to \$28.5 trillion, barely adequate to fund the government until December when another game of one upmanship will return. While there is high expectation that Congress blinks, as it often does, by finding a short-term solution to the debt ceiling, there is always a risk that a political impasse can one day lead to a cat-

astrophic breakdown of a default on US obligations, including payments of salaries and social programs. A default also has negative implications for the domestic and international markets, and significantly, to the US dollar as a reserve currency.

Q: Have similar situations like this happened before in the US?

Dr Findakly: Yes. Unfortunately, it has happened more often than necessary, ever since Congress first adopted the concept of



Dr Hani Findakly

debt ceiling in 1917. The purpose then was to allow the government to borrow without having to revert to Congress every time it needs money, while keeping an overall constitutionally mandated congressional oversight over the budget. Over the past 50 years, the debt ceiling was raised almost routinely over 80 times. But the process of raising the debt ceiling has turned increasingly contentious, resulting in a series of crises starting in 1995 forcing a three-weeks government shutdown, followed by more shutdowns in 2011, 2013, 2018, and 2019. The increasing frequency of debt-extension crises is worrisome, as much because of its implication to the securities markets where US public debt is a key source of liquidity, but because of role of the US dollar as a major instrument of trade, international transactions, and the pricing of international commodities.

Q: What are the possible solutions and what will it take to implement them?

Dr Findakly: This is an intractable problem, deeply embedded into the US system where Congress has the 'power of the purse' and the debt has spun out of control. The only way to avoid it, other than a constitutional amendment, which is nearly impossible, there are no feasible short-term solutions. Broadly, there are three ways to ease the debt burden: faster economic growth, higher taxes, or lower spending. While faster growth is possible, the size and maturity of the US economy preclude a sustainably high growth. Raising taxes, as the third rail in American politics, is a major

challenge in a combusive political atmosphere and corrupt powerful interests. Finally, cutting spending is nearly impossible since discretionary spending constitutes only 30 percent of the Federal budget of \$1.5 trillion, half of it is defense. The non-discretionary spending now absorbs 62 percent of the budget (29 percent in 1969) including 48 percent for social security and healthcare (19 percent in 1969), and 8 percent for interest payment.

Aging population and the future cost of medical care for several million veterans of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, estimated at \$4-6 trillion, will keep the cost of the social safety net programs high for decades.

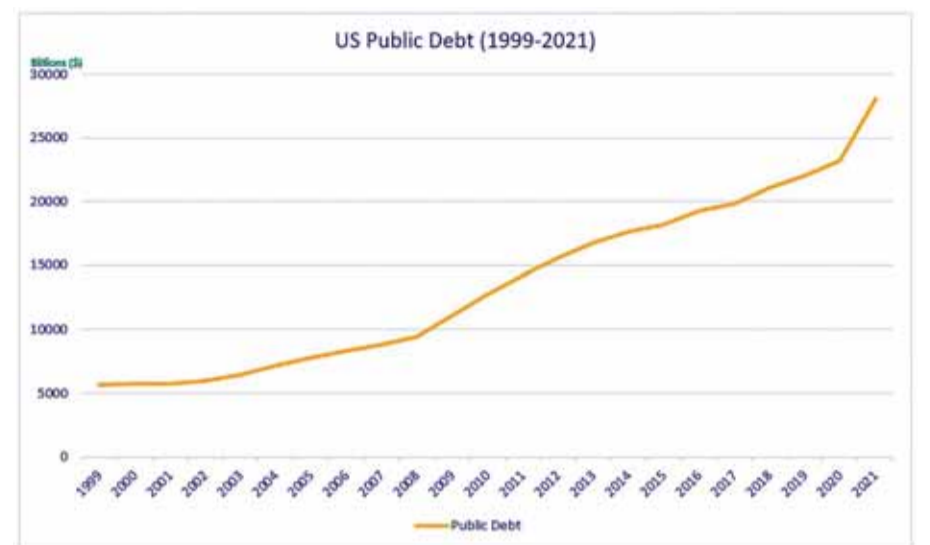
Absence of a major reduction in defense spending (America's sacred cow), there is little room to cut spending as red ink will endure. A conceivably palatable solution to the political elite in the near term is to allow inflation to rise at a faster rate. By inflating our way out of this dilemma, real spending and the real value of the debt will shrink, offering some short-term optical relief, but potentially creating more problems in the long term. This solution was adopted in the mid-1970s after the Vietnam war that ulti-



mately caused a series of economic crises including the breakdown of the Bretton Woods system where the US dollar fixed convertibility into gold was abandoned leading to a major devaluation of the US dollar against the Japanese Yen and major European currencies (save for the UK). It is not inconceivable that a similarly unwise option may be contemplated again, adding further uncertainty into the post-COVID-19 economy.

Q: Who might gain or lose from this matter?

Dr Findakly: There are no major winners. First, since most financial crises arise out of excessive debt, uncertainty over default could stress the credit markets and snowball into a 2007-type crisis. Second, a cycle of inflation and devaluation could undermine the banking system as the prospect of rising defaults curtails lending



and investments. Third, currency and market instability will impact developing countries who could struggle to finance their debt as well as shrinking demand for their products. Fourth, the prospect of higher inflation discourages savings and investments, slowing economic growth. Fifth, the US-China standoff can deepen the fissures in the global economy, aggravate geopolitical tensions and increase the likelihood for accidental conflicts. Sixth, economic crises hit the poor the hardest, thereby widening an already bad economic inequity. While there may well be certain marginal winners, e.g., large borrowers who will pay back in depreciated money, and possibly some geopolitical winners, e.g., China, the dynamics of any crisis often produce unpredictable consequences.

Q: What else keeps you awake at night?

Dr Findakly: Debt! It is a ticking time-bomb. Historically, every systemic financial crisis has been rooted in excessive debt and leverage. For a perspective on the rise of US public debt, consider that US federal debt was at an interim high of \$250 billion in 1945, which in current Dollars equals to \$3.8 trillion. Today, US debt is \$28.3 trillion or 7.5 times its 1945 real value. While interest on the debt remains low at around 1.5 percent of GDP, because of the low and negative real interest rates, an anticipated rise in rates could raise the cost of borrowing significantly. A 1 percent rise in interest rates could raise the annual interest on the public debt by \$285 billion. Already, the staggering fiscal deficit of \$3 trillion in FY2020, will top \$3.7 trillion in FY2022, or 15 percent of

GDP. Meanwhile, low interest rates and fear of inflation have unleashed a borrowing binge that has catapulted household debt to a record \$16 trillion, while non-financial corporate debt reached \$12 trillion. Excluding unfunded liabilities, overall US debt exceeds \$56.5 trillion, or 2.5 times GDP. Repaying this mountain of debt under persistent twin fiscal and current account deficits is a Herculean task.

Q: What is needed then?

Dr Findakly: It requires draconian measures and a consensus on priorities that the US political system lacks. Although US debt is in US dollars, a quarter of it, or \$7 trillion, is held by central banks, including 15 percent of which held by China. Therefore, a US default, directly or indirectly through inflation, can emit shockwaves throughout the global markets, disrupting trade, finance, and investments. For as long as the Dollar is at the center of global finance, the risk of contagion is high, confirming the old maxim that when the US sneezes, the rest of the world catches a cold. The dearth of exit options creates a Hobson's choice as many financial indicators of US debt are fast approaching a red zone. The numbers are alarming, the trends are disconcerting, and the solutions are elusive.

Note: Dr Hani Findakly is Vice Chairman and Director of Clinton Group Inc, an investment management firm in New York. He is a graduate of Baghdad University (BSc, Magna Cum Laude), and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT): Master of Science (SM, Systems Analysis) and Doctor of Science (ScD, Decision Theory).

UK retail sales extend slump

LONDON: UK retail sales volumes dropped for a fifth month in a row during September, official data showed Friday, as the country suffers supply constraints and high prices. Sales volumes dropped 0.2 percent last month from August, the Office for National Statistics said in a statement revealing the longest retreat on record.

"Household goods were the main driver of... (September's) decline, with a fall of nearly 10 percent," noted ONS economic statistics director Darren Morgan. "Despite the lifting of (lockdown) restrictions, in-store retail sales remain subdued, with many consumers still opting to shop online."

Although sales of petrol surged in late September as drivers rushed to fill up their tanks, a UK fuel-shortage crisis likely meant consumers visited stores only for necessities, analysts said.

"Whether the products aren't available, the price tag is too high, or shoppers have simply finished fettleing with their home decor, non-food sales pulled down September's figures," added AJ Bell financial analyst Danni Hewson. "Furniture stores have been warning for months that big ticket, big size items have been caught up in the shipping crisis and that seems to have worked its way through to consumer sales."

The UK is facing delays to the shipping of goods owing to an acute shortage of lorry

drivers. Helen Dickinson, chief executive of the British Retail Consortium, said UK retailers will be concerned "just as they begin their preparations for the all-important Christmas period" which last year was disrupted by a pandemic lockdown.

This time around, the run-up to the festive season has been affected by supply disruptions as economies reopen from lockdowns. Nevertheless, UK private sector business activity expanded at the fastest pace in three months in October, a key survey showed.

Growth was however accompanied by an unprecedented rise in inflationary pressures due to higher wages and supply chain costs, according to the survey from IHS Markit and the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply. Britain is meanwhile forecast to see an interest rate hike from the Bank of England as soon as November to help dampen inflation, which could force consumers to cut spending ahead of Christmas. The BoE's new chief economist Huw Pill said in an interview with the Financial Times on Thursday that the UK annual inflation rate risks shooting above 5.0 percent in the coming months from 3.1 percent currently.

British annual inflation cooled slightly in September but remained close to a nine-year peak, data showed earlier this week. The rate fell to 3.1 percent from 3.2 percent in August, which was the highest level since early 2012.

High inflation is weighing on companies and consumers globally, while rate tightening is used by central banks to try and dampen price rises.—AFP



Flying green will be more expensive

PARIS: Under huge pressure to go green, the aviation industry needs to spend billions of dollars to become more climate-friendly in what risks ramping up fares and making air travel the preserve of the rich once again. Like many countries, airlines the world over have pledged net-zero emissions by 2050 as has the European Union, putting pressure on the aviation industry among other sectors.

The 27-member bloc also wants to tax kerosene. All of this will come at an unprecedented cost for the industry. The International Air Transport Association (IATA), whose 290 member airlines make up 82 percent of global air traffic, estimates that the industry's green transition will cost "around 1.55 trillion dollars."

Cleaner fuel

In order to make that transition, airlines need to invest in the latest planes, more efficient than their current fleets. Airbus for one hopes to see aircraft running on hydrogen, which emits no pollution when burned, enter service by 2035. Meanwhile, a production chain for sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) that the EU is going to make compulsory in incremental proportions needs to be created almost from scratch. IATA hopes to accomplish two-thirds of its emissions reductions by using SAFs—non-conventional fuels derived from organic products including cooking oil and algae.

Fuel currently represents between 20 and 30 percent of airline costs. But SAFs are, "as things stand, three times more expensive for (those using) used (recycled) oils, five times more expensive for biomass and five to ten times more expensive for synthetic fuels", Jean-Baptiste Djebbari, France's transport minister, told AFP. He said it was crucial to "scale up production to bring down prices." Patrick Pouyane, the head of oil and gas giant TotalEnergies, which is producing SAF, warned earlier this year that the cost of these non-conventional fuels were far from matching less expensive conventional ones.

"The energy and ecological transition will have to be financed not only by airlines or energy companies, but also by the whole chain, including customers," he said. Djebbari added that flight prices could rise "in the short term." He warned that the pandemic could also see many airlines disappear, thus reducing competition and pushing prices up.

Drowning in debt

Higher prices would mark a big change for a sector that was once the preserve of the rich but gradually became accessible to more people, even if it still excludes up to 95 percent of the global population.

In 1970, 310 million air trips were taken, according to the World Bank. In 2019, that figure stood at 4.4 billion. And despite the pandemic, IATA is banking on the figure rising to 10 billion in 2050. IATA says the cost of air transport has plunged by 96 percent since 1950 thanks to the introduction of jets in the 1960s, which led to dramatic industry growth, and the 1978 deregulation of the sector in the United States. It adds that this "downward trend continues due to improved technology and efficiency as well as strong competition."—AFP

Eurozone growth slows as prices jump on supply woes

BRUSSELS: The recovery of the eurozone economy is losing steam, a closely watched survey said on Friday, with big supply chain problems at factories causing price hikes not seen in twenty years. "The ongoing pandemic means supply chain delays remain a major concern," warned Chris Williamson, Chief Business Economist at IHS Markit. This was "constraining production and driving prices ever higher both in the manufacturing and in the services sector," he said.

The purchasing managers' index (PMI), which measures corporate confidence, demonstrated the slowdown clearly. IHS Markit said it slipped to 54.3 in October, after posting 56.2 points in September and a high 59 points in August. A figure above 50 indicates growth. IHS Markit said supply problems were especially felt in Germany, the EU's export powerhouse that depends on the global economy to churn out high-value goods, such as cars and machinery.—AFP

Russia sharply raises key rate

MOSCOW: Russia's central bank aggressively raised its interest rate for the sixth time in a row Friday in an effort to slow soaring food prices, and did not rule out further hikes. Rising prices, falling incomes and a lack of tangible government support during the pandemic have been eroding popular support for President Vladimir Putin's two-decade rule, and authorities are under pressure to ease inflation.

At a meeting on Friday, the Bank of Russia increased its key rate by 0.75 percentage points to 7.50 percent, surprising many analysts who had expected a smaller hike. The bank said that more hikes could follow and revised up inflation predictions. "Inflation is developing substantially above the Bank of Russia's forecast and is expected to be within the range of 7.4-7.9 percent at the end of 2021," the bank said.—AFP



Business

JustClean CEO features in first episode of Gulf Bank's 'Let's Talk Business' podcast

Gulf Bank's podcast highlights the little-known origin stories behind some of Kuwait's favorite local brands

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank launched the first episode of its "Let's Talk Business" podcast, with local entrepreneur, Athbi Alenezi, CEO of JustClean, as its first guest. The program, hosted by Tareq Al-Saleh, Deputy General Manager of the Economic Research Unit at Gulf Bank, presents entrepreneurial stories within a simplified economic framework, targeting budding entrepreneurs who are considering starting businesses of their own. The Bank's new podcast is part of its overarching strategy of fostering economic and community sustainability in Kuwait.

The idea

During the first episode, Alenezi touched on several compelling aspects of his business, including the idea behind the JustClean application, the company's financing, marketing, and more. Regarding the idea behind JustClean, Alenezi said: "When I returned from studying in the UK, I noticed how widespread laundry delivery services were in residential and commercial areas in Kuwait. In contrast, laundry delivery services were not as available in the U.K., and that was very interesting to me. During that time, the huge acquisition of the Kuwaiti Talabat application took place, which made me, like many young people back then, want to start working on a digital application."

Financing

With the ins-and-outs of JustClean's vision becoming clearer, Alenezi and his brother, Nouri Alenezi, moved to the implementation phase, which started with obtaining funding. Alenezi continues: "According to our simple study of

the market at that time, we discovered that we needed at least KD 30,000 to start working. I went to the bank to request a loan, while my brother left his job in the oil sector to devote himself to managing the new company. We initially directed this funding towards paying rent and the legal costs associated with preparing contracts, in addition to building the internal work structure in terms of our company's sources of income and the cost of building the digital application itself."

He added: "At that time, my experience in the business sector was simple, and I did not want to blame anyone for my loss. That is why we did not want to actively seek out investors just yet. However, one of my friends convinced me to give a presentation about our company to investors, and I did. Among the investors was Mohammed Jaffar from Faith Capital, who expressed his interest in the idea and his desire to finance it on the condition of expansion in the GCC, which was incredibly fortunate. We are so incredibly grateful to Faith Capital for believing in us and for their ongoing support."

Challenges

Alenezi added: "One of the challenges we faced due to our lack of experience in business management was that we did not take into account the costs required for the post-launch stage of the business. We did not have the money required for advertising campaigns, and at that time, the profits were not enough to cover these costs. At that time, I had to contact all the newspapers, magazines and bloggers in Kuwait to help us with advertising—and it was still not enough. We end-



ed up coming up with a new idea for digital advertising that required the help of the laundry companies we dealt with, and the idea, which was relatively cost-efficient, won the satisfaction of the laundry companies."

There were other challenges related to the laundry sector that JustClean wanted to address. Laundry service deliveries tended to take place at unspecified timings, causing an inconvenience to customers. Many laundry services also lacked a sophisticated sales management system, with invoices recorded using pen and paper, and prices not being clear or fixed. Regarding this, Alenezi says: "We realized at that time that the laundry sector in Kuwait was in dire need of development, because it is a service sector that brings together many service providers, and changes were bound to come either way. We launched the JustClean application, and we were keen to include several features, including giving customers the

option to specify their preferred delivery times, clear and transparent pricing, and the option for customers to evaluate the laundries they dealt with. We made these features available to all customers."

Expansion

JustClean has expanded both operationally and geographically, as the company has set its sights on providing multiple types of cleaning services, having started with offering a car cleaning service. After the company launched in Kuwait, it also began to expand to Bahrain, as the Bahraini market is small compared to the rest of the region. After Bahrain, the company launched in several regions in the United Arab Emirates, followed by Qatar, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Working during the pandemic

JustClean reaped the benefits of geographic expansion during the pandemic. While the lockdowns in Kuwait were

undoubtedly a challenge, Alenezi notes that other countries were preventing everyone from entering laundry services, and allowing delivery and pick-up services only. Fortunately, some of the restrictions were in the interest of JustClean, which was often times the only provider of laundry services in some areas. While the company's sales did decline at the time, the team also managed to reduce costs, and used the time and resources available to develop an expansion strategy that it began implementing this year.

"Let's Talk Business" is Gulf Bank's newest podcast, created in collaboration with Belmokhba, a local creative content creation and production house. New episodes air every Thursday at 7:00 pm on Gulf Bank's digital and social media channels. Gulf Bank's vision is to be the leading Kuwaiti Bank of the Future. The Bank is constantly engaging and empowering its employees as part of an inclusive and diversified workplace in recognition of every employee's role in delivering customer excellence and serving the community at large. With its extensive network of branches and innovative digital services, Gulf Bank is able to give its customers the choice of how and where to conduct their banking transactions, all while ensuring a simple and seamless banking experience. Gulf Bank is committed to maintaining a robust sustainability program at the community, economic, and environmental levels through sustainability initiatives that are strategically selected to benefit both the country and the Bank. Gulf Bank supports Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait" and works with various parties and stakeholders in service of the vision.

Ooredoo partners with KidZania, launches Ooredoo Telecom Center

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, has announced its partnership with KidZania Kuwait, an award-winning children's city concept globally recognized for its unique blend of education and entertainment. The announcement came during the official opening of "Ooredoo Telecom Center" in KidZania on October 20, 2021 which also included a private introductory tour of KidZania.

Driven by its vision of improving children's capabilities, helping them to build their identity, and introducing them to the basic principles of the Internet and the fifth generation in particular (5G) which helps them understand and create a relationship with the real world, along with teaching them the importance and efficient role of the Internet and communications in our lives from an early age, Ooredoo opened its own telecom center in KidZania Kuwait for children to enjoy the interactive activities prepared for them.

KidZania is a safe and interactive edutainment center where children can experience over 100 role playing activities in a replica of a real city. The various playful activities of KidZania are specifically designed to aid physical and intellectual growth, and contribute to the development of skills and attitudes.

Commenting on the opening, Tapan Tripathi, Acting Chief Commercial Officer at Ooredoo Kuwait, said: "We are happy with our partnership with KidZania Kuwait, which came within our belief that our children are the leaders of the future and our vision of unleashing their imagination in an educational yet entertaining way. Further, we take pride of our continued efforts that contribute to enhancing



The official opening ceremony of Ooredoo Telecom Center at KidZania

knowledge and experiences of youth wishing to learn about the world of communications, technology and the Internet, and to stimulate their creativity by enabling them to play different roles in the world of digital services, and Information and communications technology. Our partnership with KidZania Kuwait will also contribute to realizing the dreams of children and help them create an initial idea of developing their career path when they grow up to become leaders in the telecommunications sector."

Fernando Medroa, Vice President of Leisure and Entertainment at Alshaya Group said: "At KidZania, it is our constant endeavor to partner with brands that provide opportunities for children to learn through unique, real-life like role-plays, to positively impact the society and the environment they live in. We are very happy to see the launch of the "Ooredoo Telecom Center" at KidZania to promote skills, values and positive qualities in an entertaining way for our children. The experience at the "Ooredoo Telecom Center" will enhance kids on how technology plays an important role in our lives, aligning with our objective to help children develop their skills and curiosity". KidZania Kuwait is proud to welcome Ooredoo Kuwait onboard.

The scaled-down city replicates the real world in a safe and self-contained 7,000 square meter facility.



The official opening ceremony of Ooredoo Telecom Center at KidZania

Children can choose from 78 engaging establishments and role-play 100 exciting roles, which include being a police officer, doctor, journalist or a shopkeeper - and, just like in the real world, they can earn kidZos, KidZania's currency, to either spend or save. KidZania operates like a real city complete with buildings, paved streets, vehicles, a functioning economy, and recognizable destinations in the form of "establishments" sponsored by Marketing Partners who represent leading multi-national, regional, and local brands.

NBK Economic Report

Egypt's post-COVID economic recovery is broadly on track

KUWAIT: With lockdown restrictions easing over the summer and businesses gradually reopening, economic growth has continued to recover. GDP growth accelerated to 7.7 percent y/y in 2Q21 (the final quarter of FY20/21) - albeit boosted by a base effect after weakness a year earlier - from 2.0 percent in 1Q21. This pushed growth to 3.3 percent during FY20/21 from 3.6 percent in FY19/20. However, the tourism sector (worth about 12 percent of GDP in 2019) is likely to remain under pressure due to continued international travel disruptions. We expect growth to recover to around 5.0 percent over the medium term based upon the authorities' continued commitment to crucial economic reforms, and assuming no major slowdown in the global economic recovery including due to the emergence of more contagious coronavirus strains.

Fiscal deficit

Despite huge pandemic pressures, the govern-

ment still managed to trim the fiscal deficit again last year, helped by improved spending control and slower growth in debt service costs. The deficit narrowed to 7.4 percent of GDP in FY20/21 from 8.0 percent a year before, with the rise in revenues (+12 percent y/y) outpacing growth in spending (+9 percent). The primary balance (i.e. excluding interest payments) reached a surplus of 1.4 percent of GDP. As the economy recovers and the government pursues its debt restructuring strategies (including diversifying the debt structure and extending the average debt maturity), the overall budget deficit could narrow to 7.0 percent of GDP in FY21/22 and further to about 6.0 percent by FY23/24. This will help public debt decline to about 86 percent of GDP by the end of June 2022 and further in the medium term. Given prevailing low global interest rates and previous successful debt issues, the government is likely to utilize external borrowing to finance a major part of these projected deficits.

Drop in tourism revenue

Despite the gradual recovery of Egypt's external position, the current account is still under pressure as subdued international travel weighs on the tourism sector, the main source of foreign currency earnings. In fact, the drop in tourism revenues in FY20/21 (-50.7 percent to \$4.9 billion) contributed to a widening of the current account deficit to \$18.4 billion (4.6 percent of GDP) from \$11.2 billion (3.1 percent of GDP) in the previous fiscal year. We expect the

deficit to narrow to an average of 2.5 percent in future years on a recovery in tourism and trade. On the financial side, the recent acceleration of capital inflows combined with IMF support (\$5.2 billion Stand-by Arrangement, COVID emergency financial assistance of \$2.7 billion and \$2.8 billion from an SDR allocation) and foreign borrowing have more than offset the increase in the current account deficit. This has helped the pound remain broadly stable against the US dollar at an average of EGP15.7/\$1 so far this year. Meanwhile, after dropping to a pandemic low of \$36.0 billion in May 2020, net foreign reserves had recovered to \$40.8 billion in September 2021, further supporting the external picture. Monetary policy on hold amid moderate inflation.

Amid rising commodity and energy prices, inflation accelerated to 6.6 percent y/y in September (4.5 percent in 1H21). Over coming months, the late-July increase in fuel prices and a potential rise in prices for subsidized bread could push up the headline rate. Still, inflation should remain under control in FY21/22, averaging about 5.8 percent compared to 4.5 percent in FY20/21, much lower than in the past, and still towards the lower end of the CBE's target range of 7 percent ±2 percent. So far in 2021, the central bank has kept its policy rates unchanged at relatively high levels (8.25-9.25 percent). Although a fresh rate cut is possible in Q4 to support the economy and lower debt financing costs, the bank will be mindful of the need to avoid triggering capital outflows, especially if as expected the US Fed starts to taper its asset purchases.

Dow ends at record as Evergrande worries recede

WASHINGTON: The Dow finished at a record Friday, capping a strong week for US stocks, while European and Asian equities mostly rebounded as risks of contagion from troubled Chinese property giant Evergrande eased. While both the S&P 500 and Nasdaq dropped Friday, all three major Wall Street indices scored weekly gains following mostly solid corporate earnings that have offset worries about inflation.

"While just about every company is talking about supply chain pressures, you're not seeing a lot of companies talking about how demand is falling," said Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare.

O'Hare said investors have been reassured by statements that companies have managed to pass on price increases to consumers, preserving profit margins. But some companies have sold off sharply after surprising investors with bad news. Snap plunged 26.6 percent as it reported a hit from Apple's move to change its privacy settings that have made it more difficult to target advertising. Fellow social media companies Twitter and Facebook both lost about five percent.

Earlier, Chinese state media reported that Evergrande made a key offshore interest payment a day ahead of a weekend deadline, averting a default for now. The crisis at one of the nation's biggest property developers, which is drowning in \$300 billion of debt, has hammered investor sentiment and fueled fears of a spillover into the wider economy. Evergrande's share price jumped more than four percent in Hong Kong, though that came a day after a drop of more than 12 percent sparked by its announcement that the planned sale of its property services unit had fallen through.

The payment helped boost sentiment in Asian and European equity trading. Stocks stumbled last month as investors worried about persistent supply chain problems that are stoking inflation and which are pushing monetary policymakers to begin to wind down economic stimulus measures.

But corporate earnings have largely beat expectations, with many companies having been able to pass along price hikes and maintain profits. Analyst Fawad Razaqada at ThinkMarkets said that the records likely reflect a view by investors that the supply bottlenecks and surge in inflation are likely to be temporary after all, and that therefore central banks won't tighten monetary policy too much.

"Central banks wouldn't want to choke off economic growth by being too aggressive when they tighten their policies, especially as there have been some signs of weakening recovery of late," he said. —AFP



Security guards stand at the entrance of Bonanza Creek Ranch in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Actor Alec Baldwin was the focus of investigations into a shocking and deadly on-set tragedy, after the actor fired a prop gun that killed a cinematographer and wounded the director of a Western he was shooting at the ranch. — AFP Photos



Prop guns are seen during an interview with props expert Guillaume Delouche at Independent Studio Services in Sunland-Tujunga, Los Angeles, California.

GRIEF, ANGER OVER DEATH ON ALEC BALDWIN MOVIE

Actors and movie makers in Hollywood were mourning the death of a rising star of their business Friday, but there was also anger over how Halyna Hutchins could have been killed when Alec Baldwin fired a prop gun. "I am gutted and just so mad right now," tweeted filmmaker Rachel Morrison. "No shot, no scene and no movie is worth the loss of life. #RIPHalynaHutchins"

Hutchins was cinematographer on 19th-century western "Rust", which was filming at the Bonanza Creek Ranch in

the US state of New Mexico, when the incident occurred Thursday. The 42-year-old, who was reportedly hit in the stomach, was airlifted to hospital, where she was later declared dead. Director Joel Souza was also hurt, but was released after emergency care. Actor Elijah Wood, who worked with Hutchins on superhero thriller "Archenemy" said: "Absolutely horrifying and devastating news about cinematographer Halyna Hutchins. My heart goes out to her family."

Fellow "Archenemy" alum Adam Egypt Mortimer said he was "so sad" and "infuri-

ated that this could happen on a set." "She was a brilliant talent who was absolutely committed to art and to film." The tragedy recalled the death of Brandon Lee, son of the legendary Bruce Lee, who died from a gunshot wound incurred on the set of the 1993 film "The Crow." "Our hearts go out to the family of Halyna Hutchins and to Joel Souza and all involved in the incident on 'Rust'," said Shannon Lee, Brandon's sister and Bruce's daughter. "No one should ever be killed by a gun on a film set. Period."

Hutchins was born in Ukraine and lived

in Los Angeles. In 2019, she was named by American Cinematographer magazine as one of the industry's rising stars in 2019, according to the organization's website. "Deeply sad," wrote entertainment journalist Rebecca Keegan. "Halyna was talented and cool. Last time we talked was Cannes 2017 and she was brimming with energy and excitement." Innovative Artists, who represented Hutchins described her as "a ray of light. Always smiling, always hopeful."

"She decided early on she would take the craft of cinematography by storm and

the last couple of years proved she was well on her way. Her talent was immense." Filmmaker Rachel Morrison questioned the use of real guns during filming. "Why the f--- are we still using blanks when it costs like 50 (cents) to add gunfire in post (production)? If you can't afford to make a movie safely, you shouldn't be making it at all." — AFP



In this file photo, Alec Baldwin accepts the award for Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Comedy Series for 'Saturday Night Live' onstage during the 69th Emmy Awards in Los Angeles.

Killed on set: Famous Hollywood tragedies

With a cinematographer killed and a movie director wounded after US actor Alec Baldwin fired a prop gun during filming, we look at other deadly movie accidents.

'The Captive'

Gun related deaths go back to the dawn of cinema with extra Charles Chandler shot in the head in 1915 while filming the Cecil B. DeMille movie "The Captive". He died after a bullet was left in a rifle after soldiers shot at a door with live ammunition to give the scene more realism.



In this file photo, filmmaker Halyna Hutchins attends the 2018 Sundance Film Festival Official Kickoff Party in Park City, Utah. US actor Alec Baldwin fired a prop gun that killed a cinematographer and wounded the director on a film set in New Mexico. Halyna Hutchins and Joel Souza were shot when a prop firearm was discharged by Alec Baldwin, the sheriff in Santa Fe said in a statement, with Hutchins succumbing to her wounds. — AFP photos

'Twilight Zone: The Movie'

Actor Vic Morrow was decapitated and two Vietnamese-born child extras killed in 1982 when a helicopter crashed on them after being hit by pyrotechnics during the shooting of a night battle scene for the sci-fi horror movie near Los Angeles. Director John Landis was later acquitted of the manslaughter of the 53-year-old star as well as the children, aged six and seven, in the first such case in Hollywood history.

'The Crow'

US actor Brandon Lee, a martial arts legend and the son of Bruce Lee, was shot and killed on the set of "The Crow" in 1993 in a case which set off a whirl of conspiracy theories about him being murdered by Hong Kong gangsters. But investigators found his death was caused by negligence. An actor fired at Lee with a gun which was supposed to contain blanks. However, there was a bullet in the chamber and Lee, 28, died hours later from his injuries.

'Batman: The Dark Knight'

Rumours of a "Curse of Batman" circulated after the 2007 death of stuntman Conway Wickliffe during a test run for a scene involving the Batmobile in "The Dark Knight" was followed by the drugs overdose of Heath Ledger, 28, who played The Joker. Co-star Morgan Freeman was later badly injured in a car crash and Batman himself Christian Bale faced accusations of assaulting his mother and sister the day before the film's UK premiere.

'Jumper'

A set dresser was killed on the Samuel L Jackson sci-fi movie in 2008 when frozen sand, earth and ice from an exterior set collapsed onto staff below during shooting in Toronto. David Ritchie, 56, died instantly.

'A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood'

Emmy-winning sound mixer James Emswiller died after falling from a second-floor balcony during the filming in 2018 of a biopic about US television icon Fred Rogers for which Tom Hanks was later nominated for an Oscar. — AFP

Guns on film: How are weapons used safely?

The fatal shooting of a crew member by actor Alec Baldwin during the making of a movie in the western United States has raised questions over the use of guns on film sets. Hollywood armorer Guillaume Delouche - who has been supplying weapons to filmmakers for three decades, with 75 titles to his name - says there are usually multiple safeguards against tragedy. Here are some of his insights into the use of guns in the movie business.

Why are guns used on a movie set?

Even though adding digital effects in post-production is relatively easy and cheap nowadays, a lot of directors and actors prefer to use real guns, says Delouche, citing added authenticity. "The problem with dummy weapons is that you take away the recoil and the smoke, which adds something to the acting," he said. "When you give the actor a latex or plastic gun and add the effect of the bullet later with digital effects, there is still a clear difference."

How are guns handled on film set?

Protocols are necessarily strict, says Delouche, comparing the double and triple checks with the way airplane safety systems operate. "We treat blank weapons as if they were real weapons. In many cases, they are real weapons that have been modified," he explained. "The weapons are kept in a safe. Once they are on the set, we organize the blank ammunition, which is marked and color-coded to differentiate it. "First, we show the crew and actors that the gun is empty before loading it. "When we put blanks in a gun we announce it, several times."



Props expert Guillaume Delouche at Independent Studio Services holds a prop gun while talking about them in Sunland-Tujunga, Los Angeles, California.

When a gun needs to be fired

"We have very strict safety distances: you can't have someone less than 20 feet - or about six meters - in front of a weapon when it is fired. "Even with blanks, there can be small debris that is projected. It's better to never aim at someone directly, so we work with the cinematographer to frame the shot and give the illusion that the person is in the line of fire. "If we need to be closer we put up Plexiglas walls. We cover the operators and stagehands with fire blankets. They also have anti-noise helmets and safety glasses to protect against splinters."

How can accidents happen?

It remains unclear what happened on the set of "Rust." According to Delouche accidents are extremely rare, considering

how many Hollywood productions feature characters wielding guns. They can occur, however, if live ammunition is being used on set for some reason. "But real ammunition has absolutely no place on a set because dummy bullets are also used and they could be confused," he said.

"A possibility is that a dummy bullet becomes separated from its casing and then enters the chamber of the gun. "If a blank is put in behind that dummy, it effectively becomes a live round. "This is what cost Brandon Lee his life (in 1993 on the set of "The Crow"). There was never a check by the prop maker, which would have prevented the accident." "For an accident to happen, there is always a chain of errors that precede it." — AFP



A sign points to the Bonanza Creek Ranch in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Actor Alec Baldwin was the focus on October 22, 2021, of investigations into a shocking and deadly on-set tragedy, after the actor fired a prop gun that killed a cinematographer and wounded the director. — AFP photos

#MeToo comes for French theatre

For four years, the alleged rape had been wiped from Alice's mind - "post-traumatic amnesia," she says. When the memory started to emerge, it took another four years for her to find the courage to file a complaint against renowned actor and theatre director Michel Didym. "Filing a complaint, having to recount everything, it increases the trauma," Alice (not her real name) told AFP at a protest in Paris yesterday organized by a new group, #MeTooTheatre. Alice accuses Didym, more than 30 years her senior, of raping her when she was a 20-year-old acting student at the National Drama Centre in Nancy.

"As an actress, I depend on people who have far too much power," she said, her hands trembling as she spoke, and her face entirely masked to maintain anonymity. "The directors know perfectly well what's going on—that there are many predators." She is not alone in accusing Didym, who has had an illustrious career in the theatre dating back to the early 1980s. Several women accused the 63-year-old of sexual assault or harassment in newspaper Liberation earlier this month. He denies the charges but has cancelled his upcoming shows and is under investigation by the police.

Convicted murderer

It has taken a while for the MeToo movement to reach the world of French theatre. Protests, however, have been building against two controversial figures featuring in the current season of the Colline Theatre, one of France's six national theatres. Activists are angry over the hiring of director Jean-Pierre Baro, who was accused of rape in a complaint that was later dismissed for lack of evidence, and rock star Bertrand Cantat, who beat his girlfriend to death in 2003. Cantat, former singer with Noir Desir ("Black Desire"), repeatedly punched the actress Marie Trintignant (daughter of famed actor Jean-Louis Trintignant), in the head in a Vilnius hotel room.

She died from her injuries a few days later. The singer was sentenced to eight years in prison but was released on parole after four. The head of the Colline, Wajdi Mouawad, chose Cantat to compose the music for "Mere" which opens next month. In a statement, Mouawad said he supported "unreservedly" the fight against violence and sexual harassment, but that he would not act as "a substitute for the judicial system".

Although Mouawad was appointed directly by the government, Culture Minister Roselyne Bachelot told France Inter radio on Monday that it was not her job to intervene in the theatre's day-to-day affairs, though she "regretted" the decision to hire Cantat. Mouawad has worked with Cantat before, casting him in "Des Femmes" (Some Women), in 2011, the same year the singer's parole ended. An outcry at the time meant Cantat never appeared on stage, though Mouawad still used a recording of his voice.

'Enough'

Such decisions are now attracting greater resistance. The #MeTooTheatre group was formed after a blogger, Marie Coquille-Chambel, published her account of being raped by a 45-year-old actor when she was 16. It triggered an avalanche of similar stories. "I was 23 and had a professional meeting with a 60-year-old director. He was naked in his bath when I arrived and asked me to join him," wrote actress Celine Langlois on Twitter. She was among the 300 or so that gathered for the protest yesterday. "We were scared to talk for a long time. But now we've had enough," she told AFP.

"Had enough of the myth of actresses being loose women, of the demand that they stay young and beautiful until death, of their under-representation in management posts." It is the precarious nature of the job - "the fear of missing out on roles" - that has allowed the problems to go unaddressed, said Laetitia Cesar-Franquet, a researcher with the Emile Durkheim Centre. There is also an attitude in the theatre "that the body is something that can be treated any way they want", she added. "If we witness violence and the majority don't intervene, people will go with the crowd," she said. — AFP



View of the remains of a member of the Maya community of Pomuch during a private ritual where relatives clean their loved ones' remains preceding celebrations of the Day of the Dead in Campeche State, Mexico. — AFP photos



Residents of the Maya community of Pomuch clean the skull of a relative during a private ritual preceding celebrations of the Day of the Dead.

Cleaning bones: Maya community honors the dead

Antonio Canche lovingly brushed a relative's skull in a cemetery in the Mexican jungle - part of the Maya community's ancestral bone cleaning tradition to honor the dead. This year, the ritual, usually held in late October before Mexico's Day of the Dead festival, is taking place for the first time since the start of the coronavirus pandemic. Indigenous Maya residents of Pomuch in Mexico's southeastern state of Campeche carefully open graves and take out the bones of their relatives.

After they are cleaned, the burial shroud is changed for a new one and the remains are returned to their resting place, said Canche. Canche, 74, spent

the whole day cleaning the remains of his in-laws, his parents and an uncle. "For me it means joy and enthusiasm to do it," he said. Between songs and anecdotes, the families watched over the remains for a few hours to give them some sun and fresh air. "Come out, come out souls of grief," women sang in front of open boxes containing human remains and white clothes embroidered with the names of the deceased.

"It's a very beautiful tradition to remember our ancestors," said resident Jacinta Chi. "We change their shrouds because the celebration is coming and we remember them with a lot of love and affection," he added. It is customary for bones to be

cleaned for the first time three years after death, and every year thereafter. "Last year due to the pandemic, the ritual was not carried out. Many people were very afraid," said Sebastian Yam, Pomuch's cultural representative.

"The pandemic was worldwide, and definitely here in Pomuch as in all places there were many people who died because of COVID," he said. This year one woman performed the ritual for the first time with the remains of her father. She had to open the coffin, remove the skeleton, divide it into pieces and place them in a wooden box. Nobody knows exactly when the bone cleaning practice began, but Yam believes it to be centuries

old, based on the accounts of the village elders.

After cleaning the remains of their relatives, the residents of Pomuch, like others Mexicans, will set up an altar in their homes with their favorite dishes and drinks for the Day of the Dead. It is believed that their spirits will return from death to eat and drink on what is one of Mexico's most important festivals, celebrated at the start of November. Orange marigold flowers are laid out to guide the spirits to the altar as part of this tradition recognized by UNESCO on the List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2008. — AFP



View of the remains of a member of the Maya community of Pomuch.



Residents of the Maya community of Pomuch clean the skull.

World's largest museum for artist? Munch gets new digs

To Edvard Munch, they were his children. And like any doting father, he hated the idea of them straying too far from home. Now, more than 26,000 artworks from the master expressionist's "family"-including his best known piece, "The Scream"-have moved under one roof in the enormous and custom-built MUNCH museum on the shore of Oslo Fjord.

Gone is the old, rundown and poorly secured Munch Museum in the Norwegian capital's outskirts-from where a version of "The Scream" and another masterpiece, "Madonna", were stolen by armed robbers in 2004. On Friday, the new museum opens to the public smack dab in the heart of Oslo, in a luxuriously spacious modernist building that has sparked much controversy.

"This might be the biggest museum for a single artist," museum director Stein Olav Henriksen says as he gives a tour of the building. With 13 floors covering more than 26,000 square meters, the new building offers five times more exhibition space than the gloomy museum that until now housed Norway's national treasure. A bachelor who had no children, Munch (1863-1944) bequeathed his work to the city of Oslo. He had originally intended to leave it to the Norwegian state, but changed his will at the last-minute to avoid the art falling into unwanted hands.



An image shows an external view of the new Munch museum building in Oslo, Norway.



Norway's King Harald and Queen Sonja open the new museum of Norwegian painter Edvard Munch in Oslo. —AFP photos

'Degenerate art'

At the time, Norway was occupied by the Nazis, who considered the pioneer of expressionism to be a maker of "degenerate art". Rising from the shore of the fjord and next to the city's iconic opera house, the new museum aims to make up for a historical injustice by finally giving the world-renowned artist the building his admirers feel his oeuvre deserves.

Half a million visitors are expected each year-with the museum hoping for more than a million-to view the 200 works on permanent display across 4,500 square metres. Amid some of the recurring darker themes like angst, despair and death are less depressing ones exploring love, self-portraiture and landscapes.

Pallid and sickly naked bodies mix with fiery red strokes depicting mops of hair or sunsets. And of course, there is "The Scream". The museum owns several versions of the iconic artwork: one painting, one drawing, six lithographs and several sketches. It also features other masterpieces such as "Madonna"-both it and the stolen "Scream" were recovered by police two years later-"Vampire" and "The Sick Child", as well as some lesser known Munch pieces.

Among the latter are sculptures, photographs, a film, and two massive paintings-"The Sun" and "The Researchers"-which had to be lifted into the museum

during construction through a hole in the facade. "Munch wanted to have a museum. He talked about his children (referring to) all his works and he wanted them to be together as a collection," says curator Trine Otte Bak Nielsen. "I think he would be very happy to see what we have made now."

'Brutal building'

The building itself, dubbed "Lambda" because its slanted top resembles the letter of the Greek alphabet with the same name, has been the subject of controversy. That shape has riled some, while the luminous glass windows promised in the designs are largely hidden beneath what some say resemble monstrous metal shutters.

Back in 2019, art historian Tommy Sorbo slammed the project as a "pollution" of Oslo, a "coming catastrophe". He maintains that opinion today, "at least for the exterior and the entrance". "The lobby looks like an airport, a warehouse, a hotel or a commercial building," he told AFP. "There is absolutely nothing in the choice of colors and materials to indicate that the place houses one of the greatest artists in the world." Management has shrugged off the criticism, saying the museum should provoke people in the same way Munch's art did at the time it was made. —AFP

Ancient Peruvian burial tombs shed new light on Wari culture

A team of archeologists in northern Peru discovered the remains of 29 people, including three children, that could help experts rewrite the history of the pre-Incan Wari civilization, the lead researcher said on Friday. The skeletons were buried more than 1,000 years ago in Huaca Santa Rosa de Pucala, an ancient ceremonial center in the coastal region of Lambayeque, 750 kilometers to the north of Lima.

The burials of the three children and a teenager at the front of the temple indicated they were human sacrifices from the Wari culture, Edgar Bracamonte, the lead researcher, told AFP. It is the first time a discovery linked to the Wari civilization has been made this far from their area of influence, said Bracamonte. "These discoveries allow us to rethink the history of the Lambayeque region, especially the links to Wari and Mochica occupations in the area," said Bracamonte. The Wari culture flourished in the central Peruvian Andes from the seventh to 13th centuries.

The Huaca Santa Rosa de Pucala enclosure, in the form of the letter 'D', was built between 800 and 900 AD. "We found a ceremonial temple with 29 human remains, 25 belonging to the Mochica era and four to the Wari culture," said Bracamonte. The Mochica, or Moche, culture developed from 100 to 700 AD on the northern Peruvian coast. The 25 Mochica remains were found in clay tombs and burial chambers in a temple. Researchers also found pieces of pottery and the remains of camelids — such as llamas and alpacas — and guinea pigs.

One of the most significant discoveries related to the Mochica culture was in 2006 with the unearthing of the fifth century Lady of Cao mummy, that showed the civilization included female leaders. The 1987 discovery of another mummy, the third century Lord of Sipan, is considered by experts one of the most significant archeological discoveries in the last few decades, as the main tomb was found intact and untouched by thieves. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features



Egyptian film director Ali El Arabi (center) poses with his team and their award for the Best Arab Documentary Film 'Captains of Za'atari' during the closing session of the 5th edition of the Gouna Film Festival in Egypt's Red Sea resort of El-Gouna on October 22, 2021. — AFP photos



Egyptian film director Ali El Arabi poses with the award for the Best Arab Documentary Film 'Captains of Za'atari' during the closing session of the 5th edition of the Gouna Film Festival.



(From left to right) Lebanese film director Mounia Akl, producer Myriam Sassine, actress Yumna Marwan and actresses Jiana and Ciana, react as they receive the El Gouna Green Star award for their movie Costa Brava, during the 5th edition of the El-Gouna Festival.



Tunisian actress Darine Haddad tries to pick up her dog Yorkshire as a GFF official approaches him on the red carpet of the 5th edition of the Gouna Film Festival (GFF).

Cartoon dreams: Netflix's Japan anime school targets demand

Armed with a set of pencils and a feather to sweep away eraser dust, Hitomi Tateno is training the next generation of anime artists at a new Netflix-funded academy as global demand for the Japanese genre soars. From runaway box office triumph "Demon Slayer" to recent Cannes sensation "Belle", anime has shaken off its reputation as a geeky subculture, drawing in hordes of new fans during virus lockdowns.

But Japan is facing a shortage of skilled animators, in part because most face years toiling in low-paying jobs to learn the ropes, meaning much of the painstaking frame-by-frame drawing work is outsourced overseas. That's something the US streaming giant thinks it can change with its WIT Animator Academy, which offers a group of junior artists free training and a stipend for living expenses as they learn.

George Wada, president of top anime production house WIT Studio, which is running the training with Netflix, compares it to other fast tracks into demanding industries. "If you become an apprentice with a top sushi chef, it may take years before you master all the recipes, but you can go to a sushi academy and finish the whole curriculum in one year," he explained. The six-month course focuses on "in-between" art - the frames between each "master" picture that create the illusion of movement.

Tateno, who has worked on top titles from Studio Ghibli's "Spirited Away" to cult classic "Akira", has built a successful career by in-betweening. "This job is like weaving a rug. It's very delicate and requires patience," the anime veteran told AFP as she checked lines drawn by a student. "Many aspiring animators want to quickly step up to a key animator position, and even if some want to specialize in in-betweening, not many can survive."

The in-betweeners

There's no doubt about the growing demand for animators. More than 100 million households worldwide watched at least one anime on Netflix in the 12 months to September 2020, a figure that grew 50 percent year on year, the US entertainment behemoth says. The firm hopes the academy will "help the future of Japanese animators to spread their wings to the world through their works", with eventual plans to expand and offer tracks into other animation specialities.



Photo shows Hitomi Tateno, CEO of the anime school Sasayuri, holding colored pencils at her school in Tokyo. — AFP

EGYPT FILM ON POVERTY RUFFLES FEATHERS TRIGGERING BACKLASH

Egyptian movie "Feathers" has drawn critical acclaim abroad but its unsettling depiction of poverty in the Arab world's most populous country has sparked heated debate at home. Veteran actor Sherif Moneer, who walked out of a screening at Egypt's El Gouna Film Festival this month, has led a patriotic backlash against the film for "presenting Egypt negatively".

But others have praised director Omar El Zohairy for shedding light on a genuine social problem in a way that is both artistic and constructive. On late Friday at the closing ceremony of the fifth edition of the El Gouna Film Festival, "Feathers" won the award for best Arab narrative film. "For me any artistic work will always generate differing views," a beaming Zohairy told AFP on the red carpet, addressing the issue after claiming the prize.

"The film is more important than any award," the director said. "The film is strong because of its feeling, artistic authenticity... and human values." "Feathers" tells the story of Om Mario (Mario's mother), a poor woman from the rural south who struggles to make ends

meet after her husband is transformed into a chicken. The absurdist narrative is performed by an amateur cast, mostly from the country's Coptic Christian minority.

It was the first Egyptian feature film to win a major award at the star-studded Cannes Film Festival this year. The film's opponents, who also include pro-government lawmakers, accuse Zohairy of creating an exaggerated image of squalor that bears no relation to contemporary Egypt. "The slums that we had and those that are disappearing now are better than the scenes represented in the film," Moneer, the actor, said in a television interview this week.

"The state has made great strides in eliminating slums and moving people to excellent alternative furnished housing... We are in a new republic now." Loyalist MP Mahmud Badr took to Twitter to condemn the "making of a movie depicting your country as if there was no development." Samir Sabry, a lawyer with a penchant for suing critics of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, filed a lawsuit against the film's producers for "insulting Egypt and

Egyptians".

'Shedding light'

But the rush of well-to-do Egyptians falling over each other to defend government policy and national pride over a movie about poverty was widely lampooned on social media. Economic rights researcher Osama Diab said the film's depiction of poverty was by no means exaggerated, based on the government's own figures. Around one in three of Egypt's 100 million people live below the poverty line. "It has been steadily on the rise in Egypt since the '90s, according to official figures," Diab told AFP.

In the past two years, COVID-19 had further deepened social inequality because of "the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on the poor", he said. "The highest concentration of poverty is among women living in the countryside of Upper Egypt, which is ironically the setting of the film." Diab said poverty reduction had never been a priority for government economic policy, which had been set in agreement with the International Monetary Fund.

from seeing "No Time to Die". The industry is hoping that a string of new big-budget flicks - some made months ago but unreleased - will bring back the good times. The massive backlog will begin screening from Diwali weekend - the festival of lights in early November - with "Sooryavanshi" starring Akshay Kumar, one of Bollywood's biggest stars.

Biryani banned

Bollywood, India's Hindi-language film industry, was worth \$2.5 billion in 2019 and is the world's most prolific. Movies in other languages are also big business. Maharashtra state and its capital Mumbai are among the last to re-open theatres, multiplexes and auditoriums, but for the industry it is "very, very important", film trade analyst Komal Nahta told AFP.

"Maharashtra contributes around 20 percent of the total all-India theatrical revenue and Bombay (Mumbai) is the nerve centre of Bollywood," Nahta said. Occupancy is being capped at 50 percent and no refreshments can be served, a far cry from pre-pandemic days when moviegoers at big multiplexes would be served biryani and ice cream in their seats.

Cinema-goers must wear face masks at all times, but while staff need to be fully vaccinated, there is no vaccination requirement for members of the audience. "The effects of the pandemic will linger but we are hopeful that 2021 will bring back the theatre-going audience," said Ajay Bijli, chairman of India's largest cinema chain PVR. Nahta predicted audiences "will return with a vengeance and therefore we will see collections probably which will be beyond everybody's imagination". - AFP



Bollywood actors Rajkumar Rao and Kriti Sanon (left) pose for pictures during the promotion of their upcoming comedy drama Hindi film 'Hum Do Hamare Do' in Mumbai. — AFP

Cinemas re-open in movie-mad Mumbai

Cinemas began re-opening in movie-mad Mumbai on Friday, the home of Bollywood, with theatres in India's tinseltown pinning their hopes on blockbuster releases from next month to pull back in the crowds. The pandemic torpedoed the industry worldwide but films have a special place in Indian culture, with stars enjoying almost divine status and people often queuing to watch the same movie multiple times.

Lockdowns and a devastating surge in coronavirus cases in April and May kept Indians away from the silver screen, putting dozens of small cinemas out of business and squeezing production firms hard. Many Indians turned instead to streaming platforms such as Netflix, which saw a boom in subscribers and hosted the releases of some new Bollywood films. On Friday, only a few cinemas took advantage of being allowed to open, showing older pictures as well as the new James Bond and US superhero caper "Venom", and punters were few and far between.

"I am an avid cinema enthusiast and I have been waiting for this day for a long time. The last movie I saw was in 2019, before the pandemic began. I am too excited to be back," said Smer Sagar, 18, fresh

Adele storms back to top of UK charts with comeback single

British soul superstar Adele on Friday topped the British charts for the first time in six years with comeback single "Easy On Me", notching the highest first-week sales since 2017. The single, in which she shares with the world details of the traumatic years she has endured since last releasing a record, achieved 217,300 chart sales, the highest week one figures since Ed Sheeran's "Shape of You" in 2017, according to the Official Singles Chart.

It also drew 24 million streams in Britain during its first week of release, smashing the record set by Ariana Grande in 2019. Despite her years out of the limelight, her fans flocked online to hear her new song, which has already attracted almost 100 million views on YouTube. Her much-anticipated new album, "30", will be put out on November 19, the "Hello" and "Rolling in the Deep" singer announced last week. The 33-year-old from north London recently opened up about her "year of anxiety", in which her marriage fell apart. Recording began three years ago, she wrote on Twitter, at a time when her life was "a maze of absolute mess and inner turmoil". She broke a five-year silence with an interview for Vogue, published earlier this month, that spoke of living like a recluse as she battled with anxiety. — AFP

Sports

Kohli says Pakistan 'very strong' ahead of Twenty20 blockbuster

Forget the past in India match, Babar tells Pakistan team

DUBAI: India skipper Virat Kohli yesterday said they will take on a "very strong" Pakistan team in their Twenty20 World Cup opener and downplayed their unbeaten record against their opponents. India have beaten Pakistan in all of their 12 matches at the T20 and 50-over World Cups.

“Records are meant to be broken”

"We never discussed these things, about our record and past performance," Kohli told reporters on the eve of the much-anticipated clash in Dubai today. "These things create distractions. What matters is how we prepare and execute on that particular day, regardless of the opposition."

Kohli said regardless of their past dominance Pakistan is and always has been packed with talented players. "Pakistan, according to me is a very strong team and always has been a strong side," he said. "You have to play your best cricket against them, because they have lots of talent and players who can change the game."

Babar Azam's Pakistan will look to break their World Cup jinx against India, who have won all five clashes in T20's showpiece event. Babar, Mohammad Rizwan and Fakhar Zaman hold the team's batting key while quicks Shaheen Shah Afridi and Hasan Ali lead a potent bowling attack.

Kohli backed his team's match winners including Hardik Pandya to come good in the tournament despite the all-rounder struggling with his bowling. "He is getting better in terms of getting prepared to bowl two overs for us," said Kohli. "What he brings at that number six spot is something that you cannot create overnight and hence I was always in favor of backing him in Australia as a batter purely. He can take the game away from the opposition when he is in full flow."

Pandya emerged as India's top all-rounder after his white-ball debut in 2016 but a spate of back injuries affected his career and he underwent back surgery two years ago. The pace bowler did not bowl in the second leg of the Indian Premier League (IPL) in the United Arab Emirates for his side Mumbai Indians. But Kohli says the attacking batsman is an asset to the team in the shortest format.

'Beyond us'

Babar vowed his team will not think about Pakistan's poor record against arch-rivals India when they meet today. "To be honest, what has passed is beyond us," Babar told a virtual media conference yesterday. "We want to use our ability and confidence on the day of the match so that we can get a better result. Records are meant to be broken."

The tickets for the match were sold out within hours of going on sale after the United Arab Emirates government allowed a 70 percent crowd for the Twenty20 World Cup matches in a relaxation of the COVID-19 restrictions. The South Asian nuclear rivals have only played in multi-national events like the World Cups and the Champions Trophy as strained relations have stalled bilateral cricket since 2007.



MANCHESTER: In this file photo taken on June 16, 2019, Pakistan's Mohammad Amir (second right) and teammate Babar Azam (right) speak with India's captain Virat Kohli (center) and India's Vijay Shankar (left) as they walk back to the pavilion as rain stops play during the 2019 Cricket World Cup group stage match between India and Pakistan at Old Trafford in Manchester, north-west England. — AFP

Pakistan did tour India in 2012 for five limited over matches but ties were not fully resumed as the two nations continued to be at loggerheads over multiple issues, with the disputed region of Kashmir and terrorism heading the list. Babar admitted it will be a match full of intensity. "The matches between Pakistan and India are always full of intensity so we need to perform well in all three departments of the game," said Babar.

Former champions India and Pakistan are placed in Group 2 along with New Zealand, Afghanistan and

Scotland and Namibia, who both came through the qualifying stage. Babar said Pakistan's prime minister Imran Khan — who led the country to victory in the 1992 World Cup — had shared his experiences with the team. "The Prime Minister met us before our departure and shared his experiences of the 1992 win and told us to play aggressive and fearless cricket against India." Earlier this week, India won both their warm-up matches, beating England and Australia while Pakistan beat the West Indies but lost to South Africa. — AFP

Houston Astros beat Boston Red Sox to reach World Series

LOS ANGELES: The Houston Astros booked their third trip to the World Series in five seasons on Friday, defeating the Boston Red Sox 5-0 to wrap up a 4-2 victory in the American League Championship Series. The Astros, who will face either the Atlanta Braves or Los Angeles Dodgers in Major League Baseball's showpiece, edged out a dogged Red Sox performance at Minute Maid Park in Houston.

Houston outfielder Kyle Tucker put the seal on a clinical win for the Astros, smashing a three-run home run in the eighth inning to effectively put the game out of Boston's grasp. Earlier, Cuban slugger Yordan Alvarez drove in the opening run for Houston in the bottom of the first inning, doubling on a fly ball to centerfield to score shortstop Alex Bregman.

A tense pitching duel then unfolded over the next four innings, with Boston starter Nathan Eovaldi digging in to prevent the Astros adding to their lead. Astros rookie pitcher Luis Garcia was superb from the mound, giving up only one hit across 5.2 scoreless innings with seven strikeouts. Houston finally added to their lead in the sixth inning when Tucker grounded into a double play at first base as Alvarez crossed home plate. After a scoreless seventh inning, Tucker jumped on Boston reliever Adam Ottavino's 95mph fastball, sending a rocket high into left center field to bring Alvarez and Carlos Correa home. Houston closer Ryan Pressly then mopped up the Red Sox in the top of the ninth inning, quickly disposing of Enrique Hernandez, Rafael Devers and Xander Bogaerts as the Houston home crowd erupted.

The Astros won the World Series in 2017 against the Dodgers, but that victory was subsequently tarnished by revelations of a sign-stealing scandal which led to a \$5 million fine and the sacking of then manager A.J. Hinch and general manager Jeff Luhnow. Houston reached the 2019 World Series but suffered a 4-3 series defeat to the Washington Nationals. — AFP



LOS ANGELES: LeBron James of the Los Angeles Lakers looks at the fans seated courtside as they were getting blown out by Phoenix Suns during the second half of the game at Staples Center on Friday in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

Davis, Howard clash as Lakers slump again

LOS ANGELES: Anthony Davis and Dwight Howard had to be separated by teammates as the Los Angeles Lakers slumped to an eighth straight defeat with a 115-105 loss to the Phoenix Suns on Friday. After losing all six of their pre-season games, the Lakers followed up their season-opening reverse to Golden State on Tuesday with another disjointed performance at the Staples Center.

And the tensions within the Lakers' new-look roster boiled over in the first half when Davis and Howard squared up to each other on the bench during a timeout. Several Lakers players including LeBron James scrambled to separate the duo, with Davis gesticulating as he was hustled away. Coach Frank Vogel later played down the altercation, which he said had arisen from a miscommunication on court.

"Dwight and AD had a miscue on a coverage and they talked it out," Vogel said. "When you're getting you're a** kicked, sometimes those conversations get heated. Those guys love each other, they talked it out. And that's going to happen from time to time — I'd rather our guys care than not care."

Howard later told reporters he had settled his differences with Davis. "We squashed it right then and there," Howard said. "We're both very passionate about winning and we didn't want to lose this game. But we're grown men, we got it out the way. We squashed it."

Sport Club to officially represent Kuwait in regional and international Jet Ski championships. The champions won several prominent titles during their past participations in the biggest Gulf, Asian, and international competitions.

Some of the team's most prominent accolades include the recent achievement at the Europe Championship (the first round of the World Championship) held last year, where World Champion and title holder Mohammed Borubaye attained the first-

There's no issue between me and him — that's my brother, my teammate."

The Lakers led early in the second quarter against last season's NBA Finals runners-up, but were overwhelmed in the third quarter as the Suns romped into a 32-point lead. Chris Paul led the scoring for Phoenix with 23 points and 14 assists while Devin Booker had 22 points, with Mikal Bridges adding 21.

James led the Lakers scorers with 25 points while Davis added 22 with 14 rebounds in a losing effort. Russell Westbrook was one assist away from his first triple double in a Lakers shirt, with 11 rebounds, nine assists and 15 points.

Sixers collapse

Elsewhere Friday, Kevin Durant scored a 29-point triple-double as the Brooklyn Nets punished a late collapse by the Philadelphia 76ers to bag their opening win of the season. The Nets appeared to be poised for a second straight loss following their opening defeat to Milwaukee after the Sixers pulled into a 108-98 lead with just five minutes remaining in the fourth quarter.

But the Sixers' hopes of extending their unbeaten start to the season evaporated as their shooting accuracy deserted them in the closing stages. The Sixers made 10 misses as the Nets turned a 10-point deficit into a 114-109 win with a 16-1 scoring run. Durant finished with 15 rebounds and 12 assists along with his 29-point haul, while LaMarcus Aldridge finished with 23 points and James Harden 20. Joe Harris added 14 off the bench while Patty Mills chipped in with 11.

The Sixers led for the entire game until their late fourth-quarter collapse, going 14 points clear in the first quarter alone. But they were unable to respond when Brooklyn turned up the pace in the fourth quarter with a more physical approach. — AFP

NBK RUN on December 4th

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) launches its Annual Sports Festival "NBK RUN" on December 4, 2021. For registration, visit nbk.com/nbkrun. "As the health crisis gradually abates, NBK is looking forward to introduce a new experience with a new look. NBK transformed its walkathon into NBK Run to pave the way for both professional runners and beginners to enjoy challenges and competitions," said Manal Al-Mattar, NBK Public Relations - Assistant General Manager.

"NBK Run is your way to fun and challenges, in addition to enjoying a day of entertainment with your family", she added. "We were eagerly waiting for the return of this huge sporting event. As the health crisis gradually declined, we decided to come back new and different. We see NBK RUN as a place where all family members can enjoy, and this is what families deserve after a long wait."

"NBK looks forward to welcoming participants and giving away many exciting prizes. The Walkathon event will host various functions, activities and competitions", she noted. "As part of the bank's dedication to corporate social responsibility, NBK regularly supports events which encourage healthier lifestyle for members of the community"

NBK will be giving away a new Nissan X - TERA 2021 car from the strategic partner Al-Babtain Group as the grand prizes along with many other valuable prizes. The race is open for runners aged 15 and above. The top six winners will be rewarded with valuable cash prizes. The walk for both the female and male participants will start at 8:30 am from the Green Island on the Gulf Road to the Shuwaikh Beach Park, parallel to the Gulf Road, next to KPC building for a distance of 11 Km.

NBK strongly supports sporting events and encourages sporting activities as means to promote a healthier and more active lifestyle for members of the community. Throughout the years, NBK also organized several social awareness programs including educational, environmental, health and many other active initiatives.

less confidence of the competencies of the country's athletes and their capabilities in excelling in different fields. As a leading digital service provider in Kuwait, Zain is constantly looking to identify and support excellence across the sports sector. The company will continue to put Kuwaiti National teams and individual athletes at the forefront of its priorities and pledges to continue motivating them to achieve all the recognition they deserve.

Zain welcomes Kuwait jet ski champions

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, welcomed the National Jet Ski team champions at Kuwait International Airport's fourth terminal (T4). The team recently received 10 medals as part of their recent participation in the second round of the World Jet Ski Championship 2021 held in the United States of America. The reception ceremony was attended by Secretary General of Kuwait Sea Sport Club Khaled Al-Fodari, Director of the Jet Ski committee in Kuwait Sea Sport Club Hussain Dashti, as well as several Sea Sport Club officials, club staff, and the team's sponsors, headed by Zain.

Zain is proud to partner with the World Champions for the past decade as part of its Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility strategy towards supporting the youth and sports sectors as well as supporting outstanding Kuwaiti athletes. The team received 10 medals (8 golds, and 2 silvers) as part of their participation in the World Jet Ski Championship 2021 concluded recently in the United States of America. The National Jet Ski team is authorized by the Kuwait Sea



KUWAIT: The champions, Sea Sport Club officials, and Zain's team at Kuwait International Airport.

Sports

Ronaldo, Salah duel takes center stage as Man Utd face Liverpool

Salah scored 12 goals in 11 matches; Ronaldo six in eight

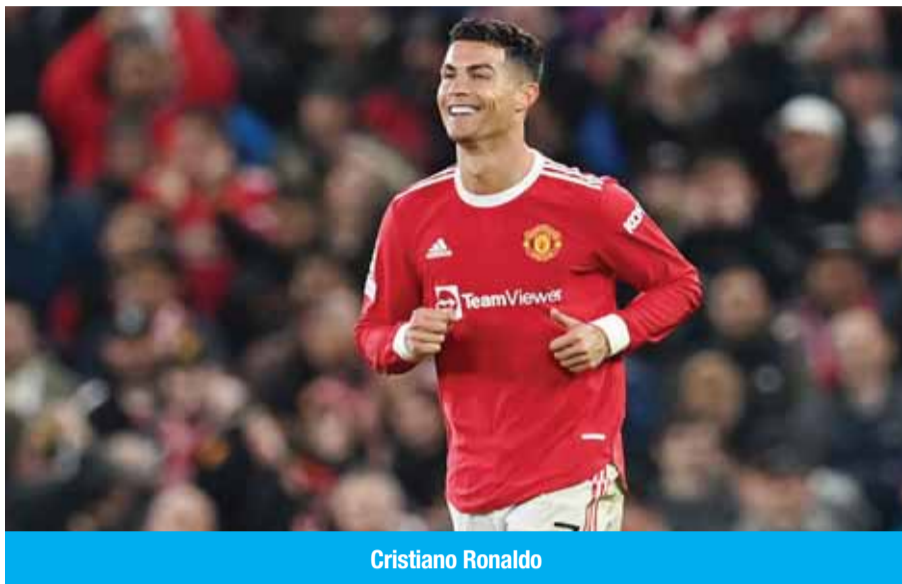
MANCHESTER: Cristiano Ronaldo and Mohamed Salah will go head-to-head for the right to be billed as the Premier League's top team when Manchester United face arch-rivals Liverpool today. Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp risked irking United striker Ronaldo ahead of the crunch clash when he hailed Salah as the best player in the world last weekend. The Egypt forward has been in superb form, with his sublime strikes against Manchester City and Watford already goal of the season contenders.

But Ronaldo hasn't been far behind with a series of crucial goals underlining his superstar status. While Paris Saint-Germain duo Lionel Messi and Kylian Mbappe can also stake their claim to be the world's best, in the Premier League there is little doubt that Ronaldo and Salah are the main men. So who will be this season's preeminent force?

Today's crucial showdown at Old Trafford will go some way to deciding that question. Without a win in their last three league games, United are four points behind second-placed Liverpool. United need Ronaldo to continue his knack of rising to the big occasion, while unbeaten Liverpool hope Salah can continue his blistering streak.

Salah has scored 12 times in 11 games this season, with Ronaldo netting six times in eight matches since returning to United from Juventus in August. Salah became the first Liverpool player to score in nine consecutive games after striking twice in the Champions League win at Atletico Madrid on Tuesday.

Just 24 hours later, Ronaldo stole the European spotlight with the late headed winner that completed United's fight-



Cristiano Ronaldo



Mohamed Salah

back from two goals down to beat Atalanta 3-2. United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer naturally leans towards his player in any debate about the best of the best. But he admitted Salah's red-hot run makes him a fearsome proposition.

"I'll always back Cristiano in any competition. He's unique. That being said, Salah, at the moment, he's on fire," Solskjaer said. "We know we have to be at our best to defend against him. We have to focus on them for 95 minutes to keep a clean sheet. I'm a big fan of Liverpool's front three. We have to enjoy the players, though not Salah on Sunday, of course."

True greatness

Asked to debate the virtues of the pair on Friday, Klopp took a diplomatic

approach as he highlighted each star's quality. "Why should we compare Cristiano Ronaldo and Mo Salah? Obviously both are world-class players,



United sits four points behind Liverpool

so that's how it is," he said. "Even when Ronaldo's left foot is not that bad, I would say Mo's left foot is probably better. Maybe then Cristiano in the air is

slightly better and the right foot is probably better. But speed-wise they are both pretty quick, very desperate to score goals, so maybe that's it."

It is the ability to propel a team to silverware that defines true greatness and, on that front, Ronaldo has the edge, for now. While Salah has won one Premier League title with Liverpool, Ronaldo is a three-time English champion, not forgetting his combined four league titles at Real Madrid and Juventus. Salah has one Champions League crown, but Ronaldo has lifted Europe's elite club prize five times.

Salah, whose contract expires in 2023, is reportedly looking for a new deal that would make him one of the Premier League's highest paid players alongside Ronaldo. Liverpool will surely

have to bow to the 29-year-old's demands, given he has scored 137 goals in 214 games for the club since joining from Roma in 2017.

Ronaldo has such longevity that even Salah might not be able to match all the Portugal legend's achievements. The 36-year-old has amassed 124 goals in 300 United appearances over his two spells with the club. He has also won the Ballon d'Or five times and is the record goalscorer in both the Champions League and international football.

However, Klopp believes Salah has the right character to stay at the top for years to come. "Mo is incredibly professional. He's really the first and very often the last out of all the players," Klopp said. "He's constantly interested in all the different things he has to do to improve. He has still a lot to give, 100 percent." — AFP

Barcelona, Real Madrid combine present, future in Clasico of fallen giants

MADRID: Barcelona's players met for dinner in a Catalan restaurant late on Wednesday night to celebrate Ansu Fati's new contract and to bond ahead of Sunday's Clasico against Real Madrid. The 18-year-old Fati committing himself for another six years carried special significance for Barcelona.

Despite all the problems they face, one of the most exciting talents in the world had pledged his future, raising hopes he can be the leader of a new generation for many years to come. More immediately, there was the desire for camaraderie ahead of the visit of Real Madrid at Camp Nou.

It will be a chance for Barca to regain lost ground in La Liga and to round off an encouraging week that has already seen them beat Valencia and scrape a much-needed Champions League win over Dynamo Kiev.

Those two intertwining threads - navigating the present while nurturing the future - feel like the defining feature of this Clasico, a meeting of two historic clubs, each of them trying to strategize, fix and rebuild while simultaneously flapping their arms just to keep heads above water.

Last summer, in the same restaurant, Barcelona president Joan Laporta met Ronald Koeman to discuss the season ahead. Laporta told Koeman he needed two weeks to assess his position as coach, which was taken to mean he would try to find a successor. But nobody could be found, or at least persuaded, and consequently an awkward, unhappy marriage has continued.

Across from Koeman today will be Carlo Ancelotti whose appointment by Real Madrid in the summer came as a surprise. Ancelotti's predecessor, Zinedine Zidane, had been fiercely loyal to the club's hugely successful, but older, generation of players and the expectation was Madrid would plump for a coach with a grander vision, one that was prepared to facilitate change.

Instead, Real Madrid president Florentino Perez turned to Ancelotti, who had already managed the club between 2013 and 2015. That is not to say Ancelotti and Koeman have not embraced youth.



SANT JOAN DESPI, Spain: Barcelona's defender Jordi Alba (left) looks at midfielder Ansu Fati during a training session at the Joan Gamper training ground in Sant Joan Despi yesterday on the eve of their Spanish League football match against Real Madrid. —AFP

Koeman can take credit for promoting several of the players Barcelona are most excited about including Pedri, Gavi, Nico Gonzalez, Ronald Araujo and Sergino Dest.

Ancelotti has put faith in Miguel Gutierrez at left-back and Eduardo Camavinga in midfield. The 21-year-old Vinicius Junior made his Real Madrid debut in 2018 but under Ancelotti is in the form of his fledgling career. Gavi might not have been given his chance had Barcelona been able to grant Koeman his wish to sign Georginio Wijnaldum, who chose Paris Saint-Germain. Miguel has seen his route to the Madrid starting line-up shortened by an injury to Ferland Mendy.

There also remains a loyalty to the old guard, a justifiable belief that Gerard Pique at 34 is still Barcelona's most important defender or that Luka Modric at 36 is still Madrid's finest midfield playmaker. The result today will be two sides made up of separate generations. The 17-year-old Gavi may play alongside the 33-year-old Sergio Busquets or the 20-year-old Rodrygo in support of the 33-year-old Karim Benzema.

across all competitions and have lost just once to OM in the last decade.

That 1-0 defeat in Paris came in a near-empty stadium at the start of the pandemic-affected last season. This time there will be a full house at the Velodrome as PSG aim to extend their 10-point advantage over Marseille, who are third and do have a game in hand.

Messi scored twice for PSG in their 3-2 win over RB Leipzig in the Champions League in midweek. All three of his goals so far in a Paris shirt have come in Europe. Indeed he has played more minutes so far in the Champions League than he has in Ligue 1.

Kylian Mbappe, who scored the other goal against Leipzig, has been the main man for Mauricio Pochettino's team this season, while Neymar has struggled for form. The Brazilian could return from an adductor muscle problem at the ground where he was sent off in October 2017 as the heated atmosphere got to him.

Marseille, who played Lazio in the Europa

With Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo gone, La Liga is trying to harness the image of Spanish football as the world's new talent factory and the Clasico - its most marketable fixture - as a window into the future. On Twitter, La Liga's official account asked on Thursday: "Which teenage star are you most excited to watch in #ElClasico?"

And yet there is a conflict there too, with Real Madrid and Barcelona still officially attached to the European Super League, a project based not on encouraging local talent but pocketing financial rewards and attracting bigger television audiences.

Barcelona brand their squad the 'Dream Teen' online but Laporta believes the quickest route to financial stability is not Fati or Gavi but a closed-off league, with more games against Liverpool, Manchester United and PSG. It means whoever wins the Clasico today will, for a few days, own the narrative, take confidence and momentum, and perhaps plunge their opponents into a period of crisis and doubt. But beneath the scrap for points and position and power is a deeper duel, a fight for relevance again and reassurance that better days lie ahead. — AFP

Dybala back for Juve's trip to champions Inter

MILAN: Paulo Dybala is back for Juventus' Serie A clash at fierce rivals Inter Milan after recovering from a thigh injury, coach Massimiliano Allegri said yesterday. The Argentinian forward has been out of action since picking up the knock in his team's win over Sampdoria a month ago. Although Allegri did not say whether the 27-year-old would start at the San Siro today, his return is a boost for Juve as they try to continue their march up the table.

"Dybala is available, he's well, he's done two training sessions with the squad so he'll be available," Allegri told reporters. "We've almost got a fully-fit squad, which is important because we have quite a few matches between now and the next international break (November 8-19)."

Around 56,000 fans are expected at the San Siro as Inter host their first big match since maximum stadium capacities were increased to 75 percent by the Italian government earlier this month. Juve sit seventh, three points behind third-placed Inter after a run of four straight league wins in which they have impressed more for their doggedness than for their play.

They are however still 10 points behind league leaders Napoli, who have won all eight of their matches and face Roma in the Italian capital just before today's big match in Milan. Champions Inter fell to defeat at Lazio last time out after a second-half meltdown over refereeing decisions but looked strong in their 3-1 Champions League win over Sheriff Tiraspol midweek.

"Inter are still favorites for the league title so tomorrow will be test against a good team," said Allegri. "Tomorrow isn't a decisive game in my opinion. Tomorrow is a chance to take a step forward and continue our positive run of results, but it's not a decisive match." — AFP

PSG and Messi face grudge match in Marseille

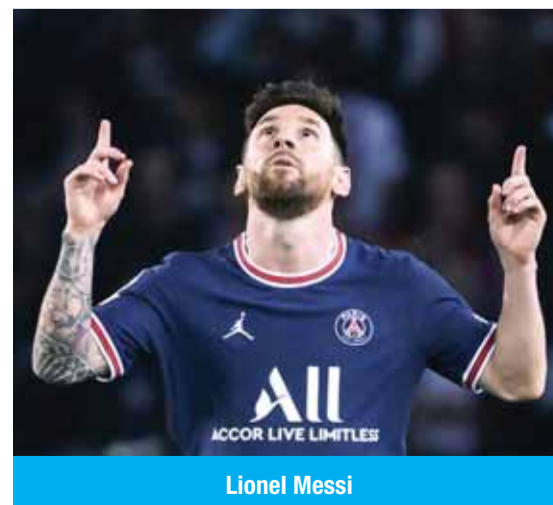
PARIS: Lionel Messi gets his first taste of French football's biggest rivalry as Ligue 1 leaders Paris Saint-Germain travel to face Marseille today. A few hours after Messi's old side Barcelona take on Real Madrid in the Clasico, the Argentinian will take to the field at the Velodrome in the fixture known as "Le Classique". It is a rivalry that grew in the early 1990s, when Marseille were the dominant force in French football and, for a short while, in Europe.

These days Qatar-owned PSG reign supreme in France, even if they missed out on the Ligue 1 title last season to Lille and their performances in this campaign have not always convinced. They have won seven of the last eight meetings of the clubs

with a PSG team that have won nine out of 10 league outings. "It's going to be a special occasion and a difficult match," said PSG midfielder Ander Herrera. "They are in good form, and there will be a bit more than just the usual three points at stake."

Player to watch: Matteo Guendouzi

The 22-year-old moved to Marseille on loan from Arsenal in order to breathe life into his career, which had stalled in north London where he had been frozen out by manager Mikel Arteta. After a spell at Hertha Berlin last season, Guendouzi now looks right at home under Sampaoli at Marseille and is flourishing in a midfield role which allows him to get forward and join the attack. Guendouzi, who was a non-playing member of the France squad at the recent UEFA Nations League finals, scored one goal and made two more in Marseille's 4-1 win over Lorient last weekend. Now he comes up against PSG, the club he supported as a boy and with whom he began his career as a youth before leaving for Lorient aged 15. — AFP



Lionel Messi

League on Thursday, have entertained this season under Argentine coach Jorge Sampaoli but it remains to be seen if they are capable of competing

Qatar opens fifth World Cup stadium

Doha hopes to attract 1.2 million World Cup visitors



DOHA: This fisheye image shows fireworks illuminating the venue during the opening ceremony of the Al-Thumama Stadium in the capital on Friday, ahead of the Amir Cup final football match between Al-Sadd and Al-Rayyan. — AFP

DOHA: Qatar inaugurated the fifth stadium that will host World Cup games in 2022 with a domestic cup tie on Friday watched by thousands who either recently recovered from coronavirus or received vaccinations. Al-Thumama stadium, 12 km south of central Doha, and inspired by the lace-like Islamic gahfiya cap, will seat 40,000 fans in the Gulf nation, the most controversial hosts in a generation.

"Since we won the World Cup (rights) we have received a lot of criticism. There is constructive criticism that we tried to take on board," said Fatma Al-Nuaimi, head of communications at the Supreme Committee that is organizing the 2022 tournament. "We also try not to let this criticism stop us."

The inaugural fixture, the Amir Cup, is in honor of the nation's all-powerful ruler Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani who attended Friday's fixture along with FIFA president Gianni Infantino. It saw Al-Sadd, under former Spain legend Xavi Hernandez, take on Al-Rayyan, coached by former France boss Laurent Blanc, with Al-Sadd winning 5-4 after a penalty shootout. "It's my first time inside a stadium. It's amazing," said Julie Rule, 25, a beauti-

cian from the Philippines.

Around the stadium, which is located between suburban Doha and the blue-collar Industrial Area, migrants who outnumber Qataris seven to one gathered on dusty parcels of land to play impromptu games of pre-match cricket and football. The area around Thumama, designed by Qatari architect Ibrahim Jaidah, is best known to expatriates in Qatar for the sole off-license permitted to sell alcohol and pork, as well as the country's only authorized Christian churches.

Energy-rich Qatar has so far inaugurated five of the eight stadiums that will be the home of the first World Cup in the Middle East. In addition to Al-Thumama, Qatar has so far inaugurated new-build Ahmad Bin Ali, Al-Janoub and Education City stadiums alongside the refurbished Khalifa ground. Ras Abu Aboud, Al-Bayt, and Lusail, which will host the final in 14 months, are yet to be opened.

Following the World Cup, Al-Thumama's capacity will be reduced to 20,000, with a sports clinic and a boutique hotel set to open on site as tiny Qatar seeks to avoid the burden of superfluous sta-

dia. Fans were able to apply for tickets to Friday's event if they either tested positive for virus antibodies, or have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19. Qatar, which says it vaccinated more than three quarters of its population, will review infection data ahead of the Arab Cup regional test tournament due to kick off in November.

Meanwhile, Nuaimi said organizers hope to attract 1.2 million tourists to the country, hosting them in traditional hotels and "innovative" accommodation. "We hope that during the World Cup, more than 1.2 million visitors from around the world will attend," she said. "They will not (all) be in the country at the same time, as the event extends over a period of 28 days."

Qatar, with a population of approximately 2.75 million, will be the first ever Middle East World Cup host nation between Nov 21 and Dec 18 next year. In addition to the hotels already available, Nuaimi said there were other "innovative and temporary" solutions to hosting visitors. Those include accommodation on cruise liners, hotel apartments, fan villages with an Arabian desert vibe, as well as stays in

private homes.

Officials have said 16 floating hotels will also be built, providing around 1,600 rooms in total. Nuaimi said the "Host a Fan" initiative will give visitors an opportunity to learn about Qatari culture. "We are a hospitable people, and this will be applied to the World Cup as well," she told AFP. Qatar had earlier said it expected as many as 1.5 million people to descend on the tiny Gulf nation for the World Cup, and in the months before and after the big event.

Some fans and commentators have expressed concerns that the conservative Gulf country may not offer visitors the same experience as past tournaments. Nuaimi said while alcohol was not part of Qatari culture, "alcoholic beverages will be available in designated areas".

Qatari authorities have repeatedly insisted that they have done more than any country in the region to improve worker welfare and say they have "always been transparent about the health and safety of workers". Nuaimi stressed that "98 percent of the construction was ready, and preparations will be completed by the end of the year". — Agencies

England thrash Windies; Aussies beat Proteas

DUBAI: Adil Rashid returned figures of 4-2 to set up a six-wicket victory for England after they dismissed defending champions West Indies for a paltry 55 at the Twenty20 World Cup yesterday. West Indies rattled England's top order before Jos Buttler (24) and skipper Eoin Morgan (7) took the team home in 8.2 overs in Dubai.

Left-arm spinner Akeal Hosein took two wickets and Moeen Ali was run out, but the target proved too meagre to challenge England. Moeen opened the bowling for England with his off-spin and made an instant impact, first with a sharp running catch to remove Evin Lewis. He then got the wicket of Lendl Simmons.

Pace bowler Tymal Mills claimed two wickets including Chris Gayle, the only batsman to make double figures with his 13, as West Indies crumbled in a poor batting performance from the two-time champions. Rashid entered the attack with West Indies on 44-6 and bowled the big-hitting Andre Russell for nought. He took two more wickets in successive balls in

his next over and then wrapped up the innings. He returned outstanding figures of 4-2 from his 2.2 overs of leg-spin.

West Indies avoided their worst T20 total of 45 against the same opposition in 2019. The two sides met five years after their clash in the 2016 final in Kolkata when Carlos Brathwaite hit Ben Stokes for four straight sixes in the last over. But with yesterday's crushing performance, England have fired a warning to their rivals in the seventh edition of T20's showpiece event.

Earlier yesterday, Marcus Stoinis and Matthew Wade stood unbeaten to help Australia prevail in a tense finish against South Africa and win by five wickets in the Twenty20 World Cup. Chasing a modest 119 for victory, Australia were in trouble at 81-5 after Steve Smith, who scored 35, and Glenn Maxwell, who made 18, departed. Stoinis, who made 24, stood firm and put on an unbeaten stand of 40 with the left-handed Wade, who made 15. Stoinis hit the winning boundary to take Australia over the line with two balls to spare. — AFP

Rampant Chelsea hit Norwich for seven, Newcastle still winless

LONDON: Chelsea opened up a four-point lead at the top of the Premier League with a 7-0 demolition of Norwich yesterday as Newcastle's wait for a Premier League win went on after a 1-1 draw at Crystal Palace. Mason Mount scored a hat-trick for the Blues at Stamford Bridge as the European champions coped easily without first-choice strikers Romelu Lukaku and Timo Werner.

Only Norwich are keeping Newcastle off the foot of the table and already look destined for a swift return to the Championship with only two points and minus-21 goal difference from their opening nine games. Mount started the rout after just eight minutes and finished it with two more in the closing stages after Ben Gibson had been sent-off for the visitors.

Callum Hudson-Odoi, Reece James and Ben Chilwell were also on target for Thomas Tuchel's men, while Max Aarons' own goal summed up a sorry day for the Canaries. Mount had not scored since May and Tuchel welcomed his return to scoring form with Lukaku and Werner expected to be out for some time. "No matter how satisfied the coach is, the offensive guys need goals to be fully happy," said Tuchel. "He waited too long, so it was good that he got some goals. I agree he looked fresh again today."

Newcastle's new Saudi owners were given another reminder of the investment it will take to make the Magpies a force to be reckoned with at Selhurst Park. Interim manager

Graeme Jones took charge for the first time since Steve Bruce was sacked and needed a moment of brilliance from Callum Wilson just to salvage a point. Christian Benteke headed the Patrick Vieira's men in front.

Wilson showed the value of a proven goalscorer with a stunning overhead kick into the top corner 25 minutes from time. Benteke also hit the woodwork twice and thought he had earned a deserved three points for the Eagles five minutes from time, but his second goal was ruled out after a VAR review for a foul by Marc Guehi. Newcastle stay second bottom, but are just three points adrift of safety.

Claudio Ranieri got his first win as Watford manager as the Hornets twice came from behind to stun Everton 5-2 at Goodison Park. Josh King failed to score as an Everton player last season, but hit a hat-trick to help move Watford six points clear of the relegation zone. Juraj Kucka and Emmanuel Dennis were also on target for the visitors, who scored four times in the final 12 minutes.

Leeds needed a stoppage-time penalty to earn a 1-1 draw at home to Wolves. South Korean international Hwang Hee-chan opened the scoring at Elland Road. Wolves were set to move up to fifth until Joe Gelhardt was fouled inside the area in the 94th minute and Rodrigo slotted home the penalty.

Burnley remain in the bottom three, but



LONDON: Chelsea's English midfielder Mason Mount controls the ball during an English Premier League match between Chelsea and Norwich City at Stamford Bridge yesterday. — AFP

Maxwel Cornet is proving himself a shrewd signing for Sean Dyche's men as the Ivorian scored twice in a 2-2 draw at Southampton. Saints turned the game around after Cornet opened the scoring to take the lead with goals from Tino Livramento and Armando Broja. The former Lyon winger then salvaged a point for the Claretts with a thumping finish on the volley from outside the area. — AFP