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MoE to open night schools to make up for closures

Assembly panel decides to shun foreign consultants, hire Kuwaitis instead

Qatar Amir receives Speaker

DOHA: Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani received yesterday Kuwait's National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and his accompanying delegation in Doha. During the meeting, Ghanem conveyed HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's greetings and best wishes to the Qatari Amir. He also congratulated the Qatari Amir on the success of the first legislative elections of the Shura Council and expressed his support for that move. Meanwhile, Qatar's Amir conveyed his sincere greetings to HH the Amir of Kuwait and affirmed the deep historical relations between Kuwait and Qatar. — KUNA



DOHA: Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani receives Kuwait's National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem yesterday. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Education Ministry Undersecretary Dr Ali Al-Yaqoub said yesterday the ministry plans to compensate for school closures during the pandemic by opening night schools in November in coordination with the health ministry. Speaking on the sidelines of a forum discussing the pandemic's effect on educational performance organized by Hawally educational area, Yaqoub said the compensation plan hinges on approval from medical authorities.

Yaqoub said 34 diagnostic and analytical tests were run to find solutions and put forth policies to improve students' performance. He said the absence of students from schools for nearly a year and a half led to disparate educational levels. Therefore, plans will take into consideration each student's case in an effort to compensate the skills they have missed.

Yaqoub indicated that by the end of each month, plans are reviewed and the ministry will be working with health authorities to look into all measures, including class timings and the attendance mechanism. He affirmed that the ministry of education is committed to coordinate with health authorities,

especially on the possibility of opening night schools.

Meanwhile, the newly-elected National Assembly legal and legislative committee yesterday decided to stop dealing with expat consultants and replace them with Kuwaitis.

The decision came immediately after the panel unanimously elected leading opposition MP Obaid Al-Wasmi as its head and MP Hisham Al-Saleh as its rapporteur.

Saleh told reporters Wasmi immediately decided that the panel will no longer deal with expat consultants and will seek to replace them with Kuwaitis. Most of the Assembly committees were elected by a unanimous vote in the opening session of the new term on Tuesday, reflecting harmony in the house following national dialogue called by HH the Amir. — Agencies



Dr Ali Al-Yaqoub

News in brief

KFF Instagram account hacked

KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Force announced yesterday that its Instagram account has been hacked. In a press statement, KFF said work is underway to restore it. — KUNA



US issues passport with 'X' gender

WASHINGTON: The US yesterday announced its first passport with "X" for gender, a landmark step for people outside the binary male or female categories. The State Department said it had issued a first passport with "X" for gender and would make the option routinely available by early 2022 both for passports and birth certificates of Americans abroad. — AFP

Mosques vandalized in Tripura

GUWAHATI: Indian security forces guarded mosques in the northeastern state of Tripura yesterday after rightwing groups attacked Muslim targets in apparent revenge for deadly violence against Hindus in Bangladesh. Authorities banned gatherings of more than four people in parts of the state, while police have issued warnings about "provocative messages" spreading on social media. At least four mosques were vandalized and shops and homes owned by Muslims were ransacked. — AFP

Mullah Omar's son on TV

KABUL: The son of Taliban founder Mullah Omar appeared in public for the first time yesterday, as Afghanistan's hardline rulers try to polish their media image. The televised event saw Mohammad Yaqoob, Afghanistan's new defense minister, appealing to local businessmen to invest in hospitals and clinics, signaling the Taliban are emerging from the shadows. — AFP

Geagea dodges court summons

MAARAB, Lebanon: Prominent Lebanese Christian leader Samir Geagea failed to show up yesterday at a military court summons over his role in a deadly flareup earlier this month in Beirut. Simultaneously, hundreds of flag-waving supporters of the Lebanese Forces (LF) leader gathered in front of the ex-warlord's home in his mountain bastion and marched in a show of support. Geagea had warned last week he would ignore the summons if his bitter

rival, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, was not called in for questioning too.

Seven people were killed in street fighting two weeks ago, following a rally organized by Hezbollah and its allies against the judge investigating last year's deadly blast at Beirut port. Hezbollah accuses the FL of firing the first shots in the Oct 14 violence. Geagea denied any involvement and claimed that his summons had no legal grounding. The army was tasked with investigating the unrest, which took place in central Beirut and over which 18 people were detained.

Geagea is the only warlord from the 1975-1990 civil war to have served jail time, and Nasrallah the only one whose movement kept its

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MAARAB, Lebanon: Supporters of Lebanese Forces (LF) leader Samir Geagea gather in front of the ex-warlord's home in his mountain bastion in a show of support yesterday. — AFP

Sudan junta tightens grip amid pressure

KHARTOUM: Sudanese security forces launched sweeping arrests of anti-coup protesters yesterday, tightening the regime's grip while the international community ramped up punitive measures. The World Bank froze aid and the African Union suspended the East African country over this week's military takeover. Armed forces deployed in large numbers after overnight protests saw clashes in the capital Khartoum, when officers fired tear gas and arrested several leading pro-democracy activists, including from Sudan's largest political party, the Umma Party.

"Police forces have removed all the barricades since Wednesday morning and arrested all the people who stood near them," said Hady Bashir, a protester, after AFP correspondents saw security forces clear rocks and tires blocking major streets in Khartoum. Beyond the capital, protesters have stood their ground to decry the country's latest military coup, setting up blockades in Port Sudan in the east, Wad Madani to the south, and Atbara to the north.

"Sporadic protests erupt every now and then



KHARTOUM: Sudanese anti-coup protesters use bricks to barricade a street in the capital yesterday. — AFP

demanding the government's return," said Osama Ahmed, a witness from Wad Madani, about 186 km south of Khartoum. Since top General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan on Monday announced the dissolution of the government and declared a state of emergency, thousands of citizens have maintained protests, chanting "No to military rule".

Shops have remained closed following calls for a campaign of civil disobedience, and pro-democracy movements ratcheted up calls for "million-strong protests" on Saturday. Yesterday, the AU called the

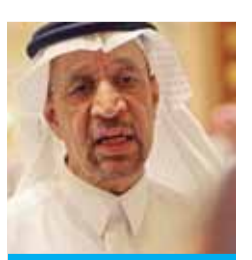
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44 global firms to set up regional HQs in Riyadh

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia said yesterday it has licensed 44 international companies to establish regional headquarters in Riyadh, competing with Gulf neighbors, particularly Dubai, for the position of regional business hub. In February, the oil-rich kingdom issued an ultimatum to foreign firms that those seeking state contracts must have their Middle East headquarters in the country by 2024.

The ultimatum was seen as a direct challenge to Dubai, which has long dominated as the region's business hub, against the backdrop of Saudi efforts to diversify its oil-reliant economy. "Forty-four companies from various sectors and countries have signed agreements to move (their regional headquarters) and have obtained final licenses," Investment Minister Khalid Al-Falih told AFP on the sidelines of the Future Investment Initiative (FII) conference in Riyadh.

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Khalid Al-Falih

Local

KFAED, UN-Habitat sign KD 4m deal to help reduce dust storms

KPC, UN-Habitat ink MoU on sustainable development



KUWAIT: United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of the Program Maimunah Sharif (left) and KFAED Director-General Marwan Al-Ghanem pose for a group picture after signing the agreement. — KUNA photos

KUWAIT: Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) and United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-Habitat) yesterday signed a grant agreement worth KD 4 million (\$13.2 million) to finance Improved Resilience to Transboundary sand and Dust Storms in Kuwait and Iraq Project. The deal was signed by United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of the Program Maimunah Sharif, and KFAED Director-General Marwan Al-Ghanem.

Ghanem said in a press statement on the sidelines of the signing ceremony that the project would contribute to reducing about 40 percent of the total amount of sand and dust falling on the state of Kuwait. It will also help reduce the amount and number of occurrences of sand and dust storms in two specific areas, Muthanna and Dhi Qar provinces in the Republic of Iraq, which are located about 250 kilometers north of the Kuwaiti border, he added.

The project aims to identify the main causes that lead to the formation of sand and dust storms in terms of climatic, geological, and chemical factors, and provide solutions in the areas suffering from these storms, he added. This will be achieved through analysis of information using specialized

programs to obtain results that help to carry out fieldwork to mitigate the negative effects of these storms, he said, noting that the main components of the project are: preparing technical, economical and health indicators, and procurement documents for goods and services, physical intervention and fieldworks, monitoring and analysis of results and securing project sustainability.

Moreover, the project will directly contribute to maximizing regional efforts in achieving a set of sustainable development goals, most notably the eleventh goal on creating sustainable cities and local communities, the thirteenth goal on expanding the scope of measures to mitigate and adapt to climate change, and the seventeenth goal on strengthening global partnerships and cooperation in achieving development goals, he noted. In the meantime, the UN official said the project will contribute to cutting sand and dust storms and their negative impacts on public health and the economy of the affected areas,



Cutting 40% of sand falling on Kuwait

specifically on the State of Kuwait.

Sustainable development

Meanwhile, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) and the UN-Habitat yesterday signed a memo of understanding (MoU) for attaining Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The MoU was signed by KPC's CEO Hashem Hashem and Director of the Regional Office for the Arab States at the UN-Habitat Erfan Ali, with officials from both sides attending.

Addressing the signing ceremony, Hashem said the document is meant to provide a cooperative framework for both sides to work together to realize SDGs. The MoU will be put in place in Kuwait by means of focusing on environment recovery, urban governance, decision-support mechanism, social inclusion and basic service management, Hashem elaborated.

The document defines joint cooperation programs for carrying out particular projects pur-

posed to make the KPC a role model for sustainable corporations that are capable of surviving and working together for improving the environment performance of the KPC and its subsidiaries and even the State of Kuwait. It, further, offers environmental consultations and oil sector-bearing sustainability consultations with a view to attaining sustainable urban development goals, together with cooperation for implementing new environment projects in the oil sector, eventually leading to further revamping Kuwait's reputation regionally and globally.

The United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-Habitat) is the United Nations agency for human settlements. It is mandated by the UN General Assembly to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all. KPC was established in January 1980 as a state-owned oil corporation. The shares of its subsidiaries, namely Kuwait Oil Company, Kuwait National Petroleum Company, Petrochemicals Industry Company and Kuwait Oil Tanker Company, were transferred to the new corporation. KPC is responsible for marketing Kuwait's oil outside the country. — KUNA

Turkey taking firm steps towards future

KUWAIT: Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey Ayse Hilal Sayan Koytak released the following statement on the occasion of Turkey's national day, which falls tomorrow:

"On October 29, we celebrate the 98th anniversary of the proclamation of the Republic of Turkey. I would like to thank our friends in Kuwait who did not leave us alone with their messages of celebration. We are proud because in nearly a century since its establishment, the Republic of Turkey has been a respected country both in its region and beyond, with its democratic structure, economic and political independence.

"Particularly in the last 19 years, we have made a great breakthrough in all aspects of state and national life, from education to health, from security to justice, from transportation to energy. With this breakthrough, we have established the basic infrastructure for the '2023 goals', referring to the 100th year of the Republic, as well as the 2053 and 2071 visions.

"The world has been grappling with deep, devastating and transformative problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic for the past two years. Turkey is one of the few countries that has managed to stay strong during this difficult period and even increase its power. First of all, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown how important quality and accessible health care is. The city hospitals, which we have implemented through public-private-partnership, serve our own citizens as well as our guests from abroad. I believe that our Kuwaiti friends will also benefit from the quality health services offered by Turkey.

"In 2020, which was the peak of the pandemic, Turkey became the second country with highest growth rate with 1.8 percent. This was not coincidental, as we continued with growth rates of 7.2 percent in the first quarter of 2021 and 21.7 percent in



Turkish Ambassador Ayse Koytak

the second quarter. We expect to complete the year 2021 with nine percent growth.

"Turkey is one of the few states among OECD countries that has increased its employment too, compared to the pre-pandemic period. While investments decreased by 35 percent globally during the pandemic period, they have hardly slowed down in Turkey. We want to increase the scale of international investments in our country even higher. For this, we will transform our investment incentive system into a much more attractive structure.

"We are among the three most successful countries in unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) technologies. We will make our drone fleet number one in the world with the introduction of our combat unmanned aircraft system. We are among the 10 countries in the world that can design, build and maintain their own warships. We meet the needs of friendly and allied countries along with ourselves in land and sea vehicles. We currently have seven companies in the top 100 defense companies in the world. We plan to commission the first of our new type of submarines next year. We aim to take our own design electric vehicle off the band by the end of 2022.

"Last year, we made 540 billion cubic meters of natural gas discovery in the Black Sea with our own seismic exploration and deep drilling vessels. Turkey has written a success story not only in

exploration and discovery activities, but also in the widespread use of natural gas and its delivery to households.

"After all, compared to the past, we see a Turkey that has increased its national income by three times, risen to 11th place in the world according to purchasing parity, and has set records in investment, production, exports, employment and growth. Despite the multidimensional challenges that we have experienced recently, the progress Turkey has made in democracy and development is promising for our future.

"The world is on the eve of a new and radical transformation. We have significant advantages to capture this new revolution, where many complex elements from climate change to artificial intelligence are combined. Turkey will not miss this new change in the global system. It will reach its targeted levels in all areas. In this process, it is my greatest hope that relations and cooperation between Turkey and Kuwait continue to further develop and strengthen in all areas.

"I avail myself of this opportunity to wish health, happiness and long life to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, as well as the friendly people and government of Kuwait."

Geagea dodges court...

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arsenal after the conflict. Their latest feud adds a layer of complication

44 global firms to set up...

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He did not disclose the names of the firms. "We have a short-term goal to reach up to 400 or 500 companies, but there is no cap," added Falih. Saudi Arabia will offer companies incentives, such as zero percent corporate tax for 50 years, a 10-year waiver from the state's "Saudization" policy to reserve jobs for Saudis and "preferential" treatment in government contracts, according to a document seen by AFP.

"The direct and indirect benefits from the presence of companies (in Saudi Arabia) amount up to 170 billion riyals (\$45 billion)," said Falih. Saudi

to the fate of Tarek Bitar, the judge investigating the port blast that killed more than 200 people and disfigured Beirut last year. Bitar's determination to question senior officials over the explosion has earned him the respect of the victims' families - and the enmity of the political barons running a country where major crimes have systematically gone unpunished. — AFP

officials are putting the finishing touches to launch the King Abdullah Financial District (KAFFD), a multi-billion-dollar project announced in 2006, with many companies expected to be based there.

While some experts believe Saudi Arabia, the Arab world's largest economy, is directly competing with Dubai, Falih said it was about "integration" with the emirate. "If there is competition, it is a creative competition that is beneficial to both parties. Everyone will benefit from growth and openness," he said. Falih said that the United Arab Emirates, which is made up of seven emirates including Dubai, will also benefit from the kingdom's growth. "In the UAE, they are trailblazers and successful, and their success and brilliance will continue in many areas, including in the field of attracting companies." — AFP

Sudan junta tightens grip...

Continued from Page 1

military takeover in Sudan "unconstitutional" and suspended its membership within the continent wide bloc. The World Bank later suspended aid to the East African country over the coup.

Analysts had warned that the putsch could put at risk much-needed international assistance unlocked under Hamdok's government to rescue Sudan's economy, battered by decades of US sanctions and by mismanagement. The blows came after Burhan allowed home Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok - who was detained by the military on Monday along with his ministers and civilian members of Sudan's ruling council - following intense international pressure.

But Hamdok and his wife were returned "under close surveillance", his office said on Tuesday, while other ministers and civilian leaders remain under full military arrest. In a joint statement, Western diplomats called for an urgent face-to-face meeting with Hamdok. "We continue to recognize the prime minister

and his cabinet as the constitutional leaders of the transitional government," read a joint statement by US, UK and Norway, the European Union, and Switzerland.

The coup comes after a rocky two-year transition outlined in an Aug 2019 power-sharing deal between military and civilians. Their joint rule followed the ouster of autocrat Omar Al-Bashir on the back of mass protests against his regime. It was the latest putsch in one of the world's most underdeveloped countries, which has experienced only rare democratic interludes since independence in 1956.

Burhan who has been Sudan's de facto head of state since Bashir's ouster was also a senior general during Bashir's three-decade long hardline rule, and has the support of Sudan's much feared paramilitary Rapid Support Forces. Tensions had long simmered between the civilian and military sides, but divisions peaked after a Sept 21 "foiled" coup. Four people were killed and scores wounded on Monday when soldiers opened fire on protesters, according to an independent doctors' union.

Violence against protesters has mounted in a "vengeful" crackdown by

security forces, said the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), an umbrella of unions which were instrumental in the anti-Bashir protests. Late Tuesday, security forces arrested Sedeeq Al-Sadiq Al-Mahdi, the Umma party deputy, and took him to "an unidentified location", his family said.

Internet services have largely been blocked. But Khartoum airport, which has been closed to flights, was set to reopen yesterday afternoon, the civil aviation authority said. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with Hamdok on Tuesday, the State Department said, welcoming the prime minister's return home from custody but expressing "deep concern" about the takeover and reiterating US support for a civilian-led democracy.

Washington has suspended hundreds of millions of dollars in aid over the coup. The EU has also threatened "serious consequences" for Sudan's rulers, including suspension of financial support. Bashir has been jailed since his ouster in 2019 and convicted of corruption. He is separately on trial for the 1989 Islamist-backed coup which brought him to power, and is wanted by the International Criminal Court on charges of genocide in the civil war in Darfur. — AFP

Local

Kuwait strongly deplores Lebanon Information Minister's comments on Saudi Arabia, UAE

Lebanon stresses its position on defending security, safety of Gulf states

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry yesterday voiced vehement condemnation and disapproval of the Lebanese information minister's remarks on Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates (UAE). In his comments, the Lebanese minister pressed baseless accusations against both sisterly countries, which ignore their great and much-appreciated role in supporting Yemen and its people and even contradict the authentic reality of the current situation in Yemen, the ministry said in a statement. The statements also run counter to the Lebanese government's official position and wink at the crucial role of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the UAE as well as the Arab coalition to support Yemen's legitimacy, it added. The Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry has summoned the Lebanese charge d'affaires in Kuwait Hadi Hashem and handed him an official memo of protest including Kuwait's utter disapproval of these comments which have nothing to do whatsoever with the reality and contradict the simplest rules of dealings between countries.

The Saudi Foreign Ministry has also summoned Lebanon's Ambassador and handed him a letter of protest regarding comments made by Lebanese information minister George Kurdahi about Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The Saudi Press Agency (SPA) quoted the foreign ministry as saying in a statement that the Lebanese minister's "statements contradict the simplest political norms and are inconsistent

with the historic relations between the two brotherly peoples." The ministry also expressed disappointment by the "insults contained in those statements directed at the Kingdom and countries part of the Arab coalition to support legitimacy in Yemen."

Lebanon's Arab brothers

Lebanon's Foreign Ministry has meanwhile defended its position that condemns "terrorist attacks" on Saudi Arabia, and stressed the security



GCC chief demands apology

and safety of the Gulf States and their citizens. Responding to the Information Minister George Kurdahi's latest controversial comments, the ministry said in a statement, "a personal statement was previously issued by Lebanon's Minister of Information, George Kurdahi, prior to his appointment as minister, and it was published yesterday".

Late Tuesday, Lebanon Prime Minister Najib Mikati said in a statement that "Lebanon highly respect and appreciates the people of the Gulf States," stressing the Lebanese government's adherence to "brotherhood ties with the Arabs". Regarding Minister Kurdahi's comments, Mikati said that these stances do not reflect those of the Lebanese government, neither reflect the government's ministerial statement that clings to brotherly ties with Lebanon's Arab brothers, especially with Saudi Arabia. He stressed his country's keenness to keep the good relations with Saudi Arabia, rejecting any interference in the kingdom's internal affair.

Inadequate understanding

In the meantime, GCC Secretary-General Nayef Al-Hajraf voiced utter rejection of the Lebanese information minister's statements, which reflect an inadequate understanding and superficial reading of happenings in Yemen. In a press statement, Hajraf deplored the Lebanese minister's criticism of Saudi Arabia, which leads the Arab coalition to support Yemen's legitimacy, as well as the UAE, while the coalition has been trying to improve the situation in Yemen since Houthi coup in September 2014. He called on the minister to read historical facts of the situation in war-torn Yemen so that he could be aware of the sizable support provided by the Saudi-led Arab coalition with a view to reaching a total



solution to the Yemeni crisis.

The GCC chief, further, blasted the minister for having defended Houthi group while winking at the latter's recalcitrance against all international efforts to resolve the crisis and its missile and drone attacks on Saudi Arabia and even disarmed Yemenis. He emphasized that Lebanon's minister of information should apologize for his remarks and that the Lebanese state should clarify its position. — KUNA



NEW YORK: Kuwait's deputy permanent delegate to the UN Bader Al-Munaikh speaks during a UN general assembly session on Tuesday. —KUNA

Nations should decide own fate, Kuwait tells UN

NEW YORK: Nations should be allowed to decide their own fate based on principles and values embedded in UN resolutions, a Kuwaiti diplomat said, saying such rights are legitimate and cannot be taken away. Citing the Palestinians as a case in point, Kuwait's deputy permanent delegate to the UN Bader Al-Munaikh told a UN general assembly session on Tuesday that the Palestinians have full-fledged political rights to determine their own fate. He

lamented that the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has been exposed to a "political attack" that imperils its core objectives, in addition to the COVID pandemic, which impeded most of the aid agency's work.

UNRWA will always have Kuwait's firm backing, the diplomat highlighted, mentioning a \$20 million grant deal signed between both sides to keep the UN agency's aid programs for the Palestinians afloat, ahead of Belgium-hosted talks over the matter next month. He reiterated calls for the Palestinians' inalienable right to an independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on 1967 borders, as supported by relevant UN resolutions, which back a two-state solution as the only way for peace in the Middle East. — KUNA

Family allegedly kept daughter's death secret for five years

KUWAIT: Kuwait police are investigating a bizarre case in which a woman is accused of keeping her daughter's body inside her apartment for five years, before officers made the grim discovery a few days ago. The case was first brought to police's attention when a Kuwaiti man told Salmiya police station officers that his mother has kept his sister's body in the bathroom of their apartment for five years, and only skeletal remains

are left. The public prosecution called the mother, her son who reported the matter and his brother for questioning about this unusual case. Al-Qabas Arabic daily reported yesterday quoting sources familiar with the investigation.

When detectives went to the apartment, they found the daughter's body in a small room with a bathroom, which was sealed with wood and difficult to open. The room was not opened for years and was full of dust. Sources said inspection by detectives and forensics personnel of the apartment revealed that the mother had covered the central air-conditioning vents with plastic so that the noxious odor of the decomposing corpse did not reach the rest of the building. She then installed many air-conditioning units to maintain good ventilation and prevent the odor from spreading, according to the sources.

The prosecution ordered the release of the son who sounded the alarm and detained his mother

and brother at Salmiya police station until investigations are complete and the coroner's report is issued about the cause of death. Meanwhile, another security source quoted in the report said the investigator noticed that the mother, who is a cancer patient, and her two sons were not behaving normally when questioned.

Separately, the same newspaper reported yesterday that the alleged armed robber of a Jahra bank told detectives he planned to rob another bank in Farwaniya after committing the first robbery. But after waiting for a long-time monitoring security arrangement, he said that he changed his mind because he was afraid of being arrested, according to the report. He then went to Hawally and hid in a hotel before he was arrested. The suspect was sent to the public prosecution on several charges. He also led detectives to the stolen money and the knife used in the crime. The suspect is a drug addict and has a criminal record.



KUWAIT: Chief of Staff of Kuwait's Army General Khaled Saleh Al-Sabah participates in the virtual meeting. —KUNA

Kuwait army chief participates in GCC meeting

KUWAIT: Chief of Staff of Kuwait's Army General Khaled Saleh Al-Sabah participated yesterday in a virtual meeting of the Supreme Military Committee of the Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces of the GCC. The Army said in a press statement that the Supreme Committee issued several decisions and recommendations that contribute to supporting military integration and cooperation between the armed forces of the GCC states. The GCC consists of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Oman. — KUNA

Saudi initiative sets foot on world economic map: Kuwait

RIYADH: Minister of Information, Culture, and State Minister for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi affirmed yesterday that Saudi Arabia's Future Investment Initiative (FII) sets foot on world economic map due to its achievements. This came in a statement to the press on the sidelines of the fifth edition of the Future Investment Initiative and his meeting with Saudi Minister of Tourism Ahmad Al-Khateeb.

Mutairi noted that the four past initiatives have established strong economic grounds that attract the attention of investors and economists that helped Saudi Arabia to achieve economic growth and attain an advanced position in global economy. "This event witnessed vast participations of more than 2,000 delegations and 5,000 participants of political and economic leaders from around the world, which reflects Saudi Arabia's central position in the world of economy," said Mutairi. "In Kuwait, we look closely to the forums set up by Saudi Arabia, as they undoubtedly benefit Kuwait and the region as a whole," he added. He also noted that Kuwait is keen to participate in these major economic initiatives to benefit from the experiences. On the other hand, Mutairi said that his meeting with Khateeb comes as part of the continuous cooperation between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and that several topics related to the tourism sector have been discussed and ways of developing them.

Grave challenges

Saudi Arabia's annual Future Investment Initiative (FII) is a testament to the grave challenges facing the entire world, Kuwait said during the pan-

regional talks on Tuesday, highlighting the need for sustainable solutions. These solutions can only be attainable with greater cooperation at an "institutional and government" level alike. His Highness the Amir's representative to the FII, Kuwaiti Defense Minister Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali said in a speech during the talks. He cited the COVID pandemic as affirmation that overcoming challenges can never be a "single-handed attempt," rather, it requires collective action to bring such measures to fruition.

On these challenges, he said rapid "social and economic" changes have only exacerbated the matter, which behooves countries to work as a cohesive unit to keep these hardships at bay, added the Kuwaiti minister. He went on to applaud Saudi Arabia for the "meteoric growth" the kingdom has seen in recent years, attributing the national success to the "wisdom" of the country's political leaders.

Humans and climate

The first session of the fifth edition of the Future Investment Initiative (FII), which kicked off Tuesday in the Saudi capital Riyadh, discussed multiple topics related to humans and climate and their relationship to investment. Seven heads of international companies discussed the importance of climate change, the challenges that will face future generations, the possible investment opportunities, and the importance of investing in small and medium-sized companies. They also touched on supporting youth for growth in the global economy, and providing greater opportunity for sustainability, indicating that renewable energy is one of the most important investments that must be focused on. The participants stressed that everyone must be ready for change, as the Coronavirus pandemic has proven that and made the world pay attention to what they should look and focus on. They also urged the need to empower women and find innovative solutions to overcome the current obstacles, in addition to rationalizing the use of electricity and searching for alternatives in clean energy.

In a session entitled 'The Future of Tourism - Global Perspectives', Saudi Tourism Minister Khateeb stressed the importance of finding unified



RIYADH: Minister of Information Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi (left) attends the fifth edition of the Future Investment Initiative in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. —KUNA photos



Minister of Information Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi meets Saudi Minister of Tourism Ahmad Al-Khateeb.

travel regulations and legislation for the world, since travel during the pandemic has become a "nightmare" for travelers. Khateeb noted that the tourism sector is one of the most affected sectors in the

world, along with the transportation sector, which decreased by more than 80 percent in 2020, which led to the loss of more than 60 million jobs out of the total jobs in the tourism sector worldwide. — KUNA

Local

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Italy removes quarantine condition for Kuwait travelers

KUWAIT: Travelers coming from Kuwait are now allowed to enter Italy for tourism and are no longer subject to quarantine, the Italian Ministry of Health announced. Consequently, the Embassy of Italy in Kuwait announced resuming issuing visas from yesterday. Applications for Schengen visa can be submitted through VFS Global. For other types of visas (national, study, medical treatment, official visits), applications must be submitted to the embassy, it said.

Entry in the Italian territory is only allowed to people vaccinated with one of the four vaccines recognized there: AstraZeneca, Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson and Moderna. Other conditions for entry in Italy are the submission of a "passenger locator form" available online or at the airport and a negative COVID-19 test (PCR) taken no more than 72 hours before landing, the embassy explained.

Society seeks to cover dialysis costs for 1,000 patients

KUWAIT: Director of Kuwait Humanitarian Friendship Society Khaled bin Sabt said the "Khairna fi Kuwaitna" (our good is in our Kuwait) campaign, which is dedicated to help financially struggling kidney patients, will continue until the end of October. The goal of the campaign is to cover expenses of kidney dialysis for 1,000 patients, he said. Donations will be used to cover the patients' dialysis sessions, he noted, adding that people who wish to donate can do so on the society's website at www.khf-kwt.com.



Khaled bin Sabt

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: High rise buildings are seen from the beach in Salmiya. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

Kuwait interior minister receives Indian ambassador

KUWAIT: Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah received Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Sibi George in his office yesterday. During the meeting, wide ranging discussions were held covering all aspects of the close bilateral relations between Kuwait and India, according to a press release issued by the Indian embassy.

Both sides deliberated on ways and means of further strengthening the existing bilateral cooperation across various domains, including health and security. The two sides also discussed about latest evolving situation related to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and matters of mutual interest. Further, the two sides also discussed all matters related to Indian diaspora in Kuwait. Ambassador George thanked the leadership and the government of Kuwait for taking care of the Indian community in Kuwait especially during the challenging times witnessed due to the pandemic, the release added.



KUWAIT: Indian Ambassador Sibi George presents a memento to Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah.

Hotels, venues start receiving bookings for celebrations

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Hotels and conference venues are now being booked after the government gave the green light to hold weddings, gatherings, events and activities, but with extra health precautions. "For the first time after almost 20 months, we have wedding celebrations and birthday parties in our hotel's function rooms. We were silenced by the coronavirus pandemic for months, which was very unfortunate, but it was a right move by the government to protect us against the pandemic," a hotel manager told Kuwait Times.

The hospitality industry was one of the most affected sectors during the pandemic, which led to a ban on gatherings such as weddings, community events and conferences, including workshops and seminars. Thousands of people were laid off or lost their jobs completely as a result.

Now, however, the industry is gearing up for a comeback. "We are back, thank God," the banquet manager said. Both five- and four-star hotels confirmed a sudden increase in reservations for events and seminars.

"Bookings are open and we hope they will increase in the coming months. Although we have a shortage of manpower, we are going to manage with the minimum staff we have. In the next few weeks, we will resume all activities in our conference halls and ballrooms. We have a reservation for 100 persons for a wedding next week," he added.

Some clients are in a hurry to book their events, especially in the month of December, when many holiday events are held. "I called a hotel yesterday to book for December 17 for our company's holiday party, but the date was already reserved, so I got the nearest available date," a company organizer said.

Amid a decline in COVID-19 infections, Kuwait returned to normalcy from Sunday, with various sectors returning to full capacity. Kuwait airport resumed operations at full capacity and worshippers in mosques are now praying without distancing, although social distancing is still in force in closed places such as shopping malls, restaurants and cafes.



KUWAIT: Secretary General of International Civil Defense Organization (ICDO) Njoupouo YAP Mariatou decorated Kuwait Fire Force Chief Lt Gen Khaled Rakan Al-Mikrad with the ICDO international commander medal in appreciation of Kuwait's efforts in supporting countries and people during crises and catastrophes.

Kuwait participates in AI defense tech event in Jordan

AMMAN: The first edition of the Artificial Intelligence Defense Technology and Cyber Security Exhibition and Conference (AIDTSEC 2021) kicked off yesterday on the Dead Sea shores in Jordan under the aegis of Jordanian Crown Prince Al-Hussein bin Abdullah II. In the opening speech, Jordanian Minister of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship Ahmad Hanandeh affirmed the government's realization of having an active cybersecurity system, locally and internationally. He noted that his country aims to keep up with the latest digital developments around the world and to seize all opportunities to innovate and reinforce technology in Jordan.

According to organizers, SOFEX, AIDTSEC, the two-day event paves the way for industry makers to spark motivation and inspire decision makers of the Defense, security, and governmental sectors. This helps to expand the capacity in order to address current and future challenges, place strategies in a global context, and position forces for high performance. This is the first exhibition to take place in Jordan and the Region, a biennial conference established to be the region's most significant AI conference, aiming to bring together the lead AI guru's in Defense Technologies and Cyber Security. AIDTSEC will take on how latest technologies and advancements in artificial intelligence and robotic engineering can aid in creating solutions that are vital for day-to-day operations in the defense industry, digital transformation and infrastructure, big data and data analytics, cyber security, data protection, and many more important AI-related subjects. Kuwait's Ministry of Defense participated in the conference, represented by Staff Brigadier General Omar Al-Sabti. — KUNA

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TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat defend impact on kids

In Syria frontline, residents 'stuck' between rivals



HANDAN: A child receives the COVID-19 vaccine at a school in Handan, in China's northern Hebi province yesterday, after the city began vaccinating children between the ages of 3 to 11. — AFP

Pandemic 'far from finished': WHO

COVID hit on jobs worse than thought: UN

GENEVA: The COVID-19 crisis is far from over, the World Health Organization's emergency committee said as it called for research into next-generation vaccines for long-term control of the pandemic. The 19-member committee meets every three months to discuss the pandemic and make recommendations. "While progress has been made through increased uptake of COVID-19 vaccines and therapeutics, analysis of the present situation and forecasting models indicate that the pandemic is far from finished," the WHO said in a statement on four-hour virtual meeting.

The committee called for further research into reusable masks and respirators, and next-generation vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics "for long-term control of the pandemic". "The use of masks, physical distancing, hand hygiene, and improving ventilation of indoor spaces remain key to reducing transmission of SARS CoV-2," the statement stressed.

The committee said the protracted pandemic was making humanitarian emergencies, mass migration and other crises more complex. States should therefore revise their preparedness and response plans. It raised concerns about Africa's challenges in tackling the pandemic, including access to vaccines, tests and treatments, as well as collecting and analyzing data to monitor the pandemic's evolution.

Just 14 vaccine doses have been administered per

100 people in Africa, according to an AFP calculation. That figure stands at 128 doses in the United States and Canada; 113 in Europe; 106 in Latin America and the Caribbean; 103 in Oceania; 102 in Asia; and 78 in the Middle East. The committee first declared on January 30 last year that the virus was a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) - the highest alarm the WHO can sound.

The committee maintained its insistence that proof of vaccination should not be required for international travel or be the only condition for it "given limited global access and inequitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines". Countries instead should consider a "risk-based approach to the facilitation of international travel by lifting or modifying measures, such as testing and/or quarantine requirements, when appropriate". The committee also called on countries to recognize all vaccines that have been given emergency use approval by the WHO.



Committee call for further research

been harder than previously expected, and a worrying two-speed recovery is emerging between richer and poorer nations, the UN's International Labor Organization warned yesterday. "The current trajectory of labor markets is of a stalled recovery, with major downside risks appearing, and a great divergence between developed and developing economies," said ILO chief Guy Ryder.

"Dramatically, unequal vaccine distribution and fiscal capacities are driving these trends, and both need to be addressed urgently," the ILO projected that global hours worked in 2021 will be 4.3 percent lower than levels in the fourth quarter of 2019, prior to the outbreak of the pandemic. That was equivalent to 125 million full-time jobs.

In June, the ILO had been projecting a decline of 3.5 percent, or 100 million full-time jobs. High-income countries fared better, suffering 3.6 percent decline in total hours worked in the third quarter of this year, the ILO calculated. That compares with falls of 5.7 percent for low-income

countries and 7.3 percent for lower-middle income countries. By region, Europe and Central Asia experienced the smallest loss of hours worked, and the Arab States the biggest, with the divergence largely driven by major differences in vaccine roll-outs and fiscal stimulus packages, the report said.

The ILO also found that young people, especially young women, have been among the hardest hit by the impact on jobs of the pandemic. The ILO estimates that if low-income countries had better access to vaccines, the working hours recovery would catch up with richer economies in just over one quarter. It estimated that for every 14 people fully vaccinated in the second quarter of this year, one full-time equivalent job was added to the global labor market.

By early October, 59.8 percent of people were fully vaccinated in high-income countries, compared to just 1.6 percent in low-income countries, according to the ILO. Ryder told a press conference that the prospects ahead looked "weak and uncertain", with the fourth quarter of 2021 expected to see only a modest recovery in working hours. Significant downside risks on the horizon include energy prices, inflation and debt distress, while in low- and middle-income countries, fiscal constraints are expected to hinder progress further. — AFP

South African town still scarred after deadly unrest

PHOENIX: On the face of it, Phoenix is a peaceful South African town, with affluent homes, a shopping centre, and several places of worship perched on a hill. So peaceful that Mahatma Gandhi started a settlement and printed a newspaper there to spread his ideas of non-violence in the early 20th century. But more than 30 people were killed three months ago on the streets of this mainly Indian town of 180,000 people, in an outbreak of vigilante violence as South Africa experienced its worst unrest in decades.

The victims were mostly black residents of Inanda, a township of corrugated iron houses and palm trees that spreads across the next hill from Phoenix. Three months later, wounds are still tender and suspicion rife. Vigilante groups continue to patrol at night. Nationwide violence erupted in July after former president Jacob Zuma was jailed for 15 months for ignoring a judicial investigation into graft during his time in office.

Mobs overwhelmed police in Durban, 25 kilometers south of Phoenix - prompting residents to form armed vigilante groups. The racial overtones in July were impossible to miss. Most rioters shown on television were black, potentially altering perceptions of police from Inanda as they passed through Phoenix. Police said at least 36 people were killed, including 33 black men - or almost one in ten of the death toll of 350 across South Africa.

Some of the dead in Phoenix were shot in the head, while others were beaten to death, or even suffered both. More than 50 people have been arrested on murder charges. One woman with Indian roots said nine of her neighbors were now behind bars, including her father. "He didn't do it. We are not racists," she said, listing her "black friends" and a pointing to a black



INANDA: A picture of Sanele Mngomezulu, 19, who was shot during the wave of violence in South Africa last July, lays on a bed in Inanda, South Africa. — AFP

neighbor. "It was a bad time," she said. "Everyone was out on the roads to protect our community." People are still being reported for involvement in the violence three months on, and tensions between the two communities are high.

'It's racism'

The hangover from the violence has influenced political campaigning ahead of local elections scheduled for November 1. Hundreds of businesses were looted and torched during the outburst. Meanwhile the main opposition Democratic Alliance has stoked tensions, putting up posters hailing as "heroes" those behind what has become known as the "Phoenix massacre". "They called us heroes because they want our votes," said an outraged resident who did not wish to be named. Before the violence, Phoenix and Inanda co-existed, despite crime on the streets in one of the world's most violent countries. "Cars

are being carjacked, houses are broken in. But this, I'd never seen this before", said private security guard Mark Nadasen.

'It's racism'

"I can't stand next to an Indian person today," said Inanda resident Charmaine Mhlongo, 39. Her 19-year-old son Sanele Mngomezulu was killed on July 12 while driving around with a group of friends. They ran into an armed patrol outside Phoenix, which opened fire. Mngomezulu was killed by three bullets as he fled the scene. Mhlongo believes "Indians" killed her son. "It's racism," she said in her modest kitchen, clutching a photo of her son. Other township residents claimed they heard Indian vigilantes shouting, "Kill the kaffirs", using South Africa's worst racial slur. Under white-minority rule, which ended in 1994, Indian and mixed-race South Africans were classed as "colored" with more rights than the majority blacks. — AFP

India's top court orders probe into Pegasus snooping

NEW DELHI: India's Supreme Court yesterday ordered an independent investigation into the alleged government use of Pegasus spyware on journalists, opposition politicians and activists with the chief justice calling the implications "Orwellian". India was one of 45 countries where tens of thousands of numbers were targeted by the spyware made by Israeli firm NSO, according to leaked documents released this year.

More than 1,000 of the numbers were Indian and the Supreme Court order followed petitions from individuals that the chief justice NV Ramana said "raise an Orwellian concern". He added that the court had accepted the petitions because "there has been no specific denial" by the government. The state cannot be given a "free pass every time the spectre of national security is raised," the court said as it named cyber and computer science experts to look into the allegations.

Phones infected with Pegasus software, which is normally only sold to governments or security agencies, give the user access to the target's messages and photos, and track their location. Critics say that in India it is part of a growing assault on dissent and civil liberties under the Hindu nationalist government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The Indian government would not deny or confirm the use of Pegasus because of national security. It offered to set up its own committee. — AFP

International

Biden swaps home tensions for foreign frustrations in summits

US president escapes bruising political turmoil at home

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden escapes bruising political turmoil at home for the more convivial world of diplomacy at twin summits in Europe this week - but the experience could be just as frustrating. To a veteran foreign policy expert like Biden, the G20 summit in Rome on the weekend and the United Nations' COP26 climate summit in Glasgow next Monday and Tuesday should be a respite, if not exactly a Roman holiday.

Instead of battling with his divided Democratic Party or trying to ignore insults thrown at him by embittered ex-president Donald Trump and his Republicans, Biden will rub shoulders largely with friends. The 78-year-old will have a perfect chance to push his mantra that "America is back." Yet for a president battling to turn those words into more than a slogan, the expected absences from Rome and Glasgow of Russian leader Vladimir Putin and China's Xi Jinping will make it hard to achieve much.

Despite dubbing the US-Chinese relationship the most consequential on the planet, Biden has yet to meet Xi as president. Two phone calls and a planned video summit later this year are the best he can do. The G20 is usually a forum for bringing members of Western clubs, like NATO and the G7, together with more uncertain allies and even adversaries. This time, the White House isn't even announcing bilateral meetings with leaders of two top - if problematic - US allies: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

"We don't even know who's coming to represent Saudi Arabia," National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan told reporters. Instead, Biden will be mostly among friends, albeit friends wondering after the traumatic US exit from Afghanistan just how solid that relationship is. Biden's opening meeting, at the Vatican with Pope Francis on Friday, will see the second Catholic US president join forces with a

pontiff sharing much of his politics, whether on the environment or the need to care for the poor.

That same day, Biden will have one of his most closely watched meetings, with French President Emmanuel Macron. A major spat blew up between Washington and Paris in mid-September over the sudden announcement by Australia that it will acquire US nuclear-powered submarines, ditching an earlier deal for French conventional vessels.

But the Rome meeting will likely underline mostly that the two sides are ready to move on. And at the big summits, Biden will find himself mostly preaching to the converted, or at least to a sympathetic audience thankful that the man at the microphone is



Biden ignores insults from Trump, GOP

not his bruising predecessor Trump. He'll point out US leadership in global COVID vaccine donations and press for recognition that despite foot dragging in Congress back home, he has brought the United States back to the table on climate change action.

Biden will also take credit for an OECD-brokered agreement that sets a global minimum corporate tax of 15 percent - a plan aimed at leveling the playing field for governments competing to attract international corporations. "After a lot of commentary in recent weeks about the state of the transatlantic relationship, the United States and Europe head into these two summits aligned in, united on the major



ARLINGTON: US President Joe Biden takes selfies with the crowd after a campaign event for Virginia Democratic gubernatorial candidate Terry McAuliffe at Virginia Highlands Park in Arlington, Virginia. — AFP

elements of the global agenda," Sullivan said.

Trouble at home

But Biden will not be able to dodge the specter of domestic woes threatening to undermine his credibility abroad. When Air Force One lifts off on Thursday, Biden likely still won't know whether his Democrats are going to give him a win on trillions of dollars in infrastructure and social spending. If the party comes through, maybe even in the next few days, Biden will be bolstered. Failure, however, would be catastrophic for a president only nine months into his first term, knocking a hole in his

argument that democracies need to show they can compete with single-minded autocracies like China.

Also hanging over Biden's head as he crosses the Atlantic is the tense Virginia governor's election next Tuesday - the day he flies home. A Republican is running neck and neck with the Democratic candidate in a state where Biden won by 10 percentage points against Trump last year. It's just one state. But losing there would trigger humiliating reviews for Biden, who took time out before his Europe trip to campaign for the Democrat on Tuesday, and signal broader party losses in the 2022 midterms, leaving Biden weaker still. — AFP

TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat defend impact on kids

WASHINGTON: Three social media networks massively popular with the youngest users - TikTok, Snapchat and YouTube - tried to convince skeptical US lawmakers Tuesday they are safe as worry about Facebook's potential harms spills over to other platforms. Video-sharing app TikTok and photo network Snapchat, in their first testimony to US senators, argued they are built to protect against the mental health and safety risks present on social media.

"Your defense is, 'We're not Facebook,'" Senator Richard Blumenthal told the networks' representatives. "Being different from Facebook is not a defense, that bar is in the gutter." "Everything you do is to add users, especially kids, and keep them on your apps," he continued. While a recent whistleblower-fueled controversy has focused on Facebook's knowledge that its sites could cause harm, other social media giants also grapple with safety issues.

"Snapchat was built as an antidote to social media," said Jennifer Stout, Snap VP of global public policy, noting images on the platform delete by default. Under questioning later in the hearing, she said the company is making efforts to crack down on the drug dealing that has proliferated on the platform, with sometimes deadly consequences.

TikTok, which said in September that it has one billion active users, has fast become a phenomenon among youths and argued it is a different kind of platform.

"TikTok is not a social network based on follow-



WASHINGTON: Ranking Member Sen Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) speaks during a Senate Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety, and Data Security hearing on Protecting Kids Online: Snapchat, TikTok, and YouTube in Washington, DC. — AFP

ers.... You watch TikToks, you create on TikTok," said Michael Beckerman, TikTok's head of public policy in the Americas. Yet the app has been attacked on charges its algorithm can serve content to kids, for example, that encourages dangerous weight loss or introduces them to viral challenges that promote the destruction of school property.

'How long will this continue?'

The site also became a political battleground after then-president Donald Trump targeted the app in 2020 for a subsequently abandoned shutdown effort on the argument the platform represented a national security risk because of its links to China. The ByteDance subsidiary, whose equivalent in China is called Douyin, nevertheless remains well behind YouTube, which claimed 2.3 billion monthly active users in 2020. Though 13 is the official minimum age limit to join most social media platforms, both TikTok and YouTube have versions that are aimed at younger children. — AFP

The status is reminiscent of the Soviet-era term "enemy of the people" and is meant to apply to people or groups that receive funding from abroad and are involved in any kind of "political activity". "Foreign agent" organizations must disclose sources of funding and label publications with the tag or face fines. A journalist can face a fine of up to 2,500 rubles (\$36) for failing to properly mark a story or a social media post. The same offence could cost a company up to 50,000 rubles. The branding has put off advertisers, editors at news organizations say, piling financial pressure on the few independent outlets left in Russia.

Mayetnaya, who works for US-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFERL) and other reporters on the pariah list say it also seriously hinders their work. "People have refused to speak to me saying: 'It'll end badly for us,'" Mayetnaya said. The Kremlin says the measures are necessary because of increased "interference" from abroad with non-governmental groups and journalists exploited by outside actors to meddle in Russian affairs. The result is that all eyes in Russia's media landscape are glued to the justice ministry's website most Friday evenings, where, almost weekly, new names appear.

Aside for the 24-word social media disclaimer, people branded "foreign agents" say they are subjected to "absurd" bureaucracy, such as meticulously reporting income and expenses. Every three months, they have to complete a financial audit. "The ministry not only wants to know where I send my money, but also where the money people transfer me comes from," said Maria Zheleznova, a former reporter at the Proekt investigative media banned as "undesirable" in July. — AFP

Human faces behind Germany's surge in migrants via Belarus

EISENHUTTENSTADT: At the Eisenhuettenstadt reception centre for refugees on Germany's border with Poland, 19-year-old Iraqi asylum seeker Sibian dreams of making a new life for himself after an exhausting journey from Belarus. "I want to live here," he says in broken German, learned through a few months of online courses. Sibian spent eight days trekking across Poland by foot to get to Germany after flying to Minsk from Turkey. "I had no water, no food, it was cold. It was very tiring," he tells AFP. Sibian is one of more than 6,100 illegal migrants who have entered Germany via Poland from Belarus since the beginning of this year, most of them from the Middle East, according to German authorities.

The EU accuses Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko of flying migrants from the Middle East and Africa to Minsk and then sending them into the bloc on foot in retaliation for sanctions imposed over a crackdown on the opposition. German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer has branded the alleged scheme "a hybrid threat, in which migrants are used as political weapons". The migrants are initially crossing from Belarus into Poland and the Baltic States, but many are then travelling on to Germany - seen as welcoming to migrants after Angela Merkel's decision to leave the borders open to hundreds of thousands in 2015-16.

Tenfold increase

On arriving in Germany, the migrants are not being immediately sent back to Poland as EU rules would normally dictate, but taken to reception centres for

registration. The centre in Eisenhuettenstadt has seen 10 times more arrivals this year than in 2020, Olaf Jansen, head of the city's migration authority, tells AFP. It feels like 2015 all over again, "even if we don't have the same numbers" at the national level, he says. A dozen new tents have been set up to accommodate the new arrivals and create space for Covid-19 testing centers. Around half of the 1,300 asylum seekers at the centre are from Iraq. The others are mostly from Syria, Afghanistan, Iran and Yemen.

Most of them want to remain in Germany. "Very few want to continue the journey to France or north-



EISENHUTTENSTADT: Refugees check their mobile phones at the arrival centre of the initial reception facility of the eastern German state of Brandenburg in Eisenhuettenstadt. — AFP

ern Europe," Jansen says. "I want to stay in Germany and continue my studies. It's good here," says Rohullah, 23, who arrived four days ago from Afghanistan. To pass the time, some play football between the tents, while others call their relatives while sitting in the courtyard. All have stories of exhausting journeys on foot. Zeidun, 22, from Fallujah in Iraq, walked non-stop for 10 days across Poland before taking a taxi across the border. — AFP

Russia 'foreign agent' reporters navigate 'absurd' rules

MOSCOW: In her Moscow apartment, reporter Yelizaveta Mayetnaya motions to her laptop displaying a message now infamous among independent Russian journalists. "This news media/material was created and/or disseminated by a foreign mass media performing the functions of a foreign agent and/or a Russian legal entity performing the functions of a foreign agent."

Since being branded a "foreign agent" by authorities this year, the 47-year-old is obliged to add the disclaimer to each and every one of her social media posts, whether they're part of her reporting or a picture of her dog digging through autumn leaves. It's one of the tedious regulations that she and dozens of other reporters recently slapped with the label are learning to navigate in a year that has seen the walls close in on independent media.

The authorities want "everyone to exhaust themselves doing this, so there isn't any time for anything else," Mayetnaya said. The label is a "form of repression", she added, predicting it would be used more and more to silence Kremlin critics. Russia first introduced the term in legislation passed in 2012, but it applied to non-governmental groups before being expanded to media organizations in 2017 and individual journalists last year.

In bellwether Virginia vote, it all hangs on COVID-19

RICHMOND: It is mid-afternoon on a Saturday in downtown Richmond's Penny Lane Pub and the post-pandemic crowd, like the head of a well-poured pale ale, is bubbly but thin. Owner Terry O'Neill has plenty of time between serving drinks and swapping banter with regulars to reflect on the damage COVID-19 has done to business.

"It's never going to come back to what it was. We were doing 150 lunches. We're down to 40," says the grandfather-of-five who is a former bouncer at The Cavern Club, the Liverpool nightclub frequented by The Beatles. Washington politics can seem far away from the daily struggles of people in Richmond, but Virginia is seen as a reliable indicator of where the parties are headed in national elections.

All eyes have been on the state for weeks because it holds its election for the governor's mansion on November 2, a too-close-to-call race between Democratic establishment candidate Terry McAuliffe and brash Trumpist Glenn Youngkin. Now in his 80s, O'Neill bought the Penny Lane with his wife Rose in 1979 after 10 years in New York. Signed photographs and record covers adorn the walls, alongside memorabilia from his beloved Liverpool Football Club.

During the darkest days of the pandemic, the native Briton was only able to keep the business afloat thanks to government COVID relief. "We would not be here now if it wasn't for the loans they sent us. It was my nightmare," he tells AFP. While next week's vote is in large part about how well Virginians think

their state is run, the old capital of the Confederacy is also a crucial national battleground for President Joe Biden and Donald Trump, the man he evicted from the White House and the most likely Republican challenger next time around.

'Topsy-turvy'

Traditionally conservative Virginia has swung left since the turn of the century. Four of the last five governors have been Democrats and Biden won the state by 10 points in 2020. The gubernatorial race has been tightening for weeks, with McAuliffe's lead evaporating in the final stretch. The Democrat has tried to make the race a referendum on Trump, while Youngkin has focused on Republican red meat such as mask mandates and the school curriculum.

Richmond's Democratic mayor Levar Stoney describes central Virginia - with its rural counties, suburbs and diverse urban areas - as "a microcosm of America." "We are preoccupied by some of what's driving some of the American conversation right now. That's COVID-19 and the impacts that this virus and the pandemic have had on our economy, jobs, public education and our way of life," he tells AFP. "It's been a little topsy-turvy since last March so there's a lot of folks who are still suffering."

Stoney sees the election as a precursor for the November 2022 midterms, with the parties getting an early shot at testing messages to deliver on the national stage. But he adds: "Virginia voters are going to be voting on Virginia issues, on Virginia candidates." And the issue that comes up time and again when locals voice their concerns is the faltering US recovery from COVID-19. Like every other state, Virginia saw its economy obliterated by the pandemic but business has been perking up, with tax revenue soaring by 18 percent year-on-year last month. — AFP

International

Taiwan has no right to join United Nations, China says

In latest Taiwan move, US urges more UN inclusion

BEIJING: China insisted yesterday that Taiwan had no right to join the United Nations, after the United States ratcheted up tensions with a call for the democratic island to have greater involvement in the world body. In a statement marking 50 years since the UN General Assembly voted to seat Beijing and boot out Taipei, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Tuesday he regretted that Taiwan had been increasingly excluded on the world stage.



Taiwan thanks US for support

"As the international community faces an unprecedented number of complex and global issues, it is critical for all stakeholders to help address these problems. This includes the 24 million people who live in Taiwan," Blinken said. "Taiwan's meaningful participation in the UN system is not a political issue, but a pragmatic one," he said. "That is why we encourage all UN member states to join us in supporting Taiwan's robust, meaningful participation throughout the UN system and in the international community."

China considers Taiwan—where nationalist forces fled in 1949 after losing a civil war to the communists—to be a province awaiting reunification, by force if necessary. It responded to Blinken's statement with strident, albeit familiar, statements emphasizing its position

that Taiwan's government had no place on the global diplomatic stage. "Taiwan has no right to join the United Nations," Ma Xiaoguang, spokesman for the Taiwan Affairs Office in Beijing, told reporters.

"The United Nations is an international governmental organization composed of sovereign states... Taiwan is a part of China." The United States has long called for Taiwan's inclusion in UN activities. Taiwan's Foreign Minister Joseph Wu thanked the US for its support: "We appreciate it very much," he said. "We'll continue to fight for our rights in international organizations," Wu told reporters in Prague during an official tour, adding the situation was "growing more dangerous" as China keeps sending troops into the Taiwan Strait. "We are determined to defend ourselves," Wu said.

Defense of Taiwan

The latest statement adds to an escalation of diplomatic rhetoric and military posturing over Taiwan. China is regularly setting records for its number of warplane flights near the island. US President Joe Biden last week told a televised forum that the United States was ready to defend Taiwan from any Chinese invasion. Those comments were quickly walked back by the White House amid warnings from China, continuing a strategy of ambiguity on whether it would intervene militarily if China attacked.

The United States switched recognition in 1979 to Beijing. But Congress at the same time approved the Taiwan Relations Act that obligated the supply of weapons to the island for its self-defense. Blinken on Tuesday reiterated that the United States still recognized only Beijing. But he emphasized the democratic credentials of the island of 23 million people. "Taiwan



NEW TAIPEI CITY: This aerial view shows a mountain village of Jiufofen township, a tourist landmark in New Taipei City, northern Taiwan. — AFP

has become a democratic success story," Blinken said. "We are among the many UN member states who view Taiwan as a valued partner and trusted friend."

Blinken pointed to Taiwan's exclusion from meetings associated with the International Civil Aviation Organization and the World Health Organization. He noted that Taiwan was hailed for its "world-class" response to COVID-19 - which largely spared the

island after early intervention—and that tens of millions of passengers go through Taiwanese airports each year. Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen welcomed Blinken's remarks. "Grateful for #US support for expanding #Taiwan's international participation," she said on Twitter. "We stand ready to work with all like-minded partners to contribute our expertise in international organizations, mechanisms & events." — AFP



KABUL: Women hold placards during a protest in Kabul - calling for the international community to speak out in support of Afghans living under Taliban rule. — AFP

Anger over men-only foreign delegations to meet Taliban

ISLAMABAD: Global powers and aid groups that have loudly demanded an inclusive Afghanistan under the Taliban are now facing criticism for sending all-male delegations to Kabul to meet the hardline Islamists. Since seizing power in August, the Taliban have excluded women from their new caretaker government and put restrictions on work and education, drawing condemnation from the outside world.

But female representation has been little better among some governments and aid groups in their meetings in the capital with Afghanistan's new rulers, who are seeking international recognition. "Senior women in your teams should be leading your interactions with the Taliban... Don't exclude women," said Shaharad Akbar, the exiled head of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission. In a tweet addressing "governments and aid agencies", she called on them to "NOT NORMALISE Taliban's erasure of women".

'Sausage party'

Heather Barr from Human Rights Watch created a list, under the hashtag "sausageparty", of pictures posted by the Taliban of their meetings with delegations in Kabul. "Foreign countries and especially aid organizations should be leading by example," Barr told AFP. "No one should let the Taliban think that this kind of men-only world that they are creating... is normal."

The Taliban have posted dozens of photos on social

media of closed-door meetings with groups of foreign representatives, showing not a single woman. Among the many meetings highlighted was one earlier this month between British envoy Simon Gass and the Taliban's interim deputy prime ministers Abdul Ghani Baradar and Abdul Salam Hanafi, seated on a sofa in a lavish room. An official told AFP it was a coincidence that the special envoy and head of mission were both men. Pakistan, which has advised the Taliban on how to win international backing, also posted pictures and video of an all-male group accompanying the foreign minister and intelligence chief to Kabul. Fawzia Koofi, one of the negotiators in failed peace talks between the then Afghan government and the Taliban last year in Doha, voiced her anger. "As world leaders, when they talk about women's rights, they also need to act. They need to show that they believe in it, that it is not just a political statement," she told AFP.

Complacency 'not acceptable'

Even more concerning, Barr said, were the numerous pictures of meetings between the Taliban and humanitarian organizations that seemed to follow the same pattern. When contacted by AFP, the organizations on her list highlighted their dedication to women's rights and said they strived to include women in meetings with the Taliban. But several acknowledged holding at least one meeting with the hardline Islamists that included no women. The International Committee of the Red Cross, the UN children's agency, and Doctors Without Borders explained that on the photographed occasion, they had only sent small delegations of top leaders, who happened to be men. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies meanwhile said a last-minute scheduling change had meant a woman staff member due to take part had been unable to attend, turning one meeting into an all-male event.—AFP

regime rule. A taxi driver, he now lives on the front line because he cannot afford expensive rent elsewhere in Syria. "I live in a house without doors or windows," he said. "I can't even set up utilities or spend much on it... because I don't know if I'm going to stay or leave."

'Better than a tent'

In 2017, Russian-backed regime forces seized control of a part of Tadmir following battles with IS. During that period, Turkey and its Syrian rebel proxies launched a months-long operation in northern Syria targeting jihadists as well as Kurdish fighters labeled by Ankara as "terrorists". Turkey's Syrian proxies have since taken control of several areas in the country's north, including a pocket in northern Tadmir, where they command several neighborhoods.

Regime forces control the rest of Tadmir—the only town in Syria where regime and Ankara-backed rebels coexist in relative peace. "My children ask me: Our house is so close, will we never return to it?" Ibrahim lamented. The streets of Tadmir still bear evidence to the battles and bombardment that destroyed swaths of the town before IS was expelled from the area. At its northern entrance, bullet-riddled IS billboards loom over devastated streets and bombed-out buildings. At the front line, sandbags and large stones are stacked

Isolated and unpaid, Mongolian coal drivers queue at China border

TSAGAAN KHAD: Snaking across the barren Mongolian desert, a convoy crawls along the once-busy highway to the Chinese border - its truckers desperate to finally deliver their cargo of coal after months of brutal COVID-19 delays and no pay. Pre-pandemic, the route was packed with drivers delivering the vital fuel to China - the world's biggest coal importer - currently grappling with widespread power cuts threatening its economic growth. But now the line of trucks outside the tiny coal town of Tsagaan Khad has been reduced to a trickle, held up by China and Mongolia's strict coronavirus measures, leaving the drivers stranded without pay or company.

"Our families are calling us and saying they need wood, fuel, and clothes to wear in winter," said Davaasuren Tsogtsaikhan, 32, having waited three months to make a single delivery. "Life is hard here," he said. Last year, resource-rich Mongolia exported over 35 million tons of coking coal to China - this year so far is less than a third of that. Terrified any outbreak might make China slam the border shut, Mongolia has imposed strict coronavirus rules. Some 3,500 increasingly wretched drivers have been quarantined in camps of 40 people while they wait.

Undrakh Bold told AFP he spent 42 days waiting without making a delivery, having been quarantined outside capital Ulaanbaatar after one member of his group tested positive. After returning to Tsagaan Khad, the 43-year-old faced another 28 days of waiting. "If all of us test negative, we will be able to transport our coal the next day," the weary father-of-three said, as he queued to be tested. On the Chinese side, they are not allowed out of their cabs, or even to open windows. "I want to dump the coal in China, get my money and go back home," he said.

Drivers are tested for COVID-19 in Mongolia then bussed over the Chinese border in masks and hazmat suits, where they undergo yet another test. Mongolia's vast South Gobi province is home to 12 billion tons of coal reserves - a key supplier to Chinese iron ore smelters. But now many drivers are considering finding other work. "We worry about Covid test results all day and night," said trucker Davaasuren, preparing to take his first test.—AFP

into a make-shift border. The regime-run side is inhabited exclusively by Syrian soldiers and allied militia fighters. The rebel-run pocket is home to many Tadmir natives as well as rebel fighters and their families. Public services there are non-existent, leaving many without power.—AFP



TADMIR: Syrian boys look through a hole at a border separating regime and rebel-held territory in the northern town of Tadmir, located about 32 kilometers east of Aleppo city. — AFP

Which Asia-Pacific nations are re-opening to visitors?

KUALA LUMPUR: Thailand's re-opening to vaccinated foreign tourists marks a major easing of border controls for Asia, where governments have been far slower to roll back coronavirus travel curbs than in much of the West. Here is a look at which countries are opening up across the Asia-Pacific region and those staying sealed off from the world.

Southeast Asia

Thailand will allow vaccinated travelers from 46 countries and territories to enter the kingdom without quarantining from Monday, as it seeks to revive its vital tourism industry. Other parts of the region—which largely escaped the pandemic's initial wave, only to be hit hard this year—are following its lead, albeit at a slower pace. Business hub Singapore has started quarantine-free travel for fully vaccinated travelers from 10 countries, including the United States and several European countries, and will add more soon.

Indonesia re-opened the resort island of Bali this month to tourists from select countries although, with travelers still required to do a five-day quarantine on arrival, the scheme has had a slow start. Vietnam plans to allow foreign visitors entry to the holiday island of Phu Quoc from next month and Malaysia has a similar plan for Langkawi island, while Cambodia will reopen beach spots Sihanoukville, Koh Rong and Dara Sakor from November 30. Some countries, including the Philippines and Myanmar, remain closed to foreign tourists.

East Asia

Mainland China, where COVID-19 first emerged last year, remains closed to overseas tourists, as is Japan. South Korea has started accepting visitors from 49 countries. A negative coronavirus test is required for all arrivals, with a limited exemption from a 14-day quarantine for those vaccinated in South Korea. Some of the world's toughest measures have been implemented in Hong Kong—with a maximum 21-day quarantine for incoming travelers—which has kept virus cases low but crippled the travel industry.

South Asia

Recovering from a devastating surge earlier this year, India re-opened for foreign tourists on charter flights this month and will allow in visitors on all flights from mid-November. Fully vaccinated travelers no longer have to undergo home quarantine, provided they are arriving from countries with which India has reciprocal arrangements for acceptance of WHO-approved vaccines. Last month, Nepal started issuing visas on arrival for vaccinated tourists and dropped quarantine requirements as it seeks to lure back foreign trekkers to its mountains. More than a million tourists visited the Himalayan country in 2019 - but numbers dropped by 80 percent last year.

Among the first countries to reopen borders was the popular holiday destination of the Maldives, which started allowing in foreign tourists in July last year. The number of tourists visiting the Indian Ocean atoll nation recovered to 500,000 last year following the re-opening, and authorities expect 1.5 million holidaymakers this year—just shy of the figure in 2019. Sri Lanka opened its international borders for fully vaccinated tourists without any quarantine requirements on October 7, while Pakistan allows in foreign visitors as long as they have proof of vaccination and a negative Covid-19 test.

Australia and the Pacific

Australia introduced some of the world's toughest border restrictions in response to the pandemic, banning citizens from travelling overseas without permission. But the government announced yesterday that the ban would be lifted, with the country's border also set to open to skilled workers and international students by year's end. New Zealand remains closed to foreign visitors, with no date for reopening. The South Pacific nation of Fiji, whose economy is heavily tourism-dependent, will allow vaccinated travelers from countries across Europe and Asia to enter quarantine-free, as well as those from the United States, starting December 1.—AFP

Business

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2021

Saudi could go carbon-neutral before its 2060 target: Minister

Circular carbon economy holds key to kingdom's net zero goal

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia could go carbon neutral before its 2060 target if technology evolves quickly enough, its energy minister said yesterday, days before the COP26 climate summit.

Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman said new processes enabling the "circular carbon economy"—a concept where waste carbon is captured and repurposed—were key to the world's top oil exporter achieving net zero. The kingdom, also one of the world's biggest polluters, is heavily promoting the virtues of the circular carbon economy (CCE) at the Future Investment Initiative conference in Riyadh, an elite business gathering dubbed "Davos in the desert". "CCE first and foremost depends on the evolution of technology," the minister told the conference, describing 2060 as a "dynamic baseline".

"Actually, if technology evolves even faster, we may not have to wait until 2060. It could bring it earlier." On Saturday, Saudi Arabia pledged to go carbon neutral by 2060. Two days later it announced a billion-dollar contribution to initiatives to fund the circular carbon economy and provide "clean" fuel for the world's poor. The United Nations says more than 130 countries have set or are considering a target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by mid-century, an objective it says is "imperative" to safeguard a liveable climate.

World leaders will gather in Glasgow from Sunday for the UN's COP26, a historic summit billed as humanity's "last best chance" to get devastating climate change under control. "The most



RIYADH: Saudi Energy Minister Abdulaziz bin Salman (second right) participates in a panel during the annual Future Investment Initiative (FII) conference in the Saudi capital Riyadh yesterday.—AFP

daunting challenge that we are all faced with is climate change," the energy minister said, before adding that he did not expect any drop in demand for oil. "I still argue it would not happen," he said. Oil production remains the fundamental plank of

Saudi energy policy. This month, state-owned giant Saudi Aramco said it planned to raise production by a million barrels a day by 2027.

Two days after targeting carbon neutrality by 2060, and ahead of next week's COP26 global cli-

mate change summit, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman promised to contribute 15 percent of \$10.4 billion to fund the "circular carbon economy" and provide "clean fuel" to help feed 750 million people worldwide.—AFP

UK eyes solid recovery despite strong inflation

LONDON: Britain's pandemic-hit economy is set to extend its solid recovery into next year despite strong inflationary pressures, finance minister Rishi Sunak announced yesterday as he delivered the government's latest budget to parliament. Confirming plans for multi-billion-pound funding projects aimed at driving long-term recovery and reducing pressure on the state-run health service, Sunak added that the government was reducing state debt that soared during the pandemic.

And after triggering an outcry by cutting Britain's foreign aid budget, the chancellor of the exchequer vowed just ahead of a UN climate summit to restore the funding in the coming years where help for poorer countries will be pivotal. "Today's budget delivers a stronger economy for the British people: stronger growth, with the UK recovering faster than our major competitors," Sunak said in his speech.

Growth recovery

UK gross domestic product output is expected to rebound by 6.5 percent this year before slowing slightly in 2022, said chancellor of the exchequer Sunak. The 2021 forecast was much stronger than the 4.0-percent GDP growth predicted in March but Sunak added that the pace of output would slow to 6.0 percent next year.

Sunak said the UK economy was on course to



LONDON: Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak (center) holds the Budget Box as he poses with members of his Treasury team prior to leaving 11 Downing Street in central London yesterday to present the government's annual budget to Parliament.—AFP

return to its pre-pandemic level at the turn of the year, while recognizing that "people are concerned about global inflation" which is rising at a fast pace as economies reopen after lockdowns. Sunak said the UK annual inflation rate was forecast to climb to an average of 4.0 percent over the next year from 3.1 percent currently, with price rises fuelled by soaring energy costs and supply constraints. Britain's growth expectation this year meanwhile compares favorably with Europe's biggest economy Germany, which Wednesday forecast GDP expansion of around 2.6 percent in 2021.

Germany's slower-than-expected rebound from a pandemic-induced slump last year was largely owing to bottlenecks in global supply chains, its government said. On the eve of its budget, the UK government revealed plans to raise minimum wage rates and end a

freeze on pay rises for public-sector workers.

But the boost to salaries is likely to be offset by rising inflation, which is denting Britons' spending power. A further hit has come from the government returning welfare benefit payments to pre-pandemic levels, after a temporary hike to help families through the virus outbreak.

British unemployment meanwhile risks soaring in the coming months after the government ended its costly jobs furlough scheme, which paid the bulk of wages for millions of private-sector workers during the pandemic. Government borrowing rocketed to around £320 billion (\$442 billion, 381 billion euros) in the financial year to March, driven higher by costly COVID support. That was equivalent to 14.9 percent of gross domestic product, the highest UK level since the end of World War II.—AFP

Turkey's hazelnut farmers fume at Nutella 'monopoly'

AKYAZI, Turkey: Kneeling from dawn till dusk, the Turkish farmers picking most of the hazelnuts going into Nutella spreads complain of exploitation and meager pay, setting up a clash over labor rights.

The little heart-shaped nut making Nutella such a guilty pleasure is a cherished commodity in Turkey, which accounts for 82 percent of global exports. But this love is not shared by Mehmet Sirin, a 25-year-old from Turkey's mostly Kurdish southeast who travels to lush northern valleys filled with hazelnut trees to make a living during harvest season.

"We work 12 hours a day. This is a demanding job," said Sirin, a hood protecting him from a cold drizzle covering the leafy ground where the hazelnuts hide after ripening and falling from the trees.

"The hazelnuts we pick go abroad and come back in the shape of Nutella. They make more profits than us. This is exploitation," he said in the Black Sea town of Akyazi. The world-famous

spread is made by Italy's Ferrero confectionary, Turkey's top hazelnut purchaser. The global giant's other sweets include Ferrero Rocher chocolates and Kinder chocolate eggs. But the Italian company is developing ill will in Turkey, where farmers get paid roughly 12 euros (\$14) a day collecting nuts off the ground and stuffing them into huge sacks they then lug on their backs.

"They have a monopoly, they have a free hand," said Aydin Simsek, 43, a local producer watching his dozen or so workers pick nuts out of the corner of his eye. "You see our conditions, how hard we work," he said, explaining that the price he gets for a kilogram (2.2 pounds) of hazelnuts has dropped to 22.5 liras (\$2.30). "This year, I will not sell my hazelnuts to Ferrero," he said.

'Market dynamics'

Ferrero has six facilities and employs more than 1,000 people in Turkey, where it has been sourcing hazelnuts across the agriculture-rich country's northern Black Sea regions for the past 35 years. In 2014, it acquired Turkey's Oltan Group—a local market leader that procures, processes and sells nuts.

A Ferrero spokesman told AFP that the Italian company does not directly "own or manage farms in Turkey and does not source hazelnuts directly from farmers". It "procures the hazelnuts it needs for its products respecting free



AKYAZI, Turkey: Workers collect hazelnuts at a nut orchard in the Akyazi district, in Sakarya.—AFP

market regulations and based on market dynamics," the Ferrero spokesman said. This argument leaves the Turkish farmers unimpressed.

"For God's sake, they buy hazelnuts for 22 to 23 liras a kilo and sell them for 23 dollars," the Turkish Chambers of Agriculture's Istanbul branch president Omer Demir fumed. "Turkey exports about 300,000 tons of hazelnut to the world. How strange that only foreign companies earn profits from this busi-

ness," he said with bitter irony. Demir said Ferrero and other global companies sourcing Turkey's hazelnuts provide tools and fertilizers for the farmers, paying for their harvests in advance.

"They are running their own show," Demir said, calling on Turkey's competition authority to intervene. "Otherwise, they will control everything everywhere and we will come to a point where we cannot sell our product to anyone else but them," Demir said.—AFP

Top US Democrat unveils proposed tax on super-rich

WASHINGTON: A top Democrat in the US Senate unveiled yesterday a plan to tax the very richest Americans in order to fund a massive spending plan backed by President Joe Biden. The proposed Billionaires Income Tax would apply to about 700 people with either \$1 billion in assets or \$100 million in annual income for three back-to-back years, and raise "hundreds of billions of dollars," according to Senator Ron Wyden, who leads the chamber's finance committee.

The tax is the latest attempt by Biden's Democratic Party to raise revenue to fund his massive social spending proposal, which will likely cost around \$2 trillion and could see Washington enact policies like universal pre-kindergarten and child-care subsidies. It would also aim Washington's taxation powers squarely at the country's billionaires, who have seen their wealth swell amid the suffering of the COVID-19 pandemic, fueling criticism that they're not contributing enough to the country. "Working Americans like nurses and firefighters pay taxes with every paycheck, while billionaires defer paying taxes for decades, if not indefinitely," Wyden said.

"The wealthiest few who avoid taxes by indefinitely holding assets are also able to borrow against those assets to fund their lifestyles. This means they opt out of paying taxes and instead pay only low interest rates on loans from Wall Street banks." If enacted, billionaires' assets such as stocks would be evaluated each year and taxes levied if they increased in value. If they decreased, taxpayers would take it as a write-off for potentially up to three years, according to the proposal.

This would be a change from current US law, where taxes on a stock's value are typically only paid if it is sold. Another new tax would be levied on sales of nontradable assets like real estate or business interests and account for interest on unpaid taxes during the years the person held it.

To address concerns that the tax could force wealthy people to sell off controlling stakes in companies, the proposal allows for an individual to designate up to \$1 billion of stock in a single business as a "nontradable asset." —AFP

Business

Commercial Bank declares net profit of KD 40.8m for nine months of 2021

Al-Tijari allocates KD 25.8 million additional precautionary provision

KUWAIT: Commercial Bank of Kuwait announced a net profit of KD 40.8 million for the nine months ended 30 September 2021 as compared to KD 17.1 million for the same period last year, recording a notable hike in net profit by KD 23.7 million during the current period.

Highlighting the overall performance of the bank, Sheikh Ahmad Duaij Al-Sabah, the bank's chairman, commented that even though the socio-economic situation is improving amidst the pervasive pandemic, the bank will continue to embrace a conservative approach of building provision cushion for any unexpected losses. Persistent on its conservative approach, Al-Tijari has allocated KD 25.8 million additional precautionary provision during the current period, bringing the total precautionary provision buffer as of 30 September 2021 to KD 131.4 million. It represents 5.8 percent of the total loan portfolio. Having adequate buffer enables the

bank to accommodate any further unforeseen losses and to explore new business opportunities.

On business updates, Sheikh Ahmad expressed that ease in travel restrictions, energy crisis-led increase in oil price, and rigorous inoculation by government, has contributed to a growth in business. There has been considerable growth in fees and commission income and forex income during the period. Moreover, we hope that coming quarters would be further brighter than what it had been since pandemic struck in 2020.

Revealing updates on the bank's digital initiatives, Sheikh Ahmad reflected that Al-Tijari has always benchmarked its digitization strategic business plans with best industry practices. In the pandemic era, the bank has witnessed an exponential growth in users of the bank's digital products/services which affirmed that digital banking services have already become the future of the banking



Sheikh Ahmad Duaij Al-Sabah

industry. Furthermore, tremendous banking transactions were processed by the customers through CBK Mobile Application and online are evidence that our strategy has successfully paid off.

Robust regulatory ratios comfortably exceeded the Central Bank's statutory requirement, capital adequacy ratio 18.6 percent against regulatory requirement of 11.0 percent. The available capital buffer is the core strength of the bank and will be utilized responsibly to expand our loan portfolio in line with our growth strategy. Similarly, a liquidity coverage ratio of 151.1 percent, net stable funding ratio of 104.3 percent and a

leverage ratio of 12.1 percent, all are well above the statutory minimum requirements which would be deployed for quality assets expansion.

As part of our Corporate Social Responsibility, the bank welcomed The 'Let's Be Aware' 'Diraya' Campaign' launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait and Kuwait Banking Association. The bank has been spreading awareness messages among its employees, customers, citizens, and residents through its website, mobile App, branches, social media platforms and frequently asked questions (FAQs) sections in all of the online portal. Sheikh Ahmad, in his closing remarks, appreciated all the efforts by Kuwaiti governmental organizations which helped in combatting this pandemic, the regulatory authorities represented by the Central Bank of Kuwait for its continuous support to the banking sector, the bank's executive management and all staff for their dedication and rigorous efforts for customer service.

Proven Robotics, Pudu Robotics unveil next-gen robots in Saudi

DUBAI: Proven Robotics, a state-of-the-art venture by Proven Solution, and Pudu Robotics, an international high-tech enterprise dedicated to the design, R&D, production and sales of commercial service robots, held a launch event to unveil Pudu's signature robots - Kettybot, Bellabot and Pudubot - for the first time in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The live event presented an opportunity for both the companies to showcase the brilliance of these robots in improving efficiencies through AI technology, reducing operating costs and simplifying processes. Representatives from Proven Robotics and Pudu Robotics discussed the growth of robotics in the region, and the role of AI and robots in Saudi Arabia's ambitious drive towards making automation and artificial intelligence a core pillar in the nation's economic development strategy.

Visitors attending the Riyadh Season 2021-22 were able to watch demos for Kettybot, Bellabot and Pudubot, robots that were developed to transform the operational landscape and improve efficiency. Bellabot robot was designed to revolutionize the human-robot interactive system, helping make manual tasks in customer-servicing obsolete; while Kettybot and Pudubot are service delivery robots and can act as a utility assistant in several industries.

With a vision of becoming the leading robotics solutions provider in the Middle East, Proven Robotics has been providing cutting edge robotic solutions and a robotics management system that can be customized to fit business needs, enabling



Zaid Al-Mashari

local and regional organizations to take full advantage of emerging applications and solutions. Through its partnership with Pudu Robotics, the company aims to offer fully scalable robotic automation solutions for customers in a wide range of industries and several customer facing sectors. "There is an increasing demand for robotics

across many industries, and this demand is expected to rise, driven by the introduction of new tech-

nologies, a growing need for automation fueled by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the need for contactless and automated interactions. Our agreement with Pudu Robotics comes in line with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 that emphasizes economic diversification and aims to support businesses and organizations in Saudi Arabia to utilize the efficiencies created by robots to stay ahead of the curve. We are committed to working with our customers to deliver solutions that match their needs, helping them stay competitive and relevant in an ever-evolving digital era," added Zaid Al-Mashari, Group CEO of Proven Arabia.

With superior offerings and global footprints, Proven Robotics and Pudu Robotics plan to host more roadshows in the future.



The past, present and future of Huawei nova Series

KUWAIT: Huawei made a bold move: it made its official debut in the consumer market. This bold move paid off in spades. Leaning on its telecommunications expertise, Huawei introduced a wide range of highly innovative smartphone products. This experience enabled its device to support cutting edge connectivity features, but that is not all. To hone its competitive edge, the company has continuously invested into product R&D and consumer research, which provided it with industry-leading innovations and a keen understanding of what consumers truly desire. All these are reflected in the flagship Huawei Mate Series and Huawei P Series, two household brand names that exemplify the Huawei spirit of innovation.

But Huawei did not arrive to where it was with just the Mate and P Series. Its smartphone portfolio is actually more diverse than a lot of people are aware of. Today, we are putting a spotlight on the Huawei nova Series. In its sixth year, the series will welcome its newest member by the end of October - Huawei nova 9 - the Trendy flagship & Camera King featuring a beautiful display, ver-

satellite cameras, supercharging support. Super Device features with EMUI 12 and an amazing performance for gaming and more. It is a great device that comes with a lot of the features that other smartphone makers often reserve for flagship models. Looking for a new trendy flagship smartphone that is tailored to you? Read on!

The genesis of the new star

Introduced at IFA 2016, the Huawei nova Series started with the debut of Huawei nova and Huawei nova plus. They were fantastic smartphones that combined stunning looks and fantastic cameras with the competitive pricing. The critical acclaim and commercial success of the first nova devices set the foundation for generations of devices to come, with each debuting with its own fair share of unique features and phenomenal user experiences.

For instance, the Huawei nova 3e was the first phone to feature a notched screen, a screen design that was highly popular at that time. The Huawei nova 5T came with 48MP Quad AI Cameras that enabled even everyday consumers to capture high-definition, ultra wide-angle, macro and bokeh photography. Later, Huawei nova 7 turned the selfie functionality up another notch by adding a circular flash feature to the front camera. It also came with signature Huawei camera features such as Super Night Selfie, for consumers to easily capture great photos in low light situations. In recent months, Huawei released Huawei nova 8, a spectacular smartphone featuring 64MP AI Quad Camera system. Through the years, Huawei has amassed a great number of fans for the series.

Newest star of the family

What's next for Huawei nova? On 31st October, Huawei will be bringing the new Huawei nova 9 to the Middle East and Africa region. The headlining feature of the new star is its stunning design together with the camera system and its many other features. It will come with flagship-grade camera technology that is much more powerful than any of its predecessors.

Rumors have it that the phone will be coming with a 120Hz Original-Color Curved Display, allowing the user to enjoy the photos and videos they capture to the fullest. And yes - it has a 120Hz display. You don't need to play top dollar to get that for your smartphone. It's also worth mentioning that the Huawei nova 9 is quite the looker as well. Featuring an ultra-thin design, Huawei nova 9 is an exemplary example of the wider series. The new colorways it's available in



also showcase the all-new advanced manufacturing processes, which produces a sandblasted texture that makes the smartphone feel as good as it looks.

From official sources, we also know that it will be equipped with a 50MP Ultra Vision Camera system that supports the powerful image quality enhancing solution XD Fusion Engine, something that until the Huawei nova 9 was only available on Huawei's flagship smartphones. The main camera also has a RYYB color filter array, which vastly improves the amount of light intake for better low-light performance. What's should prove even more exciting for creatives are the new camera features such as Continuous Front/Rear Recording features, which allow for even greater creative flexibility.

Perhaps the best part of this all is how soon it'll be available. Tune in to watch the full announcement on October 31st live from Dubai on Huawei Arabia's social platforms to mark its launch in the Middle East and Africa region to be amongst the first to know all about the newest star to join the Huawei nova family.



Semiconductor crunch hits GM's Q3 profit

NEW YORK: General Motors said yesterday its third quarter profit fell amid a semiconductor shortage that has hit auto sales, but that it remains optimistic about the year. GM said net income dropped to \$2.4 billion in the quarter ended September 30, from just over \$4 billion in the same three months of 2020.

"The quarter was challenging due to continuing semiconductor pressures," GM chief Mary Barra said in a letter to shareholders. The scarcity of computer chips as the global economy emerges from pandemic shutdowns has hit automakers worldwide, forcing some to scale back production.

The US auto giant saw sales fall in all regions and across all brands. But Barra said the automaker expects full-year results to be near "the high end" of the projected range of \$11.5 billion to \$13.5 billion. The first nine months of the year generated a profit of \$8.3 billion, more than double the \$3.6 billion gain in the pandemic months of last year, the company said. —AFP

Transportation slump drags down US durable goods

WASHINGTON: Orders for big-ticket US manufactured goods declined for the first time in five months in September, largely due to falling orders for planes and cars, according to government data released yesterday.

Durable goods orders last month fell by 0.4 percent, seasonally adjusted, from August, the Commerce Department reported, but the September decrease was less severe than analysts forecast. A 2.3 percent drop in transportation orders drove the decline, according to the data, with non-defense aircraft orders, such as Boeing's jets, decreasing 27.9 percent in the month. However, if the transportation sector is excluded, overall orders climbed 0.4 percent, which Oren Klachkin of Oxford Economics called "a sign that many businesses stayed optimistic on the economic outlook even as the Delta variant continued to spread across the country."

The effects of the global semiconductor shortage could be seen in the data, with motor vehicle and parts orders dropping 2.9 percent as automakers continue to struggle to keep assembly lines going amid a shortage of the crucial computer chips. The overall decrease would have been worse if not for the defense sector, where orders for aircraft and parts surged 104.3 percent, and capital goods rose 28.4 percent.

Excluding defense, overall orders would have decreased two percent, the Commerce Department said. Rubeela Farooqi of High Frequency Economics predicted demand would continue to support the manufacturing sector even as the global supply chain bottlenecks create challenges in the months ahead.

"The trend in orders is likely to remain positive given inventories remain lean. But for the manufacturing sector, supply bottlenecks and shortages are key constraints that are likely to persist in the near term," she said in an analysis. —AFP



Business

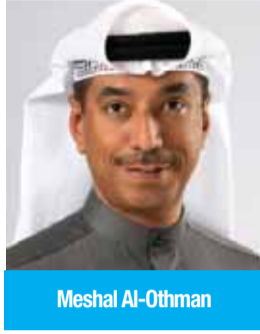
AUB announces a net profit of \$450.6m for 9 months of 2021

Net interest income \$222.5m in Q3/2021 • Total operating income \$274.0m

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank B.S.C. (AUB) reported a net profit attributable to its equity shareholders of \$152.1 million for Q3/2021, which represents a 31.2 percent increase over the Q3/2020 reported profit of \$115.9 million driven by an increase in net interest income and a lower level of net provision charge for credit losses. The Basic and Diluted Earnings per Share were US 1.5 cents in Q3/2021 versus US 1.1 cents in Q3/2020. Comprehensive income attributable to the owners of the bank for Q3/2021 was \$156.0 million (Q3/2020: \$129.7 million, +20.3 percent).

Net interest income was \$222.5 million in Q3/2021 (Q3/2020: \$193.2 million, +15.2 percent) and total operating income was \$274.0 million in Q3/2021 (Q3/2020: \$247.4 million, +10.8 percent).

AUB reported a net profit attributable to its equity shareholders of \$450.6 million for the first nine months of year 2021 which represents a 10.1 percent increase over the YTD Q3/2020 reported profit of \$409.3 million mainly driven by an increase in net interest margins and a lower provision charge in 2021 given the exceptional incremental precautionary Stage 1 and Stage 2 ECL gross provision charges of \$78.4 million raised in YTD Q3/2020 on performing risk assets to address the heightened levels of macro-economic and sectoral risks following the out-break of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Basic and Diluted Earnings per Share in YTD Q3/2021 were US 4.3 cents, compared



Meshal Al-Othman

to US 3.9 cents in YTD Q3/2020. Comprehensive income attributable to the owners of the bank for YTD Q3/2021 was \$493.8 million (YTD Q3/2020: \$287.1 million, +72.0 percent). Net interest income for YTD Q3/2021 was \$644.2 million (YTD Q3/2020: \$599.9 million, +7.4 percent) primarily due to improved spreads, reduced liquidity premia and improving market conditions. Total operating income for the YTD Q3/2021 was \$826.2 million (YTD Q3/2020: \$823.0 million, +0.4 percent).

The Group's equity attributable to owners at 30 September 2021 increased by 8.6 percent to \$4.3 billion (31 December 2020: \$4.0 billion). Return on Average Equity for YTD Q3/2021 increased to 13.7 percent (YTD Q3/2020: 12.7 percent). The AUB Group's total assets as at 30 September 2021 increased by 3.6 percent to \$41.5 billion (31 December 2020: \$40.1 billion) reflecting prudent balance sheet growth compatible with the prevailing economic environment in its main operating markets. Return on Average Assets also improved to 1.6 percent for YTD Q3/2021 (YTD Q3/2020: 1.4 percent).

The non-performing loans ratio was lower at 2.5 percent (31 December 2020: 2.6 percent) with specific provision coverage of 82.2 percent (31 December 2020: 85.9 percent). Provision coverage levels are calculated on a cash provision basis excluding the value of the substantial additional non-cash (real estate and securities) assigned collaterals available against non-performing loans.

The cost to income ratio for YTD Q3/2021 was 29.0 percent (YTD Q3/2020: 28.6 percent) reflecting AUB's efforts to enhance operational efficiencies through the roll-out of digitization initiatives as part of the AUB Group's overall transformation plan.

The AUB Chairman, Meshal Al-Othman, commented "Regional governments have conducted successful vaccination programs which ensured that the majority of their populations have been vaccinated. This facilitated proactive measured steps to ensure opening-up of local economies and return of customer confidence. However, the current period has also seen resurgence of COVID-19 virus variants in some other parts of the world with the resultant health situation adversely impacting business sentiment impacted by shortages of raw materials and components seriously affecting production levels in many key industries. As a result, global financial markets are still subject to volatility given the evolving developments and uncertainty.

Against the challenging backdrop of the still evol-

ving market conditions, AUB achieved a very satisfactory performance in the first nine months of 2021 in terms of both financial and operational results". He added, "During September 2021, AUB successfully completed a 5 year Senior Islamic Sukuk Issue and raised \$600 million as part of its funding base diversification efforts. The sukuk issue was very well received and was subscribed over 2.5 times demonstrating AUB's strong credentials and is listed on the London Stock Exchange".

Ahli United Bank B.S.C. (AUB) is a leading pan-regional financial services provider, incorporated in Bahrain in May 2000. It offers a full range of retail, commercial and private banking and wealth management services, both conventional and sharia-compliant, across the MENA region and the UK. AUB operates through its Bahrain head office and its subsidiaries in Kuwait, Egypt, Iraq, and the UK as well as its associates in Oman and Libya; and a branch in the UAE (DIFC). The key shareholders of AUB are the Public Institution for Social Security, Kuwait (18.86 percent stake) and Social Insurance Organization, Bahrain (10.01 percent stake). AUB's strong performance has earned it a string of prestigious local and regional accolades over the years, including: "Best Bank in the Middle East" by The Banker (2006, 2016) and by Euromoney (2007, 2012) besides the "Best Bank in Bahrain" consistently over the years.



Winner receiving the prize

NBK announces winner of KD 125,000 in Al-Jawhara draw

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) continues to reward its customers with an outstanding array of draws, prizes and offers all year round. In this context, the bank announced Minor Kawthar Hashem Mirza Abdullah as the winner of Al-Jawhara monthly prize worth KD 125,000 for October 2021.



Hisham Al-Nusif

Al-Jawhara Account gives customers the opportunity to enter draws and win prizes of KD 5,000 weekly, KD 125,000 monthly as well as the grand prize of KD 250,000 quarterly. Every KD 50 deposited into Al-Jawhara Account gives the customer a chance to be one the next lucky winners, and if no withdrawal or transfers occur on the account during the holding period, customers will receive an additional chance for every KD 50 held in the account, doubling their chance to win.

Commenting on this monthly draw, Hisham Al-Nusif, Deputy General Manager of Consumer Banking, National Bank of Kuwait, said: "Al-Jawhara Account is an outstanding means for customers to save and get a chance to win prizes at the same time. At NBK, we are committed to reward our customers through weekly,

monthly and quarterly draws. We also continue to offer them more exceptional rewards and campaigns that give them more distinction and benefits from NBK's leadership and excellence."

"We are constantly communicating with our customers to identify their needs, as well as measure their satisfaction with the products offered. In this regard, we have seen customer satisfaction growing remarkably as to the services and benefits provided by the bank, which come in line with our commitment to offer customers a richer banking experience," he added.

Al-Nusif affirmed that NBK ensures a quick and easy process for opening Al-Jawhara Account by visiting the nearest NBK Branch, or simply through NBK Mobile Banking or NBK Online Banking for existing customers, in line with the bank's digital transformation strategy that provides its customers with integrated banking experience by enabling them to make all their banking transactions without visiting branches. On the other hand, NBK announced the names of the winners of Al-Jawhara weekly draws worth KD 5,000 each including: Abdallah Hamzah Jragh, Hanan Moiz Peer and Maged Galil El-Alfi.

The draw was held live on NBK Instagram page in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, as well as representatives from NBK, noting that Al-Jawhara monthly and quarterly draws are conducted in the presence of a representative from Deloitte.

Since 2012, National Bank of Kuwait has rewarded loyal customers with a total worth of annual prizes amounting KD 2,200,000 in Al-Jawhara weekly, monthly and quarterly draws. In addition to providing top-notch, cutting-edge and highly secure banking services, NBK is keen to give customers a variety of offers, rewards and prizes matching their interests all year round.

with exciting gift vouchers on every purchase. Joyalukkas will also showcase a limited-edition special festive collection across all its showrooms in Kuwait. The collections are exclusively designed by top designers and craftsmen to blend with the festive attire and traditions.

Announcing the grand promotion, John Paul Alukkas, Managing Director, International Operations, quoted "Festive seasons give us an opportunity to reward our customers. This year, we are rewarding them with exciting cashback gift vouchers on every purchase, which they can redeem to buy more jewelry of their choice from Joyalukkas. The festive cashback offer will reward customers with a KD 5 gift voucher on every purchase of Gold Jewelry worth KD 250. The offer is valid from 29th October to 2nd November 2021. Diamond and pearl jewelry lovers will be rewarded with a KD 20 gift voucher on every purchase of diamond, polki and pearl Jewelry worth KD 250.

The offer is valid till 6th November 2021. Joyalukkas has also announced advance booking plan where customers can book their gold in advance by paying as little as 10 percent and secure their gold prices during the booking period. The offers are valid across all Joyalukkas showrooms in Kuwait. Our showrooms are located at easily accessible areas of Kuwait and they are in Kuwait City at Panasonic Tower, at Al-Rai near Lulu Hypermarket, Friday Market, at Dajeej, Lulu Hypermarket, at Salmiya, Al-Salam Mall, Fahaaheel at Makkah Street.

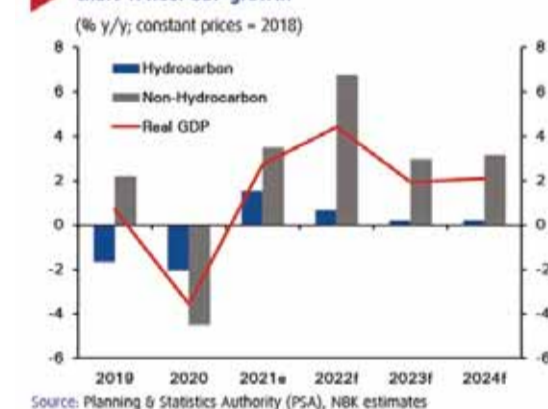


NBK Economic Report

Qatar economy expected to return to growth in 2021

KUWAIT: After last year's pandemic-linked contraction of 3.6 percent, Qatar's economy is expected to grow by 2.7 percent in 2021 and by 2.8 percent on average in 2022-24. Having eased business and mobility restrictions since mid-2021, the recovery in consumer sentiment and business activity is gaining traction and driving non-hydrocarbon sector growth. The PMI reached 58.2 in August, the second highest reading on record, and consumer spending is expected to rebound by an estimated 5 percent in 2021 (-8.5 percent in 2020). Services, such as travel, transport and tourism, will lead the non-oil recovery and especially in 2022, when Qatar's hosting of the FIFA World Cup will boost tourism and travel receipts (an estimated 1.2 million visitors are expected, around 50 percent of the current population). Growth in the hydrocarbon sector will gain from slightly higher oil production and, in nominal terms, elevated oil and LNG prices in line with stronger global economic and energy demand.

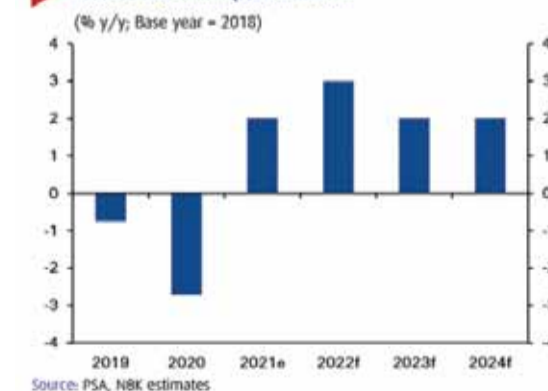
Chart 1: Real GDP growth (% y/y; constant prices = 2018)



Source: Planning & Statistics Authority (PSA), NBK estimates

Medium-term growth is also underpinned by Qatar's Vision 2030 development plan. It includes large investments to boost gas production (LNG output to rise by 40 percent from 77 mtpa to 110 mtpa by 2026 in the first phase), and a further push for diversification through investment in infrastructure and strategic sectors including manufacturing, finance, tourism and ICT.

Chart 2: Consumer price inflation (% y/y; Base year = 2018)



Source: PSA, NBK estimates

Inflation returns

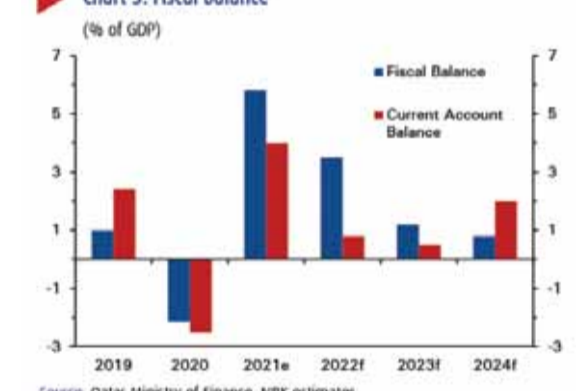
Consumer prices fell 2.6 percent in 2020 due to the economic downturn, including renewed downward pressure on housing rents which fell 4.5 percent y/y. (Excluding housing, inflation was -2 percent.) Recovering consumer demand and higher global commodity, food and transportation costs had pushed inflation back up to +2.7 percent by September 2021, though weak housing rents continue to weigh. The Qatari authorities have already reinstated food and medical customs duties, while monetary policy is expected to remain loose (the key interest rate was cut to a 15-year low of 2.5 percent in 2020). We expect inflation to average 2 percent in 2021, rising to 2.3 percent on average in 2022-24.

Fiscal balance to return to surplus

A sizable support package, coupled with reduced hydrocarbon revenues and lower corporate tax

receipts led to a modest fiscal deficit (2.1 percent of GDP) in 2020. Stimulus measures included QR75 billion (12 percent of GDP) of funds for the private sector, QR10 billion injected into the Qatar Stock Exchange, and the suspension of utilities fees and customs duties on food and medical items for a 6-month period (ending September 2020). In 2021, a surplus of 5.8 percent of GDP is expected, mainly on the back of increased oil and gas receipts due to higher energy prices. Fiscal restraint will be exercised in the near term as the authorities aim to consolidate the finances, lower the public sector wage bill (expat government employee wages were already cut by 30 percent in 2020) and reduce discretionary spending. Capital expenditure is also likely to decline this year as major World Cup-related projects are completed, and further out, VAT could be introduced by 2023, bolstering public revenues. The government is expected to resume an expansionary budget once fiscal pressures subside in order to meet its ambitious economic development goals.

Chart 3: Fiscal balance (% of GDP)



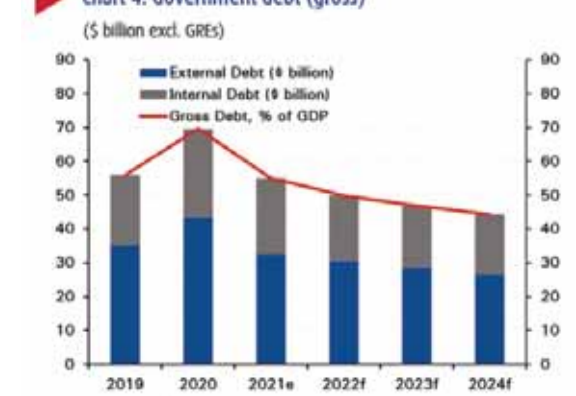
Source: Qatar Ministry of Finance, NBK estimates

Public debt

Qatar Petroleum made the largest emerging market debt offering so far this year with its \$12.5 billion bond sale to finance the North Field gas expansion. Low interest rates and strong investor demand for GCC debt should lead to continued debt issuance, albeit at a slower pace due to an improving fiscal position. Moreover, decent economic growth coupled with higher hydrocarbon receipts should see public debt ease gradually over the medium term. Qatar's credit standing remains robust (AA- by Fitch), backed by large external reserves and a good track record of effective policy-making.

Given its reliance on LNG exports, downside risks to the outlook stem mainly from exposure to volatile gas prices, which could soften on weaker energy demand and/or oversupply. However, the current narrative is one of supply shortage, with international gas prices surging. With the lowest cost base in the industry, Qatar is well-placed to compete on price with international LNG players. Domestic risks stem mainly from a slower-than-expected economic recovery, Qatar's relatively high public debt levels, and continued pandemic uncertainty. Improved neighborly relations are positive for the economy and regional security.

Chart 4: Government debt (gross) (\$ billion excl. GRES)



Source: IF, NBK estimates

Business

Water tycoon is China's richest as wealth crackdown batters Jack Ma

Zhong Shanshan is worth \$60.5 billion, according to Hurun Rich List

BEIJING: Bottled-water tycoon Zhong Shanshan has become China's wealthiest person, according to an annual ranking released yesterday, as a government campaign to rein in the super-rich took a big bite out of the fortunes of perennial front-runners like Alibaba co-founder Jack Ma.

Zhong, in his late 60s, has seen his fortune swell following the stock listings last year of his Nongfu Spring mineral water and separate pharma company Wantai Biological Pharmacy Enterprise, which has tapped into massive demand for COVID-19 test kits. He is worth \$60.5 billion, according to the Hurun Rich List, up seven percent. Ranked third last year, Zhong was propelled to the top spot as the Communist Party government's drive to redistribute wealth in the name of equality sliced billions from the fortunes of other tycoons.

Ma, last year's richest, dropped to fifth as his fortune shrank 36 percent to \$39.6 billion. Ma and Alibaba fell out of favor with Beijing soon after he gave a speech late last year criticizing China's financial regulators. That resulted in Chinese officials spiking what would have been a world record \$37 billion initial public offering for Alibaba's financial group Ant and kicked off a cascade of crackdowns on Chinese tech companies, alleged monopolistic practices, and powerful tycoons.

Pony Ma, boss of gaming giant and WeChat owner Tencent, dropped two spots to fourth as Chinese restrictions on video gaming reduced his fortune by 19



BEIJING: Bottled-water tycoon Zhong Shanshan has become China's wealthiest person, according to an annual ranking released yesterday.



SANTA PONSA, Spain: Jack Ma, co-founder and former executive chairman of Chinese Alibaba Group is pictured in Santa Ponsa, on the island of Mallorca. — AFP

percent. Second place was taken by TikTok founder Zhang Yiming.

The Hurun Research Institute, which compiles the list, said that for the first time the real estate sector had no names in the Top 10. The sector's biggest loser was Xu Jiayin, founder of deeply troubled property giant Evergrande Group. Xu had topped the list in 2017 and was fifth last year. But he has fallen to 70th with a nearly 70 percent reduction in his wealth to \$11.3 billion, according to Hurun. A liquidity crunch at Evergrande has hammered investor sentiment and rattled the coun-

try's crucial real estate market, while fanning fears of a possible contagion in the wider economy. Chinese authorities have told Xu to use his dwindling personal wealth to alleviate the embattled company's debt crisis, according to media reports this week. However, the overall number of individuals in China worth at least two billion yuan (\$310 million) grew by 520 to a total of 2,918, Hurun said.

Growth in the electric vehicle market, in particular, fuelled the rising fortunes of several entrepreneurs, according to the list. — AFP

in an email, according to Bloomberg News. "We plan to pursue all available options while continuing to serve our customers. There was no response to an email sent to the press contact at the Chinese embassy in Washington. Tuesday's announcement ramped up concerns about further measures against Chinese tech firms and battered shares in such firms listed in New York. The selling continued Wednesday in Hong Kong, where the Chinese technology firms, and the selling continued in Hong Kong with the Hang Seng tech Index losing more than three percent.

China Telecom is China's largest fixed-line operator, and its shares jumped some 20 percent in August in its Shanghai stock debut. But it has faced turbulence in the United States for years, particularly during Trump's presidency as the former president repeatedly clashed with Beijing over trade. The company was delisted by the New York Stock Exchange in January along with fellow state-owned telecoms firms China Mobile and China Unicom.

That followed a Trump executive order banning investments by Americans in a range of companies deemed to be supplying or supporting China's military and security apparatus. The US Justice Department had already threatened to terminate China Telecom's American dealings in April last year, saying US government agencies "identified substantial and unacceptable national security and law enforcement risks associated with China Telecom's operations." US regulators have also taken action against other Chinese telecoms, notably private giant Huawei. Trump's White House in 2018 began an aggressive campaign to short-circuit the global ambitions of Huawei, cutting the tech giant off from key components and banning it from using Google's Android services. "(The move) sends a broader message to Beijing, that regardless of who's president, the US continues to be concerned about the risks posed by Chinese tech firms operating in the US," Martijn Rasser, of the Center for a New American Security in Washington, told Bloomberg. — AFP



BRUSSELS: The EU yesterday unveiled a new banking law to avoid a repeat of the 2008 financial crisis that delays key aspects of an internationally agreed deal.

EU seeks delay to tighter rules on banks

BRUSSELS: The EU yesterday unveiled a new banking law to avoid a repeat of the 2008 financial crisis that delays key aspects of an internationally agreed deal. The proposals are the European Union's interpretation of the Basel III reforms of international standards on how banks evaluate credit and market risks.

Implementing the rules will require Europe's biggest banks to keep more cash on their books, something that could lead to hundreds of billions of euros in additional costs. The new rules, which were supposed to be active in 2023, would also force banks into providing greater transparency on their climate risks, with financing of fossil fuel projects, for example, evaluated poorly.

"The intention is to make sure that the rules are fully applicable as of January 1, 2025," EU vice president Valdis Dombrovskis told reporters. "This presents a

realistic assessment of upcoming legislative process and the time to put the outcome of this process in place," he said.

Europe's banking giants have lobbied hard to limit the rules or put them off as long as they can, arguing that a decade of stricter capital requirements have already shrunk profits and curbed lending.

The commission's proposal will now be negotiated with the European Parliament and EU member states, where the interests of the continent's biggest lenders have a strong influence. "While we must implement these agreements faithfully, it's also very important that we take into account the specificities of the European banking sector," an EU official told reporters on condition of anonymity.

For example, the commission argues that the current global rulebook for lending to small companies be allowed to apply longer in Europe, where firms are less prepared for the new regime.

In addition, Brussels says EU banks hold a high volume of low-risk home loans compared to their rivals in the United States and that too should allow for some leeway. The financing of infrastructure projects, which in Europe is left mainly to banks, also needs special consideration, the commission said. — AFP

OSLO: Norwegian energy giant Equinor said yesterday that soaring gas prices helped it more than double its revenue in the third quarter. Equinor, which is 67 percent owned by the Norwegian state, said that its net profit rose to \$1.4 billion between July to September this year, compared to a loss during the same period in 2020, partly due to asset write-downs. But the profit figure was well below analyst expectations of \$2 billion.

However, total revenue hit \$23 billion, narrowly beating expectations of \$22 billion, according to analysts surveyed by Factset. The number was also more than twice the revenue of the same period last year, when many businesses were devastated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Equinor's preferred indicator-net operating profit, which excludes some one-off items, came in well above expectations at \$9.8 billion. Energy prices have surged recently as the global economy recovers from the pandemic, and the northern hemisphere heads towards winter.

Chief executive Anders Opedal said that "the global economy is in recovery, but we are still prepared for volatility related to the impact of the pandemic". "The current unprecedented level and volatility in European gas prices underlines the uncertainty in the market," he said in the statement. "Equinor has an important role as a reliable energy provider to Europe and we have taken steps to increase our gas exports to respond to the high demand." Equinor's average price of oil per barrel reached \$69.2 in the third quarter-up from \$38.3 a year earlier. — AFP

Stalling growth creates headache for next German government

BERLIN: Global supply chain bottlenecks forced the German government to downgrade its 2021 growth forecast yesterday as it prepares to hand over the reins of a spluttering economy to the country's next coalition. Supply chain disruptions and shortages of raw materials, including plastics, metals and paper, have choked off the recovery from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic in Europe's top economy.

As a result, the government yesterday lowered its forecast for economic growth to 2.6 percent this year from 3.5 percent previously. "Bottlenecks and high energy prices are both equally slowing the progress of the economy in Europe and worldwide," German Economy Minister Peter Altmaier said in a press conference. The economic recovery is expected to be pushed into next year, with the government forecasting growth of 4.1 percent, up from its previous estimate of 3.6 percent. In 2023, growth would then fall back to 1.6 percent.



BERLIN: German Economy Minister Peter Altmaier poses with a placard showing the economic projections for the fall in Germany at the end of press conference on updated economic forecast in Germany yesterday. — AFP

A scarcity of components has had a particularly hard impact on the country's manufacturing-driven economy, with production lines grinding to a halt in Germany's important automotive sector. Rapid growth in 2022 would depend on "how quickly chipmakers can increase production of semiconductors", Altmaier said, noting that demand for the components would continue to be strong.

Though the minister said he did not expect there to be another coronavirus lockdown over the coming winter months in Germany, but that rising case rates could still have "negative economic consequences". The German economy would reach its pre-crisis level at the "end of the first quarter" in 2022, "one quarter later than originally thought", Altmaier said.

Difficult climate

The new forecast comes against the backdrop of a raft of tough news for the German economy. The German Ifo institute's closely watched business climate indicator fell for the fourth consecutive month in October, according to figures published earlier this week. "Supply problems are giving businesses headaches," Ifo president Clemens Fuest said in a statement, describing the bottlenecks as "sand in the wheels of the German economy". As supplies have dried up, costs have risen, with the prices faced by industry rising by 14.2 percent year on year in September, a rate not seen since the 1970s.

Meanwhile, other indicators are turning downwards: German exports fell in August for the first time since April 2020, near the start of the pandemic. Industrial output slumped by four percent in August, too, while new orders fell 7.7 percent. Under pressure from "surprisingly long-lasting bottlenecks in components, raw materials and transport, more forecasts for the economy will be revised downwards", said Ulrich Kater, chief economist at Deka Bank.

Coalition mission

The question of how to get the economy rolling again will be at the top of the agenda as the parties seeking to form the next German government pick up talks yesterday. In their initial agreement, the Social Democrats, Greens and Free Democrats (FDP) pledged massive investments and less red tape to prepare Germany for a greener and more digital future.

But they vowed not to introduce any tax hikes and to maintain Germany's strict debt rule, which limits deficits to 0.35 percent of GDP in normal times, a red line for the FDP. Finding a way to deliver on both will require "creativity" by the parties' own admission, and could see the new coalition house their investment program somewhere else, such as public lender KfW, as per one mooted solution. Germany's "stuttering economic engine" was a "wake-up call" for the coalition negotiators, said Joachim Lang, head of the influential German industrial lobby the BDI. — AFP

US bans China Telecom over security concerns

WASHINGTON: The United States on Tuesday banned China Telecom from operating in the country citing "significant" national security concerns, further straining already tense relations between the superpowers. The move marks the latest salvo in a long-running standoff that has pitted the world's biggest two economies against each other over a range of issues including Taiwan, Hong Kong, human rights, trade and technology.

It also comes as US President Joe Biden presses ahead with a hardline policy against Beijing broadly in line with that of his predecessor Donald Trump, whose bombastic approach sent tensions soaring.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) ordered China Telecom Americas to discontinue its services within 60 days, ending a nearly 20-year operation in the United States. The firm's "ownership and control by the Chinese government raise significant national security and law enforcement risks," the FCC said in a statement.

It warned that it gives opportunities for Beijing "to access, store, disrupt, and/or misroute US communications, which in turn allow them to engage in espionage and other harmful activities against the United States." The announcement came hours after Chinese Vice Premier Liu He and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen held a video call, with discussions on trade that Beijing described as "pragmatic, candid and constructive."

It will also raise the stakes for virtual talks planned to take place later in the year between Biden and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping. "The FCC's decision is disappointing," China Telecom spokesman Ge Yu said

Beijing tells Evergrande boss to pay firm's debts with own cash

BEIJING: Chinese authorities have told Evergrande founder Xu Jiayin, once the country's richest man, to use his personal wealth to alleviate the embattled company's debt crisis, according to media reports. The liquidity crunch at one of China's biggest property developers has hammered investor sentiment and rattled the country's crucial real estate market, while fanning fears of a possible contagion of the wider economy.

Last week, the group unexpectedly paid interest on an offshore bond just before a Saturday deadline, averting a default and giving it a much-needed reprieve. Evergrande also reported that it had resumed work on more than 10 stalled projects. But Bloomberg News reported Tuesday that Beijing has pushed Xu—also known as Hui Ka Yan in Cantonese—to dip into his own pocket to help pay off some of the company's debts, citing people familiar with the matter.

The report said the directive from Beijing came after his company missed an initial bond interest payment due on September 23. However, it is unlikely that Xu's personal sacrifice would make much of an impact on Evergrande's liabilities of more than \$300 billion, with Bloomberg reporting his fortune at less than \$8 billion.

Xu, 63-year-old, was once the wealthiest person in China, worth more than \$40 billion just a few years ago, before Evergrande's troubles began. People cited by Bloomberg also said that local governments across China are monitoring the developer's bank accounts to ensure company cash is used to complete unfinished housing projects and not diverted to pay creditors.

The crackdown on China's indebted real estate sector that prompted Evergrande's cash crisis has also hit several other builders, with Sinic and Fantasia among those failing to make debt payments. Yesterday ratings agency Fitch downgraded another, Modern Land, saying it failed to make a \$250 million payment this week. — AFP



Hikers walk next to sinkholes across a dried-up sea area which exposed and created a salt plain, some 20 Km south of the Israeli Kibbutz Ein Gedi in the southern part of the Dead Sea, on January 15, 2021. — AFP photos

Sinkholes on receding Dead Sea shore mark 'nature's revenge'

In the heyday of the Ein Gedi spa in the 1960s, holidaymakers could marinate in heated pools and then slip into the briny Dead Sea. Now the same beach is punctured by craters. A spectacular expanse of water in the desert, flanked by cliffs to east and west, the Dead Sea has lost a third of its surface area since 1960.

The blue water recedes about a metre (yard) every year, leaving behind a lunar landscape whitened by salt and perforated with gaping holes. Going forward, "you might be lucky to have a channel of water here, that people will be able to put their toes in," laments Alison Ron, a resident of Ein Gedi who once worked at the spa. "But there will be a lot of sinkholes."

The sinkholes can exceed 10 metres (33 feet) in depth and are a testament to the shrinking sea. Receding salt water leaves behind underground salt deposits. Runoff from periodic flash floods then percolates into the ground and dissolves the salt patches. Without support, the land above collapses.



A picture taken on October 6, 2021, shows an ibex herd grazing in an abandoned palm grove that was destroyed following the formation of sinkholes filled with water as a result of a drop in the water level in the Dead Sea.



Picture taken on September 21, 2021, shows sinkholes filled with water which were formed as a result of a drop in the water level in the Dead Sea.

Ghost town

At the Ein Gedi thermal baths, the roughly three kilometres (two miles) of rocky sand that now separate the spa from the shore are dotted with holes and crevices. Further north, a whole tourist complex has turned into a ghost town, disfigured by craters and enclosed in fences. The pavement is gutted, the lampposts overturned, the date plantation abandoned.

Ittai Gavrieli of the Zionist Geological Institute told AFP there are now thousands of sinkholes all around the shores of the Dead Sea, in Jordan, Zionist entity and the occupied West Bank. They reflect human policy that has literally decimated the flow of water into the

Dead Sea. Both countries have diverted the waters of the River Jordan for agriculture and drinking water. Chemical companies have extracted minerals from the seawater.

Climate change further accelerates evaporation. In Sodom, southwest of the Dead Sea, the country's highest temperature in over 70 years was recorded in July 2019 — 49.9 degrees Celsius, or nearly 122 Fahrenheit.

'Nature's revenge'

Gavrieli said the Geological Institute is monitoring the formation of sinkholes from space but it is not an exact science. He said they are certainly "dangerous" but also "magnificent." "It has potential to become a tourist attraction, if you're will-

ing to take the risk on one hand and if insurance issues are clear," he said.

Much too perilous, answers Gidon Bromberg, director of the NGO EcoPeace, for whom the sinkholes are "nature's revenge" for "the inappropriate actions of humankind". "We will not be able to bring back the Dead Sea to its former glory," he said. "But we are demanding that we stabilise it." His organisation, comprised of Jordanian, Palestinian and Jewish environmentalists, advocates increased desalination of seawater from the Mediterranean to relieve pressure on the Sea of Galilee and the River Jordan, which could then flow back to the Dead Sea. EcoPeace would also like the industry to be "held accountable" by paying more taxes.

Inescapable decline

Asked by AFP, a spokesman for Jordan's water ministry offered no detailed fix for the crisis. Instead, he said the donor community should play a "vital role" in sparking interest "to find reasonable solutions to the Dead Sea problem".

In June, Jordan abandoned a long-stalled proposal to build a canal with Zionist entity and the Palestinians to carry water from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea. Instead, Amman announced it would build a desalination plant to supply drinking water. Even if the canal had been built, it could not have saved the lake on its own, said hydrologist Eran Halfi of the Dead Sea-Arava Science Center.

"The Dead Sea is at a deficit of one billion cubic metres per year and this was

supposed to bring 200 million cubic metres," he said. "It would slow the drop but not prevent it." So is the Dead Sea doomed to evaporate? Scientists say its decline is inevitable for at least the next 100 years. Sinkholes will keep spreading over the century.

However, the lake could reach an equilibrium because as its surface decreases, the water becomes saltier and evaporation slows down. In Ein Gedi, Ron said that forecast gave her little satisfaction. By diverting rivers and building factories, she said, "man has interfered". "We have to be ashamed of ourselves that we have allowed this to happen," she said. — AFP



DWC holds farewell dinner for Chad envoy

Wife of the ambassador of Republic of Popular Sudan held a farewell dinner for Chad ambassador to Kuwait whose diplomatic mission in Kuwait concludes. The dinner was attended by the head of the Diplomatic Women Committee (DWC) Sheikha Hala Bader Al-Mohammad Al-

Ahmad Al-Sabah, ambassador of Kenya and members of the diplomatic committee. She spoke about her diplomatic and social experience of which she benefitted a lot especially that it achieved a lot for her country.



Kiwi boffins aim to clear the air on livestock emissions

Tucked away in rural New Zealand, a multi-million dollar research facility is working to slash the greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere by farm animals-saving the world one belch at a time. Cattle and sheep are kept in perspex pens for two days per session as scientists carefully analyse every burp and fart that emerges from them at the New Zealand Agricultural Greenhouse Gas Research Centre.

"I never thought I'd make my living measuring the gas that comes out of animals' breath," the facility's director Harry Clark told AFP. The UN says agricultural livestock accounts for 14.5 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions generated by human activity and the centre-regarded as a world leader in livestock emissions research-is hopeful it can play a key role in tackling the problem.

How authorities ended up funding the project to the tune of NZ\$10 million (US\$7.0 million) a year is a story of economic necessity and changing attitudes to climate change. But it begins in the gut of ruminant livestock, which use microbes to partially digest their food by fermenting it in a compartment of their stomach before regurgitating it to be chewed as cud.

The process results in copious amounts of methane-a gas that has more than 80 times the 'global warming potential' of carbon dioxide, across 20 years according to the UN Economic Commission. There are estimated to be 1.5 billion cows on the planet, with each



PALMERSTON NORTH, New Zealand: This photo taken on September 29, 2021 shows a calf standing inside a holding cell having its gas emissions monitored at the New Zealand Agricultural Greenhouse Gas Research Centre in Palmerston North. — AFP

one capable of producing 500 litres (132 gallons) of the gas each day. In addition, livestock urine produces nitrous oxide, another powerful climate pollutant.

'Tantalising' methane vaccine

New Zealand's farm-reliant economy means its proportion of agricultural emissions is much higher, accounting for around half of its greenhouse gases.

At Clark's centre in Palmerston North, the major focus is on livestock methane, which accounts for almost 36 percent of the country's total. "New Zealand has a specific problem and it's imperative we give farmers the tools and technologies to reduce their emissions," Clark said. The facility, which is vetted by an ethics committee, is exploring research that includes selective breeding programmes to develop bloodlines of animals that naturally produce less gas.

Sheep have been bred that produce 10 percent less methane than average and Clark said researchers were trying to produce similar results with cattle.

Other projects include putting emission-inhibiting additives in livestock feed and even developing a harness or mask with filters that capture methane before it leaves the animal's mouth.

But Clark said perhaps the most exciting prospect being developed in Palmerston North is a vaccine that reduces methane by targeting the microbes in the gut that produce the gas.

"It's tantalisingly close, in the sense that it works in the laboratory but it doesn't work in the animal yet," he said, adding such a vaccine could be easily administered to flocks and herds worldwide, with an immediate impact on global emissions. It is a growing area of research globally: In the US, researchers are experimenting with probiotics for cattle, while in India, scientists are adding supplements to feed-with the aim of reducing the amount of methane produced.

But critics warn this approach offers only short term benefits and "band-aid" solutions to major problems. "Reducing methane output while breeding still more methane-producing animals ignores animal suffering, deforestation, and the increased risk of diseases-including zoonotic viruses-all associated with animal agriculture," said Aleesha Naxakis, spokesperson for People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA).

Global shift

New Zealand's government has committed to reducing livestock methane 10 percent by 2030 and 24-47 percent by 2050, compared with 2017 levels.

But some have questioned why the lucrative agricultural sector is treated differently to the rest of the economy, which has been set a target of zero net emissions by 2050. Monitoring website Climate Action Tracker rates New Zealand's climate policies as "highly insufficient", citing the methane carve out as one of the main reasons. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features



Senior research technician Jaana Rikkinen prepares a bio reactor where the sustainably grown coffee cells will be placed to keep growing at the VTT research lab in Espoo, Finland.



Head of Plant Biotechnology Heiko Rischer shows cells of sustainable coffee at the VTT research lab in Espoo, Finland.



A picture shows sustainably grown coffee once the process is finished, the darker colour is due to the roasting process at the VTT research lab.

— AFP photos

Finnish scientists create 'sustainable' lab-grown coffee

Latte drinkers may in the future be sipping on java sourced from a petri dish rather than a plantation, say scientists behind a new technique to grow what they hope to be sustainable coffee in a lab. "It's really coffee, because there is nothing else than coffee material in the product," Heiko Rischer tells AFP, pointing to a dish of light brown powder.

His team of researchers at the Finnish technical research institute VTT believe their coffee would avoid many of the environmental pitfalls associated with the mass production of one of the world's favourite drinks. The coffee is not ground from beans, but instead grown from a cluster of coffee plant cells under closely controlled temperature, light and oxygen conditions in a bioreactor.

Once roasted, the powder can be

brewed in exactly the same way as conventional coffee. Rischer's team used the same principles of cellular agriculture that are used to produce lab-grown meat, which does not involve the slaughter of livestock and which last year was given approval by Singapore authorities to go on sale for the first time.

"Coffee is of course a problematic product," Rischer said, in part because rising global temperatures are making existing plantations less productive, driving farmers to clear ever larger areas of rainforest for new crops.

"There is the transport issue, the fossil fuel use... so it totally makes sense to look for alternatives," Rischer said. The team is carrying out a fuller analysis of how sustainable their product would be if manufactured on a large scale, but believe it would

use less labour and fewer resources than conventional coffee. "We know already that our water footprint, for example, is much less than what is needed for field growth," Rischer said.

Taste test

For coffee lovers, the key to the success of the lab-grown variety will be in its taste-but so far only a specially trained panel of sensory analysts are authorised to try the new brew because of its status as a "novel food". For the time being, they are only allowed "to taste and spit, but not swallow it," said research scientist Heikki Aisala, an expert in sensory perception who leads the testers on the project. "Compared to regular coffee, the cellular coffee is less bitter," which may be due to a slightly lower caffeine content, Aisala told

AFP, adding that fruitiness is also less prominent in the lab-produced powder. "But that being said, we really have to admit that we are not professional coffee roasters and a lot of the flavour generation actually happens in the roasting process," Rischer said.

Other initiatives are also under way in search of a more sustainable alternative to coffee. The Seattle startup Atomo in September announced it had raised \$11.5 million in funding for its "molecular coffee", which has the same flavour makeup as the drink, but is originated from other organic material than a coffee plant.

But surveys in the US and Canada have suggested widespread public wariness towards lab-grown food substitutes, although less so among younger consumers. Despite the environmental bene-

fits, some food policy specialists have warned that coffee producers' livelihoods could be hit if there is a widespread move towards lab-produced products.

In Helsinki, Rischer estimates it will be a minimum of four years before the team's lab-grown coffee gains the regulatory approval and commercial backing to enable it to sit alongside its conventional cousin on the shelves.

The project has a special significance in Finland, which according to analyst group Statista ranks among the world's top consumers of coffee, averaging 10 kilos (22 pounds) per person every year. "There's definitely a lot of enthusiasm for it," Aisala said. — AFP



A sheep eats seaweed on the beach at North Ronaldsay, Orkney on September 7, 2021.

Orkney's seaweed-eating sheep offer hopes of greener farming

On a tiny island in Scotland's far-flung Orkneys, thousands of sheep spend the winter munching on seaweed, a unique diet that scientists say offers hope for reducing planet-warming methane emissions. Around 60 people share North Ronaldsay — an island just over 3 miles (5 kilometres) long, ringed by rocky beaches and turquoise waters off the north coast of mainland Britain — with the distinctive native sheep.



Sheep farmer Sinclair Scott poses for a photograph by dry-stone wall on North Ronaldsay, Orkney. On a tiny island in Scotland's Orkneys, thousands of sheep happily munch on seaweed all winter, a unique diet that scientists say offers hope for reducing planet-warming methane emissions. — AFP photos

Boasting brown, beige or black wool, the animals are hemmed into its foreshore owing to a large system of stone walls — called a sheep dyke — built in the early 19th century to keep them away from fields and roads. The island's crofters — people who live and work on so-called croft agricultural land — wanted to use every available space to grow crops and as pasture for cows. The unintended result: in summer the sheep can nibble on grass, but by winter eating the plentiful seaweed is their only means of survival. While some other mammals — including Shetland ponies native to the neighbouring island chain, and red deer — are known to snack on seaweed, scientists say that the North Ronaldsay sheep are unique worldwide for spending months eating only the marine plants.

Methane reduction

With the world facing a deepening climate emergency, they are increasingly seen by some as a case study that could lead to a breakthrough in methods for raising livestock, which is a major source of greenhouse gases. Farm animals belch and fart methane gas which, though trivial

sounding, is about 30 times more powerful than carbon dioxide at trapping heat in the atmosphere.

Given the vast scale of the global meat industry, the issue has become a major focus for climate scientists — just as world leaders prepare to gather in the Scottish city Glasgow from Sunday for the crucial COP26 summit. The seaweed diet of the Orkney sheep has an effect on their complex digestive system and appears to reduce the amount of methane produced.

"There's different components in the seaweed that actually interfere with the process (of) how methane is made," said Gordon McDougall, a researcher at The James Hutton Institute in Dundee in eastern Scotland who has been examining the sheep's diet for two decades. Researchers at The University of California, Davis, published results in March showing that a "bit of seaweed in cattle feed could reduce methane emissions from beef cattle as much as 82 percent".

David Beattie, another James Hutton Institute scientist, stressed there is huge interest in such innovation. "There's a really big movement within the industry to try and cut out the carbon footprint that the industry as a whole has," he told AFP. "I see seaweed playing a part in that."

Scale

This would not necessarily mean cows and sheep switching to a diet entirely comprised of seaweed like the North Ronaldsay sheep, but it could supplement their usual feed. Seaweed is not available in large enough quantities to feed so many animals, McDougall noted, and taking away too much from the sea could also damage the environment and ecosystems.

But the marine plants — good sources of minerals, vitamins and omega-3 fatty acids — could partly replace soy, which is heavily used in animal feed but transported for thousands of miles and linked to deforestation. Researchers still need to determine the types and quantities of seaweed which could be best suited to adding to feed.

"And then, can you scale that up to a level where you'd actually have an effect on the overall UK farming?" said McDougall. The plump North Ronaldsay sheep, who chow down strands of seaweed as if they were spaghetti, are set to keep providing a useful case study. — AFP

Myths, marriages and Mako: Japan's imperial family

Japan's Princess Mako married her sweetheart Kei Komuro on Tuesday forgoing traditional rites following years of controversy. Here are some things to know about what is considered the world's oldest monarchy:

Who are Japan's royals?

Mako is the niece of Emperor Naruhito, who came to the throne in 2019 after his father abdicated, beginning a new imperial era named "Reiwa". The family has a myth-filled history dating back more than 2,600 years and is said to be descended from the legendary sun goddess Amaterasu.

While 61-year-old Naruhito holds no political power under Japan's post-war constitution, he is an important symbolic figurehead. The emperor and empress host state visits and ritual ceremonies at the Imperial Palace, their main residence within vast grounds in the heart of Tokyo. But their status can be a sensitive topic in Japan, given its 20th century history of war waged in the name of Mako's great-grandfather Hirohito.

Why is Mako leaving?

The Imperial Household Law, in place since 1947, only allows male family members to ascend the Chrysanthemum Throne, while women lose their title if they wed a commoner. This means Mako, 30,



File photo shows Japan's Princess Mako (R), the eldest daughter of Prince Akishino and Princess Kiko, looking at her fiancée Kei Komuro (L), as they meet the media during a press conference to announce their engagement at the Akasaka East Residence in Tokyo. — AFP

has left the royal family after marrying law graduate Komuro, four years after they first announced their engagement. Mako's 15-year-old brother Hisahito is currently the only male heir to the throne other than their father, Crown Prince Akishino.

If Hisahito does not have a male child, the line of succession will be broken-prompting some debate about changing the rules, with polls showing the Japanese public broadly support women being allowed to rule. Although traditionalists are vehemently against the idea, Japan has had as many as eight empresses in the past. The last one, Gosakuramachi, was on the throne about 250 years ago.

Why such a scandal?

The Japanese royal family faces huge pressure to conform to tradition and meet exacting standards of behaviour, with each move intensely scrutinised. A furore erupted after tabloid reports alleged Komuro's mother had failed to repay a four-million-yen (\$35,000) loan from a former fiancé.

When the couple's union was finally announced earlier this month, the Imperial Household Agency said Mako was suffer-

ing complex PTSD because of the media coverage. Mako and Komuro did not conduct traditional wedding rites and gave up the lump-sum payment usually made to women marrying out of the royal family, reportedly worth up to 153 million yen.

Has this happened before?

It is the first time in Japan's post-war history that a royal wedding took place with no elaborate rituals. Other female royals have suffered from stress-related illnesses, especially after joining the family through marriage. Mako's aunt Empress Masako, a former high-flying diplomat, has struggled for years, with some observers blaming the pressure of producing a male heir. The imperial couple have one daughter, Aiko, who is 19 years old.

And Michiko, wife to Naruhito's father Akihito and the first commoner to marry into the family, also faced criticism from hardliners and tabloid gossip, especially in the early years of their marriage. She once lost her voice for months, and has also suffered stomach problems linked to stress. — AFP

Washington, District of Cats: US capital first city to count its felines

A striped feline leaps from a rock under the shade of a tree on a late October morning. As its front paws touch the ground, the whiskered creature looks up, eyes darting left. A wildlife camera clicks and captures the scene. It's a cat — and the location isn't a remote rainforest, but the capital of the United States. The photo is part of the DC Cat Count, a first of its kind, three-year effort by animal welfare advocates, conservationists and scientists to enumerate every *Felis catus* in Washington. The team behind the study says it provides an accurate estimate of the size of the city's indoor, outdoor and

shelter population. It found there are about 200,000 cats in the District of Columbia, with about half of them living indoors only, said Tyler Flockhart, a conservation biologist and science lead on the DC Cat Count. The other half is a group that includes owned cats with limited or unlimited access outdoors, stray cats, and roughly 3,000 to 4,000 feral cats who avoid interactions with humans, Flockhart said. "I don't think that you can find another wild mammal — another wild carnivore — that occurs at that density anywhere in the world," he said, of cats and urban environments. "I think that this is really sort of an interesting idea that we can have so many cats in such a small location."

Consensus for a cat census

The study brought together groups that are often at odds over the impact that outdoor cats have on wildlife and landscape. While conservationists worry that outdoor cats can decimate bird populations, animal advocates seek to ensure the welfare and

safety of cats seeking to survive outside. "What was really groundbreaking with the DC Cat Count was these organizations coming together," said Stephanie Shain, the chief operating officer of the Humane Rescue Alliance (HRA), which took part in the study. They were driven by a common purpose "to really focus not on who is right or who has been right, but really focus on getting it right — finding out the information, analyzing the data," she added. Shain said HRA recommends that cat owners keep their feline friends indoors only in order to keep them safe and avoid damaging wildlife. "I was pleased to see how many people actually follow that advice," she said.

To count all the cats who call the seat of American power home, researchers surveyed more than 2,600 residents, analyzed animal shelter records, walked along specific routes in search of cats and set up wildlife cameras in more than 1,500 spots. "This is probably the most thorough analysis of cats of any city in the world," Flockhart said. He and other researchers continue to analyze the data collected since 2018 and the research has already led to several peer-reviewed scientific papers. The DC Cat Count team also made an extensive toolkit available online with protocols and guidelines for organizations wishing to carry out their own cat census.

Besides cats, the camera traps also snapped pictures of numerous animals including squirrels, raccoons, foxes, deer — and even a bobcat. "There's a huge diversity of wildlife in our cities," Flockhart said. "We tend to think of it as humans-only, and it could be anything but the case. There are all types of wildlife, from rodents all the way up to large predators." — AFP



Humane Rescue Alliance (HRA) employees Alyx Smith (left) and David Ford (right) hold cats wrapped in towels at an HRA animal shelter in Washington.

Sports

Beijing Games organizers say virus 'biggest challenge', 100 days from start

Millions under stay-at-home orders to contain small outbreaks

BEIJING: Protecting the Beijing Winter Olympics from the coronavirus is the "biggest challenge", organizers said yesterday, as millions of people in China were under stay-at-home orders to contain small outbreaks 100 days before the Games.

The Chinese capital will in February become the first host of a Summer and Winter Games, and last week welcomed the Olympic flame with a low-key ceremony. Case numbers remain low in China, with only three reported in Beijing yesterday and small clusters of infections elsewhere, but authorities nationwide are on edge.

The Chinese government has maintained a zero-COVID approach through rigorous measures that have seen millions told to stay at home, mass testing across at least 11 provinces and many flights and trains brought to a standstill. "The pandemic is the biggest challenge to the organization of the Winter Olympics," Zhang Jiandong, executive vice president of the Beijing Organizing Committee, told a press conference.

China's strict rules "can reduce the risks and impact of COVID-19", he said, adding that those in the Games' stringent bubble who fail to comply with anti-epidemic measures will face consequences,

including disqualification.

Zhang told reporters that "all preparations are complete" and venues finished. Coming just six months after the pandemic-delayed Tokyo Summer Games, the Winter Olympics will be held in a "closed loop" bubble. The estimated 2,900 athletes must be fully vaccinated or face 21 days' quarantine upon arrival. They will also be tested daily.



Beijing first to host Summer, Winter Games

Some of the 2008 Summer Games venues will be used during the winter spectacle, including the "Bird's Nest" national stadium for the opening and closing ceremonies. But only people living in China will be allowed to buy tickets to attend the Games, which run from February 4 to 20. "The vaccination policy, a 'closed-loop' management system and regular testing are among the vital ele-

ments that will enable the Games to take place safely," the International Olympic Committee said yesterday.

'Biggest concern'

As an outbreak linked to a travelling domestic tour group spreads, China reported 50 new domestic cases and rolled out a series of measures to try and contain the outbreak. The northwestern Ningxia region, which has recorded 14 new cases since Saturday, closed nearly 800 schools and authorities said they would test 3.5 million people in the regional capital Yinchuan for a second time, despite the initial round of samples all coming back negative.

Lanzhou, a city 720 miles (1,200 km) to the southwest of Beijing, went into lockdown Tuesday with authorities ordering its four million residents to stay home except in emergencies. In another locked-down county of 35,000 people in China's Inner Mongolia region, authorities were working to provide medicines for stranded domestic elderly tourists with chronic conditions, state media outlet Beijing News reported.

As the capital's countdown clock showed 100 days to go, Beijing residents said they were hoping for a successful Olympics untarnished by COVID-19. "The



BEIJING: A countdown clock shows 100 days until the opening of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympic Games, at the Olympic Park in Beijing on Tuesday. — AFP

biggest concern is the pandemic," resident Li Shuwei said. "I hope everyone can do a good job in protection and make the Beijing Winter Olympic Games a success."

In addition to the pandemic, boycott calls are also casting a shadow over the Games. Human rights activists last week

disrupted the flame-lighting ceremony in Greece. Campaigners have accused Beijing of repression in the northwestern Xinjiang region as well as Hong Kong and Tibet. China has consistently railed against what it calls the "politicization of sport". — AFP



SAN ANTONIO: Anthony Davis #3 of the Los Angeles Lakers blocks the shot of Devin Vassell #24 of the San Antonio Spurs in third quarter at AT&T Center on Tuesday in San Antonio, Texas. — AFP

Davis injury scare for Lakers, Warriors stay unbeaten

LOS ANGELES: The Los Angeles Lakers overcame the absence of LeBron James and an injury scare to Anthony Davis on Tuesday to beat the San Antonio Spurs in overtime as the Golden State Warriors extended their unbeaten start to the season.

Lakers star Davis finished with 35 points, 17 rebounds and four assists while Russell Westbrook weighed in with 33 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists in a 125-121 win over the Spurs in Texas. But the Lakers, already without James, who was struggling with right ankle soreness, were given a fright late in the fourth quarter when Davis crumpled to the court clutching his right knee.

Davis later recovered to help the Lakers close out their overtime win. Lakers coach Frank Vogel said afterwards the team would monitor Davis' injury for a possible reaction. "We'll just have to see how sore it is," Vogel said. "He just banged knees with one of their players. We'll see how he responds overnight."

Vogel meanwhile was pleased with how his side had battled back from a 12-point deficit in the fourth quarter. "We never lost belief, even when we were down, that we were going to win the game," Vogel said. "We just persevered and got a big road win."

In Oklahoma City, Stephen Curry scored 23 points as Golden State came from behind to extend their unbeaten start to the season with a 106-98 victory over the Thunder. Curry added six rebounds and four assists while Andrew Wiggins added 21 points to make it four wins out of four for the Warriors. Oklahoma City remain winless through four games.

The Warriors recovered after a shaky first half display which left them trailing 59-48 at the break, before a dominant third quarter which saw them outscore the Thunder 33-17. Otto Porter drained back-to-back three-pointers from the bench to close the third, transforming a one-point deficit into a five-point lead, while Damian Lee finished with 20 off the bench. Warriors coach Steve Kerr blamed a "poor defensive showing" for his team's first half struggles.

"What clicked was getting stops together," Kerr said. "We weren't clicking offensively, but the game starts at the defensive end, and we were not ready mentally ready. This is what happens in this league — you try to get up for every game, occasionally you have some letdowns. OKC played a great first half, and did everything right. But we've strung together four good wins and heading home we're in a good spot. We know we've got to just keep it going — things can change in a hurry in this league." — AFP

State holding Australian Open says no to unvaccinated players

MELBOURNE: Unvaccinated players will not get special dispensation for the Australian Open, the top official in the state holding the Grand Slam said yesterday, potentially ruling out reigning men's champion Novak Djokovic. A leaked email earlier this week suggested that players who were not inoculated against the coronavirus would be able to take part as long as they completed 14 days' quarantine.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison then said that unvaccinated players would be permitted to enter the country if they received an exemption, which the host state Victoria would need to apply for on behalf of players. But Victoria state Premier Daniel Andrews quickly ruled that out.

"We are locking people who are unvaccinated out of pubs, cafes, restaurants and the MCG (Melbourne Cricket Ground) and all sorts of other events," he said. "We're not going to be applying for an exemption. Therefore, the issue is basically resolved."

Australia's federal government controls the country's border and issues visas. But during the pandemic state governments have run quarantine facilities and imposed vaccine mandates, making it

Braves rout Astros in first game of World Series

LOS ANGELES: Jorge Soler smashed a home run on the first swing of the game and Adam Duvall blasted a two-run homer as the Atlanta Braves rolled over the Houston Astros 6-2 in the opening contest of the World Series on Tuesday.

The Braves, who are in their first World Series since 1999 and haven't won the Fall Classic since 1995, used a blistering start to post five runs in the first three innings and never looked back. Both starting pitchers exited the game early, the Braves Charlie Morton with a broken leg and Astros Framer Valdez after giving up five runs on eight hits in just two innings in his World Series debut.

Braves closer Will Smith got the final out in the ninth inning by forcing Michael Brantley to ground out to second base. "It was huge to get this first one tonight," said Braves third baseman Austin Riley. "The series is far from over."

The win was costly for the Braves, who lost Morton for the rest of the best-of-seven World Series with a broken right fibula after he was hit by a ground ball. The 37-year-old Morton took an inning to find his form so it was left to the Atlanta batters to deliver the early fireworks in front of a crowd of 40,060 at Minute Maid Park in Houston, Texas.

The Astros, who lost in seven games to Washington in the 2019 World Series, are back in the title matchup for the third time in five seasons. Houston manager Dusty Baker said the bounces went in favor of the Braves. "Tomorrow is another day and who knows," said Baker, who is in the World Series for the first time since 2002. "The way I look at it is tomorrow the ball is going to bounce our way."

The Braves wasted no time getting off on the right foot as designated hitter Soler hit a lead off home run to make it 1-0. Soler took two balls then launched a 382 foot hit into left field. Three batters later Riley hit an RBI double, scoring Ozzie Albies as the Braves took an early 2-0 lead.

Atlanta's Morton survived a scare in the first



MELBOURNE: A new show court is fitted out at a venue of the Australia Open tennis tournament park in Melbourne yesterday. —AFP

unclear who will get the final say on the Australian Open rules.

Nine-time Australian Open champion Djokovic is one of many players who have refused to share their vaccination status, casting doubt over whether he will defend his title at Melbourne Park in January. This year's Australian Open was hit hard by the pandemic with all players going through two weeks of quarantine, while crowds were restricted and a five-day snap lockdown called mid-event.

A leaked WTA (Women's Tennis Association) email

on Monday had suggested unvaccinated players will be allowed to compete at the 2022 event if they complete hotel quarantine and submit to regular coronavirus testing. Fully vaccinated players are expected to be able to enter Australia without quarantining or being confined to bio-secure bubbles, the email added. Tennis Australia said earlier this week it was working with both the Victorian and federal governments on conditions for players, saying it was "optimistic that we can hold the Australian Open as close to pre-pandemic conditions as possible". — AFP



HOUSTON: Jorge Soler #12 of the Atlanta Braves hits a solo home run against the Houston Astros during the first inning in Game One of the World Series at Minute Maid Park on Tuesday in Houston, Texas. — AFP

inning as he fell behind the Houston hitters, who loaded the bases. But Morton got right fielder Kyle Tucker to ground out to first to end the inning stranding three runners on base.

The Braves tacked on another run in the second when Soler grounded into fielder's choice to the shortstop and Travis d'Arnaud scored. Atlanta threatened to score more runs but also left the bases loaded in their half of the inning. Braves made it 5-0 when Duvall belted a homer to left field in the third which scored outfielder Eddie Rosario.

Atlanta are first team in history of World Series to score a run in each of the first three innings of game one. Duvall's home run chased Valdez from the mound. A half inning later, the Braves lost Morton, who had been hit earlier by a grounder that went off his right ankle. He initially stayed in the game but the ankle started swelling up, and it became too painful for him to continue. He was

replaced by lefthander AJ Minter.

The Braves announced during the game that Morton had suffered a right fibula fracture and would miss the rest of the World Series. Morton struck out three and allowed no runs on one hit in a little over two innings of work. Pitcher Jake Odorizzi, who replaced Valdez, put a stop to the bleeding for the Astros by striking out Riley to end the top of the fourth inning.

Astros got their first run in the bottom of the fourth when Braves shortstop Dansby Swanson made an error on a routine grounder that allowed Kyle Tucker to score and cut the lead to 5-1. It was the first error by a Braves infielder in the playoffs. Swanson scored the Braves final run in the eighth when Freddie Freeman hit a sacrifice fly to right field. Minter was credited with the win after striking out three and allowing just one run in two-plus innings of work. — AFP

Sports

Dortmund boss wants clamp down on fans coming onto pitch

No Haaland, no problem as cup holders Dortmund advance

BERLIN: Borussia Dortmund coach Marco Rose says more must be done to prevent the club's supporters getting on to the pitch during home matches after star striker Erling Braut Haaland ended up giving his playing shirt to a pitch-invading fan earlier this month. "This shouldn't be allowed to explode exponentially and that three or four people get onto the pitch every game," said Rose.

The coach became involved after a Dortmund fan got onto the pitch following the final whistle of Tuesday's 2-0 German Cup win over Ingolstadt and managed to get the playing shirt of Brazil midfielder Reinier. Rose sees a worrying trend after a similar incident in their previous home game when Haaland celebrated scoring a goal with a pitch-invading Dortmund fan, who ended up with the Norway star's shirt.

"We have to find a solution so that this doesn't happen every weekend," said Rose who helped escort the fan off the pitch on Tuesday. "I can understand the fans trying to get a shirt, but basically everyone knows that we should try to stop this."

With 80,000 fans able to fit into Signal Iduna Park



This shouldn't be allowed to explode

at full capacity. Rose said that "if 80,000 do the same thing, we will have our work cut out". The coach explained that he intervened on Tuesday to prevent over-zealous stewards rough-handling the pitch-invader. "Nobody should get injured" he said, but Rose also had sympathy for the stewards, "who were just trying to do their job".

Thorgan Hazard netted twice as holders Borussia Dortmund advanced without striker Haaland, who is

sidelined by injury. Germany winger Julian Brandt set up both goals for Hazard who came off the bench to score twice in the second-half at Signal Iduna Park. Haaland is missing with a hip issue and with under-study Youssoufa Moukoko also sidelined, third-choice striker Steffen Tigges made only his fifth appearance this season.

Dortmund labored against their second division opponents with England midfielder Jude Bellingham claiming the best first-half chance. The hosts settled the second-round tie when Hazard scored a minute after coming on by firing home from close range. The second goal arrived nine minutes from time when Hazard converted Brandt's cross to put Dortmund in Sunday's draw for the third round with the ties to be played January 18/19.

Bundesliga sides RB Leipzig and Hertha Berlin both managed to avoid upsets as they came through their ties against fourth-tier minnows Babelsberg and Preussen Muenster respectively. Hoffenheim handed out a 5-1 thrashing to second division Holstein Kiel. — AFP



DORTMUND: Borussia Dortmund's coach Marco Rose (left) and forward Thorgan Hazard celebrate after their team's German Cup 2nd round football match against Ingolstadt in Dortmund, Western Germany, on Tuesday. — AFP



MILAN: AC Milan's Swedish forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic (center) replaces AC Milan's French forward Olivier Giroud (right) during the Italian Serie A football match between AC Milan and Torino at The San Siro Stadium in Milan, on Tuesday. — AFP

Giroud fires low-key Milan top of Serie A

MILAN: Olivier Giroud scored the only goal in AC Milan's 1-0 win over Torino on Tuesday to move his side to the summit of Serie A despite an underwhelming performance at the San Siro. France forward Giroud tapped home his fourth league goal since arriving from Chelsea in the summer in the 14th minute of a largely dreary contest to move Milan three points clear in first place. Napoli can however reclaim top spot today with a home win over Bologna. "I'm very happy, we did well early in the match and afterwards Torino didn't create lots of chances," said Giroud in faltering Italian to DAZN before switching to English. "We have the three points which is the most important thing. We play every three days and it's very difficult for the body, so everything was not perfect but we are very pleased with the win tonight."

It was a sixth straight Serie A win for Stefano Pioli's side on the day Milan announced they had halved their losses to 96.4 million euros (\$111.8 million). However, with a long injury list slowly being reduced it was a far from vintage performance against a Torino team who played their part and could have earned at least a point with some sharper finishing.

Andrea Belotti was substituted in the 54th minute, seconds after the Italy striker scuffed a presentable opportunity after being well set up by Karol Linetty. Antonio Sanabria wasted Torino's best chance with 14 minutes remaining, collecting Dennis Praet before hitting his close-range shot too close to Ciprian Tatarusanu.

And Praet left the home fans with their hearts in their mouths 11 minutes later when his shot took a massive deflection off Fikayo Tomori and clipped the top of the crossbar. Torino pushed for a leveller but Milan held for the win with some frantic defending.

Red card enrages Venezia

Venezia fell to a late 2-1 home defeat to Salernitana after Ethan Ampadu's strange sending off left the hosts down to 10 men for more than 20 minutes. Andrea Schiavone swept home the winner for Salernitana in the 95th minute in Venice to complete a come-from-behind win in the clash between struggling promoted sides.

The away side moved off the bottom of the table with seven points but are still in the relegation zone despite their first away win of the season. They are level with third-from-bottom Genoa, who earned a 1-1 draw at Spezia thanks to Domenico Criscito's 85th-minute penalty.

"We need to keep up this rhythm because it's important. We played well, we were all together, today you saw a group that wanted to win and the three points were very important," Franck Ribery told DAZN. Salernitana had a man advantage from the 67th minute, with the scores level through goals from Mattia Aramu and Federico Bonazzoli.

Wales midfielder Ampadu, 21, performed what looked to be a perfect tackle to dispossess Ribery, but referee Marco Di Bello pulled out his red card. Venezia players surrounded Di Bello in protest and the match official then went to the pitchside screen to check his decision after being prompted by VAR.

However Di Bello inexplicably confirmed his decision to send off Ampadu, on loan at Venezia from Chelsea. "We had a referee who was the worst performer on the pitch," Venezia coach Paolo Zanetti told DAZN. "These are important matches in which we're fighting for our survival, they can't be influenced by things like that." — AFP

lead over their teammates as they look to claim an eighth world title.

In the Manufacturers' Championship, the points scored by Evans and Ogier have added to Toyota's tally and brought it a step closer to sealing the title. Toyota now leads by 47 points with a maximum of 52 available from the season finale in Italy, which takes place from 19 to 21 November at the Autodromo Nazionale di Monza.

Over the years, Toyota has been participating in many different forms of motorsports, including Formula One, the World Endurance Championship (WEC), and the Nurburgring 24 Hours endurance race. Toyota's participation in these events was overseen by separate entities within the company until April 2015, when Toyota established GR, to consolidate all of its motorsports activities under one in-house brand. Representing Toyota's belief that 'the roads build the people, and the people build the cars,' GR highlights the role of motorsports as a fundamental pillar of Toyota's commitment to making 'ever-better' cars. Harnessing years of experience gained under the extreme conditions of various motorsports events, GR aims to forge new technologies and solutions that bring the freedom, adventure, and joy of driving to everyone.

Chelsea survive S'hampton, Arsenal see off Leeds

LONDON: Chelsea needed a penalty shootout for the second consecutive round to reach the quarter-finals of the League Cup as they edged past Southampton, while a much-changed Arsenal beat Leeds 2-0 on Tuesday. Kepa Arrizabalaga was the Chelsea hero as he made a string of late saves to deny Saints a place in the last eight as the game at Stamford Bridge ended 1-1 after 90 minutes.

Both goals came minutes either side of half-time as Kai Havertz headed Chelsea into the lead before Southampton hit back quickly when Che Adams bundled the ball home after Kepa parried Kyle Walker-Peters' shot. The Spain goalkeeper saved from Will Smallbone, Mohammed Salisu and Lyanco to deny the tie to a shootout.

Kepa then denied Theo Walcott from the spot and Smallbone blasted over as Chelsea progressed despite Mason Mount's penalty being saved by Fraser Forster. Two goals in 14 second-half minutes from Callum Chambers and Eddie Nketiah took Arsenal through at the Emirates.

Mikel Arteta had named a strong side in the previous two rounds with the Gunners not involved in European football for the first time in 25 seasons. But the Spaniard made nine changes from the side that started Friday's 3-1 win over Aston Villa.

Leeds boss Marcelo Bielsa attempted to lift his side from a slump with just four changes from a 1-1 draw with Wolves on Saturday as England international Calvin Phillips made his return from injury. The visitors enjoyed the better of the first-half, but paid a heavy price for failing to make it count.

Chambers had barely been on the pitch for a minute after replacing Benjamin White when he forced the ball over the line from a corner to open the scoring. Eddie Nketiah then made the most of a rare start to seal the tie against his former club.

The England under-21 international pounced on a slack header towards his own goal from Liam Cooper and scooped the ball over Illan Meslier before getting a slice of luck as his mis-hit finish bobbed into the net.

"We understood the game and what we had to do, we did this the right way," said Arteta. "They gave us some issues, they always do, but we created a lot of shots and situations without being very clinical, we adjusted a few things at half time and we were better and stronger."

League One side Sunderland are also into the quarter-finals as they beat Queen's Park Rangers 3-1 on penalties after a 0-0 draw at Loftus Road. — AFP

FIFPro, European Leagues call for reform in wake of Super League threat

BRUSSELS: Two key organizations in the running of European football on Tuesday announced a joint manifesto calling for greater influence over decisions affecting the future of the sport in the wake of the failed breakaway Super League project.

Global players union FIFPro held a policy forum in Brussels at which it unveiled the joint initiative with the European Leagues organization, which represents over one thousand clubs from 30 countries across the continent. It has been a turbulent few months for football governance, with 12 clubs stunning the sport in April by announcing a breakaway European Super League, only for their plan to unravel in a matter of a few days in the face of widespread opposition.

Real Madrid, Barcelona and Juventus remain attached to the project despite the other nine clubs — including six from the Premier League — quickly backing out. Meanwhile FIFA is struggling to find consensus on controversial plans to hold the World Cup every two years.

"The current system of government is no longer capable of dealing with the decisions that need to be taken," said the FIFPro general secretary Jonas Baer-Hoffmann at the event held in the shadow of the European Parliament. Leading representatives from European football's governing body UEFA, or from the influential European Club Association, were absent.

"We need everyone in the room for these discussions and unfortunately they are not," Baer-Hoffmann said. "To take big constructive decisions has become virtually impossible. It is time for significant change in the governance of football."

The announcement of the manifesto came as representatives of the European Parliament on Tuesday called for mechanisms to be put in place to protect against the threat of a Super League. "Sport is a right for everyone and we need to ensure that it is safe, accessible, inclusive and equal for all," said Tomasz Frankowski, a Polish former player and now a member of the European Parliament.

The EU's Sports Policy report also expressed opposition to the biennial World Cup proposals, saying "sports organizations must respect the established frequency of major international sports events". Members of leagues and organizations from across the continent who gathered in Brussels complained about the lack of dialogue with FIFA over the proposals to play the World Cup every two years instead of the current four-year cycle.

The proposals have been championed by former Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger in his role as FIFA's director of global development. "Wenger's presentation was purely informational," said Bobby Barnes, the deputy chief executive of the English Professional Footballers Association. "We talk about being consulted as stakeholders. If your role within the game is to be acknowledged, you have to have these conversations before Wenger's presentation." — AFP

GAZOO Racing claims podium finish at Rally de Espana

MADRID: The GAZOO Racing (GR) World Rally Team (WRT) achieved another podium finish recently in the FIA World Rally Championship (WRC) when Elfyn Evans claimed second place in the No. 33 Toyota Yaris WRC at the Rally de Espana in Spain. The result sets up a final-round Driver's Championship title decider with his teammate Sebastien Ogier at next month's Rally Monza in Milan.

Evans and co-driver Scott Martin had led the rally in the No. 33 Toyota Yaris WRC after winning the first three stages, and went on to finish second on the podium by the end of the four-day event. The points gained ensure that Evans still has an opportunity to secure his first Drivers' Championship going into the final round in Italy. Sebastien Ogier and co-driver Julien Ingrassia now hold a 17-point



Roy praises bowlers for England's second win

Batsman smashed 61 off 38 as England romped to victory in T20 World Cup



ABU DHABI: England's Jason Roy (center) plays a shot as Bangladesh's wicketkeeper Nurul Hasan watches during the ICC men's Twenty20 World Cup cricket match between England and Bangladesh at the Sheikh Zayed Cricket Stadium in Abu Dhabi yesterday. — AFP

ABU DHABI: Opening batsman Jason Roy yesterday credited the England bowlers for helping set up a second successive victory at the Twenty20 World Cup with an eight-wicket drubbing of Bangladesh. Roy smashed 61 off 38 balls as England romped to their victory target of 125 in 14.1 overs in the Super 12 clash in Abu Dhabi.

He reached his seventh T20 half-century with a straight six in his 50th match during a partnership of 73 with Dawid Malan, who made an unbeaten 28. "We bowled extremely well. Take nothing away from the bowlers," Roy told reporters after his man of the match performance. "We took our catches and fielded and bowled really well. We got off to a great start with the bats and then just capitalized on a lower total."

England left-arm quick Tymal Mills took three wickets and combined with spinners Moeen Ali and Liam Livingstone to restrict Bangladesh to 124-9 in the two nations' first ever meeting in the format. Eoin Morgan's England, the world's number one-ranked T20 team, top Group 1 with two big wins after a six-wicket thrashing of holders West Indies in their tournament opener.

Roy said England's loss to Bangladesh in the 2015 50-over World Cup knocked them out of that tournament but helped build a strong bond between the players and change their brand of cricket.

"Our camp has been together since 2015," he said. "We've created bonds outside of cricket and on the field, which I think plays a huge part in travelling the world and playing good cricket. We understand our roles in the team as individuals and as teammates."

Bangladesh, who lost their opening Super 12 match to Sri Lanka, lost regular wickets after electing to bat first.

Spin attack

After giving away 10 runs in the opening over, Moeen hit back and was on a hat-trick in his second over, only to be denied by Mushfiqur Rahim,

who top-scored with 29. Moeen, an off-spinner, had Liton Das caught at deep square leg for nine and then sent Mohammad Naim trudging back to the pavilion for five.

Bangladesh found themselves in trouble at 26-3 when Chris Woakes claimed Shakib Al Hasan's key scalp with Adil Rashid taking a good catch running backwards. Shakib fell for four. Mushfiqur and skipper Mahmudullah Riyad, who made 19, tried to repair the damage in a 37-run partnership before Livingstone broke through.

Livingstone trapped Mushfiqur lbw, but England had to use the umpire referral after the onfield official ruled it not out. Bangladesh kept faltering as a run-out cost Afif Hossain his wicket for five and Mahmudullah departed, for 19, soon after as Livingstone's second wicket.

"Definitely, we were disappointed with the batting, it was a good wicket but we didn't start well and didn't have any partnerships in the middle either," said Mahmudullah. "We are more skilled hitters than power hitters, we don't want to change that because we believe we can post good totals. We need to reassess and come up with a good plan."

Bangladesh's batting effort was well below par and the England batsmen having little trouble in their batting reply despite losing Jos Buttler for 18. Roy smashed five fours and three sixes in an attacking knock that took the steam out of the Bangladesh bowling. Malan, who did not bat in the first match, got useful batting time

Both team stook the knee before the start of the game with much focus on the anti-racism gesture after South Africa's Quinton de Kock pulled out of a match against West Indies on Tuesday because he refused to obey the national cricket board's orders. Roy said, "Our team is extremely diverse with people from all over the world. It's only right that we support that and we support what they are going through." — AFP

“ We understand our roles as individuals, teammates ”

UEFA hope for record-breaking women's Euro 2022

MANCHESTER: A year later than planned, the countdown to the women's European Championship begins today when the draw for Euro 2022 takes place in Manchester. England will play host to the tournament from July 6-31, which hopes to smash attendance records for women's football with Manchester United's Old Trafford the setting for the opening game before a Wembley final.

The hosts are hoping home advantage will help them win a major women's international tournament for the first time. The Lionesses have fallen at the semi-final stage in each of the last two World Cups and Euro 2017. England are guaranteed to kick the tournament off at Old Trafford with organizers hoping for an attendance that will break the 41,300 record for a women's European Championship match.

Holder the Netherlands, France and

Germany are the other top seeds and contenders for the tournament, along with Olympic silver medalists Sweden and a rapidly improving Spain side filled with Champions League winners who play their club football for Barcelona.

Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Italy, Northern Ireland, Norway, Russia and Switzerland are the other qualifiers for a tournament UEFA hopes to be the biggest European women's sports event ever in terms of attendance. Premier League stadiums in Brentford, Brighton and Southampton will play host to games, along with more modest venues in Leigh, Manchester, Milton Keynes, Rotherham and Sheffield.

"This was coupled with the need to strike the right balance for the tournament. Setting an ambitious ticket target - with more than 700,000 tickets available for fans - whilst seeking to achieve full venues where possible," said the English Football Association's director of women's football Sue Campbell. "This is a balance we believe we have achieved in the selected venues and cities, with England's Lionesses due to play all of their group stage games at Premier League grounds across the country."

a message aimed directly at Kimmich. "You are a personality with exemplary character. And if you get vaccinated, other people will say, 'then I'll do it too.'"

Kimmich, who captained Germany in a recent World cup qualifier, sparked a fierce debate in Germany at the weekend when he revealed he opted not to get vaccinated, because of "personal concerns". Medical experts have criticized his stance, accusing Kimmich of neglecting his duty as a role model in football-mad Germany.

"Joshua Kimmich is an expert in football matters, not of vaccination and vaccines," fumed Thomas Mertens, chairman of Germany's Standing Vaccination Commission (Stiko). In a video interview for German daily Bild yesterday, Seehofer

Women's football was hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic at time when participation and popularity was growing rapidly after a successful 2019 World Cup in France. As governing bodies scrambled to restart the men's competitions as soon as possible to secure lucrative broadcast income, even the elite end of the women's game was treated as an afterthought.

The Lionesses did not play a game for nearly a year between March 2020 and February this year, while the 2019/20 Women's Super League season was terminated with nearly a quarter of the games still to play. UEFA also moved the women's Euro back a year to allow the men's Euro 2020 to go ahead earlier this year. But UEFA's chief of women's football Nadine Kessler defended that decision to give "maximum exposure for women's football and the goal to provide the tournament with the centre stage it deserves."

That call was aided by a rare space in the men's football calendar due to the later start to the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. After being shunted into the shadows for too long, Europe's best female players will again have a stage on which to shine. — AFP

urged Kimmich to rethink his position as "vaccination is the main weapon in the fight against the pandemic".

Germany has seen a sharp rise in numbers of those testing positive for the coronavirus with 23,212 new cases reported yesterday. Of Germany's population of 83 million, around 66 percent are fully vaccinated.

Kimmich appears to be in the minority as more than 90 percent of footballers and backroom staff in Germany's top two leagues are vaccinated, according to figures released Tuesday by the German Football League (DFL). Bayern head coach Julian Nagelsmann is currently isolating at home after testing positive for the coronavirus last week. — AFP

Preparations ongoing for Kuwait Crown Prince shooting tourney

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Preparations are ongoing at Kuwait Shooting Sport Club's Jahra branch to start the official training and preliminaries on Saturday in the air pistol and rifle events as well as Olympic archery for HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's second annual tournament, which will be held from Nov 4-6, 2021.

Secretary General of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations Obaid Manahi Al-Osaimi thanked HH the Crown Prince on behalf of the chairman and board members of Kuwait Shooting Sport Club for his continued support of the sport of shooting in Kuwait. Osaimi said in a press statement that the sponsorship by HH the Crown Prince of an annual tournament that carries his name is a source of pride for the entire shooting community.

Kuwait Shooting Sport Club's Jahra branch is equipped with the necessary equipment to hold this major event and declare the new season open, Osaimi said. Qualification will be carried out for juniors in Jahra governorate, as the Jahra branch was opened for training following the coronavirus pandemic, and is ready to serve Jahra



Obaid Al-Osaimi

residents who can carry out their training under the supervision of the technical and administrative departments.

Osaimi said the aim of the chairman and board members of KSSF in organizing local tournaments at various branches is "to allow Kuwaiti youth to practice the sport of our forefathers and discover promising talent". He concluded his statement by thanking HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the government and information and culture minister and state minister for youth affairs for their continued support.

'Get vaccinated' German minister tells Kimmich

BERLIN: Bayern Munich star Joshua Kimmich has been told to get vaccinated against COVID-19 by Germany's acting interior minister after the footballer sparked a lively debate by revealing he had opted out of receiving jabs against the coronavirus.

"Think again and get vaccinated," Horst Seehofer, a senior figure in Angela Merkel's outgoing government, told Bild in