



7 Mongolian students go back to school and end long exile



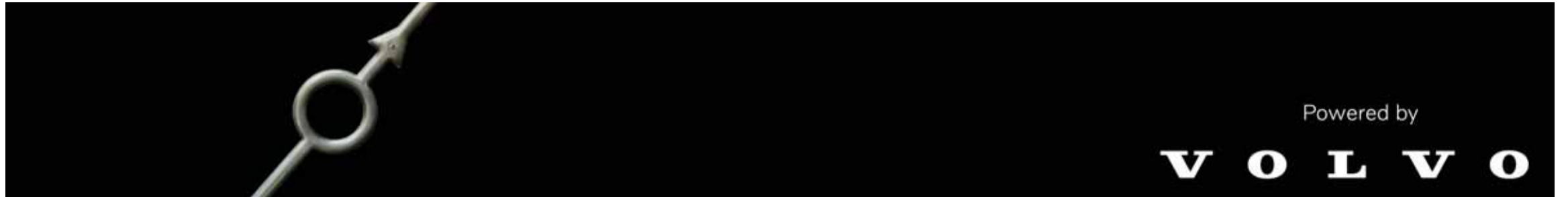
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Children's activities resume after 18 months of closure

Back-to-school measures discussed • MP files to grill housing minister



KUWAIT: Children enjoy a ride at an entertainment park in Hawally yesterday. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikha

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Entertainment activities for children in Kuwait resumed yesterday after a year and a half of closure due to the coronavirus pandemic. Concerned authorities have imposed health requirements and precautionary measures to combat COVID-19, which consists of developing a safety plan to organize the entry for rides and social distancing to ensure the safety of children and employees. The Cabinet decided in its meeting on July 26 to resume social events and activities for children from yesterday.

Also yesterday, Education Minister Ali Al-Mudhaf affirmed the ministry's keenness on adhering to all precautionary measures and health protocols to counter the pandemic. This came during a discussion on the return of students, teachers and administrative personnel to schools for the 2021-2022 academic year.

Mudhaf stressed the importance of having a certain mechanism for teams that will visit schools and provide daily reports to the ministry. He also discussed the budget for maintenance, janitorial and security contracts and appreciated the massive efforts exerted by the ministry's employees.

Meanwhile, MP Fayez Al-Jamhour yesterday

filed to grill Minister of State for Housing Affairs Shaye Al-Shaye for allegedly obstructing major housing projects and attempting to stop state funding of such projects, which he claimed will harm tens of thousands of Kuwaiti families. The lawmaker said more than 72 percent of Kuwaiti families are suffering because of the housing crisis in the country, adding that the crisis has been exacerbated by the delay in housing projects and an increase in rents.

Jamhour accused the minister of failing to fulfill promises he made on the Mutlaa housing project, the biggest in the history of Kuwait, planned to house some 28,000 units and over 400,000 people after 10 years. He said the housing ministry provided permits for only four out of 12 suburbs, thus depriving over 19,000 families from building homes in that area. The same thing happened in South Saad Al-Abdullah, where all hurdles were cleared but the ministry failed to provide building permits.

In addition, the lawmaker charged that the minister is pushing to pass new government-sponsored legislation for funding housing through private banks and not through the government. The National Assembly is currently in summer recess and the grilling will be listed on the agenda of the first when the new term opens in October.

News in brief

New PAM online services

KUWAIT: Spokeswoman and PR Director at the Public Authority for Manpower Aseel Al-Mizyad yesterday announced the launch of new online services. These include transferring from student visa (article 23) to private sector work visa (article 18) and transferring from self-sponsorship (article 24) to article 18, in addition to transferring from article 18 to article 24.

OPEC+ upholds output increase

LONDON: The world's leading oil producers yesterday upheld a deal reached just over a month ago to boost output gradually despite US pressure to go further. After weeks of wrangling, members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries along with allies such as Russia agreed in July to raise output by 400,000 barrels per day (bpd) from August. — AFP

Philippines hits 2 million cases

MANILA: The Philippines topped two million coronavirus cases yesterday as the country battles a record surge in infections that the WHO confirmed is being driven by the hyper-contagious Delta strain. Yesterday's official data show the country recorded 14,216 new infections, taking the total caseload to just over two million, with 33,533 deaths in the country of 110 million people. — AFP

Egypt signs Med-Red rail deal

CAIRO: Egypt signed a \$4.45-billion contract yesterday with a consortium including Siemens to construct a high-speed electric rail line between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean, state television said. The railway will run 660 km between Marsa Matruh on northern Egypt's Mediterranean coast to the Red Sea port of Ain Sokhna in the east. — AFP

Drone attack wounds eight

RIYADH: A drone attack on Saudi Arabia's Abha airport wounded eight people on Tuesday, said the Saudi-led coalition battling Houthi rebels in Yemen. Following an earlier attack, "a second drone attempting to attack Abha International Airport was intercepted and shot down", the coalition said. — AFP

Taleban stage parade as Biden defends pullout

KABUL: The Taleban yesterday paraded some of the military hardware they captured during their takeover of Afghanistan, hours after US President Joe Biden defended his decision to end the two-decade war. The Islamist hardliners are celebrating Monday's final withdrawal of US troops as a historic victory after taking control of Afghanistan last month following an astonishing two-week offensive that capped a simmering 20-year insurgency.

Yesterday, a long line of green Humvees and armored fighting vehicles drove in single file along a highway outside Kandahar - the spiritual birthplace of the militant movement - many with white-and-black Taleban flags attached to aerials, an AFP journalist saw. In footage posted on a pro-Taleban account of the build-up to the parade, a helicopter flew overhead trailing the Taleban's standard as fighters wrapped in headscarves waved beneath.

At least one Black Hawk helicopter has been seen flying over Kandahar in recent days, suggesting someone from the former Afghan army was at the controls as the Taleban lack pilots. The United Nations warned meanwhile of a looming "humanitarian

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Tunisia plants seeds of hope

JEDAIDA, Tunisia: Tunisian farmers are turning to the past to ensure a future by planting indigenous seeds as the North African country suffers at a time of drought, disease and climate change. Traditional seeds come from a genetic heritage best suited to the environment, said Maher Medini, from Tunisia's National Gene Bank, which promotes the development of sustainable agriculture in the country.

"They are reservoirs of genes hundreds, if not thousands of years old," Medini said, adding that the seeds are more resistant to the ever-growing dangerous impacts of global warming. Climate change is causing challenging variations in rainfall, temperature and humidity, creating disease in the crops, he said. "The foundation of adaptation is diversity," Medini said.

Wheat varieties developed in the 1980s are being blighted by disease in Tunisia, but farmers say that traditional varieties appear to be more resistant. In the past, using indigenous seeds, Tunisian farmers set aside a

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N African sun offers hope, but state role key

CAIRO: Blessed with year-round sunshine, North Africa has enormous potential for solar energy, but the huge investment and state subsidies required for large-scale projects are a challenge for cash-strapped regional governments. The region boasts a few

marquee projects that are among the largest in the world but renewable energy entrepreneurs say the focus should be at community level, helping whole villages to operate off the national grid and without using diesel fuel.

Egypt, the most populous Arab country, with more than 100 million people, has made solar power a priority in its quest to source 42 percent of its electricity from renewables by 2035. In the western desert, about 40 km north of the southern city of

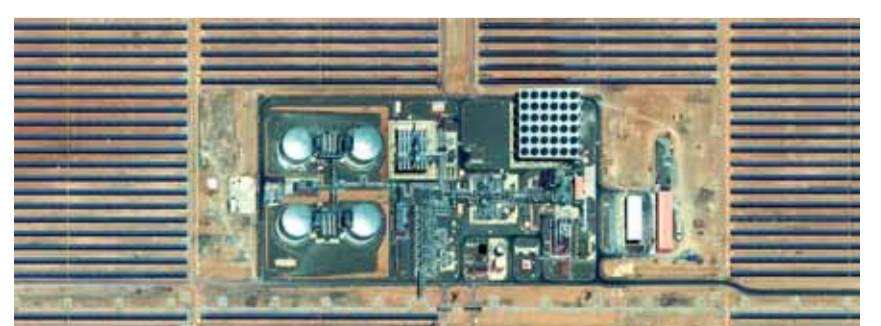
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KANDAHAR: A helicopter flies above supporters gathered yesterday to celebrate the US withdrawal of all its troops out of Afghanistan. — AFP



JEDAIDA, Tunisia: A Tunisian farmer harvests wheat on June 12, 2021 in this agricultural region some 30 km northwest of the capital Tunis. — AFP



This handout satellite imagery released on May 20, 2021 shows a view of the Noor Solar Park, about 10 km northeast of the town of Ouarzazate in Morocco's southern Draa valley in the Tafilalet region. — AFP

Local

Kuwait's Amir receives Crown Prince, Premier

Prime Minister meets outgoing ambassadors



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



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



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



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets the French Ambassador to Kuwait Anne-Claire Legendre.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets Djibouti's Ambassador to Kuwait Mohammad Ali Moumin.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday His Highness the Crown Prince

Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. His Highness the Amir also received His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-

Hamad Al-Sabah. His Highness the Crown Prince also received His Highness the Prime Minister at Bayan Palace yesterday.

In other news, His Highness the Prime Minister received yesterday at Bayan Palace the French Ambassador to Kuwait Anne-Claire

Legendre and Djibouti's Ambassador to Kuwait Mohammad Ali Moumin on the occasion of the end of their tenures. — KUNA



KANDAHAR: A helicopter displaying a Taliban flag flies above supporters gathered yesterday to celebrate the US withdrawal of all its troops out of Afghanistan. — AFP

Taliban stage parade as Biden...

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catastrophe", underscoring the daunting challenges that the Taliban face as they transform from insurgent group to governing power.

Biden was nonetheless defiant. "This is the right decision. A wise decision. And the best decision for America," he said in an address to the nation. For the United States, Biden argued, the only choice was "leaving or escalating". The president, who has been savaged by critics for his handling of the withdrawal which saw the US and its allies evacuate more than 122,000 in just over two weeks, hailed the operation as an "extraordinary success". "No nation has ever done anything like it in all of history; only the United States had the capacity and the will and ability to do it," he said.

All eyes will now turn to how the Taliban handle their first few days with sole authority over the country, with a sharp focus on whether they will allow free departure for those wanting to leave - including some foreigners. The United States has said that "under 200" of its citizens remain in the country, and Britain said the number of UK nationals inside was in the "low hundreds".

Thousands of Afghans who worked with the US-backed government over the years and fear retribution still want to get out. Talks are ongoing on who will now run Kabul airport, which German Chancellor Angela Merkel warned was of "existential importance" as a lifeline for aid. A Qatar Airways flight landed in Kabul yesterday afternoon - the first since the United States departed - bringing a team of technical experts to work on fixing the trashed airport, a source close to the matter told AFP.

The goal was to resume flights for both humanitari-

an aid and to provide freedom of movement for those wanting to leave. Many Afghans are terrified of a repeat of the Taliban's initial rule from 1996 to 2001, which was infamous for their treatment of women and girls, as well as a brutal justice system. The group has repeatedly promised a more tolerant brand of governance compared with their first stint in power.

Still, senior Taliban leader Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai told BBC Pashto in an interview that while women could continue working, there "may not" be a place for them in the cabinet of any future government or any other top post. UN chief Antonio Guterres expressed his "grave concern at the deepening humanitarian and economic crisis in the country", adding that basic services were at threat of collapsing "completely". He pleaded for financial support from the international community for the war-ravaged country, which is dependent on foreign aid.

Authorities from several countries have already begun meeting with Taliban leadership, the latest being India. Qatar's foreign minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani, urged the Taliban to combat terrorism and called for an inclusive government. The US-led airlift began as the Taliban completed an astonishing rout of government forces around the country and took over the capital on Aug 15.

The withdrawal came just before the August 31 deadline set by Biden to end the war, which began with a US-led invasion that ousted the Taliban in the wake of 9/11, but later reached a stalemate on the battlefield with the resurgent militants. The conflict has claimed the lives of tens of thousands of Afghans and more than 2,400 American service members.

The evacuation was complicated by a threat from the regional offshoot of the Islamic State group, rivals of the Taliban. Thirteen US troops were among more than 100 people killed when an IS suicide bomber attacked the perimeter of the airport, where desperate Afghans had massed in the hope of boarding an evacuation flight. — AFP

N African sun offers hope, but...

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Aswan stands the Benban Solar Park. Visible from space, the \$4 billion World Bank-funded project is the fourth largest solar park in the world, stretching over 37 sq km. With six million solar panels, Benban was connected to Egypt's national grid in 2019 and currently produces 930 gigawatt hours a year, which is enough to light up 420,000 households, according to the UN. Egypt's 42 percent target is an ambitious one. In 2016, just nine percent of its power needs came from renewable sources, according to official figures.

But experts say the state will need to provide incentives if it expects much help from consumers, few of whom have the means or space to switch to solar energy for their household needs. "In Cairo, it's a bit difficult to install solar panels because you need a lot of space on top of buildings plus it doesn't cover all your electricity needs like powering an air conditioner during summer," said Mohamed Abdel Raouf, an expert on green economies in the region.

He said tourist resorts on the Red Sea and Mediterranean coasts as well as rural centres offered more fertile ground. "The state needs to incentivize it for the average consumer because it would cost me

around 60,000 pounds (\$3,800) to switch over to solar energy for my home in urban Cairo," he said. "Why would I invest in environmentally friendly technology that's expensive? The state really needs to take the lead in making it attractive."

The International Energy Agency said over the past decade North Africa has managed to increase its renewable energy production by 40 percent. But that does not mean that addition to fossil fuels has waned. In oil-rich Algeria, which receives around 3,600 hours of sun per year, renewable energy only represents a paltry 1.8 percent of the country's consumption.

In Morocco, the gaps in its green strategy are embodied by the gigantic Noor Ouarzazate solar complex - the world's largest multi-technology solar installation. At the gateway to the Sahara, the enormous complex has four power plants with an installed capacity of 530 megawatts. "From the start, it was clear that the strategy was unbalanced. The strategic error was to want to invest in monstrous projects that are difficult to finance," said Guemra, a specialist in energy management, told AFP.

Rabat sells its green energy at a loss with the generating costs double the price it is sold at to the national grid. Concentrated solar power (CSP) stations produce energy costing between 1.6 and 1.4 dirhams (18 cents to 16 cents) per kilowatt hour, which is sold to the National Electricity Office (ONEE) at 0.8 dirhams. The strategy has not paid off and the privately-owned, publicly-funded Moroccan Agency for Sustainable Energy (Masen), which runs the Noor complex, is more than \$100 million in debt. — AFP

Tunisia plants seeds of hope...

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small part of the harvest to sow in the next season. But the development of hybrid or genetically modified seeds resulted in better harvests, and native varieties largely fell out of use.

One problem is that seeds from the new varieties cannot be replanted, and farmers have to buy in more seed every year. Now some farmers are looking at the methods used by their forebears. Mohamed Lassad ben Saleh farms in the agricultural region of Jedaïda, some 30 km northwest of the capital Tunis. Eight years ago he switched to planting a traditional variety of wheat, known as Al-Msekmi. On his farm, the harvest is now in full swing. The wheat harvested from each hectare is weighed separately, so each plot's productivity can be calculated. "The results are good," Ben Saleh said.

When he meets other farmers, he lets them know how his traditional seeds are performing. The national average in recent years has been 1.4 to two tonnes a hectare, while Ben Saleh says his yield has been five tons. Ben Saleh reports his seeds are more resistant to drought and disease, which means he does not have to use as much pesticide. "The new varieties are weak and quickly affected by mold," he said.

With most farmers buying new seeds every season, the country currently imports 70 percent to 80 percent of its seeds each year. "A return to local or native seeds is one of the conditions needed to reach food

sovereignty," said Aymen Amayed, a researcher in agricultural policies. The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization has warned against the increased use of hybrid seeds, and considers it a threat to indigenous varieties and to local genetic heritage. The FAO estimates that over the past century, around three quarters of the diversity in world crops has disappeared.

But Tunisia's gene bank is working to "reclaim its genetic heritage". Since 2008, it has been collecting traditional seeds from farmers, and also working to recover indigenous Tunisian seeds stored in gene banks around the world. So far, it has been able to repatriate more than 7,000 samples of seeds from fruit trees, cereals and vegetables out of over 11,000 located worldwide.

These seeds are once more being planted in Tunisian soil. Mbarek Ben Naceur, head of the national gene bank, says that more than 400 farmers have been persuaded to use these seeds, and old varieties such as Al-Msekmi and Al-Mahmoudi are being sown again. "These seeds are the descendants of this land, and they know it," said Ben Naceur. "Our varieties have been accustomed to rises in temperature and drought for thousands of years, so they will resist climate change and temperature rises," he added.

A report last month by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change showed unequivocally that the climate is changing faster than previously feared, and because of human activity. August saw record-breaking temperatures: in Tunis the mercury reached 48 degrees Celsius at midday, smashing the capital's previous record high of 46.8 degrees in 1982. "Between now and 2050, temperatures in the world will rise between 1.8 and two degrees," Ben Naceur said. "And 2050 is tomorrow - it's not so far away. Varieties that are not resistant will disappear." — AFP

Local

Relief in Kuwait as sports activities, kids' entertainment facilities resume

Activities back with strict implementation of health protocols



KUWAIT: Kuwait Municipality team inspect health measures taken at an entertainment facility inside a local mall yesterday. —Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh



Children play inside an entertainment hall yesterday.

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Families in Kuwait breathed a collective sigh of relief yesterday as entertainment activities for children resumed under health requirements and precautionary measures after a year and a half of closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, most sports activities that had stopped due to the coronavirus pandemic resumed in June 2021. Cricketers in Kuwait, for example, resumed their regular games and tournaments in July. The community of cricketers in Kuwait comprises of 150 teams with 18-20 members each. They have been holding matches at various outdoor locations in Kuwait, but spectators have been barred due to health protocols.

Indian cricket organizer Jiss Jacob told Kuwait Times, players on the weekend continue to swell in numbers after months of inactivity. "More and more sporting activities are taking place now, especially since everything seems to be alright and we are slowly returning back to normal. We are happy to have survived this scary pandemic, and need to push for more activities to compensate for the lost

months. Most people find cricket a relaxing activity, and wait to meet friends and enjoy the game after a week of work pressure and tensions," he said.

According to Jacob, cricket has connected many people, and whenever someone is in a difficult situation, other players lend their support. "Recently, a friend passed away on the ground due to cardiac arrest, and we helped him. That's the good thing about sports - we not only channel our strength and energy, but also financially and even mentally and emotionally," he pointed out.



Relieving emotional stress through sports

'Emotional recovery'

Meanwhile, the Association of Filipino Organizations in Kuwait (ASFOK) announced plans to resume sporting activities from tomorrow

at Qadsiya Sporting Club in Hawally. A sports fest will be held from 7 am to 5 pm. Francis 'Kikz' Olpindo, coordinator and the current ASFOK chairman, said "it's about time to help our kababayans (countrymen) recover from the emotionally draining environment of the past two years".

"We need to help each other to recover. This is a much-needed activity and relief from all the cares of the coronavirus. If we are too slow to resume and get emotional, this pandemic will continue to hurt our people and it will be very hard for all of us to recover. It will continue to devastate people, so we need to face the reality and at least play," he told Kuwait Times.

ASFOK also plans to organize basketball, chess, volleyball, badminton and table tennis tournaments with the strict implementation of health measures at

the venue. "We want the sports fest to succeed and hope that we will be able to help Filipinos restart anew. All sporting activities are now allowed, but we will be strictly following health protocols and advice of the club and health experts and welcome members only. We still discourage non-members to join, especially if they are unvaccinated. The sports fest will have a no vaccine, no entry policy," Olpindo said.

"While we will be glad to return to the pre-COVID environment and want everyone to enjoy, it is the responsibility of each one of us to be safe. Players should immediately leave the venue after their games; that way, we will all be safe," he added.

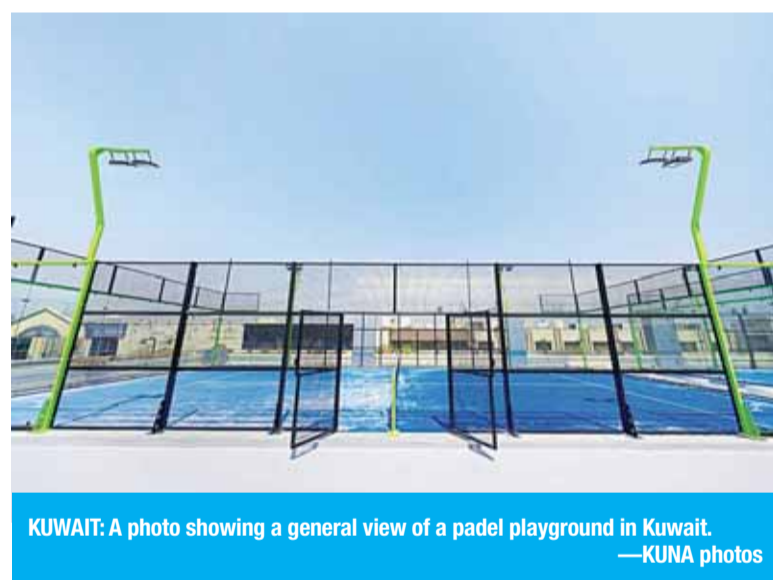
In June, Kuwait resumed all sporting activities, more than 15 months after the pandemic hit the nation, but with strict implementation of health protocols. Sports clubs and associations must comply with ministry of health's measures to ensure the safety of players. The move comes as the country is intensifying its vaccination campaign. In the last few weeks, Kuwait has administered 2,790,113 vaccine doses, at a rate of around 38,000 daily. According to reports, 70 percent of people have been vaccinated.

Padel attracts Kuwait youth amid pandemic

KUWAIT: Young people in Kuwait have become growingly interested in the padel sport amid the ramifications of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic worldwide, mainly health restrictions and precautions. Padel is a racquet sport that combines between tennis and squash. Padel is typically played in doubles in an enclosed court that is smaller than the size of a tennis court.

Padel is essentially different from tennis and squash in view of rules and the way of playing. Scoring is the same as normal tennis and the balls used are similar but with a little less pressure. This sport emerged in Mexico in the late 1960s. It then found its way to Spain. In 2014, this sport reached Arab countries, mainly Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Egypt and Bahrain. It found its way to Kuwait in late 2019.

Padel sport, which is easy for people of all ages to play, requires physical flexibility in spite of the small size of the court. In fact, it has become common among young people in the Gulf countries. The Kuwait Olympic Committee recognized padel as a fresh sport in the country last May, and then decided to form a padel committee. Speaking to the press, the committee's Deputy Chairman Yusuf Al-Sultan said



KUWAIT: A photo showing a general view of a padel playground in Kuwait. —KUNA photos



A player prepares to serve during a padel game in Kuwait.

he began to like padel so much when he was on holiday in Spain where the sport was so common. This sport has become wide-spread over the last couple of years, he said, adding that padel courts have been created in Kuwait to allow young people to freely play this sport.

Alaa Al-Awadhi said that she began to play this racquet sport two years ago, believing that it is easy to play padel since its rules are different from the ones used in tennis and that people of all ages can practice it. As relevant equipment and tools were

unfortunately unavailable at the local market at the beginning, players had to make online orders from other countries, she remembered. "But, now everything is available," she said.

Bader Tifoni said meanwhile that padel has become so common in Kuwait amid the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic since physical distancing is essentially involved. Sports shops in Kuwait have now special corners for padel equipment, showing that young Kuwaitis have become increasingly interested in this sport. —KUNA

KFH utilizes social media to promote campaign

KUWAIT: Senior Manager - Public Relations and Media Services at Kuwait Finance House (KFH), Abdullah Al-Saif said that the initiatives, awareness media campaigns and activities launched by KFH on its social media accounts through 'Be Aware' campaign has tremendously attracted the attention and interest of the bank customers and the public.



Abdullah Al-Saif

Saif added that KFH, as part of its social responsibility, continues its effective contributions to the banking awareness campaign 'Be Aware' which was launched by the Central Bank of Kuwait, by spreading and publishing various awareness materials that targets several categories of followers on social media platforms and all e-channels of the bank. The campaign aims to shed some light on the customers rights and enlighten them about their rights and obligations when dealing with the bank.

He said that to ensure the spread of 'Be Aware' campaign on social media and achieve its goals, KFH has allocated a budget for paid advertisements and availed all benefits offered on social media to enhance



KUWAIT: Players compete in a padel match during a tournament sponsored by KFH.



Winners of a padel tournament sponsored by KFH pose for a group photo.

the 'Be Aware' campaign and organized several competitions and interactive questions for the public.

On the other hand, Saif indicated that the 'Be Aware' campaign is not limited to the public or the bank customers only. The bank is working on spreading awareness among its employees by publishing and announcing the campaign on the internal media of the bank and the employees accounts on Instagram.

KFH has fully supported the 'Be Aware' campaign which was launched by CBK in cooperation with Kuwait Banking Union. KFH believes in the importance of enhancing financial education and culture for all society tiers and benefiting from all kinds of banking services.

The campaign aims to spread awareness on customer's rights including personal finance, consumer loans or residential loans. Also, it includes the mecha-

nism to file complaints regarding banking services, sundry banking cards, methods to avoid fraud operations and awareness concerning the risks of encashments as well as high risk investments and other important issues.

It is worth mentioning that the 'Be Aware' campaign aims to spread banking knowledge and awareness among society members and increase public awareness on the most important financial issues and the means to protect assets from any fraud operations. Also, the campaign aims to highlight the banking sector role in general and the banking products, by introducing a set of instructions and publishing the same on regular basis through social media platforms in cooperation with Kuwait Banking Union and local banks. The campaign shall continue till the end of the year.

Kuwait seeks anti-doping regulations through national committee

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Anti-Doping Committee would seek to develop clear policies, prepare regulations and basic systems for anti-doping in sports, striving to establish fair principles in competitions, said an official.

In a statement to reporters yesterday after presiding over the first meeting of the committee's board of directors, the Head of the Kuwait Anti-Doping Committee Bader Al-Laili said that they are concerned with preserving the health of athletes. The committee, in accordance with its establishment Law No 82 of 2018, will implement doping control programs in local as well as international championships that are held in Kuwait, in coordination with relevant international organizations, also in accordance with international standards, foremost of which is the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), headquartered in Montreal, Canada, he added. Kuwait Anti-Doping Committee will work on education programs with officials from sports federations, employees of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, health clubs and relevant community organizations, to fight against doping, he said.

Laili underlined the importance of establishing the committee, as it comes in implementation of the international laws ratified by Kuwait, including the International Convention Against Doping in Sports, thanking the Minister of Information, Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi for supporting the organization. Meanwhile, Director General of the Kuwait Anti-Doping Committee Hana Al-Bati considered that the establishment of a specialized anti-doping organization is a vital step to the fight against doping in sports nationwide. The internal regulations of the Kuwait Anti-Doping Committee's board of directors were approved, as the draft executive regulations of the law establishing the organization were discussed in preparation for its approval to the competent authorities for official issuance, she noted. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Members of the Kuwait Anti-Doping Committee's board of directors attend their first meeting yesterday. —KUNA

Local

Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First Daily in The Arabian Gulf

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
ESTABLISHED 1961

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EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432
ADVERTISING : 24835616/7
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CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 163
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Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A picture taken on Tuesday shows a view of the landmark Kuwait Towers in Kuwait City. - Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (To have your picture featured in the Kuwait Times' 'Photo of the Day' section, please send your high resolution, unedited photos to local@kuwaittimes.com, along with the full name and Instagram account)

Crimes

Reckless driver dead in alleged shooting

KUWAIT: A police officer allegedly shot a young man dead in Taima after stopping him for driving recklessly in the area, Al-Rai Arabic daily reported yesterday. The man was pronounced dead with a gunshot wound in the chest, the newspaper reported quoting a security source.

Shooting suspect caught

Police arrested the suspect who fired at a bedoon with an M16 machinegun in Salwa. A source said the arrest was made in Abu Halifa following stiff resistance. Police found the suspect under the influence of hashish, 600 narcotic pills and several car keys on him. The car he was driving was reported stolen, and he is wanted to serve a three-year jail sentence. The victim said he had a previous dispute with the suspect.

Bogus office raided

Police raided a bogus domestic help office managed by an Arab resident along with 12 Asians, all in violation of the residency law, Al-Anbaa daily reported yesterday. The office was making helpers work on a pay-per-day basis. The suspects were sent to concerned authorities. The interior ministry has asked citizens and residents not to harbor any helpers unless they are under their sponsorship.

Maid's suicide

A domestic helper in her 30s committed suicide by hanging in Jahra, according to preliminary investigations. Her sponsor informed police about the incident. The coroner removed the body after investigating the scene, Al-Anbaa daily reported yesterday. Further investigations are ongoing.

Vietnam celebrates 76th National Day

KUWAIT: Ambassador of Vietnam to Kuwait Ngo Toan Thang released the following message yesterday on the occasion of the 76th anniversary of his country's independence.

"Seventy-six years ago, on September 2, 1945, President Ho Chi Minh delivered the Declaration of Independence that proclaimed the birth of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (now the Socialist Republic of Vietnam). Vietnam is now a vibrant economy with population of nearly one hundred million people.

"In 1986, Vietnam launched the Doi Moi (Economic Reform) process, which has helped Vietnam arise and achieve enormous and historical accomplishments, turning Vietnam from an underdeveloped country to a member of a variety of

bilateral and multilateral trading organizations in the region and the world over.

"On this auspicious occasion, the Party, the State, the Government and the People of Vietnam are proud to follow the spirit in the statement by General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam Nguyen Phu Trong - 'Our country has never enjoyed such fortune, national strength, international standing and prestige as it does today'.

"Nowadays, the world is facing the most unprecedented challenges due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economy, society, politics, and, most of all, human life. The COVID-19 viral disease, especially the new Delta variant, has swept past all countries and killed less than 4.5 million people.

Vietnam is now heavily affected by the disease with number of COVID cases rising every day, frustrating our efforts to develop the economy. Therefore, Vietnam is now in need of urgent medical assistance, notably the vaccines from interna-



Ambassador of Vietnam to Kuwait Ngo Toan Thang

tional organizations and friendly countries.

"I would like to take this opportunity to express our deep appreciation to the government and people of Kuwait for precious assistance to Vietnam over the past 45 years. May the two countries live in peace and prosperity forever."

Huawei Kuwait honors Olympic medalist Rashidi



KUWAIT: Huawei Consumer Business Group honored the Olympic athlete Abdullah Al-Rashidi on the occasion of winning the bronze medal in the skeet competition at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. This honor comes over pride in the accomplishment he achieved and the efforts he made to attain this and to raise the flag of Kuwait in this global forum. Huawei Consumer Business Group seeks to honor national competencies and capabilities of sports to enrich the sports movement. It also confirmed to continue to support sports and athletes and pay attention to heroes who are advancing at world competitions,

with the Kuwait flag hoisted on the podiums.

The group stresses the efforts made by all the athletes at the Olympics and other world championships, wishing them more achievements and successes and to continue raising the flag of Kuwait. The Kuwaiti champion expressed his deep appreciation for the initiative of Huawei Consumer Business Group to support and honor Kuwaiti athletes. The group indicated that it will continue to support all Kuwaiti athletes and talents and appreciate all efforts made to achieve advanced positions at Arab and international competitions.



KUWAIT: Ambassador of India to Kuwait Sibi George met yesterday with Fahad Ahmad Al-Awadhi, Kuwait's Assistant Foreign Minister for Arab Affairs, and discussed with him the bilateral relations and ways to further strengthen them across all domains, in addition to regional and international developments, and issues of mutual interest.

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Singapore premier awarded \$275,000 in defamation damages

PM Johnson says UK owes 'huge debt' to Afghan refugees

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JEAN LAFITTE, Louisiana: A person wades through water while waiting for aid yesterday in Jean Lafitte, Louisiana. Jean Lafitte Mayor Tim Kerner has pleaded for help for residents of the small town, which is roughly 20 miles south of New Orleans. —AFP

New Orleans under curfew as US South tallies Hurricane Ida damage

More than 1,600 personnel for search and rescue operations deployed

NEW ORLEANS: Louisiana and Mississippi took stock Tuesday of the disaster inflicted by powerful Hurricane Ida, as receding floodwaters began to reveal the full extent of the damage along the US Gulf Coast and the death toll rose to four. New Orleans was under a curfew Tuesday evening, nearly two days after Ida slammed into the Louisiana coast as a Category 4 storm, exactly 16 years after devastating Hurricane Katrina — which killed more than 1,800 people — made landfall.

Four deaths have been confirmed as crews began fanning out in boats and off-road vehicles to search communities cut off by the giant storm. A man was also missing after apparently being killed by an alligator. Mayor LaToya Cantrell said on Twitter she had signed an executive order mandating an overnight curfew in New Orleans, most of which was still entirely without power after the storm.

Images of people being plucked from flooded cars and pictures of destroyed homes surfaced on social media, while the damage in New Orleans itself remained limited. New Orleans Airport said all incoming and outgoing flights scheduled for Tuesday were canceled, while airlines had scrapped nearly 200 flights late yesterday.

One person was killed by a falling tree in Prairieville, while a second victim died trying to drive through floodwaters some 60 miles (95 kilometers) southeast in New

Orleans, officials reported. Ida knocked out power for more than a million properties across Louisiana, according to outage tracker PowerOutage.us, most of which still out Tuesday evening, leaving residents without air conditioning in late summer.

But power provider Entergy told New Orleans City Council members Tuesday morning that some electricity could be restored as early today, the New Orleans Times-Picayune reported. The first to see



Flights canceled

power would likely be hospitals — many of which are dealing with a surge of Covid patients — and sewage and water treatment centers, the paper reported, saying it could still be days before average customers were reconnected.

Entergy had initially said it could take days to even assess the full extent of the damage. In Mississippi, which has been buffeted by torrential rain, a road collapse

left two people dead and 10 more injured, including three in critical condition, the state's highway patrol said.

The death toll is expected to rise further, Louisiana Deputy Governor Billy Nungesser warned Tuesday, especially in coastal areas directly hit by Ida where search and rescue operations are ongoing. Meanwhile in St. Tammany Parish, police said a 71-year-old man was attacked and "apparently killed by an alligator while walking in flood waters following Hurricane Ida."

Ida heads northeast

President Joe Biden declared a major disaster for Louisiana and Mississippi, which gives the states access to federal aid. Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards said his state had deployed more than 1,600 personnel for search and rescue operations, while the Pentagon said over 5,200 personnel from the military, federal emergency management and National Guard had been activated across several southern states. Ida — now a tropical depression — was travelling northeast, threatening the Tennessee and Ohio Valleys. It was expected in the mid-Atlantic, according to the National Hurricane Center. Scientists have warned of a rise in cyclone activity as the ocean surface warms due to climate change, posing an increasing threat to the world's coastal communities. — AFP

Fears of worsening India floods as rains wreak havoc

NEW DELHI: More than three million people have been affected by the annual monsoon deluge as torrential rains pummel eastern India, officials said yesterday, with villagers fleeing to higher ground and wildlife sanctuaries underwater.

Monsoons are crucial to replenishing water supplies after the scorching summer season but also cause widespread death and destruction across South Asia each year.

The storms have been worsened by climate change, experts say. India's poorest state Bihar and wildlife-rich Assam have been hit by incessant rains for a week, with swollen rivers bursting their banks and stranding thousands of people in villages.

In Assam, water levels for the Brahmaputra — a mighty trans-border Himalayan river system — have risen above their "danger levels", a water resource department official told AFP.

Villager Amshar Ali said locals were struggling with basic needs. "We are in great suffering. It is difficult to get food, drinking water and other essential items," Ali told AFP. "Many villagers do not have their own boats, so people are suffering." Farmer Liyakat Ali said he had to move his livestock to a friend's property after his house was submerged. "The floodwaters have risen to above four to five feet (1.2-1.5 metres) in the last two days," he told AFP.

Up to 80 percent of the Kaziranga National Park and Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary — both along the Brahmaputra and home to rare one-horned rhinoceroses — were underwater, officials said. "All the wild animals are taking shelter on higher lands in the sanctuary," Pobitora ranger Nayanjyoti Das told AFP. — AFP

Pope Francis to visit Greece, Cyprus, Malta

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis announced plans to visit Greece, Cyprus and Malta and confirmed he hopes to attend the COP26 climate conference in Glasgow, in an interview broadcast yesterday.

The 84-year-old has already scheduled a visit to Slovakia September 12-15 after a brief stop in Hungary to celebrate a mass in the capital Budapest.

Asked by Spain's Cope radio whether he may also travel to Spain to coincide with the Holy Year in the northwestern city of Santiago de Compostela, the pontiff said he could not rule it out.

"But my choice so far of travel to Europe is the small countries. First it was Albania and then all the countries that were small," he said.

"Now Slovakia is on the programme, then Cyprus, Greece and Malta. I wanted to take that option: first to the smaller countries..."

"And if I go to Santiago, I go to Santiago but not to Spain, let's be clear," ruling out an official trip to the country. The pope, who has been outspoken on the need to tackle climate change, also confirmed he hoped to attend the COP26 conference in Scotland in November — and urged participants to aim high.

"It all depends on how I feel at the time. But in fact, my speech is already



VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis leaves after his weekly general audience in the Paul VI hall at the Vatican yesterday. —AFP

being prepared, and the plan is to be there," he said.

It is the biggest climate summit since the 2015 Paris negotiation, which Francis said "was the summum (pinnacle) in becoming globally aware."

"Then what happened? Fear set in," Francis said.

'No script'

"And slowly, in the subsequent meetings, they went backwards. I hope that Glasgow will now raise its sights a bit and bring us more in line."

The official programme for his trip to Hungary includes a meeting with President

Janos Ader and Prime Minister Viktor Orban on his arrival.

Asked what he would like to say to Orban, whose anti-migration views contrast with his own, Francis appeared to avoid the question.

"I don't know if I am going to meet him. I know that authorities will come to greet me..."

"One of my ways is not to go around with a script: when I am in front of a person, I look him in the eyes and let things come out. "It doesn't even occur to me to think about what I'm going to say if I'm with him, those potential future situations that don't help me." — AFP

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International

PM Johnson says UK owes 'huge debt' to Afghan refugees

Raab faces a tough hearing before the Foreign Affairs Committee

LONDON: Prime Minister Boris Johnson yesterday said Britain owed "an immense debt" to Afghans who worked with NATO forces as he announced "vital support" for those resettling in the UK.

But his government is coming under fire after thousands of Afghans who helped NATO and are eligible to move to Britain under the "Relocations and Assistance Policy" were believed to be have been left stranded in Afghanistan, where they are at the mercy of the Taliban.

More than 8,000 did make it out, and the government announced yesterday that they will be given immediate indefinite leave to remain and that £15 million would be provided for additional school places and to support access to the health service.

"We owe an immense debt to those who worked with the Armed Forces in Afghanistan and I am determined that we give them and their families the support they need to rebuild their lives here in the UK," Johnson said of the so-called "Operation Warm Welcome" measures.

"I know this will be an incredibly daunting time, but I hope they will take heart from the wave of support and generosity already expressed by the British public."

The government said the measures "will give Afghans the certainty and stability to rebuild their lives with unrestricted rights to work and the option to apply for British citizenship in the future."

But current and former officials have condemned the government, suggesting many more could have

been rescued. The Observer on Sunday cited a whistleblower as saying thousands of emails from MPs and charities to the foreign ministry highlighting specific Afghans at risk from the Taliban takeover went unopened.

Foreign Minister Dominic Raab has already been strongly criticised for not immediately leaving a beach holiday when the Taliban took control.

An unnamed minister also told the Sunday Times

“**Operation Warm Welcome**”

that "I suspect we could have taken out 800-1,000 more people".

Raab faces a tough hearing before the Foreign Affairs Committee yesterday, when he will be grilled by MPs over the chaotic withdrawal.

Announcing the evidence session, Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee Tom Tugendhat said that "the last two weeks have been tough for so many of us: Anger, shame, even incredulity".



LONDON: Britain's Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab (L) and Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson (R) tour with Director General, Tom Drew (C) on a visit to The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office Crisis Centre at the Foreign Offices in London, to see how they are supporting and monitoring the ongoing evacuations in Afghanistan. —AFP

"We never thought we would see the day NATO forces, led by the US, would turn their backs on the people of Afghanistan. How will we deal with the Taliban? How will Afghanistan shape our regional

strategy? How will the government hold the Taliban to account for reverses in human rights?"

"These questions, and so many others, will be put to the Foreign Secretary." — AFP

German go on trial for spying for Russians

BERLIN: The German employee of a security company went on trial yesterday for allegedly passing on floor plans of parliament buildings to Russian secret services, a case that has further frayed ties between Berlin and Moscow.

The suspect named only as Jens F. 56, is accused of handing over a CD-Rom with more than 300 files of floor plans of buildings used by the German Bundestag to the military attache of the Russian embassy in 2017.

The military attache in post at that time is believed to be an employee of Russia's GRU military intelligence service. The suspect meanwhile worked for a security company contracted by the Bundestag.

Reading out the charge sheet before a court in Berlin, prosecutor Frank Stuppi accused the man of espionage. The suspect did not make any statements at the opening of the trial.

The court revealed that a plea bargain had been offered with a jail term of between 20 months to two years, but that was not taken up by the suspect. The defence had advised Jens F. not to plead guilty, arguing there was no proof that he had transmitted the information to the Russians.

According to defence lawyer Friedrich Humke, the prosecution's case is based on the life of his client — who was once an army officer in former communist East Germany.

Prosecutor Stuppi acknowledged that other people could have had access to the floor plans, but argued that the indictment was based on the route that the files had taken.

Key indicators were when the files were saved and how they were stored, he said. The court is expected to hear the case until the end of September.

Tensions

Without citing its sources, Spiegel magazine reported that the suspect was a former officer of the 9th tank division of the East German army. Between 1984 and 1990, he also worked for the feared Stasi secret police informally, said Spiegel.

The case comes at a time of particularly rocky ties between Berlin and Moscow over a series of espionage cases, the poisoning and jailing of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny as well as repeated cyberattacks against the West.

The West has accused the Russian government of poisoning Navalny with the Soviet-era nerve agent Novichok in August 2020, which the Kremlin denies.

Navalny was treated in Berlin before he returned to Moscow several months later. Upon landing at the airport, Navalny was imprisoned, sparking demands from the West for his release. In June, German police arrested a Russian scientist working at an unidentified university, accusing him of spying for Moscow.

Germany has also repeatedly accused Russia of cyberattacks on its soil. The most high-profile incident blamed on Russian hackers to date was a cyberattack in 2015 that completely paralysed the computer network of the Bundestag lower house of parliament, forcing the entire institution offline for days while it was fixed.

In another high profile case before a German court, a Russian man is on trial over the assassination of a former Chechen commander in a Berlin park, allegedly on Russia's orders. Moscow has denied being behind such actions. — AFP

California declares war on 'ghost guns'

LOS ANGELES: California is declaring war on "ghost guns"—weapons kits sold on the internet without any system of control—with Los Angeles on Tuesday becoming the latest city to move to outlaw them. City councilors in the metropolis—the second largest in the United States—voted unanimously to move to ban the sale or possession of the untraceable firearms whose use has exploded in recent years.

"When we see an increase in homicides here, and when we see that the (police) report that 40 percent of the crime guns recovered are ghost guns, we know that we have a very urgent critical situation that needs to be addressed," said Paul Koretz, the councilmember who proposed the ordinance.

Ghost guns first appeared around a decade ago, and became popular among weapons enthusiasts. Also called "80-percent guns," they are sold as parts, and must be assembled

by the end user. Crucially, they have no serial number, and, because they are not classified as guns during the retail process, the kits do not require a license or a background check in many US states, including California.

Readily available online, they quickly became the go-to solution for people barred from buying a weapon because of a criminal record or their age. The resulting proliferation is becoming a real problem for law enforcement, said Los Angeles Police Department Deputy Chief Kris Pitcher.

"Ghost guns have been around for approximately nine years, however, they have surfaced as a major problem in 2020 with the confiscation of 814 ghost guns just last year alone in Los Angeles," he said. A study by Everytown for Gun Safety, an organization that fights gun violence, found that a kit to assemble an AR-15 rifle—one of the most popular models in the United States, and often used in mass shootings—can cost less than \$400.

An online pitch for the weapon boasts how easy it is to assemble, according to the study. "Building... doesn't take too long. Within an hour or two, you should be breaking it in at the range." Anyone needing inspira-

6-week abortion law takes effect in Texas

WASHINGTON: A Texas law that bans abortion after six weeks, and makes no exception for rape or incest, took effect yesterday after the Supreme Court did not act on an emergency request to block it. Governor Greg Abbott, a Republican, signed a bill in May to ban abortion once a fetal heartbeat can be detected, usually in the sixth week of pregnancy.

While similar bans have been passed in a dozen states, all had so far been blocked in the courts from going into force. The Supreme Court may still grant the request from rights groups and abortion providers to halt the so-called "heartbeat bill", which makes Texas the hardest state in the United States in which to get an abortion.

The American Civil Liberties Union, Planned Parenthood, the Center for Reproductive Rights and other groups filed an emergency request with the Supreme Court on Monday asking it to stop the law from

taking effect. "Approximately 85 to 90 percent of people who obtain an abortion in Texas are at least six weeks into pregnancy, meaning this law would prohibit nearly all abortions in the state," ACLU said.

The other states that have sought to enact restrictions on abortion in the early stages of pregnancy have been barred from doing so by the landmark 1973 Supreme Court ruling Roe v Wade. That decision allowed abortion so long as the fetus is not viable, which is usually the case until the 22nd to 24th weeks of pregnancy.

Texas's law is different from those of other states because it allows the public—rather than state officials like prosecutors or health departments—to enforce the ban. Everyday citizens are encouraged to report people getting an abortion in violation of the terms of the law or doctors who perform them.

The Texas law "creates a bounty hunting scheme that encourages the general public to bring costly and harassing lawsuits against anyone who they believe has violated the ban," the ACLU said. "Anyone who successfully sues a health center worker, an abortion provider, or any person who helps someone access an abortion after six weeks will be

3 Florida murders linked to Brazilian serial killer

MIAMI: Three murders of women in Florida some 20 years ago were committed by a Brazilian serial killer who later died in a plane crash, police said Tuesday.

Roberto Wagner Fernandes, who lived in Miami in the 1990s and early 2000s, may be responsible for other murders, the Broward County Sheriff's Office said.

"I believe there are other cases out there and

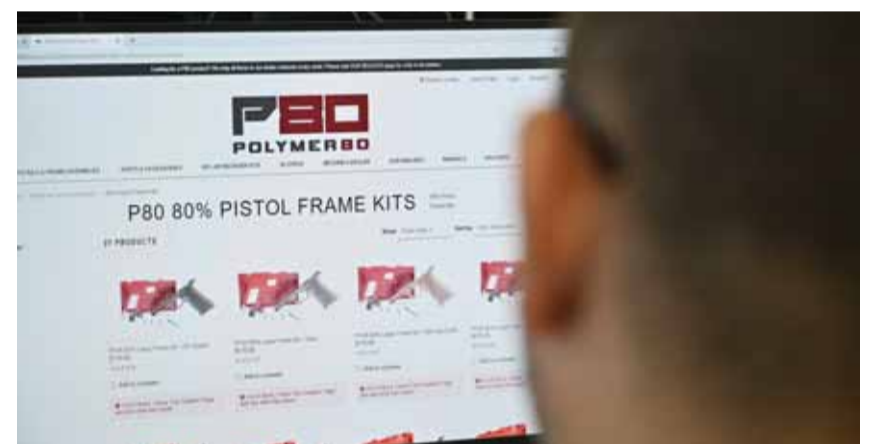
that is part of our ongoing investigation," said Broward County Detective Zachary Scott.

Police said Fernandes had been charged in Brazil with murdering his wife in 1996 but was acquitted and moved to Miami, where he worked as a flight attendant and a tour bus driver.

He is suspected of murdering three women in Florida who suffered from drug addiction and had engaged in prostitution. The first victim was Kimberly Dietz-Livesey, whose body was found stuffed inside a suitcase in June 2000.

Two months later, the body of another woman, Sia Demas, was found inside a duffel bag by the side of a road. A third victim, Jessica Good, was stabbed to death. Her body was found floating in Biscayne Bay in Miami in August 2001.

After becoming a suspect in Good's murder,



LOS ANGELES, California: In this photo illustration, a man looks at a website which sells gun kits or "ghost guns," August 31, 2021 in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

tion need look no further than YouTube, where tutorials with hundreds of thousands of views are not hard to find.

Legal loophole

The vote Tuesday brings Los Angeles closer to both San Diego and San Francisco in trying to rid the streets of the weapons. The city of San Francisco is suing three manufacturers in a bid to staunch the flood of unlicensed guns.

"We directly take on those who are responsible for bringing these dangerous and unregulated weapons into the streets of San Francisco and throughout the state of California," said San Francisco District Attorney Chesa Boudin. According to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the government body that regulates gun sales on a federal level, two-thirds of the ghost guns seized in the United States last year were in California. — AFP



AUSTIN, Texas: File photo shows protesters march down Congress Ave at a protest outside the Texas state capitol on May 29, 2021 in Austin, Texas. A Texas law that bans abortion after six weeks, and makes no exception for rape or incest, took effect yesterday. — AFP

rewarded with at least \$10,000, to be paid by the person sued," it said.

"Anti-abortion groups in Texas have already set up online forms enlisting people to sue anyone they believe is violating the law and encouraging people to submit 'anonymous tips' on doctors, clinics, and others who violate the law," it said.

Nancy Northup, president of the Center for Reproductive Rights, said the Texas bill would force women to

"travel out of state—in the middle of a pandemic—to receive constitutionally guaranteed healthcare."

"Many will not be able to afford to," Northup said. "It's cruel, unconscionable, and unlawful." Alexis McGill Johnson, president of Planned Parenthood, said the Supreme Court is being asked "to uphold 50 years of precedent and ensure Texans won't be denied their constitutional right to abortion." — AFP

Fernandes fled to Brazil, which does not have an extradition treaty with the United States.

In 2011, investigators were able to match DNA and fingerprints from Good's murder to the murders of Dietz-Livesey and Demas in Broward County and the hunt for Fernandes resumed.

After learning that Fernandes, a licensed pilot, had reportedly been killed in a 2005 plane crash while flying from Brazil to Paraguay, the authorities went looking for his grave.

"We had to confirm whether the death was real or not," said Sergeant Nikoli Trifonov. "People may fake their death, especially after committing a murder." Fernandes' remains were exhumed several months ago and the American authorities were able to conclusively match his DNA to the three Florida murders. — AFP

International

Mongolian pupils go back to school and end long education exile

Nearly two-thirds of the population has been fully vaccinated

ULAANBAATAR: Guiding her younger brother from their yurt on the outskirts of Ulaanbaatar, 15-year-old Urangoo Basandorj could barely contain her excitement for yesterday's return to school, as Mongolia's children mark the end of grinding months of exile from education. The country of three million has taken some of the world's toughest and most enduring measures against the COVID-19 pandemic, shutting schools and kindergartens since January 2020 and plunging children into a purgatory of remote learning with patchy access to technology.

Nearly two-thirds of the population has been fully vaccinated yet Mongolia reported 3,726 new virus cases yesterday—the highest daily increase since the pandemic hit the country, the health ministry said.

Still, masked students in blazers filed into a primary school in the capital Ulaanbaatar, where classrooms were kitted out with temperature monitors, hand sanitiser and social distancing stickers. "I heard the news about reopening schools and I was super excited... I was so happy and I dreamt (of) my classmates all night," Urangoo Basandorj told AFP.

"It was so difficult not (being) able to meet my friends... the online class wasn't nice." Parents across Mongolia—a landlocked country where nearly a third of people live below the poverty line—have complained of varying access to education since the pandemic first emerged in neighbouring China, with televised classes condemned as limited and online learning restricted to those with internet access.

For the urban poor and remote herding communities, education has been patchy at best, conducted inside small, congested homes where some families lack televisions or a reliable power supply. Complaints snowballed around social media but authorities stuck to movement restrictions and home learning, apart from a short respite late last year when schools were briefly reopened.



Remote learning

'It's time to adapt'

Yesterday's reopening saw parents living in yurt districts near the capital-city dwellers from Mongolia's nomadic culture—express delight that their children were returning to school. "When they are watching TV lessons (in the yurt), there are so many interruptions ... cooking, little siblings crying, fire in the stove, and water boiling," said Urangoo's mother, Dolgorsuren Tumurbaatar.

"Schools were closed too long. It's time to adapt and live with COVID." During the schools closures, public-school students relied on "TV lessons"—lec-



ULAANBAATAR: A teacher speaks to students during a class at the beginning of the new semester in Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia yesterday, after schools and kindergartens were closed since January 2020 amid the COVID-19 pandemic. — AFP

ture videos without any interaction—or online classes with limited outcomes.

"Usually, teachers speak on their own and some students even go to sleep while they turn off camera and mic," Urangoo Baasansuren added. For the lucky few, expensive vastly-over-subscribed private schools provided applications such as "Google Classroom" and even on-to-one tutoring to ensure nearly two years of education

were not lost to their pupils.

But for many others, in schools which routinely have 50 to 70 pupils per class, those years have gone.

At a school in the capital, father-of-three Munch Purevdorj said it is now the right time to reopen schools. "We have such a high rate of first and second-dose vaccination," he told AFP. "It's time to think about (the children's) future." — AFP

Turning from Afghanistan, US sets focus on China

WASHINGTON: After two decades of focus on Afghanistan, the United States' withdrawal this week allows the country to shift its concentration to the east, where superpower rival China is now the number-one priority.

In an indication of Washington's strategic turn, Vice President Kamala Harris was in Southeast Asia last week even as the US pullout from Afghanistan moved into its turbulent final days, hoping to strengthen US allies' pushback against the region's giant.

Harris accused Beijing of "actions that... threaten the rules-based international order," particularly its aggressive claims of territory in the South China Sea.

Her tour of Singapore and Vietnam was seen as an effort by the administration of President Joe Biden to reassure Asian allies, who were left somewhat disquieted by the US pullout from Kabul after the sudden fall of the Afghan government that Washington had propped up for nearly 20 years.

Ryan Hass, a foreign policy specialist at the Brookings Institution, said the debacle of the US pullout from Afghanistan will not have a lasting impact on Washington's credibility in Asia.

"America's standing in Asia is a function of its shared interests with its partners in balancing China's rise and in preserving the long peace that has underpinned the region's rapid development," Hass said.

"None of those factors are diminished by events in Afghanistan," he said told AFP. The US turn to East Asia will "open up new opportunities" for the US and its partners in the region, he told AFP.

No encouragement to Russia

Lawmaker Adam Smith, head of the Armed Forces Committee in the House of Representatives, said that the US exit from Afghanistan is not likely to change the balance between the United States



KABUL: A Taleban fighter (C) walks past shoppers along Mandawi market in Kabul yesterday a day after the US pulled all its troops out of the country to end a brutal 20-year war — one that started and ended with the hardline Islamist in power. — AFP

and rival superpowers Russia and China.

He rejected suggestions Tuesday that the seeming momentary display of weakness by the Americans could encourage China to invade Taiwan or Russia to attack Ukraine, for example.

"I think anyone who thinks that their [Russia's or China's] calculation has significantly changed because we just pulled the last 2,500 troops out of Afghanistan — I really don't see that," Smith said during an online Brookings conference.

"There are a lot of other issues that go into whether or not Russia and China are going to feel like they have the ability to be aggressive in those parts of the world," he said.

Derek Grossman, a former Pentagon official and now a defense expert at the Rand Corporation think tank, said China could seek advantage in fostering

good relations with the Taliban, the militant Islamist group US forces fought for 20 years before they again seized power in Afghanistan August 15.

Beijing could decide quickly to recognize the Taliban government, even as Washington and other Western governments hold off as they hope to convince Afghanistan's new rulers to moderate their headline policies.

"China, as a new great power in competition with the United States, probably wants to demonstrate its unique way of handling world events, which tends to be — often reflexively — the opposite of Washington's approach," Grossman said. "Recognizing Taleban-run Afghanistan would contribute to the perception that it is Beijing, and no longer Washington, that is now setting the agenda and shaping the future regional order," he said. — AFP

HK University labour researcher detained in China

BEIJING: A researcher from the University of Hong Kong has been detained by police in China, friends said yesterday, while studying the politically thorny issue of workers' rights. Beijing has repeatedly cracked down on grassroots protests and labour NGOs in recent years, with authorities seeking to control social movements they view as a potential challenge to the state.

Fang Ran, a sociology PhD student researching labour movements in China, has not been seen for five days, friends told AFP. A message circulated on social media, apparently from his father, said his son was detained by police in the city of Nanning in southwestern Guangxi region last Thursday.

"I am extremely shocked at this," wrote Fang's father, describing his son as a loyal member of the ruling Chinese Communist Party. "In my view, Fang Ran is definitely not a criminal who seeks to harm the Party, but an ambitious young person who is helpful to the Party's cause."

AFP could not independently verify the message, but three friends of Fang who have been in contact with his family confirmed the content. Hong Kong University said in a statement that it is "aware of the matter and actively looking into it".

"We will provide assistance to Mr Fang and his family where appropriate," a university spokesperson told AFP. In the message his father wrote that the 26-year-old had been put into a form of solitary secret detention known as "residential surveillance at a designated location", which is often used against dissidents.

Friends say that Fang, a Chinese national, had been researching labour conditions in Chinese factories in the southern manufacturing hub of Shenzhen, where he lived for the past six months. One of the friends told AFP Fang was passionate about social issues and was "not afraid of speaking out whenever he sees some injustice."

Numerous student labour activists were detained in 2018 and 2019 as part of a nationwide crackdown on campus Marxist groups, many of whom helped organise factory worker unions in southern China. — AFP

Singapore premier awarded \$275,000 in defamation damages

SINGAPORE: Singapore's prime minister was awarded more than a quarter of a million dollars in damages yesterday after winning defamation suits against a news website editor and writer, the latest libel cases brought by the leader.

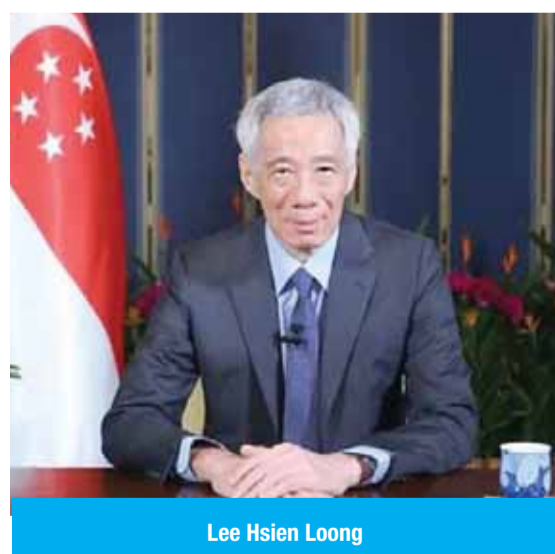
Critics say such lawsuits are among a range of tactics employed by the tightly regulated city-state to silence dissent. Terry Xu, chief editor of the Online Citizen Asia, and a writer for the site were accused of defaming Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in two separate lawsuits.

The writer, Rubaashini Shunmuganathan, had penned an article in 2019 about a bitter feud that has rocked the premier's family.

Singapore's High Court ordered Xu to pay Sg\$210,000 (\$156,000) in damages. In the second suit against the author, the judge awarded damages of Sg\$160,000 (\$119,000) — bringing the total to Sg\$370,000 (\$275,000).

"Overall, I find that Xu had acted recklessly, with indifference to the truth and with ill-will towards (Lee), which aggravated the injury to (Lee)," Justice Audrey Lim said in her decision.

Lee will donate the damages to charity, the Straits Times newspaper reported. The row covered by the website was between Lee and his siblings over the legacy of their father, Singapore's late founding leader Lee Kuan Yew. The drama



Lee Hsien Loong

captivated a city-state unused to public feuds among the elite.

Xu — whose site is typically more critical of authorities than the pro-government mainstream media — has launched a crowdfunding campaign to cover the cost of the damages.

"I hope many patriotic Singaporeans who love freedom, free speech and a free press will donate generously," his lawyer Lim Tean said.

In March, blogger Leong Sze Hian was ordered to pay almost \$100,000 in damages for defaming Lee by sharing an article on Facebook linking the leader to a corruption scandal.

He launched a crowdfunding drive too — and raised enough within a matter of days. While

Singapore is economically successful and ranks among the world's least corrupt countries, rights groups frequently accuse the government of restricting free speech and civil liberties.

Watchdog Reporters Without Borders poorly rates Singapore's press freedoms, listing it 160 out of 180 countries and regions.

Singapore's leaders have defended bringing libel suits, saying they are necessary to protect their reputations. — AFP

Number of women journalists in Kabul has plunged

PARIS: The number of female journalists working in Kabul has dwindled to below 100 since the Taleban took power, compared with 700 before, a media watchdog said yesterday. Reporters Sans Frontieres (Reporters Without Borders) said that as Taleban forces took over Kabul, women journalists were increasingly told to stay home, harassed, prevented from going on reporting assignments, or even beaten.

Last year, RSF said it had counted 108 media operating in the Afghan capital, employing 4,940 people, including 1,080

women of whom 700 were journalists. But of the 510 women employed by the country's eight biggest media groups in 2020, only 76, including 39 journalists, are still working now, the watchdog said. These are in addition to journalists at smaller media outlets.

The figures amount to "a quasi-disappearance of women journalists in the capital," RSF said. Despite assurances by the Taleban that press freedom would be respected and that female journalists would be able to work, RSF said: "A new media landscape is emerging without them."

The organization called on Afghanistan's new rulers to guarantee the freedom and the safety of women working in journalism. "It is essential that female journalists be able to return to work without being bothered, which is their most fundamental right," RSF Secretary-General Christophe Deloire said in a statement. — AFP

Business

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 2021

Global sea freight sector grapples with a shortage of container ships

Shipping firms splashing out cash on expanding fleets amid a boom in orders

LONDON: Global sea freight was severely disrupted by the COVID crisis but is now recovering and prompting a boom in new container ship orders as the industry grapples with a shortage of vessels. Shipping companies, buoyed by soaring freight prices, are splashing out cash on expanding their fleets.

New shipping capacity is now forecast to hit a record-matching level by 2023, steaming ahead as the post-pandemic recovery gathers speed. "The container ship order book is booming," said Italian maritime brokerage Banchemo Costa.

Orders have been placed for at least 276 new vessels in the first seven months of this year which would add slightly more than 10 percent capacity to the large global container fleet as of 2020, according to data it provided. However, it takes at least two years to build a new ship, so the market will remain overheated in the short term. Banchemo Costa expects only modest 3 percent year-on-year growth in shipping capacity in 2021 and 2022.



Freight prices soar, but capacity shrinks

Demand recovers from COVID

The industry is now ready to splurge on new vessels following a decade of short supply. The world's largest container carrier, Danish giant AP Moller-Maersk, saw its net profit jump to \$3.71 billion (3.14 billion euros, £2.7 billion) in the second quarter of 2021, up 30 percent on the full-year figure for 2020. France's CMA-CGM meanwhile logged a second-quarter net profit of about \$3.5 billion, twenty-five times more than the same period last year.

'Unprecedented demand'

"The strong rebound of the global economy has resulted in unprecedented demand for transportation and logistics services," said CMA-CGM chief executive Rodolphe Saade. CMA-CGM has meanwhile ordered 22 new container ships, expected to launch in 2023 and 2024.

The company will receive only 14 new ships this year. Second-hand ships are also in demand with CMA-CGM adding a total of 32 such vessels this year.

\$3.64 trillion in losses. Hurricane Ida, which slammed into the US Gulf Coast at the weekend and killed at least four people, could become the costliest weather disaster on record, Taalas told reporters.

"There is a chance that the economic cost will be higher than Katrina," he said, while adding that improved prevention and protection measures had ensured that Ida caused only a fraction of the casualties of the giant storm that devastated the same area exactly 16 years earlier. Until now, Katrina, which killed more than 1,800 people and destroyed large parts of New Orleans, had been considered by far the costliest weather-related disaster, racking up nearly \$164 billion in economic losses.

115 deaths each day

On average, a disaster linked to weather, climate and water extremes has thus occurred every single day over the past 50 years, killing 115 people and causing \$202 million in daily losses, the WMO report found. More than 91 percent of the deaths occurred in developing countries, it said.

Droughts were responsible for the largest losses of human life during the period, alone accounting for some 650,000 deaths, while storms have left over 577,000 people dead. Floods have meanwhile

Compared with the same period last year the economy soared 9.6 percent owing to the very low base of comparison. "Domestic demand drove growth of 0.7 percent this quarter which saw continued growth across household spending, private investment and public sector expenditure," said the bureau's national accounts head Michael Smedes. But the figures did not include the full impact of prolonged lockdowns in Sydney and Melbourne as well as other parts of the country that have more than half the 25 million population living under stay-at-home orders.

Australia suffered its first recession in nearly three decades last year, but recovered strongly towards the end as outbreaks were brought under control and virus curbs lifted.

Authorities have now agreed on a roadmap to reopen the country when it hits vaccination targets of 70 and 80 percent-likely later this year-which would boost the economy once more. But disagree-

ment between state government leaders over the approach could yet derail those efforts, with concerns some could block the nationwide removal of restrictions. —AFP

half of the year." The report is closely scrutinized as a preview of the critical government employment data due out Friday, which is expected to show a gain of 750,000 jobs nationwide last month and the unemployment rate ticking down to 5.2 percent from 5.4 percent in July.

ADP can differ widely from the official report, but Ian Shepherdson of Pantheon Macroeconomics said he has now trimmed his forecast, predicting employment will rise by just 400,000 positions due to Delta. "We expect a further Delta hit in September, though we hope it will be offset, at least partly, by the effects of school reopening and the ending of enhanced unemployment benefits. But the uncertainties are huge," he said. The surge in infections due to the new variant has hit the leisure and hospitality sector especially hard, as mask mandates have been reimposed in some



ISMAILIA, Egypt: In this file photo from the Egyptian port of Ismailia, 120 kilometers northeast of Cairo, shows the largest container ship in the world, Danish flag Edith Maersk, crossing the Suez Canal. —AFP

Overcapacity risks

Such expansion comes despite the fact that the market was depressed before the pandemic "due to overcapacity", said Murphy, questioning what the effect will be of a massive increase in new ships from 2023.

However, he said a reduction in the number of leading players and new environmental legislation should make it possible for the sector to absorb these new capacities without damaging its business. A planned environmental measure to limit speed, backed by France at the International

Maritime Organization (IMO), means that more ships could be required just to service old levels of demand. Carrying capacity will also be reduced because cleaner fuels in some newly-built vessels need new tank storage.

At the same time, ships whose scrapping has been delayed will also need to be replaced. Banchemo Costa said this means that while the number of ships scrapped this year will be one of the lowest since 2011, but by 2023, the number of discarded ships will be among the highest in recent years. —AFP

Weather, climate disasters surge 5-fold in 50 years

GENEVA: Weather-related disasters have skyrocketed over the past half-century, causing far more damage even as better warning systems have meant fewer deaths, the UN said yesterday. A report from the UN's World Meteorological Organization (WMO) examined mortality and economic losses from weather, climate and water extremes between 1970 and 2019.

It found that such disasters have increased five-fold during that period, driven largely by a warming planet, and warned the upward trend would continue. "The number of weather, climate and water extremes are increasing and will become more frequent and severe in many parts of the world as a result of climate change," said WMO Secretary-General Petteri Taalas.

In total, there were more than 11,000 disasters attributed to these hazards globally since 1970, causing more than two million deaths and some

Australian growth beats forecasts in Q2 but virus takes toll

SYDNEY: Australia's economy expanded more than expected in the second quarter, data showed yesterday, easing concerns that the country could suffer a double-dip recession as it battles a fresh wave of COVID infections thanks to a pick-up in domestic demand.

However, there are fears it will suffer a contraction in the current period with the two biggest cities stuck in lockdown with authorities struggling to contain the latest outbreak. The Australian Bureau of Statistics reported the economy grew 0.7 percent in April-June as household spending and government expenditure jumped.

US private firms add just 374,000 jobs in August

WASHINGTON: Private American companies hired just 374,000 more workers in August, according to payroll services firm ADP, as the Delta variant of COVID-19 undermines the job market's recovery. The modest gain was a slight increase over July but far less than economists had expected.

The data "has highlighted a downshift in the labor market recovery," ADP chief economist Nela Richardson said. "We have seen a decline in new hires, following significant job growth from the first



GENEVA: Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) Petteri Taalas holds a press conference to present an Atlas of Mortality and Economic Losses from Weather, Climate and Water Extremes at the United Nations offices in Geneva yesterday. —AFP

killed nearly 59,000 over the past 50 years and extreme temperatures have killed close to 56,000, the report found. On a positive note, the report found that even as the number of weather and climate-related disasters ballooned over the past half-century, the number of associated deaths declined nearly threefold. —AFP



ARLINGTON, US: In this file photo a woman walks by a "Now Hiring" sign outside a store in Arlington, Virginia. —AFP

ment between state government leaders over the approach could yet derail those efforts, with concerns some could block the nationwide removal of restrictions. —AFP



MELBOURNE: A man crosses a bridge in Melbourne during the city's sixth lockdown as it battles an outbreak of COVID coronavirus. —AFP

areas, but the industry added 201,000 positions last month, improving on July. —AFP

UN: Half of global population without social protections

GENEVA: Over half of all people in the world have no social protections, the United Nations said yesterday, even after the pandemic spurred countries to offer more services to their populations. In a report on the state of social protection globally, the UN's International Labor Organization said that 4.1 billion people were living without any social safety net of any kind.

Social protection includes access to health care and income security measures related especially to old age, unemployment, sickness, disability, work injury, maternity or the loss of the main breadwinner in a family, as well as extra support for families with children. In 2020, only 46.9 percent of the global population benefitted from at least one such protection, according to the report-ILO's first on the subject since 2017.

That low rate came even as access to health-care, sickness and unemployment benefits have more than ever proved their relevance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"This crisis has revealed the absolutely crucial role that social protection has played in national responses around the world," ILO chief Guy Ryder told reporters. "Without the massive and rapid expansion of social protection during the COVID-19 crisis, its impact would certainly have been very much worse than it actually has been."

'Glimmers of optimism'

Ryder said this renewed appreciation for social protections had offered "glimmers of optimism amid the devastation wrought by the pandemic." He urged countries to center their recovery efforts around boosting social protections. "Countries are at a crossroads," he said in a statement, stressing that "this is a pivotal moment to harness the pandemic response to build a new generation of rights-based social protection systems."

But while the pandemic has provided an opportunity for improving social protections, it also laid bare the glaring disparities between the protections currently on offer in different parts of the world.

Ryder said the COVID crisis had acted "as an X-ray for global society," revealing "large gaps in the coverage, in the adequacy and in the comprehensiveness of social protection." Europe and Central Asia have the highest rates of coverage, with a full 84 percent of people covered by at least one social protection, followed by the Americas, at 64.3 percent, according to the ILO.

Some 44 percent of people living in the Asia-Pacific region and 40 percent of people in Arab states meanwhile enjoy at least one social protection, while in Africa only 17.4 percent of people do. Countries on average spend 12.8 percent of their gross domestic product on social protections, excluding health care, but such spending also varies dramatically. —AFP

Business

World Conservation Congress kicks off in France tomorrow

Price tag on the planet? Helping business value nature

PARIS: From agriculture to housing to transportation, economic growth has historically depended on burning through finite natural resources and rearing natural landscapes.

As the IUCN World Conservation Congress kicks off in France tomorrow, an urgent question will be how to reduce the devastation wrought by humanity on the environment. One idea gaining currency is to assign nature an economic value. "It's the only way to speak the same language as political decision-makers," Nathalie Girouard, an expert on environmental policy at intergovernmental think tank OECD, told AFP.

"We have increased economic growth at the expense of nature." Chemical-intensive agriculture, over-fishing, pollution and climate change are all pushing ecosystems to the brink of collapse.

For business, putting a monetary value on nature means that damaging resources such as breathable air and drinkable water becomes not just a survival risk, but a financial one. But experts are divided on how to measure "natural capital", and some argue that it should not be done at all.

Natural capital

During most of industrialization, the intrinsic value of nature's bounty—air, fresh water and oceans, for example—was not recognized because it cost nothing to consume or pollute. The concept of natural capital, some conservationists and economists argue, makes it possible to evaluate ecosystems in terms of the "services" they provide—and the cost of repairing them when damaged.



Regulation still remains a key

Mary Ruckelshaus, head of the Natural Capital Project at Stanford University, acknowledges that it is a complex task. She gives the example of their work in Belize where indigenous populations, fishermen and real estate developers all value mangrove forests, but have very different ideas of what to do with them. Some will value their capacity to dampen storm surges, while others would prefer to see aquaculture or sandy beaches in their place.

"They help protect coastlines, communities from sea-level rise and hurricanes," she says, adding that such a "service" is worth millions, in some cases billions, of dollars.

"You can monetize that." But she says such numbers cannot always cover the true cost of harming a resource. "What's the cultural value of the mangrove forest to an indigenous community who lives in Belize? Priceless," she continues.

Ruckelshaus says the best way to assign value to ecosystems is to get all the interested parties around a table. "If you articulate and

quantify where the most value is for each stakeholder, often you don't have as many trade-offs as you think," she says. When you scale things up, the numbers are eye-popping. Some \$44 trillion (37 trillion euros) of annual economic value generation—half of the world's gross domestic product—is moderately or highly dependent on nature, according to the World Economic Forum.

Using the natural capital as the guiding principle, proponents favor integrating natural resources into the calculation of a country's wealth. "This is the first step to integrating biodiversity in national strategies and plans and to bring about real change, thanks to

search results.

The row has centered on claims that Google has used this content in its search results without adequate compensation, despite the seismic shift of global advertising revenues towards the search giant over the past two decades. In April last year, the French competition authority ordered Google to negotiate "in good faith" with media groups after it refused to comply with a 2019 European Union law governing digital copyright.

The so-called "neighboring rights" aim to ensure that news publishers are compensated when their work is shown on websites, search engines and social media platforms. Last September, French news publishers including Agence France-Presse (AFP) filed a complaint with regulators, saying Google was refusing to move forward on paying to display content in web searches.

While Google insists it has made progress, the French regulator said the company's behavior "indicates a deliberate, elaborate and systematic lack of respect" for its order to negotiate in good faith.

The Competition Authority rebuked Google for failing to "have a specific discussion" with media

rate a full percentage point higher than the ECB's target of two percent and to a level last reached in November 2011, though economists insist the hike is linked to effects of the coronavirus pandemic and will be short-lived.

The August inflation rate was mainly pushed higher by a 15.4 percent rise in energy prices, which compared to a 14.3 percent rise a month earlier. Jack Allen-Reynolds, senior economist at Capital Economics, said that inflation in the 19-member eurozone could rise "even further in the coming months."

"But this is due to temporary forces that should fade next year, leaving headline and core inflation well below two percent by the end of 2022," he said. The European Central Bank has for now set aside any concerns over the rise in consumer prices and says it will continue its long-running stimulus policies to help stoke an economic recovery.

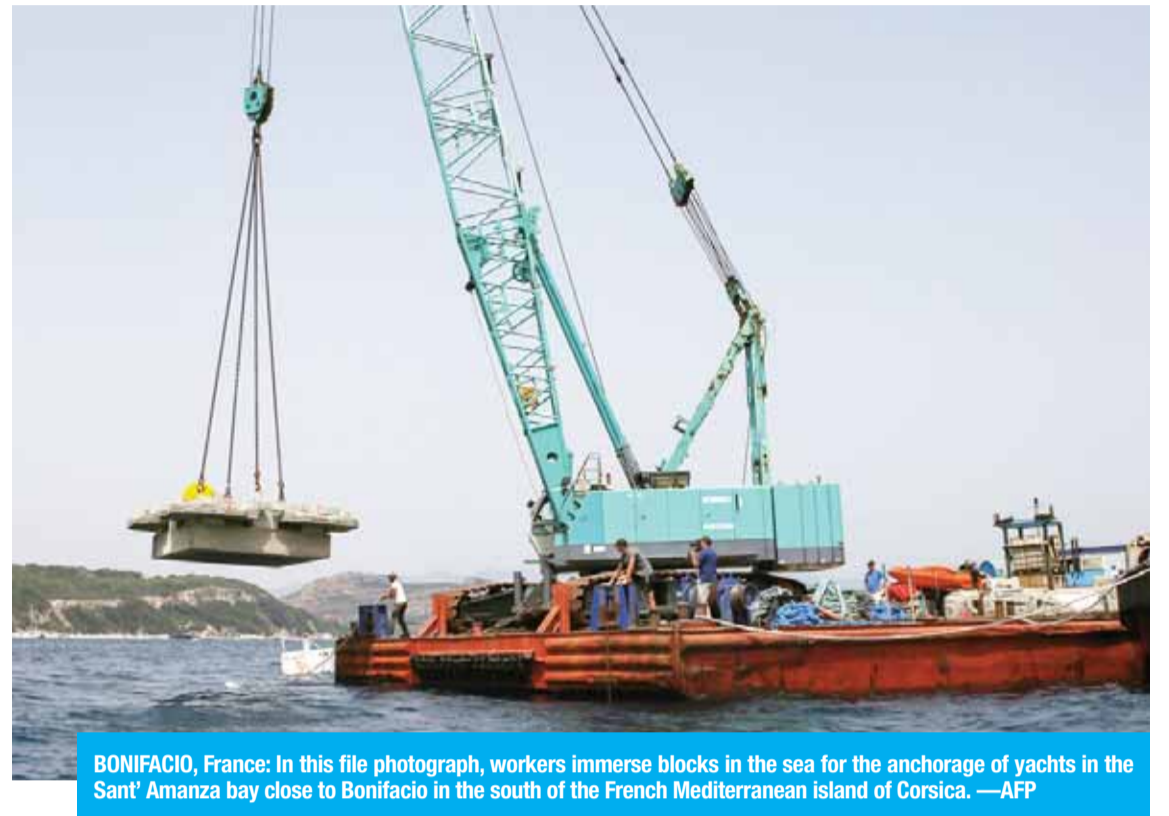
in 2021, after a forecast in March of 4.8 percent.

The Mexican economy shrank 8.5 percent in 2020, according to official figures, in the worst slump since the Great Depression some nine decades ago. In its quarterly inflation report, the central bank said that the latest upgrade was mainly due to a better than expected second quarter, when the economy grew 19.5 percent year-on-year.

Progress in Mexico's coronavirus vaccination program and the relaxation of restrictions on economic activities helped to boost growth, it said. The central bank said that this year's growth could miss or exceed its central forecast within a range of 5.7-6.7 percent.

Suisse, who posed as potential investors to assess the quality of advice from banks on sustainable financial investments. The investigation found bank advisers only asked prospective investors whether sustainability was important for them in half of the interviews. When prospective investors asked for investments that are climate-friendly and compatible with the Paris Agreement they encountered some bank advisers unfamiliar with the 2015 pact on limiting global warming.

As for the so-called climate-friendly funds that were put forward, Greenpeace said they were barely more so than conventional investments after close analysis. "None of the financial investment products put forward as climate-friendly could certify that only investments



BONIFACIO, France: In this file photograph, workers immerse blocks in the sea for the anchorage of yachts in the Sant' Amanza bay close to Bonifacio in the south of the French Mediterranean island of Corsica. —AFP

clear targets and indicators," said Girouard. But the concept remains controversial for some.

In 2018 British writer and environmentalist George Monbiot argued against the idea, which he said "reinforces the notion that nature has no value unless you can extract cash from it". French author, environmentalist and member of the European Parliament Aurore Lalucq agrees. "We don't need to give a price to bees—we need to outlaw the pesticides that kill them," she said. She believes that leg-

islation, not financial incentive, will work best to protect remaining ecosystems.

"We need to regulate, make practices illegal and invest in green infrastructure and biodiversity," she said. Ruckelshaus acknowledges that the monetary value system has its limitations and that government regulation remains crucial. "Valuing nature... gives everybody the same information but it doesn't guarantee that everyone will make the decision to protect nature," she said. —AFP

Google to appeal \$590m French fine in copyright row

PARIS: Google yesterday said it is appealing a decision by France's competition watchdog to hand it a 500-million-euro (\$590 million) fine in a row with news outlets over the use of their content under EU copyright rules. "We disagree with some of the legal elements, and consider the amount of the fine to be disproportionate compared to the efforts we have put in place to reach a deal and respect the new law," Sebastien Missoffe, head of Google France, said in a statement.

The fine, issued by the French Competition Authority in July, was the biggest in the agency's history for a failure to comply with one of its rulings. The watchdog said Google had failed to negotiate "in good faith" with media companies in a long-running legal battle over the internet giant's use of snippets of articles, photos and videos in



PARIS: A man takes a picture with his mobile phone of the logo of the US multinational technology and Internet-related services company Google as he visits the Vivattech startups and innovation fair, in Paris. —AFP

companies about neighboring rights during negotiations over its Google Showcase news service, which launched late last year. Missoffe insisted yesterday that Google "recognizes neighboring rights, and we remain committed to signing agreements in France". —AFP

Legal screws tighten for Google, Apple

PARIS: David Barnard owes his entire livelihood to Apple. In 2008, he sold his car to start a company building apps for the fledgling iPhone. He's since found success making what he self-deprecatingly calls "boring" apps, including ones that check the weather or help drivers monitor their gas use.

But his conflicting feelings sum up a growing debate — playing out in courts and parliaments around the world — over whether both Apple and Google are abusing their monopoly over the app market. In a world first, South Korean MPs passed a law Tuesday banning the two tech giants from forcing app developers to use their payment systems.

Until now, those restrictions have allowed Apple to take a cut of up to 30 percent from payments made inside apps downloaded via the App Store, and Google to do the same through its Play Store. The tech giants, whose operating systems run on 99 percent of the world's smartphones, have argued this is fair recompense for providing the platforms that allow apps to be downloaded in the first place.

And to some extent, Barnard agrees. "Apple enabled me to build a business, which I'm incredibly grateful for," he said from his home in Texas. "But it comes with some pretty big trade-offs." Barnard said he had witnessed frustrating cases of companies building clever apps, only for Apple to release similar features that work better with the phone's technology "in ways that developers can't compete with".

And with tens of billions of dollars floating through Apple and Google's payment systems as apps become increasingly integrated into people's shopping and entertainment habits, the commission charges have come in for particularly fierce opposition.

Epic legal battles

The fees are at the heart of a bitter lawsuit between Apple and Epic Games, maker of the phenomenally successful video game Fortnite. The game lets players spend real money on digital items like clothing and weapons. It sounds frivolous, but the trial revealed that this translated to at least \$100 million collected by Apple.

Furious over these lost profits, Epic is also suing both Apple and Google in Australia and has filed complaints with EU and UK competition authorities, in what competition lawyer Pierre Zelenko described as a "worldwide battle" against the tech giants. "They're piling on the pressure on multiple fronts to have more chances of a recognized authority coming out in their favor," the Linklaters lawyer said. Epic are not the only challengers taking on the app market overlords.

In July, 37 US states banded together to sue Google, alleging that the Play Store represents an illegal monopoly. They claim Google used various strategies to prevent viable competitors to the Play Store emerging, including offering to pay Samsung to make its Galaxy Store less appealing. Consumers are meanwhile waging class actions against both companies in the US and UK, while France's competition authority has joined forces with an alliance of start-ups to take Apple to court. —AFP

Eurozone jobless rate falls to 7.6%

FRANKFURT: Unemployment in the eurozone continues to fall, Eurostat reported yesterday, dropping to 7.6 percent in July from 7.8 percent the month before and from 8.4 percent over the year. The seasonally-adjusted rate in the broader European Union, including countries not in the single currency bloc, also fell by 0.2 percentage points over the month, dropping to 6.9 percent in July.

The agency estimates that 14.613 million European Union residents were out of work in July.

Meanwhile, eurozone inflation surged to three percent in August, according to official data released Tuesday, as widespread shortages, rising energy costs and one-off effects sent consumer prices in Europe sharply higher. The rise takes the

Mexican economy to grow 6.2% in 2021: Central bank

MEXICO CITY: Mexico's economy will grow by 6.2 percent this year after a deep pandemic-induced recession in 2020, the central bank predicted Tuesday, in the latest upgrade to its forecast. In June, the Bank of Mexico had predicted growth of 6.0 percent for Latin America's second-largest economy

Greenpeace accuses Swiss banks of 'greenwashing'

GENEVA: Greenpeace yesterday accused Swiss banks of practicing "greenwashing" after an investigation found that they often failed to promote sustainable investments and their products on offer weren't very climate-friendly. The NGO's Swiss branch sent people into 19 Swiss financial institutions, including giants UBS and Credit



FRANKFURT: Unemployment in the eurozone continues to fall, Eurostat reported yesterday, dropping to 7.6 percent in July from 7.8 percent the month before and from 8.4 percent over the year.

Before the summer break, ECB chief Christine Lagarde said the ECB would show "patience" in helping the 19-nation currency club through the health crisis, signaling that key interest rates would stay lower. —AFP

"Considering the persistence of some disruptions in global supply chains and the recent increase in the number of COVID-19 infections, there is still high uncertainty about the rate of the recovery in economic activity," it cautioned. Inflation is expected to remain above 5.0 percent until early 2022 before moving down towards the official target of around 3.0 percent in early 2023, the central bank forecast. Inflation stood at 5.81 percent in July on an annual basis—outstripping the target rate for a fourth straight month. The central bank has raised its benchmark interest rate twice this year, to 4.5 percent, in an effort to contain growing price pressures. —AFP

that comply with the climate objectives of the Paris Agreement are included in the portfolio," Greenpeace said in its report.

It called problematic that for almost 60 percent of the funds analyzed—because they were recommended as climate friendly—the sustainability criteria was only applied to part of the portfolio. "These results are further proof that the Swiss financial center is practicing greenwashing with what it calls 'sustainable finance,'" it said. The investigation comes just months after Greenpeace screened more than 50 Swiss and Luxembourg funds and found that funds labeled as "sustainable", "fail to invest more capital in a sustainable economy than conventional funds." —AFP

KAMCO GCC Markets Monthly Report

GCC indices touch 7-year high led by Insurance and Banks

Boursa Kuwait equities eke out gains in August

KUWAIT: The MSCI GCC index posted gains for the tenth consecutive month during August-2021 backed by gains in key large-cap sectors during the month. The index closed at a 7-year high level on 17-August-2021 but as investors booked profits, the index receded towards the end of the month to close at 708.48 points, registering a monthly gain of 4.3 percent. This further pushed YTD-21 gains to 28.6 percent for the aggregate GCC index.

Market performance during the month was broadly positive as barring Oman the remaining six exchanges in the GCC posted monthly gains. UAE exchanges reported the highest gains during the month, both recording gains of 5.0 percent. Qatar and Kuwaiti benchmarks followed with monthly gains of 3.2 percent and 3.1 percent, respectively. The gains in Abu Dhabi once again pushed the YTD-21 returns for the benchmark to the highest level among key global markets with a gain of 52.3 percent. Saudi Arabia's TASI also showed solid gains of 30.3 percent since the start of the year followed by Kuwait's All Share Index with a gain of 22.4 percent. Qatar and Oman were the only benchmarks with single digit YTD-21 gains, while the rest of GCC indices showed double digit performance.

The sector performance chart showed mixed returns during the month but highlighted gains for key large-cap sectors. The chart also highlighted the effects of waning COVID-19 cases in the region as investors booked profits on sectors that were resilient during the pandemic resulting in a decline in these sectoral indices during August-2021. Pharma & Biotech witnessed the biggest decline of 12.6 percent during the month followed by second consecutive month of declines for the Food & Beverage and Consumer Durable & Apparel sectors at 3.5 percent and 2.7 percent, respectively. Gainers, on the other hand, saw Insurance and Banks at the top with returns of 7.1 percent and 6.9 percent, respectively.

Kuwaiti equity market was up for the sixth consecutive month during August-2021, but unlike the previous months that showed a broad-based positive performance, the returns during August-2021 was mainly led by large-cap stocks. This was reflected in the 3.7 percent return for the Kuwait's Premier Market index, whereas the Main 50 Index and the Main Market indices registered gains of 1.1 percent and 1.3 percent, respectively. The net impact was a gain of 3.1 percent for the All Share Market Index. Monthly gains during August-2021 further strengthened the exchange's YTD-21 gains retaining its position as the third-best performing market in the GCC since the start of the year with a return of 22.4 percent for the All Share Index. In terms of sector performance, the Consumer Services index once again topped during August-2021 with a return of 5.3 percent followed by the three financial indices i.e. Banks, Insurance and Financial Services with gains of 4.0 percent, 3.9 percent and 3.6 percent, respectively. On the decliners side, the Consumer Goods index witnessed the biggest decline of 4.1 percent during the month followed by Oil & Gas and Technology indices with declines of 3.8 percent and 3.7 percent, respectively. However, despite the decline, the Technology index continues to be the best performing index since the start of the year with a return of 45.0 percent followed by Financial Services and Industrial indices with gains of 35.5 percent and

30.8 percent, respectively.

Trading activity witnessed recovery in August-2021 from the steep decline witnessed during July-2021 but remained subdued as compared to the last few months. Total volume of shares traded during the month increased by 56.8 percent to 6.8Bn shares as compared to 4.3 billion shares traded during July-2021. Monthly value traded witnessed an even stronger recovery of 69.3 percent to reach KD 1.3 billion in August-2021 as compared to KD 751.9 million in July-2021 also reflecting higher trades in large-cap stocks during the month.

On the economic front, Kuwait's budget for the previous fiscal year that ended in March-2021 showed record deficits of KD 10.8 billion. The deficits increased by 175 percent as compared to the previous fiscal year mainly led by the steep decline in oil prices during the pandemic last year, in addition to impact on other sectors. As a result, revenues declined by 38.9 percent to KD 10.5 billion while expenses increased by 0.7 percent to KD 21.3 billion. Oil revenues declined by 42.8 percent during the fiscal year to KD 8.8 billion whereas non-oil revenue showed a much smaller decline of 6.5 percent to KD 1.7 billion. On the expenditure



Large cap stocks make broad-based advances

side, wages and subsidies accounted for 73 percent of the total expenditure whereas capital and infrastructure spending accounted by 9 percent.

Following the budget announcement, the Kuwaiti cabinet announced plans to cut spending by at least 10 percent by cutting spending in various areas including financial incentives and rents.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Stock Exchange reported its eighth consecutive month of gains during August-2021 amid sector performance during the month. The index traded above the 11,000 points mark to close the month at 11,319.2 points, registering a monthly gain of 2.8 percent. The benchmark started the month on a positive note with consistent gains but showed weakness during mid-month only to recover towards the end of the month. The YTD-21 performance got further boost with the monthly gains and stood at 30.3 percent at the end of the month, the second-highest in the GCC and one of the best globally. The monthly stock performance chart was topped by recently listed Tanniah Food with a gain of 67.2 percent followed by Leejam Sports and Bupa Arabia with gains of 26.6 percent and 21.0 percent, respectively. On the decliners chart, Gulf General Coop Insurance topped with a decline of 14.9 percent.

Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange

The performance of the Abu Dhabi Exchange continued to remain positive during August-2021

India reports record quarterly growth after COVID slump

NEW DELHI: India's economy expanded by a record 20.1 percent between April and June, official data showed, boosted by the manufacturing and construction sectors as growth rebounded from last year's strict months-long pandemic lockdown. It was the biggest growth on record since New Delhi started publishing quarterly statistics in 1996, and was broadly expected by analysts after a historic 24.4 percent contraction in the same period last year when most factories ground to a halt.

Exports grew 39 percent compared to the same quarter last year, contributing 23.7 percent of the period's GDP, indicating strong global demand for Indian goods including petroleum products, gems and jewelry. "Economic activity has been reviving since July and has picked up momentum," Kotak Mahindra Bank

senior economist Upasna Bhardwaj told AFP.

"As the vaccination pace picks up, we expect momentum to pick up further, although we remain wary on the evolution of Delta variant cases." Compared to the previous quarter in 2021 however, Asia's third-largest economy contracted 16.9 percent, according to an AFP estimate, reflecting the impact of a record-breaking surge in virus infections and deaths in April and May.

The government does not release quarter-on-quarter economic data. ICRA ratings agency chief economist Aditi Nayar warned that while manufacturing and construction, as well as private consumption and investment, helped to drive growth, the sectors "remained well below their pre-COVID levels". She added that consumer confidence needed to improve

for contact-intensive sectors to experience a sustainable recovery.

India's growth outlook has meanwhile been revised downwards by analysts amid uncertainty over how badly the economy has been hit. The International Monetary Fund in July downgraded India's annual growth forecast to 9.5 percent for the year to March 2022 from its previous projection of 12.5 percent.

Despite this, the South Asian nation of 1.3 billion people is expected to grow faster than any other country in 2021 due to the previous year's record contraction of 7.3 percent.

New virus wave fears

The Reserve Bank of India has maintained an accommodative stance on monetary policy to support the economy even as inflation pressures rise. There are fears that a new wave of coronavirus infections could hit India in the coming months.

Cases have been rising above 40,000 nationwide over the past week, fuelled by a jump in infections in the southern state of Kerala blamed on a major local festival. Kerala has since imposed a night curfew from next week to stem the rise in cases. The pace of vaccinations across the country has risen significantly in recent weeks, with authorities giving more than 10 million COVID-19 jabs in a single day on Tuesday for only the second time. India has recorded more than 32 million infections and nearly 439,000 deaths, the second highest in the world after the United States.

But experts say that due to under-reporting, India's true toll could be much higher. —AFP

Boursa Kuwait Monthly Sector Performance



Source: Kuwait Stock Exchange, Kamco Invest Research

Monthly Value Traded (KWD Mn)



recording gains for the eleventh consecutive month. The index gained 5.0 percent during the month, the biggest monthly gain in the GCC during August-2021, to close at 7,684.61 points. With consecutive positive performance since the start of the year, the ADX index showed one of the highest returns globally at 52.3 percent. Gains during the month was led by positive performance across all sectors on the exchange. This included double digit gains for the Industrial index which recorded monthly returns of 17.5 percent that was mainly led by 46.7 percent gain in shares of Arkan Building Materials further supported by gains of 27.1 percent and 22.7 percent in shares of RAK Ceramics and Gulf Pharmaceuticals, respectively. Shares of Arkan Building Materials gained after the company's shareholders approved the company's acquisition of Emirates Steel that was announced in June-2021. The Energy sector was next with a gain of 8.7 percent mainly led by 23.6 percent gain in shares of Dana Gas, followed by the Investment and Financial Services and Consumer Staples indices with gains of 8.3 percent and 7.2 percent, respectively. Large cap sectors like Banks and Telecom showed gains of 3.2 percent and 4.6 percent, respectively.

Dubai Financial Market

The DFM index bounced back after declining in July-2021 to show a gain of 5.0 percent during August-2021 sharing the top spot with ADX in terms of index performance in the GCC during August-21. The DFMGI benchmark closed the month at 2,902.97 points after declining only on six trading sessions during the month. In terms of YTD-21 performance, the index showed gains of 16.5 percent at the end of August-2021, the fourth highest in the GCC. The sector performance chart also reflected the solid gains in the aggregate benchmark with all the sectors, barring Telecom index that showed marginal decline of 0.3 percent, showing gains during the month.

The Transportation index topped the monthly performance chart with a gain of 8.8 percent followed by Services and Real Estate & Construction indices with gains of 6.5 percent and 6.4 percent, respectively. The surge in the Transportation index were backed by gains in all three constituent stocks. Aramex recorded the biggest gain in the index at 13.0 percent followed by Gulf Navigation and Air Arabia with gains of 7.6 percent and 4.4 percent, respectively.

Qatar Exchange

The Qatar Stock Exchange witnessed gains for

the second consecutive month during August-2021. The QE 20 index closed the month at 11,092.9 points witnessing a gain of 3.2 percent, in-line with the performance of the Qatar All Share Index that closed at 3,526.4 points. Gains during the month pushed YTD-21 returns for the QE 20 Index to 6.3 percent, the lowest in the GCC while the QE All Share Index showed relatively higher gains of 10.2 percent. The sector performance chart for August-2021 was topped by the Banks & Financial Services index with a gain of 5.5 percent followed by Consumer Goods & Services and Real Estate indices with gains of 2.3 percent and 2.2 percent, respectively. Gains for the Banks & Financial Services index came after only two stocks, i.e. Doha Bank and Inma Holding recorded monthly declines, whereas the rest of the sector was in the green. Shares of Commercial Bank Qatar recorded the biggest gain in the sector at 9.8 percent followed by Qatar Islamic Bank and Qatar Oman for Investment with gains of 6.3 percent and 5.7 percent, respectively.

Bahrain Bourse

The Bahrain Bourse continued to report gains for the fifth consecutive month during August-2021. The Bahrain All Share Index breached the psychological mark of 1,600 points and closed at 1,645.41 points. The index touched a 17-month high level of 1,666.54 points on 26-August-2021 followed by declines during the last three trading sessions. Gains during August-2021 further pushed the exchange's YTD-21 returns that now stands at 10.4 percent. The monthly sector performance chart showed gains for the bulk of the indices. The Financials index topped during the month with a return of 5.0 percent followed by Materials and Real Estate indices with gains of 1.8 percent and 1.1 percent, respectively. On the decliners side, the Communications Services index topped with a decline of 7.0 percent followed by Industrials index that fell by 0.6 percent.

Muscat Securities Market

The Omani stock market declined for the second consecutive month and was the only market in the GCC to close in the red during August-2021. The index showed declining trend since the start of the month only to show partial recovery during the last week. The index traded below the critical support level of 4,000 points during the month and closed at 3,966.7 points with a monthly decline of 1.6 percent. With decline during August-2021, the MSX 30 index now shows the second-smallest YTD-2021 gain in the GCC at 8.4 percent.

NBK reveals 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 Ahmad Nabeel Ahmad Alnaqeb as the winner of Al-Jawhara Monthly prize worth KD 125,000 for August 2021.

On the other hand, NBK announced the names of the winners of Al-Jawhara weekly draws worth KD 5,000 each including: Narjes Issa Husain Yousef Al-Yousefi, Nadiyah Khaled Al-Abdulghafour, Alaa Ibrahim Abdulrahman Alturki and Fadel Mohamad Issa Al Rasheed.

The draw was held at NBK head office 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. 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 of the next lucky winners, and if no withdrawal or transfers occur on the account during the holding period, customers will receive an additional chance to enter the draw for every KD 50 held in the account, doubling their chance to win.

On this occasion, Hisham Al-Nusif, Deputy General Manager of Consumer Banking, National Bank of Kuwait, said: "At NBK, we are committed to reward our customers through a range of special, exceptional prizes that meet their expectations and reflect our keenness to continuously communicate with



them and to meet their needs, as part of our endeavors to enrich their banking experience." Al-Jawhara Account and the prizes it offers are one of the key pillars of our strategy to encourage our customers to save, as part of the efforts to achieve financial inclusion, 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, in line with our Digital Transformation Strategy that provides our customers with integrated banking experience by enabling them to make all their banking transactions without visiting branches.

Since 2012, National Bank of Kuwait has rewarded loyal customers with a total worth of 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 that suit their expectations all year round.



NEW DELHI: India's exports grew 39 percent compared to the same quarter last year, contributing 23.7 percent of the period's GDP.

Lifestyle | Features

HAS THE WILDLIFE 'RED LIST'
LET AFRICA'S BIG CATS DOWN?

Lions and cheetahs are closer to extinction than the authoritative Red List of Threatened Species suggests, according to conservation scientists who warn that sharp drops in populations could be going undetected. Africa's marquee big cats are currently listed as "vulnerable", but with declines in lion numbers close to the threshold for a higher risk category and heated debate over how many cheetahs are actually left in the wild, experts are asking if this is enough. An "uplisting" does not guarantee protection,

the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List has classified species along a spectrum from "least concern" and "near threatened" to "vulnerable", "endangered", "critically endangered" and "extinct in the wild".

Broadly, if at least half the population of a species is lost within three generations, it moves to a more threatened category. Last stop on the slide to oblivion is "extinct". Threatened status can trigger national protective measures, restrictions

Catastrophic declines

Overall, the cheetah's global numbers were estimated to have dropped about 30 percent to roughly 7,000 over the space of three generations, or 15 years. To put that in perspective, the ratio of people to cheetahs on Earth is roughly a million-to-one. While steep, the decline was still well short of the 50-percent threshold for an uplisting to "endangered". But that assessment is likely over-optimistic, scientists say, because the data comes overwhelmingly from protected areas, such as national parks and game reserves, even though that is not where most cheetahs are found.

About three-quarters of the big cat's range—and an estimated two-thirds of its population—is in unprotected zones where the solitary feline must contend with scarce prey, fragmented habitat and deadly encounters with pastoralists defending their livestock. "We're measuring population decline in the area where they're actually doing best," Durant said. More long-term, the picture is even bleaker.

The cheetah was once a top predator across most of Africa, the Middle East, central Asia and India, but today it occupies only a sliver—less than 10 percent—of its historic range. And since 1900, their numbers have dropped by more than 90 percent. "These are catastrophic declines," said Durant, a professor in conservation science at the Zoological Society of London. Lions have not fared better, even if their population in the wild exceeds 20,000, said Funston, senior director of the lion program at conservation NGO Panthera. In the 2014 assessment, to which he contributed, their global population was found to have dropped by 43 percent over three generations — 21 years—missing a reclassification threshold by a whisker.

Hunted

Unlike cheetahs, lions live in groups, or prides, and almost exclusively within protected areas. But that doesn't mean they are always easy to locate. "Every time we go and look in any real detail, we find that there are fewer lions than we thought, typically three, four, even ten-fold fewer," Funston told AFP. In 2017, Funston led an intensive survey of two large national



In this file photo a lion rests in an enclosure at the sanctuary in Jerash, some 50 kilometers north of the Jordanian capital.

parks in southeastern Angola where conservation authorities had put the population at about 1,000.

"Actual numbers were so low we couldn't derive a proper scientific estimate," he said. "We concluded that there were 10 to 30 lions left." The top driver of lion decline is industrial-scale bush-meat poaching, either of the lions themselves or their prey. Trophy hunting, habitat loss and conflict with humans also menace the animals.

'Influencer' effect

Since 2014, new threats have emerged. "Particularly in southern Africa, we are suddenly seeing an increase in the poaching of lions for body parts"—especially teeth, claws and bones—to supply a booming market in Southeast Asia and China for bogus health and virility elixirs, Funston said. This illegal traffic has been spurred on by South Africa's decade-old and controversial commercial captive lion-breeding industry, according to a recent report he co-authored.

From 2011 to 2019, poaching for body parts—evident from the dismembered carcasses left behind—accounted for more than 60 percent of all lion mortality within Limpopo National Park in Mozambique, with a clear increase from 2014 onwards. For cheetahs, the new threat comes from the Gulf states, where a demand for pets

has fuelled a brisk trade in cubs, especially from the horn of Africa, where a subspecies teeters on the brink of extinction.

Social networks are driving a demand for live big cats as well. "Influencers are flying out of Dubai to get photographed with a cheetah or lion to boost Instagram traffic," Durant said, highlighting a recent expose by the website Bellingcat. One key to protection is investment. In central and western Africa, spending is only about \$50-\$100 annually per square kilometer, according to Funston. Little wonder, he said, that both regions have lost more than 90 percent of their large wildlife.

In southern Africa however, where lion populations have gone up, \$500 to \$800 is invested annually per square kilometer. Craig Hilton-Taylor, who heads the IUCN's Red List Unit, defended its classification process as "robust" and said experts looked at a full range of issues.

But he acknowledged that without the efforts of southern African countries, "the lion would have been uplisted from 'vulnerable' to 'endangered'." "If the experts do the assessment again, and project forward rather than just looking in the past, they might be able to get it over the threshold," he told AFP. — AFP



In this file photo cheetah Afra and her seven weeks old cubs are seen in their enclosure at Schoenbrunn Zoo in Vienna. — AFP photos



In this file photo a young cheetah rests at the 'Safari de Peaugres' zoo park near Peaugres, southeastern France.

they say, but it would more accurately reflect their dire situation and could channel resources to help them survive in the wild, where they are most recently menaced by poaching and the pet trade.

The stone lions guarding Beijing's Forbidden City, the bronze ones at Admiral Nelson's feet on Trafalgar Square, the constellation Leo and the emblems of a score of top European football clubs all attest to the cultural significance of these majestic creatures. But as apex predators, they are also lynchpins in their ecosystems—as South African conservationist Paul Funston puts it, the "big daddy holding a lot of things in place." For half a cen-

tury, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List has classified species along a spectrum from "least concern" and "near threatened" to "vulnerable", "endangered", "critically endangered" and "extinct in the wild".

Broadly, if at least half the population of a species is lost within three generations, it moves to a more threatened category. Last stop on the slide to oblivion is "extinct". Threatened status can trigger national protective measures, restrictions



Capybaras eat grass next to a street in a gated community in Tigre, Buenos Aires province. — AFP photos



Capybaras are pictured by a woman while eating grass next to a street in a gated community in Tigre.

In Argentina, giant rodents vie with the rich for top real estate

Families of a giant rodent native to South America have been invading a luxury gated community in Argentina, highlighting the country's controversial environmental and social policies. Nordelta is a 1,600 hectare (3,950 acre) luxury private urban complex built on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, on a wetland from the Parana river that is the capybara's natural habitat. Many Nordelta residents have complained about capybara's ruining manicured lawns, biting pets and causing traffic accidents.

gist Sebastian di Martino, conservation director at the Rewilding Argentina foundation, told AFP. "Now that the damage has been done, the residents need to reach a certain level of coexistence with the carpinchos," said Di Martino. Built 20 years ago, Nordelta has homes, offices, a shopping center, schools, a church, a synagogue and an artificial lake that is home to aquatic birds.

But since work to build a clinic began on the last remaining piece of natural land, many residents have noted a sudden capybara "invasion." "Carpinchos were always here. We always saw them from time to time. But three or four months ago (builders) went for their last remaining stronghold and the stampede began," Perla Paggi, a Nordelta resident and capybara activist, told AFP.

Nordelta and similar luxury developments on wetlands have also been a controversial topic in Argentina. As well as eating into the capybara's natural habitat, large scale development of the wetland

the capybara as a hero of the working classes.

Lack of predators

Di Martino says the proliferation of capybaras is harmful to the environment, but that too is the fault of humans. Capybaras are prey for jaguars, pumas, foxes, wild cats and wild dogs but all of these animals are now virtually extinct in Argentina. "It's happening all over the country, in urbanized and non-urbanized areas. It is caused by the alteration and degradation of ecosystems. We've extinguished a ton of species that were their natural predators," Di Martino told AFP.

"The carpincho needs a predator to reduce its population and also make it afraid," said Di Martino. "When there's a herbivore without a predator threatening it, it doesn't hide and can spend all day eating, thereby degrading the vegetation which traps less carbon and contributes to climate change." In the wild, capybaras live between eight and 10 years and give birth to litters of up to six young, once a year.

Not everyone in Nordelta views them as a nuisance. In fact they have become the main attraction in the residential complex. Drivers slow down to take pictures of them, while children seek them out at nightfall for selfies. Some Nordelta residents want to create a natural reserve for the capybaras to live in. "We have to learn to live beside them, they're not aggressive animals," said Paggi.

"A 20 to 30 hectare reserve is enough to maintain diversity. They are defenseless animals, we corner them, we take away their habitat and now we complain because they're invading." Di Martino, though, says a natural reserve would change nothing. "It's complicated, you need to keep them away from children and pets. And then you're going to have to find a way to reduce the population, maybe moving them to other places." — AFP



Capybaras are seen on the grass in a gated community in Tigre.

Also known as a carpincho or chiguire, the capybara is the largest rodent in the world and can measure up to 1.35 meters (53 inches) in length and reach 80 kilograms (176 pounds) in weight. "Nordelta is an exceptionally rich wetland that should never have been touched," biolo-

means the soil can no longer absorb heavy rains, which then end up flooding poorer surrounding neighborhoods. In politically polarized Argentina, leftists have long attacked Nordelta as an example of elite exploitation, while jokingly presenting

Universal Studios makes China debut with soft opening

Visitors got a sneak peek at Universal Studios' first theme park in China yesterday as the Beijing attraction had a soft opening, drawing queues from dawn. The park hosts rides inspired by blockbuster film franchises including Harry Potter and Jurassic World and is part of a larger Universal-themed resort that includes two hotels and a shopping street. Liu Muhan, a 26-year-old university lecturer who dressed up in a witch costume for the occasion, said she was looking forward to the Harry Potter-themed area and felt lucky to get in.

"I've been a hardcore Harry Potter fan for more than 20 years," Liu told AFP. "I've wanted to come here for a long time." Yesterday's trial run was open only to visitors holding special corporate invitations. The park promises water shows and close encounters with an animatronic dinosaur, while facial recognition cameras allow visitors to open storage lockers, pay for meals and join express queues for rides without physical tickets. The Beijing attraction, the US media conglomerate's fifth park globally, was first announced in 2014 after receiving approval from Chinese authorities.

The city has since opened a dedicated subway station for the park. Searches for the theme park on the popular Ctrip travel booking site soared



People queue to enter the Universal Studios Beijing theme park.

more than 800 percent on Monday after the opening date was announced, state media reported. The park is expected to see a surge of visitors during the upcoming week-long National Day holidays in October, as pent-up tourism demand from a summer marred by COVID-19 lockdowns spills into autumn. Visitors yesterday were required to declare they were not experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms and had to go through temperature cameras to enter.



People queue to enter the Universal Studios Beijing theme park during an invitation-only test run in Beijing yesterday, ahead of its opening on September 20. — AFP photos

Lifestyle | Music & Movies



A girl walks past a mural showing an image of the rapper 'RM' from the K-pop boy band sensation BTS, at the Goyang Tourist Information Centre in Goyang, northwest of Seoul. — AFP photos



Copies of the book titled 'Early Death' are displayed at a bookstore in Seoul after the leader of K-pop sensation BTS turned the out-of-print book into a bestseller in South Korea.

BTS effect resurrects out-of-print book on early death

The leader of K-pop sensation BTS has turned an out-of-print book into a bestseller in South Korea in just days, as fans flocked to get a copy after he was seen reading it. The trailblazing septet have reached global superstardom, with their single "Dynamite" entering the Billboard Hot 100 at number one last year, making them the first South Korean act to top the US chart. They are credited with generating bil-

ions for the South Korean economy, and last year their label HYBE made a high-profile stock market debut.

A video released in August showed the group's 26-year-old leader RM eating a bowl of noodles with a book titled "Early Death" on the table next to him. The book, which has been out of print for more than 10 years, is about the lives and work of a dozen Korean artists who passed away at

a young age. The boy band's fans, who are known as ARMY, besieged the book's publisher Hyohyung Books trying to obtain copies, and within days the firm announced a re-publication.

"Now 'Early Death' has gained a new life and will be reprinted for the first time in 18 years," the publisher said on its Instagram account, adding: "RM and ARMY, thank you." Sales have soared and it was the

bestselling book in the art category last week, according to South Korea's largest bookstore chain Kyobo Book Centre. RM is known to be an avid reader and has previously recommended books to his fans. Earlier this year, a book by a conceptual artist titled "The Other Side of Things" sold out across the country a day after RM shared two photos of it online. — AFP



In this file photo Canadian actor Simu Liu arrives for the world premiere of Marvel's "Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings" at the El Capitan theatre in Hollywood, California.

Marvel eyes China with 'Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings'

In Hollywood's latest attempt to score in the huge-but highly restrictive-Chinese market, an Asian actor has been cast as a leading Marvel superhero for the first time. "Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings," out on Friday, takes the 25th installment in the wildly popular Marvel film series into mythical China, where enormous beasts, mysticism and kung fu collide for a tale about the difficult relationship between a son and his father. The titular son-played by relatively unknown Chinese-Canadian actor Simu Liu-fled his controlling dad as a teenager, after being sculpted into a deadly assassin, and washes up in the United States.



In this file photo Actress Awkwafina arrives for the world premiere of Marvel's "Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings" at the El Capitan theatre in Hollywood, California.

There he lives anonymously, palling around with the underachieving Katy, played by Awkwafina ("Crazy Rich Asians"), until his father-Hong Kong superstar Tony Leung-sends a sinister gang to chase him home. "Shang-Chi" locates itself firmly in the record-grossing Marvel Cinematic Universe series of movies, with an amusing reprisal of Ben Kingsley's washed-up actor Trevor Slattery from "Iron Man 3." Its value for



In this file photo Director Destin Daniel Cretton arrives for the world premiere of Marvel's "Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings" at the El Capitan theatre in Hollywood, California. — AFP photos

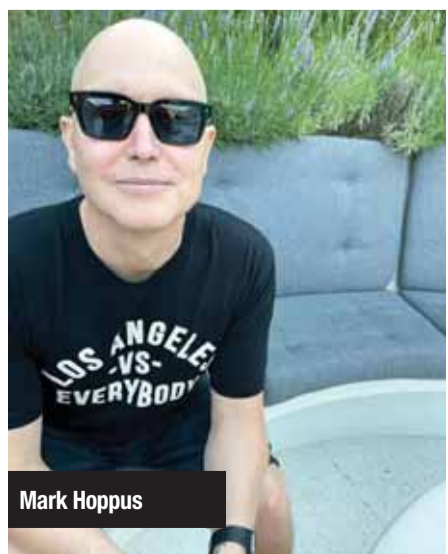
Marvel Studios, and owner Disney, however, was expected to be as a vehicle for expanding into the Chinese market. "It's very moving because it's been a long time coming to have an Asian superhero, and a movie that celebrates not only our culture but our humanity." Asian-American actress Jodi Long told AFP at the film's world premiere in Los Angeles. "And I think that's really important in this time of Covid and xenophobia."

'Stereotype'

Yet despite a predominantly Asian cast, and huge swathes of dialogue in Mandarin-both predicted to be popular among China's cinemagoers-success for "Shang-Chi" is far from guaranteed. Like the previous Marvel film "Black Widow," the film still doesn't have a release date in China, where movie theaters reopening this summer are stocked largely with domestic, patriotic features. As well as protecting Chinese filmmaking, this could reflect growing discontent with Disney-owned Marvel, whose next big superhero outing "Eternals" is being directed by Beijing-born Chloe Zhao.

Zhao won two Oscars including an historic best director statuette this year for "Nomadland," but her success has been censored in China after a nationalist backlash over years-old interviews in which she appeared to criticize her country of birth. Excitement in China for "Shang-Chi" also appears to be lukewarm among some social media users. "This movie will only deepen the world's stereotype of us," wrote one user on Weibo, China's Twitter-like messaging service.

"Marvel may not want to insult China, but it is a fact that in terms of casting, it has to cater to the American social aesthetic of humiliating China." Another user called it "a poor attempt to mint money from Chinese audiences." On popular review site Duoban-similar to Rotten Tomatoes-one user bemoaned the notion of an Americanized Chinese man returning to his homeland to do battle with his traditionally minded father. "Marvel do you really want to enter China with such a plot?" the user wrote. — AFP



Mark Hoppus

Mark Hoppus' hair is growing back

The Blink-182 star - who revealed in June he's been diagnosed with an aggressive form of lymphoma - lost his locks due to chemotherapy and though his treatment has left him feeling "terrible", he's trying to stay positive and has seen the funny side of the small amount of hair that's emerged on his scalp. Sharing a

Venice Film Festival reclaiming its star-studded mojo

Venice Film Festival returned to the spotlight yesterday with an international roster of blockbuster and auteur movies and Hollywood's jet-set poised to face the cameras. Held on the glitzy, beach-lined Lido, the world's oldest film festival will seek to recover some of the glamour lost last year, when coronavirus kept away many participants, including the most red carpet-worthy celebrities. But with strict anti-COVID measures in place, "La Mostra", as it is known in Italy, will again seek to prove that it is the indispensable springboard for the Oscars, with a first-rate sampling of films from around the globe.

The bar is high this year, after the rival Cannes Film Festival stole some focus in July after cancelling its 2020 competition. But the director of Venice's festival, Alberto Barbera, told AFP the pandemic appeared to have stimulated the creativity of filmmakers, with a particularly high quality of submissions this year. "It's like the difficult circumstances... served to stimulate the creativity of the directors," said Barbera in an interview Tuesday ahead of the opening, as workers were busy putting the final touches to the red carpet. "Many of the directors'

films are among their best," Barbera said. "This means that probably this edition will be one of the strongest of recent years."

Stars are back

A jury led by "Parasite" director Bong Joon-Ho will award one of 21 films in the main competition the coveted Golden Lion top prize during a closing night ceremony on September 11. "Nomadland", which snatched up multiple Oscars, including best film, at the 2020 Academy Awards, was last year's Venice winner, although neither director Chloe Zhao nor leading actress Frances McDormand were able to make the trip to Italy.

This year, things should be different, Barbera said, with more Hollywood talent heading for the festival, more spectators and more worldwide press. Among the stars expected to walk the red carpet over the course of the festival are Kristen Stewart - playing Lady Diana in Pablo Larraín's "Spencer"-Benedict Cumberbatch, Penelope Cruz and Antonio Banderas. — AFP



Director of the 78th Venice Film festival, Alberto Barbera (Bottom) poses with (from left) Jury members of the 78th Venice Film festival, Romanian director Alexander Nanau, Chinese director Chloe Zhao, British actress Cynthia Erivo, South Korean director Bong Joon-ho, Belgian French actress Virginie Efira, Italian director Saverio Costanzo and Canadian actress Sarah Gadon yesterday, during a photocall for the Venezia 78 Competition Jury, on the opening day of the 78th Venice Film Festival at Venice Lido. — AFP



(From left) Italian Spanish actress Aitana Sanchez-Gijon, Spanish actress Milena Smit, Spanish director Pedro Almodovar, Spanish actress Penelope Cruz and Spanish actor Israel Elejalde pose during a photocall for the film 'Madres Paralelas' (Parallel Mothers) on the opening day of the 78th Venice Film Festival, yesterday at Venice Lido. — AFP photos

photo of his scalp following his fifth round of chemo, he wrote on Instagram: "Hahaha. Look at this trash. This is the top of my head right now. This is what God sees when He looks down upon His work and despairs. "Cancer-ass head trying to grow back some hair. Awww. Poor little head. Keep your chin up, fighter. Feeling terrible this week but trying to stay positive and count my blessings."

The 49-year-old rocker has been left exhausted from the treatment and has no plans to stray further than his lounge. He added: "I hope everyone is doing great, staying healthy, and being kind to each other. If anyone needs me, I'll be on the couch for the foreseeable future." In July, Mark shared his joy that the chemotherapy had seemingly had a positive impact for

him. He tweeted: "Scans indicate that the chemo is working! I still have months of treatment ahead, but it's the best possible news. I'm so grateful and confused and also sick from last week's chemo. But the poison the doctors pump into me and the kind thoughts and wishes of people around me are destroying this cancer. Just gonna keep fighting... (sic)" The "What's My Age Again?" hitmaker previously vowed to conceal his hairloss with the "absolute worst toupee" to see how people would react. He said: "I want to get the absolute worst toupee, so that it's obviously not my hair, and just walk around and see how people look at me." — Bang Showbiz

Piers Morgan hails Ofcom ruling

Piers Morgan has hailed Ofcom's rejection of complaints against him as a "resounding victory for free speech". The broadcast watchdog delivered a 26-page ruling yesterday (clearing him of any wrongdoing after they received over 57,000 complaints over his hosting of 'Good Morning Britain' when he questioned the Duchess of Sussex's comments in her controversial Oprah Winfrey interview, including saying he didn't believe the former actress when she claimed to have been suicidal. And the 56-year-old presenter - who quit 'GMB' after refusing to apologize for his remarks - is "delighted" with their ruling.

He told MailOnline: "I'm delighted that Ofcom has so emphatically supported my right to disbelieve the Duke and Duchess of Sussex's incendiary claims to Oprah Winfrey, many of which have since been proved to be untrue. This is a resounding victory for free speech and a resounding defeat for Princess Pinocchios. "As OFCOM says, to have stifled my right to express strongly held and robustly argued views would have been an 'unwarranted and chilling restriction on freedom of expression.' And Piers joked he'd be looking to return to his position on the morning show's sofa in the wake of the verdict. He quipped: "In light of this decision - do I get my job back?"



Piers Morgan

Meghan herself was one of the people who made a complaint about his comments and Piers slammed her for the way she raised her objections to ITV boss Dame Carolyn McCall. He said: "I was reliably informed recently that Meghan Markle wrote directly to my ITV boss Dame Carolyn McCall the night before I was forced out, demanding my head on a plate. "Apparently, she stressed that she was writing to Dame Carolyn personally because they were both women and mothers - a nauseating playing of the gender and maternity card if ever there was one. What has the world come to when a whiny fork-tongued actress can dictate who presents a morning television news program?"

In their ruling, Ofcom insisted Piers was entitled to "rigorously challenge" the comments made by Meghan and her husband, Prince Harry, in the interview, including that the duchess felt suicidal and questions had been raised by an unnamed royal about the colour of their unborn baby's skin, and branded attempts to silence him a "chilling restriction on freedom of expression".

They ruled: "Mr Morgan was entitled to say he disbelieved the Duke and Duchess of Sussex's allegations and to hold and express strong views that rigorously challenged their account..."

"The restriction of such views would, in our view, be an unwarranted and chilling restriction on freedom of expression both of the broadcaster and the audience. "Overall, Ofcom considered that there is a high public interest value in broadcasting open and frank discussions about race and racism, as long as they comply with the Code." The watchdog also rejected allegations that Piers was not "duly impartial", had "misrepresented facts" and "mocked the American accent". Hours after the tell-all interview with Oprah had aired in the US on 7 March, Piers had blasted the duchess on 'Good Morning Britain'.

He fumed: "I'm sorry, I don't believe a word she says. I wouldn't believe her if she read me a weather report. The fact she has expressed an onslaught against our Royal Family is contemptible." The following day, he walked off camera during a heated row with weatherman Alex Beresford, who accused him of unfairly "trashing" the duchess. Piers quit the program later that day. — AFP



This picture shows the skull of a triceratops as it is brought into a gallery where it is set to be exposed ahead of its auction sale at Drouot auction house in October. — AFP photos



Workers bring the skull of a triceratops into a gallery where it is set to be exposed ahead of its auction sale at Drouot auction house.



A woman walks past a gallery where a triceratops skull stands on a metal frame as workers assemble the 200 bones of its skeleton.

MEET 'BIG JOHN': WORLD'S BIGGEST TRICERATOPS ON SALE IN PARIS

A Paris auction house will seek to sell in October the world's biggest known example of the dinosaur triceratops, known as "Big John", with the spectacular skeleton on show to the public beforehand, organizers said Tuesday. The triceratops is among the most distinctive of dinosaurs due to the three horns on its head—one at the nose and two on the forehead—that give the dinosaur its Latin name. "Big John" is the largest

known surviving example, 66 million years old and with a skeleton some eight meters long. It will be on display starting October 18 at the Drouot auction house in Paris, where it will be offered by the specialist auctioneers Giquello on October 21.

It is estimated that it will sell at 1.2 to 1.5 million euros (\$1.4-\$1.8 million), though dinosaur auction sales have proved very unpredictable in the past. The dinosaur has an export license and there

are a dozen possible buyers, said Alexandre Giquello of the Giquello house. The two-meter-wide skull, some 200 bones and large horns of the animal were being assembled Tuesday behind the windows of a Drouot exhibition gallery in central Paris.

A unique specimen with the skeleton more than 60-percent complete—including 75 percent for the skull-Big John was discovered in 2014 in the US state of South

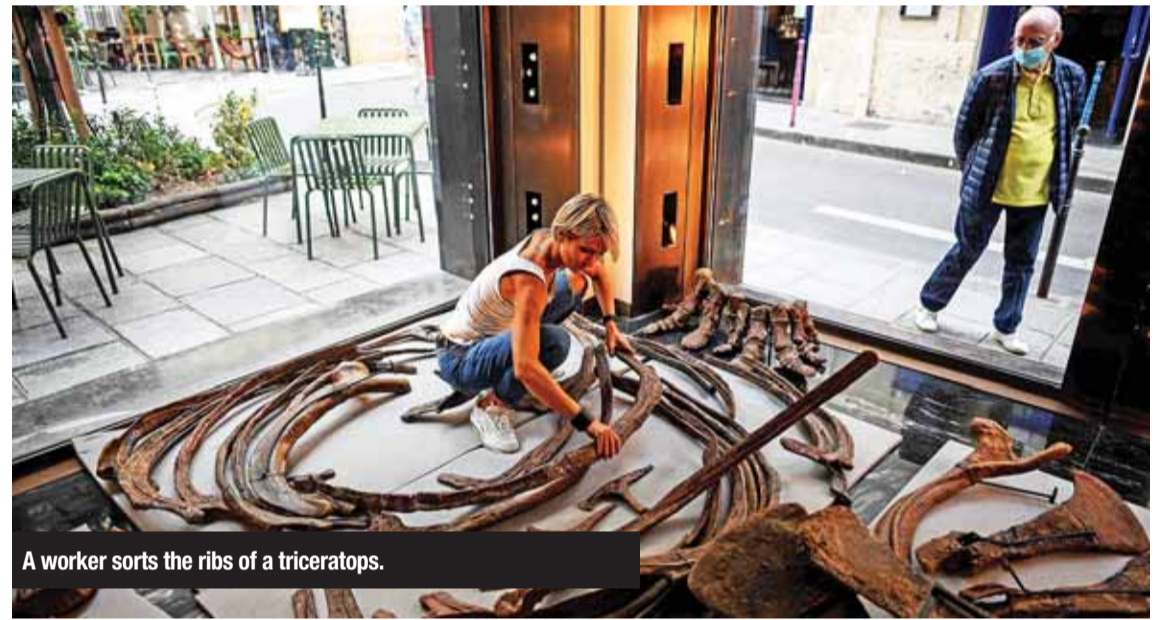
Dakota by geologist Walter W. Stein Bill. Its restoration was carried out in Trieste in Italy. This sale comes amid continued enthusiasm for dinosaur skeletons, with prices often reaching records that leave public museums and research centers unable to outbid private buyers.

In October, a rare allosaurus skeleton, one of the oldest dinosaurs, was auctioned in Paris to an anonymous bidder for over three million euros, twice its esti-

mate. A few weeks before, a 67-million-year-old T-Rex skeleton was sold in New York for \$31.8 million, smashing records for a dinosaur and far surpassing an estimate of \$6 to \$8 million. In 2020, however, several dinosaurs offered in Paris did not find takers after minimum prices were not reached. — AFP



This picture shows the ribs and vertebrae of a triceratops.



A worker sorts the ribs of a triceratops.

Wild puma found living in New York apartment

US authorities have rescued from a New York apartment a feline that was no house cat—she was an 80-pound wild cougar. The 11-month-old puma-called Sasha—was living inside a home in the Bronx, officials said. She was rescued last week in a joint operation by police, the Humane Society of the United States, city officials and Bronx Zoo personnel. The owner "surrendered" the big cat and was present during the removal, the groups said in a statement Monday.



In this image received by AFP from Bronx Zoo, a puma removed from a home in New York city is seen in the Bronx zoo in New York City, New York. — AFP

The mountain cat was taken to the Bronx Zoo, where veterinarians examined her over the weekend. Sasha was then transported to Turpentine Creek animal sanctuary in Arkansas, which cares for neglected big cats. "This cougar is relatively lucky that her owners recognized a wild cat is not fit to live in an apartment or any domestic environment," said Kelly Donithan, director of animal disaster response for the Humane Society. "The owner's tears and nervous chirps from the cougar as we drove her away painfully drives home the many victims of this horrendous trade and myth that wild animals belong anywhere but the wild," she added.

NYPD Commissioner Dermot Shea said the case was under investigation and no further information, including about the owner, was immediately available. Sasha isn't the first big cat or exotic pet to have come to the attention of authorities in New York. Police removed a 425-pound adult tiger called Ming from an apartment in Harlem in 2003 while in 2004, an eight-year-old boy on Long Island was attacked by his father's pet leopard. — AFP

Corsica's 'ecological moorings' protect seagrass and yachts

Last year when France moved to protect Mediterranean seagrass beds by barring larger boats from dropping anchor near them, Yves-Marie Loudoux found himself adrift. Captain of the 41-metre (135-foot) Ocean Sapphire, Loudoux remembers suddenly being unable to access his usual spots near fragile beds of so-called Neptune grass off the coast of Corsica. "We had no solution, we were pushed to very inconvenient moorings too far from the coast," he recalls. "[Instead] we had to go to Sardinia (Italy) nearby so that people could swim."

But today his clients—who pay some 110,000 euros (\$130,000) per week to cruise the Mediterranean in style—can once again plunge into Corsican waters thanks to anchorages designed specifically to protect seagrass. A total of 14 ecological moorings are planned for the Sant'Amanza bay to protect some 60 hectares of Neptune grass meadows, said Michel Mallaroni, director of the port of Bonifacio and head of the 2.3 million euro (\$2.7 million) project. "The challenge is to keep the southern tip of Corsica attractive for boaters while protecting the environment," he said.

Vital role

Unique to the Mediterranean, Neptune grass is one of 70 species of marine seagrass growing in vast underwater meadows from the Arctic to the tropics. The plants play a vital role in improving water quality, absorbing CO2 and exuding oxygen, and provide a natural nursery and refuge for hundreds of species of fish. Earlier this year, it was even discovered that Neptune grass helps remove plastic from Mediterranean waters, trapping it in

its leaves and forming balls that wash up on shore.

But the fragile ecosystems have come under increasing threat from human activity, with boat anchors a major culprit. An estimated 7,500 hectares of Neptune grass meadows have been damaged along the French coast alone, and in 2020 the country made it illegal for boats meas-



In this file photo a diver swims over posidonia oceanica meadows in the Mediterranean Sea near Cannes, southern France.— AFP photos

uring longer than 24 metres (79 feet) to drop anchor within designated zones. "The orders by the maritime prefecture outlawing mooring in certain zones of the Mediterranean for the protection of neptune grass were historic," scientist and environmentalist Charles-Francois Boudouresque told AFP. And with so many large yachts depending on stops along France's famed Cote d'Azur and in Corsica, the decision had a significant financial risk attached.

Ecological moorings

The solution: ecological moorings that "adapt to the sea floor by mimicking it" with a rough surface that "makes it easier for biodiversity to take hold", said Line Babioli of the BRL engineering firm. She explains that the underwater components have cavities that allow fish inside and "don't impact the movement of the water".

sels measuring over 24 meters. The traffic accounted for 60 percent of the port's revenues in 2019, he said.

With additional income generated by their wealthy passengers, boats stopping in Bonifacio are a vital source of income to the town's 3,000 inhabitants. Mallaroni says some 90 moorings are needed along the island's shores, citing the French Federation of Nautical Industries.

Example for other countries

On the mainland, a first ecological mooring off Pampelonne beach near Saint Tropez on France's famed Cote d'Azur should be available by 2022. Two other sites are in development, including one in the Calanques national park between Marseille and Cassis that should be operational by 2024. In the meantime, the seagrass zones remain off-limits to boaters—although the authority responsible for enforcing rules has so far only issued warnings. "Most of the boaters pull up their anchors and move to authorised zones," says Thibault Lavernhe of the Maritime Prefecture of the Mediterranean.

"But there have been several repeat offenders and eventually sanctions will have to be applied," he says, with a maximum penalty of 150,000 euros and a year in prison at stake. Environmentalist Boudouresque meanwhile hopes that other countries with Neptune grass ecosystems will adopt similar rules-and solutions. "The environment has no borders," says Boudouresque. "Other Mediterranean countries should get inspired by these protective measures." — AFP



In this file photograph a tourist takes a picture of the 41 meter-long yacht 'Ocean Sapphire' anchored in the port of Bonifacio in the south of the French Mediterranean island of Corsica.



Workers immerse blocks in the sea for the anchorage of yachts in the Sant'Amanza bay close to Bonifacio in the south of the French Mediterranean island of Corsica.

Sports

Germany's 'Blade Jumper' gets gold but no world record at Tokyo Paralympics

Tunisia's Tlili takes second gold with world-record discus throw

TOKYO: Germany's "Blade Jumper" Markus Rehm leapt to gold at the Tokyo Paralympics yesterday but failed to topple his own gargantuan long jump world record. The 33-year-old set a new record in June of 8.62m, which would have won him gold at every Olympics since 1992, and set his sights on breaking it again in Tokyo.

A leap of 8.18 was his best effort on a cool and drizzly evening, but it was more than enough to give him his third straight title and a fourth Paralympic gold overall. France's Dimitri Pavade took silver with a jump of 7.39,

disqualified and missed out on a gold medal for failing to appear on time.

Muhammad Ziyad Zolkefli was allowed to compete in the F20 final on Tuesday night despite being late to the call room. He finished first, breaking the world record and winning gold. But afterwards a referee and jury both determined he had no good reason for being late.

Zolkefli and two other athletes were late, with Spence saying they argued they had not heard the announcement to gather or that it was in a language they did not understand. "But all the other athletes were on time," Spence said. The gold went instead to Ukraine's Maksym Koval, who Spence said was now "getting a lot of abuse from Malaysians".

"People say the Ukrainian stole the gold. No, absolutely not. The Ukrainian had nothing to do with it. It was the athletes that were late," Spence said. And the IPC spokesman said it was not the first time Malaysian social media users had directed abuse at the Paralympic body, recalling a wave of attacks after the country was removed from the 2019 swimming championships. "Hopefully it will pass and die down. But it's just disappointing again," Spence said.

'Makes it all worth it'

On the eighth day of competition in Tokyo, 43 gold medals were up for grabs. Tokyo's first gold in boccia, a sport similar to boules that is designed for athletes with neurological impairments that impact motor function, went to Adam Peska of the Czech Republic.

And 90 qualified badminton players are gearing up for play as their sport makes its Paralympics debut, with France's double world champion Lucas Mazur facing a challenge from India's Tarun Dhillon in the men's SL4. Taekwondo, the other new sport at this Games, kicks off today. With almost all spectators banned from the



TOKYO: Germany's Markus Rehm competes in the men's long jump T64 final during the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games at the Olympic Stadium in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

Paralympics over coronavirus fears, there have been few opportunities for athletes to interact with the Japanese public. But US high jumper Sam Grewe, who won gold in the T63 on Tuesday, shared online a letter handed to him by a Tokyo 2020 employee who described the athlete's impact on his family.

Grewe's leg was amputated after he was diagnosed with a cancerous tumor in his knee as a teenager, and in his letter Masaki Kando said his 13-year-old son had also been diagnosed with a tumor on his knee and under-

gone a treatment known as rotationplasty. "I was very anxious," Kando admitted about his son's treatment, saying his family had learned about Grewe on social media. "High Jump the World Champion! You gave us great courage to my family. We are grateful to you."

Grewe, who is training to be a doctor to increase the representation of people with disabilities in medicine, said of the letter: "Win or lose, this is what it's all about." "This makes it all worth it," he added on his Twitter account. — AFP

Badminton makes long-awaited Paralympics debut

TOKYO: Badminton's Paralympics Games debut yesterday was hailed as a "dream come true" by players, 29 years after it became an Olympic sport. Badminton was first played at the Olympic Games in Barcelona in 1992 and now 90 players will battle for medals in 14 events over five days at Tokyo's Yoyogi National Stadium in the inaugural Paralympics tournament. "It's been a long, long time, 14 years for me actually," said 30-year-old British player Krysten Coombs, who has been involved from the fledgling days of the sport. "I was at the first tournament back in 2008 that had short stature," added the men's SH6 category world number five. "It's a dream come true and I can't wait to get started."

The honour of the first match win in Paralympics history went to Germany's number three seed Valeska Knoblauch, who breezed past countrywoman Elke Rongen 21-7, 21-8 in the women's WH1 category. "It feels pretty amazing," said Knoblauch, who also will go down as the player who hit the very first badminton serve in the Paralympics. "I was very nervous. It's so different to other tournaments."

The International Paralympic Committee finally recognized the Badminton World Federation (BWF) as a para sports organization in 2015 and selected it for Olympics inclusion at Tokyo, four years after the BWF had integrated para badminton into its structures. "It's been a long, long journey," BWF secretary general Thomas Lund told AFP soon after the first matches concluded. "It's great after almost 10 years to be able to participate at the highest level that para sports can offer. After being involved in all the preparations for so long, it is always great to see the first shuttle fly into the air."

'Proud to be the first'

The sport makes quite a spectacle, with two courts set up for wheelchair play alongside two for standing athletes. One major difference is that wheelchair singles take place on a playing area just half the width of the court. The sport's roots lie in Britain where it was initially played for recreation and rehabilitation until in 1995 the International Badminton Association for Disabled was formed, later integrated in the BWF. Now it is played "in more than 80 countries across five continents" according to Lund.

The sport, like all para sports, is littered with heart-warming stories of athletes who have turned tragedy to

inspirational triumph. Ritah Asimwe, Uganda's number one, was in 2005 assaulted and woke up in hospital to find her right hand had been cut off.

Born a right-hander, she had to teach her body and mind to be left-handed, and was so successful that she is now Uganda's number one para badminton player. "I'm super excited to be here, with the most experienced players in the world," said the 35-year-old Asimwe, who plays in the SU5 women's singles.



TOKYO: Japan's Yuma Yamazaki hits a return against South Korea's Lee Sun-ae during their women's singles WH2 group B badminton match at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games at Yoyogi National Stadium in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

There are six categories of para badminton, with players in wheelchairs taking part in the WH1 or WH2. Other categories are for standing players who have impairments to lower limbs (SL3/SL4), upper limbs (SU5) or are of short stature (SH6).

Dutch SU6 player Megan Hollander was glad simply to have made it to Tokyo after tearing her ankle ligaments in May and started playing again only a couple of weeks ago. "The last few months were like hell," said the 23-year-old. "I'm still glad I made it and I'm back on court so it's very, very good to be here."

France's Thomas Jakobs, who will contest both singles and doubles in the men's WH2 category, said he was honoured to be taking part. "We're proud to be the first ones," said the 30-year-old singles world number 15. "All the players are beginning their Paralympic adventure. So everybody is equal." — AFP

going to be an extremely difficult task."

Qualifier pulls shocker

French-born US qualifier Maxime Cressy fired 44 aces and saved four match points to upset Spanish ninth seed Pablo Carreno Busta 5-7, 4-6, 6-1, 6-4, 7-6 (9/7). After beating Djokovic for a Tokyo Olympic bronze medal, the Spaniard's US Open ended slapping the wall late in that buster. "I'm really happy things are starting to pay off," Cressy said.

World number one Ashleigh Barty, coming off wins at Wimbledon and Cincinnati, began her chase for back-to-back Slam titles by defeating Russian Vera Zvonareva 6-1, 7-6 (9/7). "When my back was against the wall late in that buster, I came up with some really good stuff," Barty said. The 25-year-old Australian next faces Denmark's Clara Tauson as she goes for her sixth title of the year.

Japan's Kei Nishikori, the 2014 US Open runner-up, eliminated Italy's 113th-ranked Salvatore Caruso 6-1, 6-1, 5-7, 6-3. He next plays American Mackenzie McDonald with Djokovic a possible third-round opponent. Italian sixth seed and Wimbledon runner-up Matteo Berrettini, a 2019 US Open semi-finalist, defeated France's Jeremy Chardy 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (9/7), 6-3. Canadian sixth seed Bianca Andreescu, the 2019 US Open winner who skipped last year's event, struggled but outlasted Swiss Viktorija Golubic 7-5, 4-6, 7-5. — AFP



Controversy over social media abuse

while Trenten Merrill of the US claimed bronze on 7.08.

Ahead of Rehm's appearance, Tunisian Raoua Tlili took her second gold of the Games with a world-record discus throw in the F41 final, beaming and jumping with delight at the result. She said her victory was the result of an incredible surge of support from her fellow Tunisians back home. "All Tunisians gave me confidence (by) writing (to) me on Facebook and Instagram, 'Go Raoua, we expect your gold medals'," said Tlili, who retained her shot put title on Friday.

There was controversy elsewhere though, with International Paralympic Committee spokesman Craig Spence condemning what he described as a wave of social media abuse after a Malaysian shot putter was



TOKYO: Haven Shepherd of the US leaves after competing in the women's 100m breaststroke SB7 swimming heat during the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games at the Tokyo Aquatics Centre in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

Bomb survivor 'just having fun' at Paralympics

TOKYO: US swimmer Haven Shepherd lost her legs as a baby after her parents detonated a bomb intended to kill the whole family. This week, at her maiden Paralympics in Tokyo, the upbeat teenager said her goals were all about "just going out and having fun".

Shepherd was 14 months old and living in rural Vietnam when her birth parents — who she has been told were having an affair and could not marry — decided to take their own lives, as well as the child's. They strapped themselves to a bomb, held Haven and detonated the device, killing themselves instantly and blasting their tiny daughter 12 meters (40 feet) out of their hut. She survived, though doctors were forced to amputate her legs. Six months later she was adopted by an American family who took her to Missouri to begin a new life. Now 18, she described her debut at the Tokyo Games last Saturday as "a surreal moment".

"It's something you talk about with your family for five years, and it finally happened," she said of her first race, where she finished fifth in the SM8 200m individual medley. "I'm just going out and having fun. I know

that I'm here and I made it. I accomplished my goal of making it to the Paralympics."

Shepherd also swam yesterday morning's SB7 100m breaststroke heats, missing out on a place in the final. She is excited though about having the Paralympics in the international spotlight and says she is "open" about telling her story to the world.

That ease with her distressing backstory comes from her adoptive mother, she says, who had no hesitation about answering when a five-year-old Haven suddenly asked her where she came from one bath time. "Some people don't even know their story — I think why I am the person I am today is because I got to learn about who I was before I got to live this life," she said. Shepherd says she accepted the explanation easily, and "understood on a deeper level" what had happened to her.

And she has never felt any resentment towards her birth parents, saying she only has sympathy for her late mother. "I always looked at my mother's sacrifice — what did she lose when she lost her life? She had to lose her baby," she said. "I got to live the amazing life in America and have the birthday parties and the Christmas home videos. I got to live that amazing childhood." Growing up in Missouri with six siblings, Shepherd says she never felt left out because of her disability. She describes putting her prosthetic legs on as no different to wearing glasses, and says her disability has never held her back. She began swimming at the age of 10, and quickly fell in love with the sport. — AFP

at 20 which he shares with Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal, both absent due to injuries, as is defending champion Dominic Thiem.

Rune, ranked 145th, began cramping in the third set and struggled to finish. "From the third or fourth game in the third set, he couldn't move much," Djokovic said. "You could see he struggled a lot. I feel for him."

Djokovic won the first set in 26 minutes without facing a break point, fell behind 3-0 to start the second before battling into the tie-breaker, where Rune grabbed leads of 4-0 and 6-3. After two Djokovic service winners, he sent a backhand service return long to drop the set. In the third set, Djokovic broke to lead 3-1 and Rune began getting treatments between games, grimacing at times and struggling to run for shots to the end.

Zverev stretches streak

Earlier Tuesday, Tokyo Olympic champion Alexander Zverev stretched his win streak to 12 matches and warned he has his eyes on denying Djokovic the Slam. Fourth seed Zverev, who beat Djokovic in an Olympic semi-final, dispatched American Sam Querrey 6-4, 7-5, 6-2.

"I hope in two weeks' time I'll be on an 18-match winning streak," said Zverev, who would claim his first Grand Slam title if he creates such a run. The 24-year-old German, last year's US Open runner-up, hit 18 aces and 40 winners while never facing a break point in

Djokovic launches Slam quest with US Open win

NEW YORK: World number one Novak Djokovic won without playing his best to reach the second round of the US Open on Tuesday in his quest for a calendar-year Grand Slam and record 21st major title. The 34-year-old Serbian star dominated much of the way in beating 18-year-old Danish qualifier Holger Rune 6-1, 6-7 (5/7), 6-2, 6-1 after two hours and 15 minutes in the night feature at Arthur Ashe Stadium. "It wasn't the best of my performances," Djokovic said. "At the same time, he played well in the second set when it mattered and I didn't serve well in the second set."

History-chasing Djokovic, who has won eight of the past 12 Grand Slam events, will next face 121st-ranked Dutchman Tallon Griekspoor, a rival the top seed admitted he didn't know much about. "I know this court well," Djokovic said. "Hopefully that's going to help." Djokovic would complete the first men's singles calendar-year Slam since Rod Laver in 1969 by winning the crown on the New York hardcourts. He would also break the deadlock for all-time men's Slam titles



NEW YORK: Serbia's Novak Djokovic (right) greets Denmark's Holger Rune at the net after winning their 2021 US Open Tennis tournament men's singles first round match at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in New York, on Tuesday. — AFP

advancing after an hour and 40 minutes.

"Novak is chasing history," Zverev said. "But the young guys are going to try and get in the way of that. I'm going to try to give him a challenge as well." Zverev, who next faces Spain's Albert Ramos-Vinolas, could face Djokovic in the semi-finals. "I hope I can keep the level up," Zverev said. "To beat Novak here is

Sports

Premier League flexes financial muscle amid Super League fallout

Net spend over 10 times of La Liga, Serie A, Ligue 1

LONDON: English Premier League clubs flexed their financial muscle over the rest of Europe by brushing off the after-effects of reduced revenue due to the coronavirus pandemic to spend over £1 billion (\$1.4 billion) for the sixth consecutive summer transfer window.

Cristiano Ronaldo's return to Manchester United headlined a stellar cast of stars, including Romelu Lukaku, Jadon Sancho and Raphael Varane, making their way to England with even clubs in Europe's other 'top five' leagues, feeling the strain of a talent drain.

According to financial experts Deloitte, gross spending from Premier League clubs hit its lowest level since 2015 at £1.1 billion, driven by an increase in free transfers and clubs willing to take lower fees to shed some of the burden from their wage bill. However, the net spend of £560 million was over 10 times that of La Liga (£55 million), Serie A (£50 million) and Ligue 1 (£15 million), while Bundesliga clubs made a net profit of an estimated £35 million.

"Whilst the volume of transfers has remained consistent, the number of free transfers has increased as have the number of the highest value deals," said Dan Jones, partner in Deloitte's Sports Business Group. "This reflects twin forces of clubs prioritizing financial stability and seeking value in the market

while also being willing to pay for the very best talent. This pattern has been reinforced by the financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the relative financial strength of the Premier League clubs compared to some of their European peers."

The backbone of the Premier League's financial power has been television rights deals. By securing another three-year domestic TV rights deal from the 2022/23 season worth £5.1 bil-



TV deal brings stability in uncertain market

lion, the Premier League has achieved stability in an uncertain market.

French clubs are still reeling from the collapse of their contract with Spanish-Chinese company Mediapro last season. A new deal with Amazon and French broadcaster Canal+ has been sold at a fraction of the price before the arrival of Lionel Messi to Ligue 1 with Paris Saint-Germain.

Super League shadow

The shadow of the failed European Super League (ESL) project also hung over the window. Barcelona were forced to let Messi go for free as their spiraling losses saw La Liga's financial fair play rules block an attempt to renew the Argentine's contract.

The Catalans also let Antoine Griezmann return to Atletico Madrid on loan in the final hours of the window, just two years after signing the Frenchman for 120 million euros (\$140 million). Italian champions Inter Milan sold Lukaku for £97.5 million among a fire sale to rebalance their books amid a financial crisis for Chinese owners Suning.

The ESL fallout could also be seen in England with owners keen to quell fan anger by splashing out on new players. United's clash with Liverpool in May was postponed as supporters, still shut out from the stadium at the time, stormed the Old Trafford pitch in protest at the Glazer family. There has barely been a peep of protest in the opening weekends of the season, though, with Ronaldo joining Varane and Sancho at United.

Despite sitting bottom of the Premier League table, Arsenal have been the biggest spenders of the window with billionaire American Stan Kroenke opening the purse strings to the tune of £150 million on six new players to silence com-



LIVERPOOL: Chelsea's Belgian striker Romelu Lukaku (left) wins a header during the English Premier League football match between Liverpool and Chelsea at Anfield in Liverpool, north west England on August 28, 2021. —AFP

plaints over a lack of investment.

However, the changing landscape of European football was arguably best evidenced by a deal that did not happen. PSG turned down a reported offer of 180 million euros from Real Madrid for Kylian Mbappe despite the French international having less than a year to run on his contract and seemingly no intention of renewing.

Part of the motivation for the ESL was to allow traditional giants such as Madrid, Barcelona and Juventus to compete with the state-backed projects of Qatari-owned PSG and Abu Dhabi backed Manchester City. Without structural change, PSG, City and Chelsea, owned by Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich, are the new powerhouses. —AFP

Real have to wait for Mbappe as PSG decide don't need the money

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain got Lionel Messi but that has somehow turned out not to be the most remarkable moment of the transfer window for them. There can hardly be a bigger statement from the Qatar-owned club than turning their noses up at an offer understood to be worth 180 million euros (\$212m) from Real Madrid for Kylian Mbappe with the France striker in the final year of his contract.

Real are understood to have made two bids for Mbappe last week — and there were reports on Tuesday they were prepared to go to 200 million euros — but PSG decided they would rather not sell, and risk losing the France forward for free at the end of the season. "He is one of the best, one of the most important players in the world today and for him to be with us is a gift," said PSG coach Mauricio Pochettino at the weekend.

Rejecting the money is an extraordinary decision from a club who are hardly immune to the economic impact of the pandemic, with losses of 124.9 million



STRASBOURG: France's forward Kylian Mbappe (center) reacts next to France's forward Karim Benzema (left) during a training session at the Meineau stadium in Strasbourg, eastern France, on Tuesday. —AFP

euros in the curtailed 2019/20 campaign likely to be dwarfed when the accounts for last season are filed.

Mbappe will be free to negotiate a pre-contract agreement with Real, or anyone else, in January, and PSG will not be entitled to any fee. Yet the Qataris have already shown that money is no object with their past purchases of Mbappe and of Neymar, for a world-record 222 million euros, in 2017. When

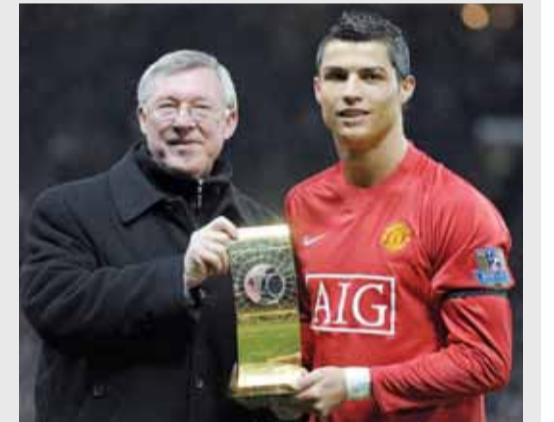
Messi became available a month ago, they pounced without worrying about the impact his salary might have on their finances.

'Dangerous'

Now they will keep Mbappe to complete a dream attacking line-up they hope will deliver a first Champions League for PSG and all the prestige that brings in the year Qatar hosts the World Cup. The French giants also added Gianluigi Donnarumma, Sergio Ramos, Georginio Wijnaldum and Achraf Hakimi in a remarkable recruitment drive.

On Tuesday they added Portuguese international Nuno Mendes on loan from Sporting Lisbon. Their rivals among Europe's traditional elite cry foul but for now PSG cannot be stopped. "State-owned clubs are as dangerous for football's ecosystem as the Super League was," tweeted La Liga president Javier Tebas. "COVID losses of more than 300m, TV revenue in France down 40 percent, and yet more than 500m in salaries? Unsustainable."

Financial Fair Play rules have been relaxed to help clubs absorb losses incurred during the pandemic. PSG president Nasser al-Khelaifi wields enormous influence with his seat on the UEFA Executive Committee and his role as president of the European Club Association. "We always follow the FFP regulations from day one that we started," Khelaifi said when asked about his club's financial position on the day Messi was unveiled. —AFP



MANCHESTER: In this file photo taken on January 14, 2009 Manchester United's Portuguese midfielder Cristiano Ronaldo poses with his FIFA world player of the year trophy with Manager Alex Ferguson before the English Premiership football match against Wigan at Old Trafford, Manchester, north-west England. —AFP

Ronaldo says Ferguson the key to Man Utd return

MANCHESTER: Cristiano Ronaldo revealed his relationship with former Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson played the key role in convincing the Portuguese to return to Old Trafford. Ferguson retired as boss of the Red Devils in 2013, four years after Ronaldo departed for Real Madrid in a then world record £80 million move. However, he remains a club ambassador and confidant of current United boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, who also played under Ferguson for many years.

Ronaldo looked set for a return to England with Premier League champions Manchester City last week until Ferguson and a host of his former United teammates intervened to reportedly inform him that such a move risked his legacy at the club where he became a world star.

"For me, Sir Alex Ferguson is like a father in football for me," Ronaldo told the United website. "He helped me a lot, he taught me many things, and in my opinion of course he had a big role because the relationship that we had, we keep in touch all the time, and he's an unbelievable person. I really like him a lot and he was the main key for me to be in the position that I am, that I signed for Manchester United."

During his first spell in Manchester, Ronaldo won the first of five Champions League and Ballon d'Or titles, as well as three Premier League winner's medals, scoring 118 goals in 292 games. However, United's fortunes have declined since Ferguson's retirement.

The English giants have not won the Premier League since 2013 and their last Champions League triumph came when Ronaldo scored against Chelsea in the 2008 final. Ronaldo will turn 37 in February, but he insists he can still spearhead another era of glory at Old Trafford.

"I think it's the best decision that I have made it," added Ronaldo on his move from Juventus. "It's a new chapter, I'm so happy and glad, and I want to carry on again, to make history, to try to help Manchester achieve great results, to win trophies." Ronaldo is expected to make his second United debut at home to Newcastle on September 11. —AFP

Neuer, Mueller ruled out of Germany's World Cup qualifier

PARIS: Germany captain Manuel Neuer and forward Thomas Mueller are both injured and ruled out of today's World Cup qualifier against minnows Liechtenstein. Arsenal goalkeeper Bernd Leno will deputise for Neuer, who sat out training all week with an ankle knock. Coach Hansi Flick is hopeful he will be fit for their next qualifier against Armenia in Stuttgart. "We assume that 'Manu' will be back for Sunday," Flick said yesterday.

Neuer's Bayern Munich team-mate Mueller is suffering an adductor injury and misses all three Group J games against Liechtenstein, Armenia and Iceland next Wednesday. "Thomas has gone home, the injury made it not possible for him to play in the games," added Flick. "The risk was too great, so it made sense to send him home. We have enough players to replace him." Borussia Dortmund captain Marco Reus or Chelsea forward Kai Havertz could deputize. Without Neuer, 35, and Mueller, 31, Germany lose a decade of experience as the pair have over 200 international appearances between them. Germany



STUTTART: Hansi Flick, new headcoach of the Germany's national football team, talks to forward Leroy Sane (center right) during a training session of Germany's national football team in Stuttgart, southern Germany, yesterday. —AFP

have ground to make up in their qualifying group as they sit third, two points behind leaders Armenia.

In Neuer's absence, Flick has still to decide who wears the captain's armband against Liechtenstein. "I asked myself under the shower who will be captain," said Flick. "I'll have a think about it, we have a few options and will clarify it internally."

This will be his first international as Germany

achieved and the progress they've made, not only this summer, but over the last four years," said Southgate, who also led England to the World Cup semi-finals in 2018. "Equally we have to start again. The journey to having the chance of another run like that in a tournament is under way. We have got to be at our very best. Mentally it's a good test for us. Away from home, 60,000 fans and a very good team we're playing against."

England are already on course for a place in Qatar after winning their opening three qualifiers in March. Victory in Hungary and Poland will all but secure qualification, but Southgate is wary of a Hungary side that held by France and Germany at the Euro. "I think the two away games this week are both going to be hugely challenging," he added. "They're good teams. They're obviously pivotal games in terms of qualification. You can't predict what your hardest games are going to be, but we know that Hungary are a very good side and sit second in the group."

head coach. After defeat to England in the last 16 of Euro 2020, Joachim Loew stepped down after 15 years in charge and has been replaced by his assistant coach when Germany won the 2014 World Cup. "I'm looking forward to my first international game and the responsibility for the nation," added Flick, who wants the same "intensity" from his team as he has seen in training. —AFP

The Hungarian FA is facing UEFA sanctions for alleged racist and homophobic chanting by fans during matches in Budapest at the Euro. England's European Championship qualifier in Bulgaria in October 2019 was twice stopped due to racist chanting. But after his players faced racist abuse online from accounts based in England after the defeat to Italy, Southgate refused to be drawn on what action his players would take if they are abused again.

"We always prepare the team for everything," said Southgate. "We've done that this week, but we know we've had our own issues at home, so we're not really focusing on other countries, we're focusing on ourselves and making sure we get our own things correct. I don't think we should speak hypothetically. We know the experience we had before (in Bulgaria), but we're going to Hungary preparing for a game against a crowd that will get behind their team and we're looking forward to the challenge of the match. Everything else is speculation." —AFP

Southgate relishing Hungary test as England forced to go again

LONDON: England manager Gareth Southgate believes facing Hungary in front of a 60,000 crowd in Budapest today will test if the Three Lions have recovered from the disappointment of losing the Euro 2020 final. Southgate's side missed out on England's first major tournament win for 55 years on a penalty shootout to Italy in July. They return to action for the first time this week with the trip to Budapest followed by clashes with Andorra and Poland in World Cup qualifying.

"The team has gained confidence from what they



STRASBOURG: France's forward Antoine Griezmann (center) takes part in a training session at the Meinau stadium in Strasbourg, eastern France, on Tuesday, on the eve of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 qualification Group D football match between France and Bosnia-Herzegovina. — AFP

Atletico Madrid welcome back Griezmann as Real sign Camavinga

PARIS: France forward Antoine Griezmann has made a shock return to Atletico Madrid just two years after leaving to join Barcelona, on the final day of a hectic European transfer window. Real Madrid also bagged a French international star as Eduardo Camavinga arrived from Rennes — but their attempts to sign Kylian Mbappe from Paris Saint-Germain failed.

World Cup-winning 30-year-old Griezmann, who scored 133 goals in his first spell with Atletico, has rejoined on a one-year loan deal with an option to extend by another year and an obligation to buy, the club said. "Welcome back, Griezmann!" Atletico wrote on its website. Barcelona have been struggling financially and had to allow six-time Ballon d'Or winner Lionel Messi to leave for PSG last month.

Midfield prodigy Camavinga, who is just 18, penned a six-year deal at Real, the club reportedly paying a fee of 31 million euros (\$36.6m) plus nine million euros more in bonuses. It is a considerable sum for the Angolan-born player, who was in the final year of his contract at Rennes. Real had spent the last week trying to clinch a dizzying deal for 22-year-old forward Mbappe, making two bids, the last under-stood to be worth a total of 180 million euros.

But PSG's Qatari owners do not need to sell and

appear prepared to risk losing Mbappe for free at the end of the campaign in order to have the World Cup winner. Neymar and Messi together in attack for at least one season. Real can come back in for Mbappe again in January, when they could sign him to a pre-contract agreement to move next summer without having to pay a transfer fee.

It has been an extraordinary summer transfer window in Europe, with Messi departing Barcelona for Paris and Cristiano Ronaldo on Tuesday finalizing his sensational return to Manchester United from Juventus. Apart from Messi, PSG have also signed Sergio Ramos from Real Madrid and one of the world's top goalkeepers, Gianluigi Donnarumma, from AC Milan.

They also strengthened their midfield with Georginio Wijnaldum from Liverpool and signed flying Morocco right-back Achraf Hakimi, who shone for Inter Milan last season. The latter cost some 60 million euros, with the rest all arriving as free agents. On Tuesday, the club also announced the signing of teenage Portugal defender Nuno Mendes from Sporting Lisbon, on a season-long loan with an option to buy.

Ronaldo is the latest big-money signing in the

Premier League, where the biggest deals have seen Manchester City buy Jack Grealish from Aston Villa for £100 million (\$138m) and Romelu Lukaku return to Chelsea from Inter for £97.5 million.

Belts tightened

In contrast, PSG apart, leading clubs on the continent have not been as willing to spend big money as they continue to suffer from the economic impact of the pandemic. Before adding Camavinga, Real's only signing of note was David Alaba on a free from Bayern Munich.

Barcelona, mired in huge debts, could not keep Messi and spent deadline day selling off some of their talented youngsters. Brazilian right-back Emerson Royal joined Tottenham Hotspur for 25 million euros after two seasons on loan with Real Betis, while teenager Ilaix Moriba headed to RB Leipzig for an initial 16 million euros.

Their only new permanent signings have been free agents, Eric Garcia and Sergio Aguero from Manchester City and Memphis Depay from Lyon. They also announced a deadline-day deal to take Sevilla forward Luuk de Jong on loan.

In the Premier League, Chelsea secured the sign-

ing of Atletico midfielder Saul Niguez on a season-long loan, while Leeds signed Wales winger Dan James from Manchester United in a deal worth a reported £25 million (\$34.3 million). Early strugglers Arsenal signed Japan defender Takehiro Tomiyasu from Bologna for a fee worth a reported £19.8 million, and offloaded defender Hector Bellerin to Real Betis on a season-long loan.

In Italy, champions Inter replaced Lukaku and Hakimi with cheaper alternatives in Edin Dzeko and Netherlands right-back Denzel Dumfries. They also signed Argentina's Joaquin Correa from Lazio on an initial one-year loan.

Juventus offloaded Ronaldo and signed two Italy internationals in striker Moise Kean and midfielder Manuel Locatelli. Both arrived on loans that will become permanent after two years, a way for Juve to spread out the payments to Everton and Sassuolo respectively.

In Germany, Bayern Munich splashed a total of 67.5 million euros signing France defender Dayot Upamecano and Austria's Marcel Sabitzer from RB Leipzig. Borussia Dortmund bought Dutch forward Donyell Malen from PSV Eindhoven and, crucially, have kept hold of Erling Haaland. — AFP



BRASILIA: In this file photo taken on July 3, 2021, Uruguay's Edinson Cavani (right) gestures next to Colombia's Duvan Zapata during their Conmebol 2021 Copa America football tournament quarter-final match at the Mane Garrincha Stadium in Brasilia, Brazil. — AFP

English clubs' player ban 'tarnishes' South America qualifiers

MONTEVIDEO: South American World Cup qualifying has been "tarnished" by the refusal of top English Premier League clubs to release star players over coronavirus quarantine rules, says Uruguay veteran Diego Godin. Already shorn of the injured Luis Suarez, the two-time world champions will have to make do without their other attacking icon, Edinson Cavani of Manchester United.

The Premier League giants, alongside the likes of champions Manchester City, Liverpool and Chelsea have refused to let a host of players join their national teams because they are due to play matches in red list countries, meaning they would have to quarantine for 10 days on their return to England.

That would force them to miss two league games as well as a Champions League fixture. In a classic club versus country clash, it is national teams that have lost out, most notably Brazil who must make do without nine players originally called up by coach Tite.

"All I will say is the truth that the competition has been tarnished by what happened," Godin told reporters upon his arrival in Uruguay from his Italian club Cagliari. "It's not normal that national teams can-

not count on the players that the coaches want to pick. In our case we're without Edi and it's not normal that players are wondering whether or not to come because they're stuck in the middle."

It is a tough blow for Uruguay in a razor tight qualification race that sees eight teams from third-placed Ecuador to rock-bottom Peru separated by just five points. Uruguay travel to Peru today before hosting Bolivia and Ecuador.

Brazil to field 'reserves'

At one point it looked as though around 30 players would be unavailable after the Spanish, Italian and Portuguese leagues joined their English counterparts in saying they would support clubs that prevent their players from traveling. But those leagues relented due to different quarantine rules that meant players based in Spain, Italy or Portugal may not miss any club games at all. The hardest hit country by far is Brazil with the likes of Chelsea's Thiago Silva, Liverpool trio Alisson, Roberto Firmino and Fabinho, Manchester City duo Ederson and Gabriel Jesus, and Manchester United's Fred all missing.

But the Selecao is also the one country with the depth of talent to ride such a blow, and after winning their opening six qualifying matches, Brazil sit six points clear at the top of the single CONMEBOL table. Most pundits think Brazil's reserves could qualify from the group anyway, but they won't want to lose to arch rivals Argentina under any circumstances.

That blockbuster on September 5 was meant to be the main talking point from these qualifiers with Lionel

Messi and Neymar due to face each other for the first time as Paris Saint-Germain teammates. Messi made his PSG debut on Saturday as a substitute in the 2-0 win at Reims.

It is less than two months since he helped Argentina end a 27-year wait for a major trophy by beating Brazil 1-0 at the Maracana in the Copa America final. This time the sides will play in Sao Paulo in the stand-out encounter of the three matchdays. It was world football governing body FIFA's decision to add the third matchday, following several coronavirus-induced postponements last year and earlier this year, that sparked the club versus country hostilities.

Cult figure Brereton

Chile, who host Brazil today, are the other side to miss players, with English-based pair Francisco Sierralta of Watford and second-tier Blackburn's Ben Brereton prevented from traveling. English-born Brereton, who qualified for Chile through his mother, in particular will be missed after becoming an instant hit while making his debut for Chile during the June-July Copa America.

He played in all five of Chile's tournament matches and scored the winning goal against Bolivia. Brereton is a bit of a cult figure in Chile as his eligibility was allegedly noticed by fans of a football computer game, who then launched a social media campaign to have him selected. In other matches today, second-placed Argentina travel to Venezuela looking to defend their unbeaten start, while Ecuador host Paraguay and Bolivia entertain Colombia. — AFP