



3 Astrolab initiative: Young stars in Kuwait's sky



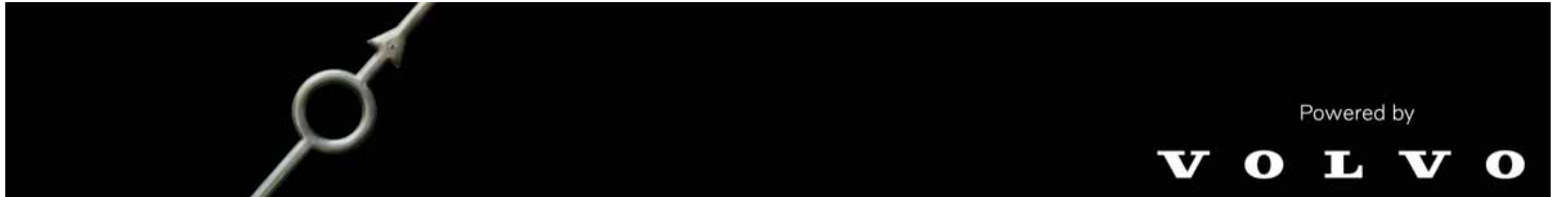
7 Top Afghan TV network stays on-air despite fear of Taliban



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Taliban yet to name govt as Panjshir fighting rages

Top US officials to meet allies on Afghan crisis trip, Austin to visit Kuwait

Kuwait's Sorour wins shot put bronze at Tokyo Paralympics

BNK Automotive gifts Volvo to medalist



TOKYO: Iran's Sajad Mohammadian (silver) Great Britain's Aled Davies (gold) and Kuwait's Faisal Sorour (bronze) pose after the Men's Shot Put - F63 event at the Summer Paralympic Games yesterday. — AFP

TOKYO: Kuwaiti shot-putter Faisal Sorour won a bronze medal in the men's standing shot put F63 event at the Tokyo Paralympics yesterday. Sorour threw a personal best of 14.13m in the event at the National Stadium, where nine athletes competed. BNK Automotive announced gifting a Volvo vehicle to Sorour after he won the bronze medal. Aled Davies of the UK won gold with a throw

of 15.33m. Iran's Sajad Mohammadian claimed silver with his season-best throw of 14.88m. Sorour made his Paralympic debut at the Aug 24-Sept 5 Tokyo Games, in which three Kuwait athletes are partaking. Ahmad Al-Mutairi won a silver medal in the men's T33 100m race and Basimah Najim competed in the women's seated shot put F34.

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KABUL: Fresh fighting was reported yesterday between the Taliban and resistance forces in Afghanistan's Panjshir Valley, as the hardline Islamists finalize a new government that will set the tone for their rule. Facing the challenge of morphing from insurgents to rulers, the Taliban appear determined to snuff out the Panjshir resistance before announcing who will lead the country in the aftermath of Monday's US troop withdrawal, which was supposed to end two decades of war.

But Panjshir, which held out for nearly a decade against the Soviet Union's occupation and also the Taliban's first rule from 1996-2001, is stubbornly holding out. Fighters from the so-called National Resistance Front (NRF) - made up of anti-Taliban militia and former Afghan security forces - are understood to have stockpiled a significant armory in the valley, around 80 km north of Kabul and guarded by a narrow gorge.

Celebratory gunfire rang out in the capital Kabul overnight as rumors spread the valley had fallen, but the Taliban made no official claim yesterday and a resident told AFP by phone that the reports were false. The Emergency Hospital in Kabul said two people were killed and 20 wounded by the salvos, as the Taliban tweeted a stern admonishment and warned its fighters to stop.

"Avoid firing in the air and thank God instead," said chief spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid, tipped to become the new regime's information minister. "The weapons and bullets given to you are public property. No one has the right to waste them. The bullets can also harm civilians, don't shoot in vain."

In Panjshir, former vice-president Amrullah Saleh, holed out alongside Ahmad Massoud - the son of legendary anti-Taliban commander Ahmad Shah Massoud - admitted the perilous position of the NRF. "The situation is difficult, we have been under invasion," Saleh said in a video message. Usually known for his sharp Western suits, Saleh was filmed wearing a traditional shalwar kameez tunic and a flat woolen pakol cap favored by Panjshiris. "The resistance is continuing and will continue," he added. Taliban and resistance tweets suggested the key district of Paryan had changed hands several times in the last few days, but that also could not be independently verified.

Away from the valley, the international community was coming to terms with having to deal with the new Taliban regime with a flurry of diplomacy. The US diplomatic and defense chiefs on Friday announced travel next week to Qatar and other allies on the Afghanistan crisis as they strive to help more people escape Taliban rule. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin will leave on a trip today that begins in Qatar and will also include Bahrain, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, fellow US military allies in the Gulf, the Pentagon said.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken will spend tomorrow and Tuesday in Qatar, the largest hub for the evacuations of some 100,000 Afghans in the final days of the 20-year US military mission. He will then travel to Germany, to lead a virtual 20-nation ministerial meeting on Afghanistan alongside German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas.

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Noted academic Shafeeq Ghabra passes away

KUWAIT: Shafeeq Ghabra, a Kuwaiti scholar and academic of Palestinian descent, passed away yesterday. He was a professor of political science at Kuwait University and founder and first president of the American University of Kuwait. He held a doctorate in political science from the University of Texas. Ghabra had struggled with cancer for the past year and a half.



Shafeeq Ghabra

Biden wants to end US global policing role

WASHINGTON: "America is back", goes US President Joe Biden's catchphrase, but his unapologetic exit from Afghanistan shows America won't be back to business as usual. Beyond the trauma of the Kabul evacuation, Biden is pitching a much broader retreat: A halt to using vast military resources to impose order and US values around the planet.

"This decision about Afghanistan is not just about Afghanistan," Biden said

in what many see as a historic speech on Tuesday. "It's about ending an era of major military operations to remake other countries." "Human rights will be at the center of our foreign policy but the way to do that is not through endless military deployments," he said. "Our strategy has to change."

Benjamin Haddad, director of the Europe Center at the Atlantic Council and an expert on transatlantic relations, called the speech "one of the most eloquent repudiations of liberal internationalism by any US president in the last decades". For those Americans fond of imagining their country to be a unique, invincible superpower - winner of the Cold War, then awesome military interventionist

Continued on Page 2



KABUL: A Taliban fighter walks in front of people sitting along a road outside a bank waiting to withdraw money in the Shar-e-Naw neighborhood yesterday. — AFP

News in brief

Top Iraqi Shiite cleric dies

BAGHDAD: Grand Ayatollah Mohammed Said Al-Hakim, one of Iraq's top Shiite clerics, died on Friday aged 85 in the holy city of Najaf after a heart attack, sources close to him said. Funeral ceremonies were held yesterday in Najaf and its twin holy city of Karbala. HH the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah extended his condolences to the Iraqi leadership and senior figures on Friday. — AFP

FB labels black men 'primates'

SAN FRANCISCO: Facebook on Friday said it disabled its topic recommendation feature after it mistook black men for "primates" in a video on the social network. A Facebook spokesperson called it a "clearly unacceptable error" and said the recommendation software involved was taken offline. — AFP

Delta does not cause more severe childhood COVID

WASHINGTON: US pediatric COVID hospitalizations have surged since Delta became predominant, but a new study that offers a first look at the relevant

data suggests that fears the variant causes more severe disease are unfounded. The paper by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also found that between June 20 and July 31, 2021, unvaccinated adolescents were more than 10 times more likely to be hospitalized than those who were vaccinated.

The health agency analyzed hospital records from across an area covering around 10 percent of the US population, between March 1, 2020 and Aug 14, 2021. This covered the period before the emergence of Delta, the most contagious strain to date, and after it

became dominant, from June 20 onwards. Weekly hospitalizations of children aged 0-17 were at their lowest between June 12 and July 3, at 0.3 per 100,000, before rising to 1.4 per 100,000 in the week ending Aug 14 - a 4.7-fold increase.

Pediatric hospitalizations reached their all-time peak of 1.5 per 100,000 in the week leading up to Jan 9, when the US experienced its winter wave that was driven by the Alpha variant. Consistent with prior research, children aged 12-17 and 0-4 are at higher

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Syria to help Lebanon with energy transit

DAMASCUS: Syria has agreed to help crisis-hit Lebanon by letting gas and electricity transit through its territory, an official said yesterday during the first high-level visit from Beirut to Damascus since Syria's civil war erupted. Harsh fuel shortages and

power cuts inflicted by Lebanon's economic collapse have paralyzed businesses such as restaurants, shops and industry as well as vital services like hospitals.

Now Beirut hopes to strike a deal to import gas from Egypt and electricity from Jordan using Syrian infrastructure - with Washington's blessing despite US sanctions against the Damascus regime. Syria is "ready" to help Lebanon with "transit for Egyptian gas and Jordanian electricity via Syrian territory," senior official

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DAMASCUS: Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Al-Meqdad and his Lebanese counterpart Zeina Akar leave a press conference following a meeting yesterday. — AFP

Local

Foul play suspected in Shaab man, woman's death

Police arrest man after tracking drugs shipment to his home

KUWAIT: Several crimes were reported in Kuwait during the weekend, which followed a string of offences reported last week. In one of the cases reported on Friday, two Kuwaitis - a man and a woman - were found dead in an apartment in Shaab, according to local reports. Police who arrived at the scene noticed bruises on the head of the male citizen. Detectives have launched an investigation to find out the exact causes of the deaths, Al-Rai Arabic daily reported yesterday.

Meanwhile, the body of a 32-year-old Kuwaiti was taken to the coroner after he was found dead in a vehicle, another daily reported yesterday. The prosecutor decided to register the case as a sus-



Woman leaves newborn near trash

pected felony. The deceased was reported to have a criminal record, according to the Al-Anbaa Arabic daily report.

Separately, Abdullah Al-Mubarak detectives solved the case of a newborn girl found near a trash dumpster. A police source said the mother - an unmarried woman in her 30s - was arrested. She said she dumped the baby hours after delivering her at home without the help of anyone, reported Al-Anbaa.

In other case, police received a call about an attempted murder, so policemen were dispatched to the scene. The Arab woman who called them said her son - a Kuwaiti - threatened to kill her with a sharp object. When police inquired about her, she was found wanted on a misdemeanor case. When she was taken to the police station, her son arrived with a sharp object in an attempt to enable her to escape, but he was subdued and arrested, Al-Anbaa reported yesterday. He was also found wanted for



A screenshot showing smoke billowing from the roof of the Roudha Co-operative Society yesterday.

damaging a police patrol vehicle. Both were sent to concerned authorities.

On Thursday, police arrested a man after he had allegedly killed his sister in Taima. The victim had reportedly called police to seek help, saying that she had been held captive inside her home for two months. When her brother found out, he attacked her with a knife before police made it to the scene, she was dead. A day before, a man reportedly succumbed to a gunshot wound after he quarreled with a policeman who stopped him for reckless driving in the same area.

Drug dealer arrested

In the meantime, the Interior Ministry announced yesterday that police arrested a citizen for bringing in 1.5kg of shabu (methamphetamine) hidden in a

sweets' parcel that was imported to Kuwait. Drugs Control General Department officers received tips about the arrival of a parcel through a courier with sweet boxes, in which drugs were hidden. Customs were contacted and the shipping policy number was obtained, then when the shipment arrived, it was let out under police surveillance.

Police tracked the shipment until it reached a house where the citizen came out, and he was placed under arrested after he received the parcel. The man confessed of importing the drugs with intent to sell, the ministry said. When his residence was searched, police found 20 grams of hashish, seven narcotic pills, and a shotgun. He was taken to concerned authorities for further action.

Also yesterday, firemen put out a blaze that broke out in a local co-operative society. Footage



KUWAIT: This handout photo released by the Interior Ministry yesterday shows a suspect arrested on drug trafficking charges.

showing shoppers being evacuated from a supermarket in Kuwait after the fire alarm went off. It went viral on social media yesterday, Kuwait Fire Force later confirmed that Shuhada firemen put out the fire that broke out in an air conditioning unit on the roof of the Roudha Co-operative Society. No injuries were reported as an investigation was opened, KFF said.

Syria to help Lebanon with...

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Nasri Khouri told reporters, after the delegation led by interim deputy prime minister Zeina Akar met Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Al-Meqdad and Oil Minister Bassam Tomeh.

"The parties agreed to set up a joint team to track technical details" of the plan, added Khouri, who is secretary-general of the Lebanese-Syrian Higher Council. Lebanon's energy minister, Raymond Ghajar, said a meeting would be held next week in Jordan with representatives from Beirut, Amman, Damascus and Cairo to discuss technical and financial issues and to decide on a work plan and timetable. Work will be needed to get Syria's war-ravaged infrastructure up to the task of moving the energy. Meanwhile Lebanon's presidency has previously spoken of US-led talks with the World Bank to finance its imports.

Lebanon has maintained diplomatic ties with Syria but it adopted a policy of dissociation from the conflict since it started in 2011, putting a dampener on official dealings. Lebanese security officials and politicians have made several visits to Syria in recent years, but almost exclusively in a personal capacity or on behalf of political parties that support President Bashar Al-Assad's government.

They include representatives of the powerful Iran-backed Hezbollah movement, which has been battling alongside Assad's forces in Syria since the early stages of the war. The visit comes after the Lebanese presidency last month said that



DAMASCUS: Syrian cabinet members (right) meet with an official Lebanese delegation yesterday. —AFP

Washington has agreed to help Lebanon secure electricity and natural gas from Jordan and Egypt through Syrian territory.

This implies that the US is willing to waive Western sanctions which prohibit any official transactions with the Syrian government and which have hampered previous attempts by Lebanon to source gas from Egypt. That announcement followed Hezbollah's statement that Iran would begin sending fuel to Lebanon, with shipping website Tanker Trackers saying Friday that the first two ships had set off.

Lebanon, a country of more than six million people, is grappling with an economic crisis branded by the World Bank as one of the planet's worst in modern times. The central bank is struggling to afford basic imports, including fuel, which has caused shortages and prolonged power cuts that now last as long as 22 hours per day. — AFP

have pledged to be more accommodating than during their first stint in power, which also came after years of conflict - first the Soviet invasion of 1979, and then a bloody civil war. That regime was notorious for its brutal interpretation of Islamic law, and its treatment of women, who were forced inside and denied access to school and work.

This time around, the Taliban have made repeated declarations that they will not carry out revenge attacks on opponents, and women will have access to education and some employment. They have promised a more "inclusive" government that represents Afghanistan's complex ethnic makeup - though women are unlikely to be included at the top levels.

In Kabul, dozens of women protested for a second day yesterday to demand the right to work and inclusion in the government. Social media clips showed Taliban fighters and officials attempting to disperse the demonstrators and stopping people from filming with mobile phones. Asked about the delay in naming the government, Australia-based Afghanistan expert Nishank Motwani told AFP it was likely a combination of factors. "First reason is that the Taliban themselves have been stunned by their military success," he said. "If they get Panjshir before the government is formed it is good for their propaganda value but that is not the reason." — AFP

Kuwait's Sorour wins shot put...

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Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi

Delta does not cause more severe...

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risk of COVID hospitalization than those aged 5-11. After examining 3,116 hospital records from the period before Delta, and comparing them to 164 records during the Delta period, the percentage of children with severe indicators was found to not differ greatly.

Specifically, the percent of hospitalized patients admitted to intensive care was 26.5 pre-Delta and 23.2 post; the percent placed on ventilators was 6.1 pre-Delta and 9.8 post; and the percent who died was 0.7 pre-Delta and 1.8 post. These differences did not rise to the level of statistical significance. The finding comes with the important caveat that because the number of hospitalizations in the post-Delta period is small, more data will need to accrue for scientists to

Biden wants to end US global...

Continued from Page 1

everywhere from Iraq to Africa ever since - this is a shock. For most, though, polls show Biden's pivot is likely to be popular.

Biden's presidency is usually seen as a repudiation of the Donald Trump administration. It's true that a lot - from things like White House decorum to re-entering the Paris climate accord - changed the moment Biden walked into the Oval Office on Jan 20. But Biden's abandonment of open-ended US military adventures - what detractors call being "the world's policeman" - is Trumpian.

When Biden announced "it's time to end this forever war," about Afghanistan, "it could just as easily be Trump," said Charles Franklin, a Marquette Law School professor and director of the Marquette opinion poll. Today "the public is not committed to a large international role, certainly not of the sort the US played in the 1950s-1990s," Franklin told AFP. Regarding Afghanistan in particular, polls show strong backing for exiting - 77 percent, according to a new Washington Post-ABC News poll - even if Biden is taking a battering for the chaotic manner of the withdrawal.

Where Biden differs sharply from isolationist

yesterday congratulated Sorour. In a statement to KUNA, the minister praised Sorour's achievement in gifting Kuwait the second medal in this great international sports gathering. He also highly valued the continuous support of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah to Kuwaiti athletes. — Agencies

gain greater confidence about the conclusion.

The study also underscored vaccine effectiveness against pediatric COVID hospitalization during Delta. Between June 20 and July 31, among 68 adolescents hospitalized with COVID-19 whose vaccination status was known, 59 were unvaccinated, five were partly vaccinated, and four were fully vaccinated. This meant the unvaccinated were 10.1 times more likely to be hospitalized compared to vaccinated.

A second study by the CDC examined childhood COVID cases, hospitalizations, and emergency department visits from June to Aug 2021, and compared them to the levels of community vaccination at the time. COVID-related pediatric (ages 0-17) emergency department visits and hospitalizations were 3.4 times higher and 3.7 times higher respectively in states that fell in the bottom quartile of overall vaccinated per capita, compared to states in the highest quartile.

The takeaway message is that, while clinical trials for vaccines among those under the age of 12 and subsequent authorizations are awaited, high community rates of vaccination squelch COVID transmission and protect children — AFP

Trump is in enthusiasm for building alliances. The United States may not be a swaggering global cop, the Biden theory goes, but it can be a friendly community leader. His administration moved quickly to put Washington back at the center of tortuous negotiations between major powers and Iran over its nuclear policy, the climate accord, and traditional alliances like NATO.

A June trip to Europe for G7 and NATO summits - Biden's only foreign trip to date - resembled the diplomatic equivalent of a band getting back together. Now, though, some of those allies might be feeling nervous, analysts say. Tricia Bacon, an expert on counter-terrorism at American University's law department, told AFP that allies feel "a fair degree of frustration" over the lack of coordination in the US departure from Afghanistan. The US "message will have to be very consistent to regain the lost credibility," she said.

And Imad Harb, research director at the Arab Center in Washington, said European partners aren't the only ones left wondering. "Arab regimes accustomed to a close relationship with the United States should be worried about what happened in Afghanistan," he wrote on the think tank's website. "Biden may have finally drawn the curtain on American military interventionism in the wider Middle East," Harb said. Calling Biden's post-withdrawal speech "sobering," Harb said the apparent "contours of a 'Biden Doctrine'" will have sown "trepidation" across a region that for two decades has known no other reality than US intervention. — AFP

Taleban yet to name govt...

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Pakistan's intelligence chief Faiz Hameed was in Kabul, meanwhile, Hameed was reportedly in the city to be briefed by his country's ambassador but is also likely to meet top Taliban officials with whom Islamabad has historically had very close relations. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is also set to convene a high-level meeting on Afghanistan in Geneva on Sept 13, to focus on humanitarian assistance for the country.

The United Nations has already restarted humanitarian flights to parts of Afghanistan, while the country's flag carrier Ariana Afghan Airlines resumed domestic trips on Friday and the United Arab Emirates sent a plane carrying "urgent medical and food aid". Western Union and Moneygram, meanwhile, said they were restarting cash transfers, which many Afghans rely on from relatives abroad to survive.

China has already confirmed it will keep its embassy in Kabul open. Afghanistan's new rulers

Local

Astrolab initiative, ambitious endeavor to promote astronomy in Kuwait

Teams monitor astrological activity from inside, outside the city



KUWAIT: An image featured by NASA and taken by Astrolab initiative team member Abdullah Al-Harbi of Kuwait. —KUNA photos



An image featured by NASA and taken by Astrolab initiative team member Mohammad Al-Obaidi of Kuwait.

KUWAIT: Astronomy has always been one of the most vital sciences because of its great importance to human life. Since the dawn of time, humans looked at the sky in an attempt to understand this universe by studying its movements. Meanwhile, Kuwait has established scientific centers based on this notion.

The Astrolab initiative, launched by Advancement of Sciences Publishing and Distribution (ASPD), is one of the centers under the umbrella of Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), and aims to spread scientific awareness and knowledge by enriching Arabic content through paper and digital publications, and also by organizing activities that encourage the public to participate in various astronomical hobbies and endeavors.

In an interview yesterday, CEO of ASPD Dr Layla Al-Mousawi said that this initiative began in 2021 by collecting several ASPD activities prior to scientific progress for publication and including them in Astrolab. The Astrolab initiative team is a group of young people interested in photography, astronomical observation and citizen

science, she pointed out. The scientific progress of ASPD contributes to providing support to the team along with its various activities and reviewing scientific content for them, Mousawi mentioned. She explained that Astrolab is divided into several teams, one of which is for monitoring Kuwait's sky. Another team is tasked with documenting the initiative's activities on social media, while one team consists of asteroid hunters whose job is to analyze data and astronomical images.

Astrolab has different activities to include all segments of the community, including locally and in Arab countries, she noted. Amateur astronomers Mohammad Al-Obaidi, Abdullah Al-Harbi and Abdulwahab Al-Khater, who represent several teams in the initiative, go on trips to Al-Salmi desert to observe the universe through telescopes, she said. The teammates also introduce the public to the stars and the shape of the sky from outside the city, astrophotography workshops from inside the city, and put astronomical events on social media platforms, she explained. —KUNA



Members of Astrolab's 'Asteroid Hunters' team.



Young stars in Kuwait's sky

Zain sets final steps for Capital entrance renovation project

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, welcomed Al-Asimah Governor Sheikh Talal Khalid Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah at the company's headquarters in Shuwaikh with the presence of Zain Kuwait's Chief Executive Officer Eaman Al-Roudhan and the company's executive management. During the visit, the final steps were set for the upcoming project where Zain will contribute to renovating and greening the Capital's main entrance.

Last May, Zain was selected to renovate and maintain the main entrance of the Capital, a step that reflects the role of private sector companies in achieving social sustainability projects in partnership with the public sector. The Governor's visit to Zain HQ coincided with the project's upcoming launch.

Commenting on the collaboration, Zain Kuwait's Chief Executive Officer Eaman Al-Roudhan said: "It was my pleasure to welcome Al-Asimah Governor Sheikh Talal Khalid Al-Ahmad Al Sabah at Zain to put the final touches on the plan of our joint project. We are proud that Zain was selected as a partner for this initiative, especially that it is the national operator and a leader of the Kuwaiti private sector".

Roudhan explained: "During our meeting, we discussed the final design and details of the unique monument that will be built by Zain at the main entrance of the Capital, which we were very keen that it reflects Kuwait's rich heritage and identity. We look forward to seeing this monument present a beautiful image of Kuwait".

Roudhan added: "We strongly believe in the vital and strategic role played by the Kuwaiti private sector in achieving the nation's various developmental plans. This partnership is a real-world reflection of that belief, and for that, we were keen on being the first to support the Governate's renovation



KUWAIT: Al-Asimah Governor Sheikh Talal Khalid Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and Zain Kuwait's Chief Executive Officer Eaman Al-Roudhan with Zain and the Governate's officials during the visit.

vision, especially the main entrance that is perhaps considered the first landmark of the country's capital. We look forward to sharing this project's amazing results with the Kuwaiti people".

Al-Asimah Governor Sheikh Talal Khalid Al Ahmad Al Sabah stressed on the vital partnership between the public and private sectors: "Our partnership with Zain on this project, which started in May, is a great example of how the two sectors shoulder each other to serve the nation's goals. Kuwait's identity is at the core of this initiative, since the Governate and a leading private sector company like Zain are behind it".

The Governor expressed his gratitude to Zain and all parties involved in this unique project and wishes that it reflects a beautiful image of Kuwait and embodies the Governate's vision in beautifying the Capital.

Zain's support to this initiative comes in line with its core objectives that aim at shouldering the advancement of the community as a whole on all levels, where the company reaffirms the principal of partnership through similar efforts with the aim of contributing to the further progress of national goals and serve the country's developmental efforts.

Kuwait's Hashash appointed to senior WSA post

VIENNA: World Summit Awards (WSA), the international award system for purpose driven digital content, yesterday appointed Kuwaiti engineer Manar Al-Hashash as WSA Secretary General of the Arab Digital Content Award. In a statement, quoted by Austria news agency (APA), WSA Board of Directors Chairman, Professor Peter Bruck, affirmed that the decision was based on Hashash's experience and dedication to enriching digital content over the 16 years of her work with the International Award for Digital Content and her continuous support for the development of high-quality interactive digital content in the Arab world. WSA is the initiative of the Austrian government to the United Nations World Summit on Information Society (UN WSIS). Since 2003, WSA succeeds as a global venture to select and promotes best digital content through its network of over 240 experts based in 187 UN member states. —KUNA



Manar Al-Hashash

KCST students shine in 'Kuwait Seeds for the Future' program

KUWAIT: Five Kuwait College of Science and Technology (KCST) students finished in the top places in the "Huawei Kuwait Seeds for the Future 2021" program for the second consecutive year. Students Abdullah Aboamara, Abdullah Al-Kandari, Aliyah Al-Muwaizri, Fatemah Abulhassan and Joud Aboutamar got the first five places out of six for the second year in a row in the program, which is sponsored by the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) and supervised by Tareq Al-Zayyat and his team of Hanan Al-Sharah, Zainab Abulhassan and Abdelrahman Al-Sarhan. This program aims to instill the basic concepts of information and communication technology. During the program, students dealt mainly with four topics: 5G networks, AI, cloud computing and internet of things.



Tareq Al-Zayyat



A group photo of students participating in the program.

Local

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Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A notice is placed at the entrance of a barber shop in Kuwait City, prohibiting customers who are not vaccinated against the coronavirus from entering, on Friday. — 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)

Kuwait Army Chief of Staff receives call from US counterpart

KUWAIT: Kuwait Army Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Khaled Saleh Al-Sabah received on Friday a phone call from US Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff General Mark Milley. In a statement, Kuwait's Army said the two discussed the latest developments in the region and international arena. The two sides also tackled ways of boosting cooperation between armies of the two countries. The General thanked Kuwait during the recent Kabul evacuation operation.



Lt Gen Khaled Saleh Al-Sabah

The Pentagon had announced on Friday that US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin will travel to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait this week in a "thank you" tour for allies and troops that helped in the massive US-led airlift from Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover.

"Throughout his trip, Secretary Austin will meet with regional partners and thank them for their cooperation with the United States as we evacuated Americans, Afghans and citizens from other nations from Afghanistan," Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said in a statement.

NATO official praises Kuwait's participant in Defense College

ROME: NATO Defense College Head, Lieutenant-General Olivier Rittmann, hailed the experience of having a Kuwaiti educational consultant in the organization on Friday. This came in remark to the press on the end of the mandate of the Kuwaiti Colonel Marine Nasser Marafie at the NATO defense college. Rittmann affirmed that the NATO defense college chose Marafie due to his extensive experience and knowledge. Moreover, he went on praising the distinguished cooperation with the State of Kuwait and its "critical" role in promoting

strategic dialogue with the countries of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. He stressed that the college has excellent and advanced partnerships with the NATO center in Kuwait, as they were able to have a long and meaningful discussion on security issues in the Gulf region.

Meanwhile, Colonel Marafie expressed his pride in choosing him, in 2018, the first non-Allied teacher to work at the NATO defense college as a teacher and strategic expert for North Africa and the Middle East. The NATO Defense College is an international military college for training and educating military and civilian leaders in the relevant diplomatic and military fields in their countries with the aim of developing strategic thinking on political and military issues, training and studies, and achieving academic and research studies to support the activities of the Alliance. —KUNA



ROME: Colonel Marine Nasser Marafie (Right) with head of the NATO Defense College Lieutenant-General Olivier Rittmann. —KUNA

Kuwait Airways announce resuming direct flights to Cairo



KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways announced the resumption of commercial flights to Cairo starting from today, with two daily flights. Public Relations and Information Director Fayez Al-Enezi said the first scheduled flight to Cairo will be at 12:25 pm, while the second will be at 11:35 pm. He said this destination is highly important and has large demand, adding that KAC will announce the resumption of flights to other destinations in Egypt soon.

Enezi said Kuwait is ready with operational and backup centers to complete the resumption of commercial operations of all flights from and to Kuwait, in addition to being ready to increase operational as

well as passenger capacity. He said Kuwait Airways continuously seeks to offer its passengers wider choices to meet their traveling needs. Kuwait Airways launched 10 permanent and summer destinations in mid-June to London, Sarajevo, Paris, Geneva, Munich, Frankfurt, Trabzon, Bodrum, Tbilisi and Malaga.

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation had announced on Friday that commercial flights between Kuwait and Egypt will resume from Sunday. Nine carriers will operate between the two countries according to the seat capacity decided by the Cabinet.



Pakistani jewelers' community members meet ambassador

KUWAIT: Prominent members of the Pakistani gold business and jewelers' community, led by Mohammad Iftikhar Ghuman, met Ambassador of Pakistan to Kuwait Syed Sajjad Haider. Informative discussions on business related matters were held. Pakistani nationals have enjoyed a

strong hold on the gold business market in Kuwait for nearly 50 years. Important topics related to the field of jewelers' community were also covered in this meeting including prospects of hiring professionally skilled workers from Pakistan. Future business opportunities between Kuwait and Pakistan were also discussed in detail. Pakistani jewelers said during the meeting that Kuwait was their second home.

They expressed great appreciation to the guidance and support provided by the ambassador and embassy staff and hoped that the international business relations between Kuwait and Pakistan will continue to develop and grow stronger.

Kuwait Times
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PANJSHIR: Afghan resistance movement and anti-Taliban uprising forces take part in a military training at Malimah area of Dara district in Panjshir province as the valley remains the last major holdout of anti-Taliban forces. — AFP

Taliban battle for final holdout province

Anti-Taliban fighters, Islamists face off in Panjshir Valley

KABUL: Anti-Taliban fighters in Afghanistan's Panjshir Valley said they were battling to repulse "heavy" assaults, as the Islamists seek to capture the last holdout province defying their rule. Efforts to strike a peace deal between the two sides have failed, and the Taliban are keen to cap their lightning military offensive which saw them seize control of the rest of Afghanistan last month.

"The Taliban have a significant advantage," said Nishank Motwani, an Afghan analyst based in Australia, saying the Islamists were emboldened by their recent victories. "They are very well armed, and they have the psychological factor in their favor in that they precipitated the fall of the government so quickly." The Taliban seized an enormous arsenal of weapons and military kit that the now departed US provided to the defeated Afghan army, as well as the support of prisoners they freed from jails. "The Taliban also have shock troops, including the use of suicide tactics," Motwani added.

Fighters from the National Resistance Front (NRF), made up of anti-Taliban militia fighters and former Afghan security forces, are understood to have significant weapon stockpiles too in the valley, which lies around 80 kilometers north of Kabul. On Wednesday, senior Taliban official Amir Khan Muttaqi issued an audio message to say their forces had surrounded the valley, calling on the people of the Panjshir to tell fighters to lay down their arms. "Those who want to fight, tell them it is enough," Muttaqi said.

Renewed attacks

But many Afghans are terrified of a repeat of the Taliban's harsh rule from 1996 to 2001. The new rulers have pledged this time they will be more

accommodating, but many in Panjshir are deeply sceptical. Hours after their warning, Taliban forces launched renewed attacks including from the south of Panjshir from Kapisa, as well as from the Khawak pass to the west of the valley. Both sides have claimed to have inflicted heavy losses on their rivals. Communications are difficult in the valley, however, and AFP was unable to verify the reports on the ground. On Friday, Ali Maisam Nazary, a spokesman for the NRF who is understood to be outside the val-

ley but in close contact with key leader Ahmad Massoud, said there had been more attacks by Taliban forces overnight.



Efforts to strike peace deal fail

"There is heavy fighting in Panjshir," Nazary said. "He (Massoud) is busy defending the valley." Massoud is the son of the late guerrilla commander Ahmad Shah Massoud, dubbed the "Lion of Panjshir" for holding out first against Soviet and then Taliban forces when they were power before. He is understood to want autonomy for the region. Massoud said in a statement Wednesday that the Taliban had offered them "one or two seats" in their new administration, but he had rejected the deal. "The Taliban

have chosen the path of war," Massoud said.

Fighting bravado
Panjshir fighters—and their media-savvy leaders—are full of fighting bravado. "We are ready to defeat them, if they dare to invade," one Panjshir fighter said. But despite their confidence, the odds seem increasingly stacked against them. Geography at least is on the side of the Panjshir's fighters, said Motwani, and while the Taliban claim to have blocked roads into the valley, that is "very different" from controlling all sides. The 115-kilometre-long valley surrounded by jagged snow-capped peaks offers a natural military advantage, since defending units can use high positions to ambush attacking forces below.

But the conflict appears to be escalating, Martine van Bijlert, of the Afghanistan Analysts Network, warned. "Taliban forces have been massing around the entrance to the valley but have been hit in ambushes and have sustained casualties," Van Bijlert wrote in a recent analysis. "Whereas both sides mainly seemed to be trying to hurt each other in order to strengthen their hand in negotiations, without starting an all-out battle, according to the latest reports, the Taliban are now summoning forces from other provinces." The Panjshir - mainly inhabited by ethnic Tajik people-has immense symbolic value in Afghanistan as the area that has resisted occupation by invaders in the past. For Afghans opposed to the Taliban, the holdout province stands as a symbol to show the hardline Islamists are not the welcome rulers of all Afghanistan, Motwani said. "It gives hope to those Afghans who have lost almost everything in a blink of an eye," he said. "It is somewhere where people can go outside Taliban rule." —AFP

Deadly floods expose the dangers of NY basements

NEW YORK: The deaths of almost a dozen New Yorkers who could not escape their homes during flash flooding has exposed the perils of living in the city's often-dangerous basements. With rents in the Big Apple among the most expensive in the world, below-ground units offer an affordable option for many low-income residents. But the cramped, sometimes windowless apartments can come with risks as Wednesday night's record rainfall painfully highlighted.

Of the 13 people killed in New York City, 11 were found dead in basements, police said, as rapidly rising water levels left them with no way out. The deaths highlight how the effects of climate change are disproportionately impacting the poor. "Among the people MOST at risk during flash floods here are those living in off-the-books basement dwellings that don't meet the safety codes necessary to save lives," lawmaker Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez tweeted.

"These are working class, immigrant, and low-income people & families," she added. Although it is not yet known whether those who died lived in illegal basements, the tragedy has renewed attention about the issue. The New York Times reported that an 86-year-old woman found dead at home in Queens lived in a building where there had been complaints about illegal basements. Another victim was a 66-year-old man, originally from Ecuador, who died in a windowless bedroom in Brooklyn, the newspaper said.

A 2008 study by the Pratt Center for Community Development found that 114,000 New Yorkers lived in illegal basement apartments but researchers say the number is now likely to be much higher. "The problem is that because these spaces are illegal, because there are big fines associated with them, because the tenants need the space, the homeowners need the income, no one wants to talk about it," said Rebekah Morris, who leads basement legalization work at Pratt, told AFP.

"So it's very, very difficult to assess what the actual numbers are but we know anecdotally that it's very high," she added. The problem is becoming more acute as New York's population grows but adequate housing fails to keep up. Over the past decade, the city added 629,000 people, bringing its population to more than 8.8 million, according to US census data released last month. All but one death in this week's storm occurred in the borough of Queens, which has a high immigrant population, including many undocumented workers from Central and South America.

Morris said basement units are "a key piece of the housing ecosystem" among immigrant communities, essential workers and older residents, who cannot afford to stay elsewhere. "There's such a big crisis here. We don't have enough housing. And so people rent where they can't get a roof over their head, which puts them in danger," said Morris. Experts want action taken against unscrupulous landlords who take advantage of low supply and cut corners to maximize profits. — AFP

Climate crisis triggers spike in lightning strike deaths in India

JAIPUR: Faizuddin is still traumatized from the lightning strike that killed his three friends as they took selfies atop a 400-year-old fort in India, where climate change is making lethal strikes more common.

Scores of people have met similarly gruesome ends this year in the western desert state of Rajasthan, where deaths caused by thunderstorms used to be uncommon. "I was hit by three thunderbolts, one after the other," said Faizuddin, his voice quivering as he lay wrapped in a blanket at his modest home in Jaipur. He and his trio of childhood friends had climbed hundreds of steps to a watchtower on top of Amer Fort during a July storm that also claimed eight other lives.

"The sound was deafening, it felt like a huge bomb blast. My trousers and shoes caught fire, my limbs became stiff and I couldn't move," the 21-year-old told AFP, a deep gash still on his head. Around 2,500 people die in lightning strikes around India each year, according to government figures, compared to just 45 in the United States. Cattle and other animals are often killed or maimed during severe thunderstorms, with one burst of lightning in northeastern Assam state wiping out a herd of 18 elephants in May.

Thunderbolts contain as much as a billion volts of electricity and can cause immense damage to buildings when they hit. Earlier this year at another fort in Chittorgarh, a few hours south of where Faizuddin's friends died, a bolt struck a tower and



JAIPUR: Photo shows members of the State Disaster Response Force conducting a search operation near the watch-towers of Amer Fort on the outskirts of Jaipur, after 11 people were killed in lightning strikes at the fort. — AFP

sent a huge chunk of stone plummeting to the ground. The site was fitted with a rod to draw lightning away from the centuries-old structure "but it proved to be ineffective," said Ratan Jitarwal, a conservator supervising the fort's painstaking repair work.

'A sudden surge'

Lightning is also becoming more frequent, with nearly 19 million recorded strikes in the 12 months to March-up by a third from the previous year. Global warming is driving the increase, says Sanjay Srivastava of the Lightning Resilient India Campaign, one of the few organizations collecting data on thunderstorms. "Because of climate change and localized heating of the Earth's surface, and

more moisture, there is a sudden surge of huge lightning," he told AFP. The problem is worldwide, with research this year forecasting a possible doubling of the average number of lightning strikes inside the Arctic Circle this century.

This could spark widespread tundra fires and trigger massive amounts of carbon stored within the permafrost escaping into the atmosphere, exacerbating global warming. Evidence suggests lightning strikes are also becoming more common in urban areas—a particular concern in India, where the city population is forecast to rise dramatically in the coming years. Srivastava said the results could be catastrophic if, for example, a strike hit a hospital and shorted out equipment used to keep patients on life support in intensive care. — AFP

International

South Sudan facing 'new wave of repression', Amnesty warns

Many activists now in hiding after a string of arrests

NAIROBI: South Sudan is witnessing a "new wave of repression", global rights group Amnesty International warned Friday, with many activists now in hiding after a string of arrests in the conflict-racked country. The world's newest nation has suffered from chronic instability since independence in 2011, with a coalition of civil society groups urging the government to step down, saying they have "had enough". The authorities have taken a tough line against such demands in recent weeks, arresting eight activists as well as detaining three journalists and two employees of a pro-democracy non-profit, according to rights groups.

"We are witnessing a new wave of repression emerging in South Sudan targeting the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly," said Deprose Muchena, Amnesty International's regional director for East and Southern Africa. The clampdown followed a declaration last month by the People's Coalition for Civil Action (PCCA) calling for a peaceful public upris-

ing. The PCCA had urged the public to join its protest on Monday in the capital Juba but the city fell silent as the authorities branded the demonstration "illegal" and deployed heavily-armed



Newest nation suffers chronic instability

security forces to monitor the streets for any sign of opposition.

"Peaceful protests must be facilitated rather than cracked down upon or prevented with arrests,

harassment, heavy security deployment or any other punitive measures," Muchena said in a statement.

The rights group noted that many activists had faced harassment since the aborted demonstration, "with some suspecting they were being shrieved by security forces". The authorities have also shut down a radio station and a think tank in connection with the protests.

'Undisguised hostility'

Media rights group Reporters Without Borders, known by its French acronym RSF, on Friday condemned the closure of the radio station and called for "an immediate end to the harassment of South Sudanese reporters". "The undisguised hostility of the authorities towards the media highlights how difficult it is for journalists to cover politics in South Sudan, where at least ten have been killed since 2014," said Arnaud Froger, the head of RSF's Africa desk. South Sudan is ranked 139th out of 180 countries

in RSF's 2021 World Press Freedom Index.

In a statement released on Friday, the United States, the European Union, Britain and Norway urged the South Sudan government to protect "the rights of citizens... to express their views in a peaceful manner, without fear of arrest". Since achieving independence from Sudan in 2011, the young nation has been in the throes of a chronic economic and political crisis, and is struggling to recover from the aftermath of a five-year civil war that left nearly 400,000 people dead.

Although a 2018 ceasefire and power-sharing deal between President Salva Kiir and his deputy Riek Machar still largely holds, it is being sorely tested, with little progress made in fulfilling the terms of the peace process. The PCCA—a broad-based coalition of activists, academics, lawyers and former government officials—has described the current regime as "a bankrupt political system that has become so dangerous and has subjected our people to immense suffering."—AFP

News in brief

Turkey fines WhatsApp

ANKARA: Turkey has joined a host of other countries in fining Facebook's ubiquitous WhatsApp messaging service for failing to sufficiently protect user data. The 1,950,000-lira (\$235,000, 200,000-euro) penalty was imposed after months of confusion over whether WhatsApp had introduced its controversial new data sharing rules in Turkey. WhatsApp unrolled a policy change earlier this year that allowed it to collect more personal data—including phone numbers and location—for everyone who agreed with its new terms of service. It offered users no other option besides dropping the service outright. It then delayed imposing the change in Turkey after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's media office moved its communications to a local equivalent to WhatsApp called BiP. Erdogan's government and WhatsApp have since issued contradictory statements about whether the new data rules had been applied in Turkey. —AFP

Data security concerns

JAKARTA: Indonesians expressed concerns over the security of their personal medical data Saturday after the president's coronavirus vaccine certificate was leaked and a large test app also appeared compromised. Indonesia has a weak cyber security record, with poor online literacy and frequent leaks previously. Joko Widodo's vaccine certificate—which circulated online, showing his censored ID number and vaccination times—was leaked by users who found his data on official vaccine-monitoring app PeduliLindungi, the government said. "Certain people have accessed the vaccine certificate of Mr. Joko Widodo by using a vaccine check feature available in PeduliLindungi," an official statement said Friday. Jakarta-based Ageng Wibowo, 39, said the leak made him nervous and called for tougher cyber security laws. "If a president can have his data leaked what about me who is just a regular person?" —AFP

NZ's COVID death in months

WELLINGTON: New Zealand recorded its first COVID-related death in six months Saturday, but health authorities said there were signs the outbreak of the highly infectious Delta variant was coming under control. A woman in her 90s, who had underlying health conditions and could not receive a ventilator or intensive care support, died in an Auckland hospital on Friday night. She is the 27th person to die with COVID-19 in New Zealand and the first recorded since February 16 this year. Authorities said the woman was a household contact of a person who had already tested positive for the virus in Auckland. New Zealand's largest city with a population of around 1.7 million. New Zealand has been battling a coronavirus outbreak since the first locally transmitted case in six months was detected in mid-August, thrusting the country of five million into lockdown. Since then, 782 cases have been recorded, primarily in Auckland, which remains at its highest level of restrictions while the rest of the country has eased back restrictions. —AFP

23 Myanmar troops killed

YANGON: Myanmar ethnic rebels have killed at least 23 government soldiers in days of fighting near the Chinese border, a spokesman for the group said Friday, in the latest clashes likely to worry powerful neighbor Beijing. The country has been in turmoil since a military coup in February, which sparked huge pro-democracy protests, a bloody crackdown and renewed fighting in ethnic border areas. Clashes broke out in Mongko, Shan state, on August 28 when troops tried to seize a base from the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), the group's spokesman and local media reports said. "They came to take our base. They were hurt a lot as we were waiting at the top of the mountain and they were at the bottom. We shot them as they were coming," an MNDAA spokesman told AFP on condition of anonymity. —AFP

EU, AstraZeneca settle vaccine supply dispute

BRUSSELS: The European Union and UK-based drugs giant AstraZeneca settled their dispute over a shortfall in coronavirus vaccine supplies on Friday, agreeing an extended delivery schedule. The European Commission went to court after the firm failed to deliver all of a promised 300 million doses by June 2021, but AstraZeneca will now have until the end of March next year to make up the number.

The agreement ends the legal battle and AstraZeneca will not face any fines or penalty payments — unless it falls short of its new target dates. "I'm very pleased that we have been able to reach a common understanding which allows us to move forward and work in collaboration with the European Commission to help overcome the pandemic," said AstraZeneca's Ruud Dobber. Brussels was furious when the British-Swedish pharmaceutical outfit fell far short of its promises, undermining the early stages of the EU's COVID-19 vaccine rollout.

Officials accused AstraZeneca of prioritizing UK vaccine deliveries over the EU order and European Commission lawyers went to court to demand deliveries or see huge daily fines imposed for any ongoing shortfall. But the firm argued that its contract with the bloc only obliged it to make "best efforts" to meet its delivery target, and that production bottlenecks in its European plants had been unavoid-

What 'Texas abortion decision' says about the Supreme Court

WASHINGTON: The conservative shift of the US Supreme Court under Donald Trump has been on full display this week with a decision seen as a severe setback to abortion rights. How the highest US court will rule on other sensitive issues and how Democrats will respond are burning questions in Washington right now.

The Texas abortion ruling

Citing only procedural arguments, the court, by a 5-4 majority, declined on Thursday to block a Texas law that effectively bans most abortions in the state. Steven Schwinn, a law professor at the University of Illinois Chicago, said the ruling "represents a sharp right turn on the court."

Even if the court did not address the merits of the Texas law, the decision creates an "end-run" around Roe v. Wade, the landmark 1973 Supreme Court case that enshrined a woman's right to an abortion. Such a ruling would not have been possible a year ago, Schwinn noted, when liberal feminist icon Ruth Bader Ginsburg was still on the bench. Ginsburg's death in September 2020 gave Trump the

opportunity to nominate his third justice to the court, cementing a 6-3 conservative majority.

Asserting their independence, the justices did reject Trump's appeals to the court to overturn the results of the November 2020 presidential election. But the Texas decision revealed their true conservative colors. "The curtain has sort of been pulled," said Tracy Thomas, director of the Center for Constitutional Law at the University of Akron in Ohio. "Their decision-making is influenced by politics and their environments in their jurisprudence and their belief systems," Thomas added.

What to expect in the future?

The Supreme Court is scheduled to consider a Mississippi law later this year that would ban an abortion after 15 weeks of pregnancy. "I expect that the court will sharply curtail the right to abortion under Roe v. Wade, or entirely overrule Roe v. Wade," Schwinn said. The court is also scheduled to hear arguments in a New York case that could restrict the ability of city or state authorities to impose gun control laws.

IS-inspired attacker shot dead after knife rampage in N Zealand

WELLINGTON: An Islamic State-inspired attacker injured six people in a New Zealand supermarket knife rampage Friday, before being shot dead by undercover police officers who had him under round-the-clock surveillance. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said she was "gutted" the man, a Sri Lankan national, had managed to carry out his "hateful" assault even though he was on a terror watchlist.

She said the man, who arrived in New Zealand in 2011, entered a shopping mall in suburban Auckland and seized a knife from a display before going on a stabbing spree. Six people were wounded, three critically, in the 60 seconds before surveillance officers opened fire. Terrified shoppers fled for the exits and video footage shot by bystanders showed men run-



PARIS: People hold placards including one reading 'Media are the virus' and wave French national flags as they march during a demonstration to protest against the mandatory COVID-19 health pass to access most of the public space yesterday. —AFP

able. In an interim ruling pending the final settlement of the case, the Brussels court imposed a new delivery schedule on AstraZeneca.

"Today's settlement agreement guarantees the delivery of the remaining 200 million COVID-19 vaccine doses by AstraZeneca to the EU," European health commissioner Stella Kyriakides said in a statement. "While this week we reached the important milestone of 70 percent full vaccination of the EU's adult population, there are significant differences in vaccination rates between our member states, and the continued availability of vaccines, including AstraZeneca's, remain crucial."

AstraZeneca manufactures vaccines designed at Britain's Oxford University and sells them on a non-profit basis - its version is cheaper and easier to store than many competitors.

But the European Union has become frustrated by the slow pace of supply and has made another vaccine produced by US giant Pfizer and Germany's BioNTech the workhorse of its buying programme. A European Commission statement said AstraZeneca had delivered 100 million doses in the first half of 2021, would send 135 million more by the end of the year and another 65 million doses by March 2022. —AFP



WASHINGTON: The US Supreme Court is seen in Washington, DC. The Supreme Court voted 5-4 not to stop a Texas law that prohibits most abortions after six weeks of pregnancy. —AFP

"Besides First Amendment and religious liberty and abortion rights, we're also seeing justices who are active and question our entire administrative procedures," Thomas said, adding this could impact "business issues, regulatory issues, environmental issues." "It crosses everything. That's a pretty wide-reaching activism," she said. "It's a conservative court... that wants to leave a legacy in the law. It's clear that conservatives are more judicially active than we have seen in decades past."

How will Democrats respond?

There have been calls for months on the Democratic left to increase the number of justices on the court in a bid to dilute the influence of the conservative faction. President Joe Biden initially said he was not a "fan" of the idea, but he later named a bipartisan commission to study the subject of reforming the court. The commission is to submit its report before the end of the year. —AFP

ning toward the incident before a barrage of shots rang out.

The attack has stirred painful memories of the Christchurch mosques shootings in March 2019, New Zealand's worst terror atrocity, when a white supremacist gunman murdered 51 Muslim worshippers and severely wounded another 40. "What happened today was despicable, it was hateful, it was wrong," Ardern said after the latest attack. "It was carried out by an individual, not a faith, not a culture, not an ethnicity. He alone carries the responsibility for these acts." Asked about the man's motivations, she said "it was a violent ideology and ISIS-inspired", using an acronym for the Islamic State jihadist group.

Ardern said she was limited in what she could publicly reveal about the attacker because he had been before the courts previously and was the subject of court suppression orders. But New Zealand media reported the man was a 32-year-old who prosecutors last year accused of plotting a "lone wolf" terror attack using knives. The case failed after a judge ruled that planning a terror attack was not in



AUCKLAND: This handout image shows a general view of a shopping mall housing a supermarket in Auckland where an Islamic State-inspired attacker injured six people in a supermarket knife rampage before being shot dead by undercover police officers. —AFP

itself an offence under existing laws. The man was instead found guilty on lesser charges of possessing propaganda supporting Islamic State and sentenced to 12 months' supervision. —AFP

International

Study in streets: Outdoor classes for Yemen's beleaguered children

Yemenis face bleak future amid coronavirus and brutal war

TAEZ: Dozens of children kneel in an outdoor, makeshift classroom at the start of the school year in Yemen, where coronavirus and a brutal war have left them facing a bleak future. The youngsters in the impoverished Arab country's third city of Tazeh make do and learn as best they can, seven years into a conflict that has killed tens of thousands and forced millions to flee their homes. "We study one day on the bare floor, another day on the rooftop and some days in the street," seventh-grader Laith Kamel told AFP.

"For four years, we have been wanting to go to a real school." Across the country children either have no classes at all or lack basics such as desks, chairs or bathrooms. Many schools have been destroyed in the conflict between the government and the Houthis rebels, while others have been turned into refugee camps or military facilities. About two million children were without school even before COVID-19 hit, according to the United Nations, which has warned the number will likely rise.

Dropouts

For those enrolled in the Al-Thulaya school in Tazeh, where annual tuition is approximately \$1 per pupil, classes are held in an unfinished building. School officials say the beleaguered government, locked in conflict with the rebels, cannot provide proper facilities. So the meagre tuition fees go almost entirely on rent for the bare, grey building, which has no glass in its windows or functioning sewage system. Teachers at the school know conditions are completely unfit for children, noting also that there are many dropouts and runaways.

"There are dropouts because there are no basic services like chairs and bathrooms," says Abdulghani Mahyoub, the principal of Al-Thulaya, which has about 900 students. "We live in the open. Most students are studying outside in the yard." What's more, "children get sick all the time" in the overcrowded classrooms, teacher Asia Ahmed says. A city of 600,000 people under government control but besieged by the Houthis rebels since 2015, Tazeh is one of Yemen's most troubled cities, and has been repeatedly bombed by the insurgents. The coronavirus pandemic has only made life harder for children and teachers alike.



'We study on bare floor, and on the rooftop'

A third wave of infections has struck Yemen's 30 million people just as the school year begins, government officials said in August. Masks and social distancing to curb the spread of COVID-19 are luxuries most cannot afford in Yemen, where the war has driven millions of displaced to the brink of famine. Yemen has so far reported nearly 8,000 coronavirus cases, including more than 1,470 deaths, but the UN says testing is scant and real numbers are likely much higher.

America in our history," Biden said. The move comes ahead of the 20th anniversary of the attack, which spurred then-president George W. Bush soon after to order the invasion of Afghanistan, where the Taliban sheltered Al-Qaeda's leadership.

Biden pulled the last US troops out of Afghanistan this week, completing a dramatic evacuation from Kabul's airport after the Taliban defeated the US-backed government and surged back to power. The push for more information is being driven by victims' families suing Saudi Arabia for alleged complicity in the horrific attack. The families have long expressed frustration at the number of documents that remain off limits. The official 9/11 Commission, which was set up by Congress, said there was "no evidence that the Saudi government as an institution or senior Saudi officials individually funded" Al-Qaeda.

That phrasing has been interpreted by some as suggesting that unofficial or lower ranking Saudi figures might have played a role. Some of the investigation may still be deemed too sensitive to release. In an executive order triggering the declassification process, Biden noted the "events in question occurred two decades ago or longer, and they concern a tragic moment that continues to resonate in American history." "It is therefore critical to ensure that the United States Government maximizes transparency... except when the strongest possible reasons counsel otherwise." — AFP

Biden orders release of secret 9/11 documents

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden on Friday ordered declassification over the next six months of still secret documents from the government investigation into the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Biden is responding to pressure from families of some of the approximately 3,000 people killed by Al-Qaeda on September 11, 2001.

They have long argued that the classified documents might contain evidence that the government of Saudi Arabia, a close US ally, had links to the hijackers who flew into the World Trade Center and Pentagon. "Today, I signed an executive order directing the Department of Justice and other relevant agencies to oversee a declassification review of documents related to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's September 11th investigations," Biden said in a statement.

Declassification must take place "over the next six months." "We must never forget the enduring pain of the families and loved ones of the 2,977 innocent people who were killed during the worst terrorist attack on



PHILADELPHIA: US President Joe Biden steps off Air Force One upon arrival at Philadelphia International Airport in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. — AFP

Afghan TV network stays on-air despite fear of Taliban

KABUL: As Taliban fighters entered Kabul on the evening of August 15, executives at Afghanistan's biggest independent TV network had a tough decision to make: stay on-air or go dark. Tolo kept broadcasting, but like the rest of the country's TV and radio stations, it now faces a tough and uncertain future under the Taliban, whose return has sent fear coursing through the media. The Islamist militant group killed and threatened journalists throughout its 20-year insurgency. During their 1996-2001 regime, TV and most entertainment were banned, and there was no media to speak of.

The Taliban takeover "put us in a very, very difficult situation... to continue our work or not," Lotfullah Najafzada, the director of Tolo News, told AFP in a phone interview. "As a 24/7 news operation, we didn't even have one hour to take a break and rethink." Tolo stayed on because it had a duty to cover the news, he said, and also because it would have been an "almost impossible" task to negotiate a resumption with the Taliban had the network shut down.

The Taliban leadership has asked Afghan media to operate as usual. One official even sat down for an interview with a woman host on Tolo News, keen to convince

people that the Taliban will be softer this time around. But many Afghans, including in the media, are not convinced. "We're scared, I'll be honest with you, we are nervous," Saad Mohseni, CEO of Tolo's parent company Moby Group, told the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) from Dubai. "Everyone is having sleepless nights, but what the viewer is experiencing is not that different."

'My family will be threatened'

The Taliban victory has plunged Afghanistan's independent media into crisis. Around 100 privately owned outlets have suspended operations, according to watchdog Reporters Without Borders (RSF). The Pajhwok news agency said many shut down because of the financial crunch caused by the Taliban takeover.

It has also forced many women out of the industry.



KABUL: Photo shows Afghan reporters of Tolo News work in the newsroom at Tolo TV station in Kabul. — AFP



TAEZ: Yemeni students attend class in their destroyed school compound on the first day of the new academic year in the country's third-city of Tazeh. — AFP

Teachers go unpaid

The UN children's agency said the COVID outbreak had forced an early end to both the 2019/20 and 2020/21 academic years. It disrupted the "education of nearly 5.8 million primary and secondary school children, including 2.5 million girls," UNICEF has estimated. The overall total could rise as high as six million, the agency warned in a July report. Yemen is enduring what the UN says is the world's worst humanitarian crisis. The conflict has killed tens of thousands of peo-

ple, mostly civilians, according to aid groups. About 80 percent of the population needs assistance, the UN has said. "To make matters worse, two-thirds of teachers in Yemen—over 170,000 teachers in total—have not received a regular salary for more than four years," according to UNICEF. "This puts around four million additional children at risk of disrupted education or dropping out as unpaid teachers quit teaching to find other ways of providing for their families." — AFP

COVID surges in US as rest of world stabilizes

PARIS: North America suffered a new surge in coronavirus infections this week and US deaths increased by a fifth, while the pandemic stabilized in the rest of the world. Here is the global state of play based on an AFP database.

Stabilisation

The number of new daily cases around the world decreased slightly by three percent this week to 639,315, according to an AFP tally to Thursday. The pandemic appears to be stabilizing after gaining ground since mid-year fanned by the highly contagious Delta variant which has become predominant in most countries. However, the confirmed cases only reflect a fraction of the actual number of infections, with varying counting practices and levels of testing in different countries.

North America up, Africa down

The pandemic continues to worsen in the United States/Canada region, where the number of cases increased by eight percent. Oceania saw a 23 percent increase in infections. But cases fell 26 percent in Africa and 17 percent in Latin America. There were also slight decreases in Europe of three percent, and in Asia and the Middle East of two percent each.

Biggest spike

Gaza was the territory where the epidemic picked up most speed, with 75 percent more cases on a daily basis. Norway followed with 69 percent more, Romania 64 percent, Syria and Ukraine (60 percent more each).

Biggest drops

At the other end of the spectrum, Indonesia and Bangladesh saw the biggest drop with 42 percent fewer new daily cases each. Ireland was down 36 percent and Cuba 30 percent.

US bears the brunt

The United States continued to record the most new infections by far, with 166,367 a day, an increase of seven percent. India followed with 42,772, an increase of 27 percent and the United Kingdom 33,456, a decrease of one percent. On a per capita basis the country that recorded the most new cases this week was Israel with 731 per 100,000 inhabitants, followed by Kosovo (642) and Georgia (620). — AFP

RSF said only 76 women journalists are still working for outlets in the Afghan capital—a huge drop from the 700 reported last year. Outside Kabul, it added, "most women journalists have been forced to stop working". There have also been reports of intimidation, harassment and violence. In one shocking incident, a group of Taliban fighters stormed the studio of the privately owned Afghanistan TV. They stood behind the anchor's desk holding assault rifles as their commander read out a statement urging viewers to not be afraid of the group. Such threats have forced scores of Afghan journalists to flee—including Beheshta Arghand, who left days after she conducted the ground-breaking Taliban interview on Tolo News. "Because of me, my family will be threatened by the Taliban," she told diplomats in Qatar on Wednesday. — AFP

News in brief

Russia bans 6 VPN providers

MOSCOW: Russia's media watchdog Roskomnadzor on Friday effectively banned the use of several major VPN networks, including the widely used Nord VPN and Express VPN. The move comes as authorities ramp up control of the Russian segment of the internet, blocking access to dozens of opposition-linked websites ahead of a parliamentary election this month. The watchdog said in a statement that the services violated Russian law by allowing access to illegal online content. Four other VPN providers were also banned. Roskomnadzor said allowing access to blocked content "created conditions for illegal activities, including those related to the distribution of drugs, child pornography, extremism and suicidal tendencies". — AFP

Gaza tunnel collapse kills 3

GAZA: The bodies of three Palestinians were discovered on Friday after an underground tunnel from the southern Gaza Strip to Egypt collapsed, authorities in the Islamist Hamas-controlled enclave said. "Civil defense teams found three bodies under the ground near the border, south of Rafah" city after part of the tunnel collapsed on Thursday, interior ministry spokesman Iyad Al-Bozom said in a statement. The deaths occurred after gas was sent into the tunnel from the Egyptian side, triggering the collapse that killed "three workers", a source close to Hamas said on condition of anonymity. Israel says a tunnel network was dug under the border with Egypt to allow the Iran-backed Hamas and its Islamic Jihad allies to smuggle in arms. — AFP

Former Iran army chief dies

TEHRAN: Former Iranian armed forces chief Hassan Firouzabadi, who once accused Western nations of spying on the country using lizards, has died of coronavirus aged 70, local media reported on Friday. Revolutionary Guards chief Hossein Salami praised Firouzabadi's "continuous efforts" to defend "the sacred system of the Islamic Republic of Iran", in a statement published on the Guards' Sepahnews website. A trained doctor, Firouzabadi joined the Basij Islamic volunteer militia during the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-88. Serving in administrative roles, he swiftly rose up its ranks before being named head of the armed forces in September 1989 by Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, remaining in the post until 2016. — AFP

4 Indonesian soldiers killed

JAKARTA: At least four Indonesian soldiers were killed and two others wounded in an ambush by guerrillas in the breakaway region of Papua, authorities said Friday. More than 30 rebels ambushed a military outpost in Maybrat, attacking the soldiers with machetes before escaping into the jungle. "It was still dark when the attack happened and the perpetrators escaped right away," West Papua military chief I Nyoman Cantiasa said in a video statement made available to AFP on Friday. Security forces arrested two members of the rebel group responsible for the ambush after hours of searching the jungle, the army said. The military has ordered a manhunt and vowed to "destroy" the rebels in response to Thursday's killings. The bodies of the dead soldiers have been flown home for burial, according to the Papua army, while the two wounded security forces are currently being treated at a hospital. — AFP

Business

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2021

Delta hits US hiring in new setback for Biden

High prices, shortages plagued US service sector in August: Survey

WASHINGTON: The United States added far fewer jobs than expected in August as businesses grappled with the Delta wave of COVID-19, a major disappointment and yet another complication for President Joe Biden's plans to remake the world's largest economy. Employment rose by just 235,000 jobs last month, according to Labor Department data released Friday, and while the unemployment rate fell to a pandemic low of 5.2 percent, the report was nowhere near the job gains seen in recent months, which have topped one million.

In some ways, the lackluster hiring told a familiar tale, with the world's largest COVID-19 outbreak once again hurting the labor market and underscoring that it is unlikely to make much improvement if infections remain high. Biden, who is negotiating passage of two massive spending bills through a Congress where even his ostensible allies have shown a willingness to defy him, said he had pulled the country from "economic free fall." "What we're seeing is an economic recovery that is durable and strong," he said in a speech from the White House.

But he acknowledged the job numbers fell short of expectations and added a somber message: "We have a lot more work to do." The president is urging Congress to enact both a \$1.2 trillion infrastructure overhaul and a \$3.5 trillion social welfare package. But on Thursday a moderate senator urged fellow Democrats to delay voting on the latter bill, which cannot pass without his support.

The Federal Reserve is also paying close attention to the data, as it could impact when it begins slowing its massive purchases of bonds meant to help the economy weather the pandemic.

Chair Jerome Powell has signaled that could start by year's end.

Small businesses struggle to survive in Afghanistan

KABUL: For 10 years Fahad made a good living selling wedding gowns at his bridal shop in the Afghan capital, but since the Taliban rolled into town on August 15 he hasn't sold a single dress. At a nearby tailor for men, Tanveer tells a similar tale—he has sold just one traditional shalwar kameez suit in over two weeks. Abdul Hassan, meanwhile, hasn't moved a single appliance in his electronics store in 20 days, and has turned off the lights and air conditioner to save money.

But Fawzi, whose family runs a swish general merchandise store in Parwan-e-Seh neighborhood, is doing better after branching out with a new line of burqas and hijabs. Small-business owners and merchants are struggling to make ends meet since the Taliban's return to power last month, with many already talking of closing shop and trying their luck outside the country.

"Nobody has any money," Fahad told AFP at his bridal shop—a fact borne out by huge daily queues

No good news
The August payroll increase was sharply lower than the upwardly revised 1.1 million positions added in July, and considerably below the 750,000 new jobs expected by analysts. The weak hiring comes as states and businesses impose mask-wearing requirements and other restrictions to fend off the fast-spreading Delta variant. COVID-19 vaccines have allowed for strong rehiring in recent months after more than 20 million people lost their jobs when the pandemic began last year, but as of August 5.3 million positions still haven't been recovered, according to the Labor Department report.

The number of people reporting they could not work because their employer lost business or closed due to the virus rose to 5.6 million from 5.2 million in July. "September likely will be weak too, and we're becoming nervous about the prospects for a decent revival in October, given that behavior lags cases, and cases are yet to peak," Ian Shepherdson of Pantheon Macroeconomics said.

Big wage jump
In an interview with CNBC, National Economic Council Director Brian Deese said, "even with the headwinds of Delta... we have an economy that's able to continue generating durable job growth," pointing to employment gains since Biden took office in January. Industries that did add jobs last month include professional and business services, which rose by 74,000, transportation and warehousing, which gained 53,000, and private education, which added 40,000, though state government education and local government education saw declines.

A positive surprise was seen in wages, where average hourly earnings rose 0.6 percent to \$30.73 after four straight months of increases.

outside city banks. The authorities have limited withdrawals to the equivalent of \$200 a time.

And Fahad is already changing the way he does business in order not to attract the attention of the Taliban. He plans to remove the heads from the mannequins modeling his glitzy gowns.

"We can't show pictures or faces of people, so I will take off the heads," he said. Like all the businessmen AFP spoke to for this article, Fahad asked not to be fully identified—or for his store to be named—for fear of reprisal. "At the moment we don't know what we can do and what we mustn't do," Fahad said. "So I am trying to operate like the Taliban were last time."

'Softer Taliban'
That "last time"—from 1996–2001—Fahad was an early teen and mostly oblivious to the repressive rule of the hardline Islamists. Women were largely barred from public life, television and music were banned, photographing people was considered idolatry and men were ordered not to shave and to wear only national dress. The Taliban have promised a softer rule this time around, but in the absence of a government and formal dictates, ordinary Afghans are wondering what they can and can't get away with. Tailor Tanveer says he doesn't expect to sell another

sugar a month," he told AFP. "I have not been able to find milk at all."

Another shopper, N Wijeratne said two kilos was not enough but added: "Rationing is good because it will let others also a chance to get some supplies." The government, which declared a state of emergency this week, imposed a maximum price of 95 rupees (62 US cents) for a kilo of sugar and 95 rupees for a kilo of white rice. Authorities said that more than 32,000 tons of sugar were found in raids on private warehouses carried out on Wednesday and Thursday. But there have also been sharp price rises for onions and potatoes, while milk powder, kerosene oil and cooking gas are also in short supply. Only government stores have been opening because of a nationwide coronavirus lockdown that the government on Friday extended for one week. Experts have blamed the food crisis on a shortage of foreign exchange to import and maintain stocks. —AFP

Last week, President Jair Bolsonaro urged Brazilians to "turn off a light at home" to conserve power, and on Tuesday the government hiked electricity prices by an average of seven percent, partly to cover new power plants and energy imports. "We are the limit of the limit," said Bolsonaro, who is gearing up to seek reelection in 2022 amid record low popularity ratings, widespread disapproval of his handling of the COVID-19 crisis, and now also confronting extreme climate conditions that show little sign of abating. Brazil's water levels will likely continue to deteriorate in September, according to electric grid operator ONS.

And the National Water and Sanitation Agency (ANA) has declared a "critical shortage of water resources," effective until November, for the Parana river basin at the heart of Brazil's hydroelectric



NEW YORK: People walk past a 'We're hiring!' sign posted at a store in New York City. New applications for US unemployment benefits increased marginally last week, the government said. —AFP

Service sector hit
The massive US service sector continued expanding in August but businesses remained worried about high prices and shortages of materials and labor, although there were signs that situation could be improving, an industry survey released Friday said. The Institute for Supply Management (ISM) reported its services index was at 61.7 percent in August, just under what was expected and below the all-time high of 64.1 percent in July.

The index was nonetheless well above the

50-percent threshold indicating expansion and in its 15th straight month of growth after the sector plunged last year when the COVID-19 pandemic began.

"There was a pullback in the rate of expansion in the month of August; however, growth remains strong for the services sector," the survey's chair Anthony Nieves said. Positive trends were seen in shortening supplier delivery times, a sign the supply chain snarls of recent months could be untangling. Prices remained high but fell 6.9 percentage points, and order backlogs also declined. —AFP



KABUL: Small-business owners and merchants are struggling to make ends meet since the Taliban's return to power last month, with many already talking of closing shop and trying their luck outside the country.

Western-style suit "for a long time".

"I used to wear suits in my shop because I am selling them. We make a good profit," he said.

"But now I am wearing shalwar kameez. Nobody has told me, but I worry in case the Taliban come and check." Abdul Hassan, meanwhile, fears another ban on watching TV—what will he do with the dozens of top-of-the-range flat screens displayed at his shop? "Usually I will have them turned on to show YouTube music. People can see the quality and they can buy them," he said.—AFP



COLOMBO: A woman carrying food bags walks past people standing in queue outside a state-run supermarket to buy essential food items in Colombo Friday as Sri Lanka began imposing price controls on essential food from September 3 after using a state of emergency to seize allegedly hoarded stocks of sugar and rice. —AFP

capacity. In a bid to stay ahead of demand and avoid outages, Brazil this week added one new biomass power station, three photovoltaic generators, and four wind farms to its power grid.

But much of the cost has fallen on consumers already contending with high unemployment and surging inflation in the country with the world's second-highest pandemic death toll.

"I was forced to cut down a lot of things at home, some types of food. I cut down on the times my children could use the phone, to save money," consumer Marisa das Dores told AFP at her home in Mateus Leme, in eastern Brazil. And price hikes are further fueling inflation, which reached 8.99 percent year-on-year in July—almost three times the limit targeted by the central bank for 2021. —AFP

Alibaba shares slide after \$15 billion 'prosperity' pledge

BEIJING: Shares in Alibaba slumped Friday upon the Chinese e-commerce giant's announcement it would invest 100 billion yuan (\$15.5 billion) in charitable causes, after President Xi Jinping called for the rich to do more to tackle inequality. Xi last month urged China's wealthiest companies and entrepreneurs to strengthen philanthropy efforts and "give back to society", in order to redistribute wealth as part of his "common prosperity" initiative.

In response Alibaba—which has already fallen foul of Beijing's sharp scrutiny this year—said it would put money into areas including tech innovation, small and medium-sized businesses, the welfare of gig-economy workers and healthcare equality. Daniel Zhang, Alibaba chairman, said the group was "eager to do our part to support the realization of common prosperity".

Shares in Alibaba slumped as much as 4 percent on the news in Hong Kong trading on Friday, as traders worried about the potential impact on the company's bottom line. "The donation doesn't guarantee that there will not be more regulations to target at Alibaba," Castor Pang, head of research at Core Pacific Yamaichi International HK Ltd, told Bloomberg News.

"It's more or less affecting the whole tech sector sentiment today." Chinese authorities have enforced a sweeping regulatory crackdown on the nation's tech sector after years of runaway growth. Alibaba was fined a record \$2.75 billion in April and a bumper IPO of its fintech arm was scrapped at the last minute.

The crackdown has also widened to include online gaming, entertainment and education tech in recent months. Many major tech firms have faced scrutiny over their treatment of gig-economy workers such as ride-hailing and delivery drivers, who often work long hours without protections such as social and medical insurance. —AFP

Sri Lanka imposes price controls to tackle food crisis

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka imposed price controls on key foods Friday as the government stepped up the use of emergency powers to counter shortages. Queues formed outside state-run supermarkets even before they opened to sell sugar seized from private dealers at less than half the price being charged on the open market 24 hours earlier.

"There is no sugar available elsewhere," complained K Perumal, 62, at the Sathosa store in Colombo's Maligawatte area where he waited for his two kilogram (2.2 pound) quota. "There are small children in my family, we need about six kilos of

Drought squeezes electricity supply, crops in Brazil

RIO DE JANEIRO: Brazil's worst drought in almost a century is threatening electricity supply and critical crops, pushing up energy and food prices at a time the country was hoping to start recovering from the economic fallout of the coronavirus pandemic. The country of 213 million people relies on hydropower for two-thirds of its electricity, but crucial dams are at near-record lows of less than a quarter full.



RIO DE JANEIRO: Brazil's worst drought in almost a century is threatening electricity supply and critical crops. —AFP

Business

Ooredoo wins big at 2021 Stevie International Business Awards

Ooredoo takes home four gold, two silver and two bronze awards at IBAs

DOHA: Ooredoo Group has won a total of eight awards at the 2021 edition of the Stevie International Business Awards (IBAs), taking home four Gold, two Silver and two Bronze awards. The Stevie IBAs honor the outstanding performance and positive contributions of organizations worldwide. Ooredoo was recognized for its excellence and achievements in a range of areas including outstanding leadership, network advancements, cutting-edge innovation for its My Ooredoo app and application of artificial intelligence, as well as for its valuable COVID-19 response programs.

Commenting on the awards, Sheikh Mohammed Bin Abdulla Bin Mohammed Al-Thani, Deputy Group Chief Executive Officer, Ooredoo, said: "Ooredoo continues to deliver best-in-class mobile services for our customers, while working to support and empower communities across our operating markets through the application of digital technologies. Despite the ongoing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, our people have continued to innovate, to deliver outstanding network performance, and to improve the customer experience through digitalization. These awards are testament to the achievements of our people and highlight our unwavering commitment to act as a digital



Sheikh Mohammed Bin Abdulla Bin Mohammed Al-Thani

enabler across our footprint and to continue enriching the digital lives of our customers."

Notably, Indosat Ooredoo was awarded the Gold Stevie for 'Company of the Year - Telecommunications' for its 4G advancements, as well as strategic network and partnership achievements. Indosat Ooredoo's President Director and CEO, Ahmad Al-Neama, was also awarded the Gold Stevie for 'Executive of the Year - Telecommunications'.

Under the 'AI/MIL and Automation Driven Network Operation Transformation' category, Indosat Ooredoo was awarded the Silver Stevie for its successful deployment of Ericsson's leading Ericsson Operation Engine (EOE) that uses Artificial Intelligence/ Machine Learning to transform data-driven operations and boost the performance of its 4G radio network.

Ooredoo Oman was recognized with a Gold Stevie

- Ooredoo Kuwait's My Ooredoo App was awarded a Gold Stevie in the 'Mobile On-Demand Application' category
- Ooredoo Kuwait's Ooredoo Volunteer Program was awarded a Bronze Stevie for 'Corporate Social Responsibility Program of the Year'.
- Award wins highlight excellence in the areas of leadership, innovation, network enhancement, corporate social responsibility and COVID-19 response

for its Sensory Rooms Initiative under the 'Corporate Social Responsibility Program of the Year' category. Under this initiative, Ooredoo Oman collaborated with the Omani Ministry of Social Development to launch special sensory rooms for disabled children, as part of the Ooredoo Goodwill Journey program.

Ooredoo Kuwait's My Ooredoo App, a mobile app that facilitates an end-to-end digital customer journey, was awarded a Gold Stevie in the 'Mobile On-Demand Application' category. Ooredoo Kuwait's Ooredoo Volunteer Program was awarded a Bronze Stevie for 'Corporate Social Responsibility Program of the Year'. A 'Most Valuable Service' Bronze Stevie was awarded to Ooredoo Maldives for its three-pronged COVID-19

response program that supported employees, customers and local communities during the pandemic.

Earlier this year Ooredoo Group was named a Top 40 Global Telecoms Brand in the 2021 Telecoms 150 report by industry valuation and strategy consultancy, Brand Finance. Ooredoo Group's Managing Director, Mr Aziz Aluthman Fakhroo, was also ranked in Forbes Middle East's Top 50 CEOs. The Stevie IBA wins add on to the four awards Ooredoo received at the 2021 Middle East and North Africa Stevie Awards, as well as earlier wins at the CV Magazine Corporate Excellence Awards, the International Business Magazine Awards and the Global CSR Excellence and Leadership Awards, among others.

US fines Kraft Heinz \$62m on 'bogus' cost savings

NEW YORK: US regulators fined Kraft Heinz \$62 million over an alleged accounting scheme that inflated the food giant's financial results due to bogus cost savings, authorities announced Friday. The Securities and Exchange Commission charged the company and two former executives over accounting practices between 2015 and 2018 that misrepresented expenses at the maker of Philadelphia cream cheese and Grey Poupon mustard, the agency said in a news release.

"Investors rely on public companies to be 100 percent truthful and accurate in their public statements, especially when it comes to their financials," said Gurbir Grewal, director of the SEC's enforcement division.

"When they fall short in this regard, we will hold them accountable." The agency alleged in a civil complaint that Kraft Heinz procurement employees negotiated agreements with suppliers that allowed them to obtain upfront discounts in exchange for future spending commitments by the company.

US accounting practices require such savings to be recognized at the time that Kraft Heinz meets its commitments, meaning they would be spread out. But Kraft Heinz staff "negotiated and maintained false and misleading supplier contracts" that were designed to "improperly recognize cost savings prematurely," the SEC said in its complaint.

Kraft Heinz ultimately revised a number of financial reports, with \$208 million in cost savings corrections. Besides Kraft Heinz, the SEC also charged former chief operating officer Eduardo Pelleissone and former chief procurement officer Klaus Hofmann for their role in the alleged scheme.—AFP



NOVATO, US: Packets of Heinz ketchup are displayed in Novato, California. US regulators fined Kraft Heinz \$62 million over an alleged accounting scheme.—AFP

Floating Dutch cow farm aims to curb climate impact

ROTTERDAM: Among the cranes and containers of the port of Rotterdam is a surreal sight: a herd of cows peacefully feeding on board what calls itself the world's first floating farm. In the low-lying Netherlands where land is scarce and climate change is a daily threat, the three-storey glass and steel platform aims to show the "future of breeding".

The buoyant bovines live on the top floor, while their milk is turned into cheese, yoghurt and butter on the middle level, and the cheese is matured at the bottom. "The world is under pressure," says Minke van Wingerden, 60, who runs the farm with her husband Peter. "We want the farm to be as durable and self-sufficient as possible."

The cows are a sharp contrast to the huge ships and the smoke from the refineries of Europe's biggest seaport, which accounts for 13.5 percent of the country's emissions. With their floating farm, which opened in 2019, Peter and Minke say they wanted to "bring the countryside into the town", boost consumer awareness and create agricultural space. The Dutch are no strangers to advanced farming methods, using a network of huge greenhouses in particular to become the world's second biggest agricultural exporter after the United States. But that has come at a cost.

'Moves with the tide'

The Netherlands is one of Europe's largest per



THIES, Senegal: An onion seller sorts bags of onions at the Notto Gouye Diama market, one of the main markets for agricultural products in the Thies region. — AFP

Senegalese onion farmers in tears over glut

DAKAR, Senegal: In a satellite town of Senegal's capital Dakar, 25-kilo sacks of onions are piled up on pavements, ignored by passers-by. The West African country is in the middle of a supply glut, with prices plummeting and heaps of the pungent vegetables left to rot by the roadside. Farmers are in despair.

"I'm going to give some to the local women," says farmer Diongue Masseye, 71, gazing despondently at his onions. He is standing inside a 450 square meter (5,000 square foot) warehouse in Bambilor, an onion-producing town about 30 kilometers (20 miles) northeast of the capital Dakar, where his unsold produce has started to sprout. Gloomy farmers—who produce about 450,000 tons of onions a year—blame the problem on increased foreign competition and a lack of storage capacity.

But the government also argues that farmers have overproduced this year, flooding the market with

onions and depressing prices. Masseye said prices had nearly halved. A 25-kilo sack of onions fetched the equivalent of about 13 euros (\$15) a few months ago, he said, but are now worth about seven euros (\$8). The bulbous vegetable is a lifeline to many in the nation of 16 million people, where it is a key ingredient in the national fish-and-rice dish, Thieboudienne, as well as Yassa chicken.

Amadou Abdoul Sy, the director of Senegal's market regulation agency, said some 200,000 farmers are employed in the onion sector. "Everyone is producing at the same time," he told AFP, explaining the glut.

Bad onions

Senegal's onion sector has long been plagued by problems. Almost a third of the crop is lost every year, Sy said. The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization noted in a 2018 report that the use of low-quality seeds by Senegalese farmers contributes to the problem. Often, producers also harvest their onions too early to try to get ahead of the competition, leaving the vegetables wet. This leads to significant losses and makes onions difficult to store, the FAO said.

Consumers are shying away from the damaged goods. Trader Daouda Mbaye, in a market in a village in western Senegal, demonstrated sacks of poor-quality

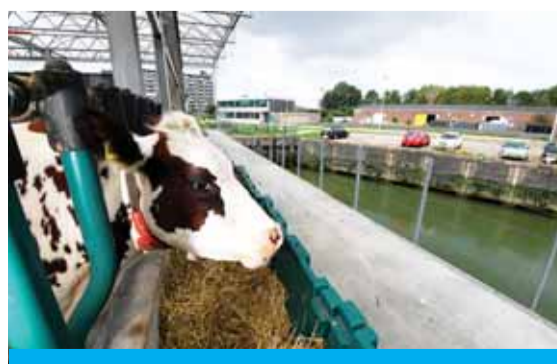
onions and said buyers were more interested in other vegetables. But to the dismay of local farmers, many people will buy imported onions. The president of Senegal's onion producers association, Boubacar Sall, said the government suspended onion imports in January in a bid to help struggling locals. But foreign-owned farms in Senegal are still producing onions, he explained. They are often larger than Senegalese farms and have better storage facilities.

The onion farmer is calling for legislation that will protect small producers who fall "prey to unfair competition" from larger ones. Lack of storage facilities are a chronic problem in Senegal, according to farmers, where a warm climate means vegetables quickly go bad. For Masseye, the 71-year-old farmer, the government should have provided refrigerated storerooms to ease pressure on producers. But Amadou Abdoul Sy, the director of the market regulation agency, said that producers themselves are partly to blame.

He said government authorities had asked farmers to sell their goods at different times in order to stop a supply glut. "They were not listened to," Sy said. While farmers are unhappy, some consumers are pleased. Astou Ndiagne, a housewife in Bambilor, flashed a mischievous smile when asked about the lower prices. "This is allowing us to save money," she said.—AFP

capita emitters of climate change gases and faces a major problem with agricultural emissions, particularly in the dairy sector which produces large amounts of methane from cows. Those emissions in turn fuel the rising waters that threaten to swamp the country, a third of which lies below sea-level, and further reduce the land in one of the most densely populated nations on Earth.

The floating farm therefore aims to keep its cows' feet dry in both the long-term, by being sustainable, and the short-term, by, well, floating. "We are on the water, so the farm moves with the tide—we rise and fall up to two meters. So in case of flooding, we can continue to produce," says Minke van Wingerden. In terms of sustainability, the farm's cows are fed on a mixture of food including grapes from a foodbank, grain from a local brewery, and grass from local golf courses and from Rotterdam's famed Feyenoord foot-



ROTTERDAM: A photo taken on August 30, 2021, shows cows feeding in a floating dairy farm in the port of Rotterdam, a possible future solution to rising waters and climate change. — AFP

ball club-saving on waste as well as the emissions that would be required to create commercial feed for the animals. Their manure is turned into garden pellets—a process that helps further cut emissions by reducing methane—and their urine is purified and recycled into drinking water for the cows, whose stable is lined with dozens of solar panels that produce enough electricity for the farm's needs.

'Cows don't get seasick'

The farm is run by a salaried farmer but the red and white cows, from the Dutch-German Meuse-Rhin-Yssel breed, are milked by robots. The cheeses, yoghurts and pellets are sold at a roadside shop alongside fare from local producers.

The products are also sold to restaurants in town by electric vehicles. "I was immediately seduced by the concept," says Bram den Braber, 67, one of 40 volunteers at the farm, as he fills bottles of milk behind the counter of the store. "It's not blood running through my veins, it's milk."

The idea of the farm is also to make farming "more agreeable, interesting and sexy", and not just to be environmentally friendly, says Minke van Wingerden.

When she and her husband first approached port authorities with the idea to build a floating farm, they said "are you nuts?", she recalls. But the farm is set to turn a profit for the first time at the end of 2021, with consumers apparently ready to pay the 1.80 euro (\$2.12) a liter for milk produced there, compared to around one euro at a supermarket. They are also aiming to build a second floating farm to grow vegetables, and to export their idea, with a project already under way in the island nation of Singapore. Most importantly, while farming goes greener, the animals don't.—AFP

US hedge fund execs pay \$7bn to settle tax row

WASHINGTON: Top executives at the Renaissance Technologies hedge fund will personally pay some \$7 billion to settle a tax dispute with the IRS, one of the largest settlements ever, US media said. Hedge fund founder James Simons will make an additional "settlement payment" of \$670 million, the Wall Street Journal reported, citing a company letter to investors. The payment is related to a dispute over decisions by the firm's Medallion fund between 2005 and 2015 and the way it was reported to the Internal Revenue Service, the US tax authorities: the IRS accused Renaissance Technologies of declaring short-term trading gains as less heavily taxed long-term profits.

Renaissance Technologies, known for investment strategies based on complex computer models capable of digesting large amounts of information, said in the letter that the company "engaged for several years in the IRS Appeals process, in which we vigorously advocated the correctness of Medallion's tax reporting." However, Renaissance's board "concluded that the interests of our investors from the relevant period would be best served by agreeing to this resolution with the IRS, rather than risking a worse outcome." The payments will be made by a group that includes seven people who were members of the board between 2005 and 2015, as well as their spouses.—AFP

Business

NBK wins Visa award for 'pursuit of excellence in CNP transactions'

Bank honored during Visa Global Service Quality Awards (GSQA) for 2020

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) was honored with 2020 Visa Global Service Quality Award for Pursuit of Excellence - Card not Present Adoption - Issuer, which are granted to banks across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

This award recognizes issuers based on a set of criteria: mainly including the growth in card-not-present (CNP) transactions in 2020, in addition to the bank's excellence in providing convenient payment solutions enabling customers to make CNP transactions.

The Visa Global Service Quality Awards (GSQA) program was established in 1992 for clients in the US region and was further expanded in 2009 to include international regions. This annual program honors some of Visa's highest-performing acquirers, issuers and processor. GSQA recipients exemplify the Visa-client partnership, fulfilling our brand promise through excellence in innovation, operational efficiency and cardholder satisfaction.

On this occasion, Hisham Al-Nusif, Deputy General Manager of Consumer Banking, National Bank of Kuwait, said: "We are pleased to win this award, which reflects our excellence in providing advanced payment solutions and digital leadership in Kuwait and the region."

"We are reaping the fruits of accelerating the implementation of our digital transformation roadmap, as the exceptional circumstances witnessed last year reaffirmed our prudent anticipation of the changes taking place in the banking industry at the present time."



Hisham Al-Nusif

Al-Nusif noted that the year 2020 was completely exceptional, as the closures led to increased reliance on digital channels to make transactions, which NBK was fully prepared for, thanks to its tremendous technological infrastructure and action plans through which we succeeded in providing world-class cutting-edge payment solutions in the Kuwaiti market, he concluded.

On his part, Ankush Devadason, Visa's Country Manager for Kuwait said: "National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) was honored with the Award for Pursuit of Excellence - Card-Not-Present Adoption - Issuer in Visa Global Service Quality Awards (GSQA) for 2020, which are granted across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. This award recognizes issuers based on a set of criteria, including the growth in card-not-present (CNP) transactions in 2020". Over the past years, NBK succeeded in maintaining top-notch banking services, and constantly strived to provide the most innovative payment solutions to its customers, which are always in line with their growing and changing needs, the fact that enabled it to maintain its leading regional position.

During 2020, NBK launched various high-quality banking products and services that gained the trust of customers, focusing on advanced payment



Pursuit of Excellence
Card Not Present Adoption

solutions and digital services through the enhancements and updates introduced on NBK Mobile Banking App and NBK Online Banking, in view of customers' increased reliance on both services for their banking transactions during the past period.

National Bank of Kuwait was named "Best

Consumer Digital Bank- Middle East" for 2020 by the reputable international magazine Global Finance, in the annual survey of the World's Best Digital Banks 2020. Additionally, it received the award of "Best Retail Bank in Customer Services in Kuwait" for 2020, according to Service Hero Customer Satisfaction Index, for the 10th time.

Digital Media Bangladesh 2021 to be held in Sept

KUWAIT: Mediaspace.global, a global professional platform for people working in the media, tech, and marketing space, is organizing Digital Media Bangladesh 2021 in partnership with The Business Standard and IAA Bangladesh (International Advertising Association) - the most influential Marcom network, headquartered in New York. For the first time ever in Bangladesh, Digital Media Bangladesh is being organized; it's going to be a half-day-long summit consisting of keynote sessions and panel discussions from esteemed professionals working in the field of media, and advertising. On top of the expert speakers' lineup, attendees will have the opportunity to interact with other attendees and speakers throughout a networking session.

The event will take place virtually, on the 9th of September 2021. With an eminent speaker line-up from leaders in Bangladesh and other countries, anyone from all over the world can join the event as a participant. The challenges and opportunities of Bangladeshi media and marketing trends with a special focus on newsrooms, data and marketing trends, and innovation will be discussed throughout the virtual event.

The event's agenda consisting of the session details are to be released very soon. To encourage the brightest minds to participate in the event, Mediaspace.global is offering the tickets for the conference at no cost. Anyone can sign-up for Mediaspace.global and get their complimentary tickets.

"Our industry has to get used not only to the

mediaspace: In partnership with IAA & THE BUSINESS STANDARD

Digital Media Bangladesh 2021

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Keynote Speakers

Inceze Kinga
Founder & CEO of Mediaspace

Dagmara Szulce
Executive Director, IAA Global

Inam Ahmed
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constant transformation but to the new pace of innovation. As the Global Compass, the International Advertising Association has been advocating for more analytics, greater knowledge sharing, and collaboration amongst all sectors to ensure a sustainable yet responsible environment for brands and creativity to thrive in," mentioned Dagmara Szulce, the Managing Director of IAA Global.

"Physical business networking systems are disrupted. The pandemic has accelerated challenges for the media and advertising industry globally. But challenges bring opportunities, as well. As the founder of Mediaspace.global, the new professional social platform for professionals in media, marketing, tech, and policymaking,

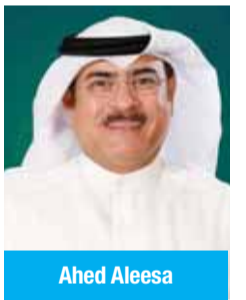
I'm thrilled to begin a collaboration with The Business Standard and the International Advertising Association in Bangladesh," stated Kinga Inceze, the Founder of Mediaspace.global.

"If the present is any reference for the future, one can tell that the marketing community is in for a massive, sharp, and uncertain ride. The only way the industry can thrive is through blending innovation, Digital with the universal human thirst for storytelling," said Shariful Islam, President, IAA Bangladesh Chapter, and also the Founder, and Managing Director, Bangladesh Brand Forum.

Stay tuned for the latest updates on Digital Media Bangladesh 2021 - for more details visit Mediaspace.global.

Aleesa: KFH offers a variety of MG cars through lease product

KUWAIT: Executive Manager - Automotive & Equipment at Kuwait Finance House (KFH), Ahd Al-eesa said "KFH is providing, through its amazing lease products, a variety of "MG" cars as part of KFH lease fleet. "MG" cars are distinguished for fulfilling the needs of all society classes. The product provides a competitive monthly lease value starting from KD 105".



Ahd Al-eesa

Aleesa added that KFH lease fleet comprises a variety of wide-spread and well-known brands, approximating 70 different kinds. KFH is distinguished for providing its (retail and corporate) customers with a unique and high-level service, thus giving them the opportunity to pick the cars of their choice through the lease products provided at KFH showrooms and the agents showrooms. The operational lease period, 12-36 months, plays a major role in identifying the best and easiest ways to enhance KFH role and contributions to customer service and the enhancement of the automotive market.

Aleesa said that KFH is distinguished for providing amazing programs through its retail and corporate finance lease products, thus enabling the corporate sector to deal with the product easily and swiftly. Lease products comprise several attractive advantages including comprehensive maintenance, Takaful insurance, replacement car, round the clock road assistance service and travel in the leased car according to certain terms and conditions.

NBK Economic Report

Reforms help Egypt sustain economic growth

KUWAIT: The Egyptian economy has performed better than expected, despite the COVID spread, thanks to the authorities' effective crisis management. However, the economy remains under pressure due to the uncertainty surrounding the pandemic and the potential emergence of new virus variants. In fact, after declining over much of the summer from a high of around 1200 cases in mid-May, daily infections have again been on the rise after the first case of the Delta COVID-19 variant was detected in July. Total confirmed cases reached about 290,000 and the cumulative number of deaths exceeded 16,000 in August. Still, only about 3.2 percent of the population has been fully vaccinated, while 7.5 million have had at least one dose. To this effect, the government announced that by October vaccinations would become mandatory for government employees, university students and staff at educational institutions.

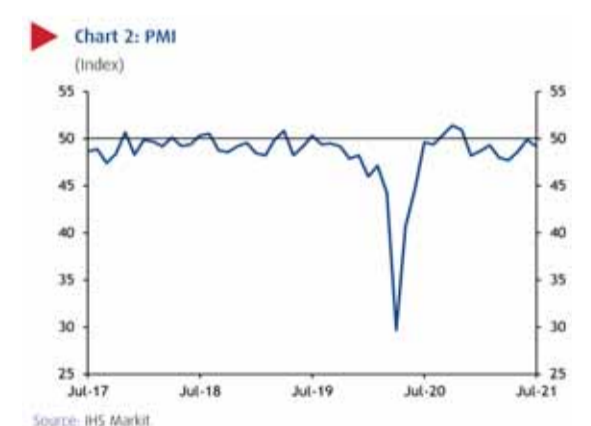
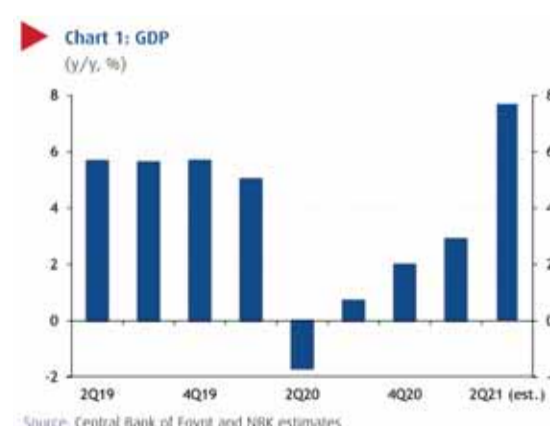
Growth continues to accelerate

Buttressed by the ongoing economic reforms, Egypt's economic recovery from the pandemic remains broadly on track. In fact, after averaging 1.9 percent y/y over the first 9 months of FY20/21 (July-March), real GDP grew by 7.7 percent in 2Q21 compared with the same period last year when economic activity dropped by 1.7 percent due to pandemic-related restrictions. For the full fiscal year (July 20 - June 21), real GDP growth reached 3.3 percent compared to 3.6 percent in the previous fis-

cal year, due to weaker economic activity, especially during 1H of FY20/21.

In this context, the unemployment rate dropped slightly to 7.3 percent in 2Q21 from 7.4 percent in 4Q20, thanks to the gradual reopening of business activities. This has so far been in line with the goals of the medium-term plan for sustainable development (2018-2022) that aims to lower the unemployment rate to around 7.3 percent by the end of the current fiscal year, as opposed to the peak of 9.6 percent recorded in 2Q20. This plan aims also to reduce the population growth rate to about 2 percent in FY21/22 from 2.56 percent in 2017 and the poverty rate to 28.5 percent from 29.7 percent a year ago. The PMI edged down to 49.1 in July from 49.9 in June, slightly below the 'no change' 50 mark, but still a huge improvement from the levels seen at the peak of the pandemic crisis (29.7 in April) and above the previous quarter (an average of 48.7 in 2Q21). The slight dip in July's PMI was attributed to ongoing business caution amid continued pandemic-related uncertainty, despite a sharp decline in new virus cases in Egypt through the month.

It is worth mentioning that although in principle this signals a contraction in private sector activity, these PMI levels have been consistent with solid GDP growth in the past. Looking ahead, firms remained optimistic about the outlook as the future output index reached 75.6 in July after registering 74.1 in June. As restrictions recently eased and vaccine roll-out accelerates, we expect the economy to continue its improvement in the coming quarters. Growth could reach about 5 percent over the medium term, benefiting from the authorities' continued commitment to reforms, absent any potential threat from new virus variants or a global economic setback. Fiscal position has improved more than expected. The fiscal position improved due to reduced subsidies and better public debt management. The government achieved a primary surplus (i.e. before interest payment) of 1.4 percent of GDP in FY20/21, higher than the 0.9 percent



official target and the 1 percent expected by the IMF. This reflects a rise in revenues by 12 percent y/y, outpacing the increase in spending, which increased by 9 percent. As a result, the budget deficit declined to 7.4 percent of GDP in FY20/21 from 8 percent a year ago and from the government's initial target of 7.8 percent. One main contributing factor was the cut in debt-servicing costs to 36 percent of total expenditures during FY20/21 compared to 40 percent a year ago, benefiting from the change in debt maturities and lower interest rates. Indeed, the government succeeded in extending the life of the debt from less than 1.3 years before June 2017 to 3.45 years in June 2021.

Like other countries, Egypt's debt increased during the pandemic, from 84.0 percent to 90.6 percent of GDP in FY20/21 due to the unexpected surge in spending on health care. Unlike most other countries, however, the debt to GDP ratio declined from its pre-pandemic peak of 108 percent in FY16/17. Looking ahead, Egypt's debt-to-GDP ratio should decline to about 80 percent by the end of June 2022, as the government maintains its commitment to fiscal reforms and as the economy continues to grow. The overall budget deficit could narrow to 7 percent of GDP before dropping to about 6.5 percent in

FY22/23, while still allowing sufficient public spending to support economic activity.

Tourism revenue collapses

The pandemic and the restrictions on international travel have hit the tourism sector hard, leading to a larger current account deficit. The deficit almost doubled in the first nine months of FY20/21 (July - March), mainly on the back of a drop in tourism revenues (to \$3.1 billion from \$9.6 billion a year ago). However, improvements in net foreign direct investment (FDI), remittances, and Suez Canal revenues are helping the overall balance of payments. FDI rose by 47.3 percent y/y in 1Q21, with a 21.7 percent y/y inflow to the non-oil sector. Remittances from Egyptians working abroad also continued their upward trend, increasing by 13 percent to \$28.5 billion during the first 11 months of FY20/21 (July-May). Revenues from Egypt's Suez Canal also picked up 11.2 percent y/y in 8 months (Jan. - Aug.) to \$3.88 billion, as the number of ships crossing rose by about 15 percent. The current account deficit could reach 4 percent of GDP in FY20/21, before improving to around 2.5 percent of GDP in coming years, as the fallout from the pandemic fades.

Lifestyle | Features

Trapped on island habitats made smaller by rising seas, Indonesia's Komodo dragons were listed as "endangered" yesterday, in an update of the wildlife Red List that also warned overfishing threatens nearly two-in-five sharks with extinction. About 28 percent of the 138,000 species assessed by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) for its survival watchlist are now at risk of vanishing in the wild forever, as the destructive impact of human activity on the natural world deepens. But the latest update of the Red List for Threatened Species also highlights the potential for restoration, with four commercially fished tuna species pulling back from a slide towards extinction after a decade of efforts to curb overexploitation. The most spectacular recovery was seen in the Atlantic bluefin tuna, which leapt from "endangered" across three categories to the safe zone of "least concern". The species-a mainstay of high-end sushi in Japan-was last assessed in 2011. "These Red List assessments demonstrate just how closely our lives and livelihoods are intertwined with biodiversity," IUCN Director General Bruno Oberle said in a statement.

'Clarion call'

A key message from the IUCN Congress, taking place in the French city of Marseille, is that disappearing species and the destruction of ecosystems are no less existential threats than global warming. At the same time, climate change itself is casting a darker shadow than ever before on the futures of many species, particularly endemic animals and plants that live uniquely on small islands or in certain biodiversity hotspots.

Komodo dragons-the world's largest living lizards-are found only in the World



In this file photograph a Komodo Dragon searches the shore area of Komodo island for prey. — AFP

Komodo dragon, 2-in-5 shark species lurch towards extinction

Heritage-listed Komodo National Park and neighboring Flores. The species "is increasingly threatened by the impacts of climate change" said the IUCN: rising sea levels are expected to shrink its tiny habitat at least 30 percent over the next 45 years. Outside of protected areas, the fearsome throwbacks are also rapidly losing ground as humanity's footprint expands. "The idea that these prehistoric animals have moved one step closer to extinction due in part to climate change is terrifying," said Andrew Terry, Conservation Director at the Zoological

Society of London. Their decline is a "clarion call for nature to be placed at the heart of all decision making" at crunch UN climate talks in Glasgow, he added.

'An alarming rate'

The most comprehensive survey of sharks and rays ever undertaken, meanwhile, revealed that 37 percent of 1,200 species evaluated are now classified as directly threatened with extinction, falling into one of three categories: "vulnerable," "endangered," or "critically endangered". That's a third more species at risk than

only seven years ago, said Simon Fraser University Professor Nicholas Dulvy, lead author of a study published on Monday underpinning the Red List assessment.

"The conservation status of the group as a whole continues to deteriorate, and overall risk of extinction is rising at an alarming rate," he told AFP. Five species of sawfish-whose serrated snouts get tangled in cast off fishing gear-and the iconic shortfin mako shark are among those most threatened. Chondrichthyan fish, a group made up mainly of sharks and rays, "are important to ecosystems, economies

and cultures," Sonja Fordham, president of Shark Advocates International and co-author of the upcoming study, told AFP.

"By not sufficiently limiting catch, we're jeopardizing ocean health and squandering opportunities for sustainable fishing, tourism, traditions and food security in the long term." The Food and Agriculture Organization reports some 800,000 tons of sharks caught-intentionally or opportunistically-each year, but research suggests the true figure is two to four times greater.

Conservation tracker

The IUCN on Saturday also officially launched its "green status"-the first global standard for assessing species recovery and measuring conservation impacts. "It makes the invisible work of conservation visible," Molly Grace, a professor at the University of Oxford and Green Status co-chair, said at a press conference yesterday. The new yardstick measures the extent to which species are depleted or recovered compared to their historical population levels, and assesses the effectiveness of past and potential future conservation actions. Efforts to halt extensive declines in numbers and diversity of animals and plants have largely failed.

In 2019 the UN's biodiversity experts warned that a million species are on the brink of extinction-raising the specter that the planet is on the verge of its sixth mass extinction event in 500 million years. "The red list status shows that we're on the cusp of the sixth extinction event," the IUCN's Head of Red List Unit Craig Hilton-Taylor told AFP. "If the trends carry on going upward at that rate, we'll be facing a major crisis soon." — AFP

No one can understand what Diana endured: Kristen Stewart

Hollywood star Kristen Stewart may be no stranger to the paparazzi, but after playing Princess Diana on the silver screen she feels that no one can understand what it felt like to be her. New movie "Spencer" premiered at the Venice Film Festival on Friday, with Stewart the latest actor to play Diana, whose marriage to Britain's Prince Charles ended in scandal and divorce. The princess later died in a Paris car crash in 1997, after fleeing photographers. The film focuses on her decision to flee the pressures of the royal family and take control of her own life at a key juncture in the early 1990s.



US actress Kristen Stewart arrives to the pier of the Excelsior Hotel during the 78th Venice Film Festival at Venice Lido.

"She was the most famous woman in the world, she was the most photographed woman in the whole world," Stewart told journalists ahead of the premiere. "I have tasted a high level of that, but really kind of nowhere near that monumental, symbolic representation of an entire group of people, an entire country-and the world," she said. "I can relate but I don't think anyone can understand what that felt like," said Stewart, of the royal family's claustrophobic watch over Diana, who was expected to bend to protocol and was powerless to make her own decisions.

In taking on the role, Stewart joins a long list of actors who have sought to capture the spirit of the royal, most recently Emma Corrin, who this year won a Golden Globe for her portrayal in season four of Netflix's "The Crown". Early reviews for "Spencer" were enthusiastic, with Variety trade magazine calling it "magnificent" and ScreenDaily calling

Stewart's performance "brittle, tender, sometimes playful and not a little uncanny". Stewart, wrote The Telegraph, "will be instantly and justifiably awards-tipped for this".

'True tragedy'

The new film, which is competing for the top Golden Lion award at Venice, was directed by Chilean Pablo Larrain and is described from the outset as "a fable from a true tragedy". It tracks the princess over three days at Christmas when the royal family is assembled at Queen Elizabeth's private residence at Sandringham. We first see Diana at the wheel on a rambling country road-lost, as it turns out, and late for Christmas Eve lunch at the castle. Tensions with Prince Charles (Jack Farthing) are at their peak, after the heir to the throne has gifted his wife the same pearl necklace offered to his mistress, Camilla Parker Bowles. As played by Stewart, Diana's misery is palpable. But more revealing is the inner radiance and sparkle we see when Diana is alone with her children, the young princes William and Harry. — AFP



Chilean director Pablo Larrain and US actress Kristen Stewart pose as they arrive for the screening of the film 'Spencer' presented in competition during the 78th Venice Film Festival at Venice Lido. — AFP photos

body who's going to get the work seen. Netflix are very supportive of a film industry that involves creatives at every level and also at the end, a cinematic release-for a period of time." As cinemas reopen in many countries after pandemic-induced closures, Hollywood has been deeply torn over whether to keep releasing films on streaming services alongside traditional theatre releases. Cumberbatch's Marvel co-star Scarlett Johansson is suing Disney over its decision to release superhero movie "Black Widow" on its streaming service this summer, saying it cost her millions of dollars in cinema revenue. Another major blockbuster, "Dune", which premieres in Venice on Friday, will also get a simultaneous release on HBO Max.

'The Power of the Dog'

Having spent \$165 million on awe-inspiring visual effects, "Dune" director Denis Villeneuve recently described that decision as "ridiculous". "The best way I can compare it is to drive a speedboat in your bathtub," he told Total Film. Cumberbatch agreed that streamers need to keep the



(From left) Spanish actor Javier Bardem, US actress Zendaya, Swedish actor Stellan Skarsgard, Taiwanese actor Chang Chen, US actor Oscar Isaac, British actress Sharon Duncan-Brewster, French US actor Timothee Chalamet, Swedish actress Rebecca Ferguson, Canadian director Denis Villeneuve, US actor Dave Bautista and US actor Josh Brolin arrive for the screening of the film 'Dune' presented out of competition during the 78th Venice Film Festival at Venice Lido. — AFP

'Dune' WOWS Venice with galactic-scale blockbuster

Giant worms and inter-planetary battles rocked the Venice Film Festival on Friday as "Dune", one of the most hotly anticipated blockbusters in years, finally landed for its world premiere. It brought several gondolas worth of stars to the city's glitzy Lido island, with fans packing the waterfront for a glimpse of Timothee Chalamet, Zendaya, Oscar Isaac, Josh Brolin and Javier Bardem. Based on a landmark of sci-fi literature about warring clans fighting for control of a desert planet, the film boasts a \$165-million budget and a critically adored director in Canadian Denis Villeneuve.

With its release delayed nearly a year by COVID, anticipation had reached a fever pitch. No one could deny the sheer spectacle of its massive world-building sets and pulsating soundtrack, which locals said was rattling nearby windows on the Lido. In a five-star review, The Guardian said the "slow-burn space opera fuses the arthouse and the multiplex to create an epic of otherworldly brilliance". But some critics quibbled with the storytelling, with many miffed that this was only "Part One" of the story.

"An awful lot of what we're watching feels like laborious setup for a hopefully more gripping film to come," said The Hollywood Reporter. Chalamet told reporters the experience had been "the honour of a lifetime." "I hope we get to do a second one, that would be a dream."

'A physical experience'

Through hits like "Sicario" and "Arrival", Villeneuve has put himself alongside Christopher Nolan as one of the few directors who can deliver deadly serious cinema that also pulls in the punters. He has previously proved his worth to sci-fi fans with "Blade Runner 2049", a lauded sequel to the Ridley Scott classic. The build-up has not been all roses, however. Villeneuve has clashed with Warner Bros. over its decision to release the film on streaming platforms at the same time as cinemas.

At the press conference on Friday, he pleaded with audiences to see it on the big screen. "It has been dreamed, designed, shot thinking IMAX," he said. "The sound and everything-it's a physical experience, we designed it to be as immersive as possible." But he said the toughest issue lay elsewhere. "The biggest challenge of making this movie was to deal with and master Timothee's hair. It's alive!" Villeneuve said.

Giant worms

Set many millennia in the future, "Dune" follows the tribal battles for control of "spice", a powerful resource only found on the planet of Arrakis, which also happens to be infested with giant worms. The

brainchild of author Frank Herbert, "Dune" was first published in 1965 and became a six-volume space opera of massive influence, not least on "Star Wars". Brolin said he was proud they had matched the vision from the books, recounting the experience of showing the film to a long-time fan. "He started screaming at the top of his lungs: 'That's what I saw as a kid.' When you see that kind of reaction, you realise it hit someone on a very visceral level," Brolin said.

'Ahead of his time'

Fans have long praised the book's visionary edge, anticipating debates over global warming and the impact of technology. "The author was ahead of his time, already concerned about what the world was heading towards," said Bardem when asked about its environmental concerns. Despite its ready-made audience and clear cinematic potential, previous transfers to film have been famously difficult. One attempt by cult Franco-Chilean filmmaker Alejandro Jodorowsky fell apart after four years of work in the 1970s.

Another attempt by horror auteur David Lynch in the 1980s turned into an expensive flop, though it still has its fans. "I love that version and I watched it about two months before shooting," Chalamet said. "But when Denis Villeneuve asks you to do a movie, you forget all that and make yourself humble to the source material." — AFP

Cumberbatch says Netflix vital for cinema in 'uncertain time'

British star Benedict Cumberbatch said Thursday he was "thrilled" over Netflix's role in the film industry, but added that streaming services still had to support cinemas. The "Sherlock" and "Doctor Strange" star was at the Venice film festival where his latest, Netflix-backed movie "The Power of the Dog" is competing for the Golden Lion. "We live in a very uncertain time," he told AFP. "We're a variant-hair's breadth away from all this-being in a cinema-not being possible again.

"I'm kind of thrilled that we have some-



(From left) US actress Kirsten Dunst, New Zealand's director Jane Campion and British actor Benedict Cumberbatch arrive for the screening of the film 'The Power of the Dog' presented in competition during the 78th Venice Film Festival. — AFP photos

cinema experience alive, and said he was confident that Netflix was striking the right balance. "The people who work for Netflix are all cineastes, we're all filmmakers, we all want to have that communal joy that we're hopefully going to have tonight," he said, speaking about the imminent premiere of "The Power of the Dog".

"Culturally, it's really important for streaming services to help nourish that. As

long as it really is happening and not their version of greenwashing-I don't know what the phrase would be-as long as it's not just good talk, then great." He added that, while he was excited to be back at a film festival, he had a bit of trouble seeing the Italian flag after England's traumatic World Cup final loss earlier this summer. "(The premiere) will be the most people I've been in a room with, apart from the Wembley final, but we



British actor Benedict Cumberbatch arrives for the screening of the film 'The Power of the Dog' presented in competition during the 78th Venice Film Festival, at Venice Lido.

don't talk about that," he said, laughing. "I saw the Italian flag and I suddenly had this weird depth-charge of sadness go off in me from the last time I saw that flag, which was when I also saw the St George flag wrapped around people drowned in rain, going home looking at their shoe laces." — AFP



Butterflies are pictured in Jardin.



Butterflies Adelpha corcyra and an Adelpha alata are pictured in Jardin.

Colombian photographer documents world's largest variety of butterflies



A Altinote ozoneme butterfly is pictured in Jardin, Antioquia department.

Like the more than 3,000 species of butterflies in Colombia, agronomist Juan Guillermo Jaramillo underwent his own metamorphosis several years ago, as his passion for photographing nature took an unexpected twist. The 65-year-old, who used to run an animal feed business, originally took photographs of birds, but he is now a key figure in the world of Colombian butterflies. Jaramillo is the co-author of an inventory that led to Colombia being recognized as having the widest variety of butterfly species in the world.

The list he worked on was published in the British Natural History Museum in London which has the world's largest collection of butterflies—in June. The Checklist of Colombian Butterflies identifies 3,642 different species in the Andean country, which makes up 19.4 percent of the known global varieties. But Jaramillo is keen to point out he is not a collector. "I broke from the traditional image associated with butterflies of collectors that kill them, put them in an envelop and then pin them to the inside of a box," Jaramillo told AFP. "I'm simply not capable of killing them."

Like bees, butterflies are pollinators vital to the ecosystem. They are also an important source of food for birds and snakes. Yet their habitats are under threat from deforestation, agriculture and global warming. Jaramillo, who lives in the southwestern Antioquia department, has an archive of 220,000 photos of butterflies and has captured images of 1,500 different species.

Tricking the butterflies

Jaramillo has spent the last 15 years trekking through jungles and woodlands in search of the "winged jewels"—a dangerous pastime given those areas are infested with armed groups and drug traffickers. The signing of an historic 2016 peace accord between the government and the marxist guerrilla Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia after more than half a century of armed conflict sparked hope areas previously off limits would become safe for scientists and naturalists. But it was not long before armed rebels and drug-traffickers returned. "I want to go to many places but there are some I don't go to out of fear," said Jaramillo.



A Diaethria clymena marchali butterfly is pictured in Jardin.



A butterfly is pictured next to the eye of Colombian photographer Juan Guillermo Jaramillo in Jardin, Antioquia department, Colombia. — AFP photos



Butterflies are pictured in Jardin.

When he does venture out, Jaramillo takes with him a camera, tripod and a container of pink liquid he prepares every morning: shrimp bait. Having tried various other types of bait, he found shrimp worked best. He spreads the foul-smelling bait on rocks and leaves by a rushing stream, and even lays out cotton balls soaked in the liquid. "That's how I make them think it's bird droppings," he explained.

"When the butterflies land on a leaf they stay there for quite some time... they're almost like models," he added. "Without the bait, it would be impossible to see certain species in the woodland because they live in very tall trees." Another potential barrier is the weather. "If there's no sun, there are no butterflies."



Colombian photographer Juan Guillermo Jaramillo edits his photographs of butterflies on a computer at his home in Jardin.



A moth from the panther odes family is pictured in Jardin.



A moth is pictured in Jardin.



A Dione Juno Butterfly is pictured in Jardin.



A moth is pictured in Jardin.

Lifestyle | Features



A Mesosenia mevania butterfly.



A Adelpha Corcyra butterfly.



A Pseudohaetera hypaesia butterfly.

Some like it hot

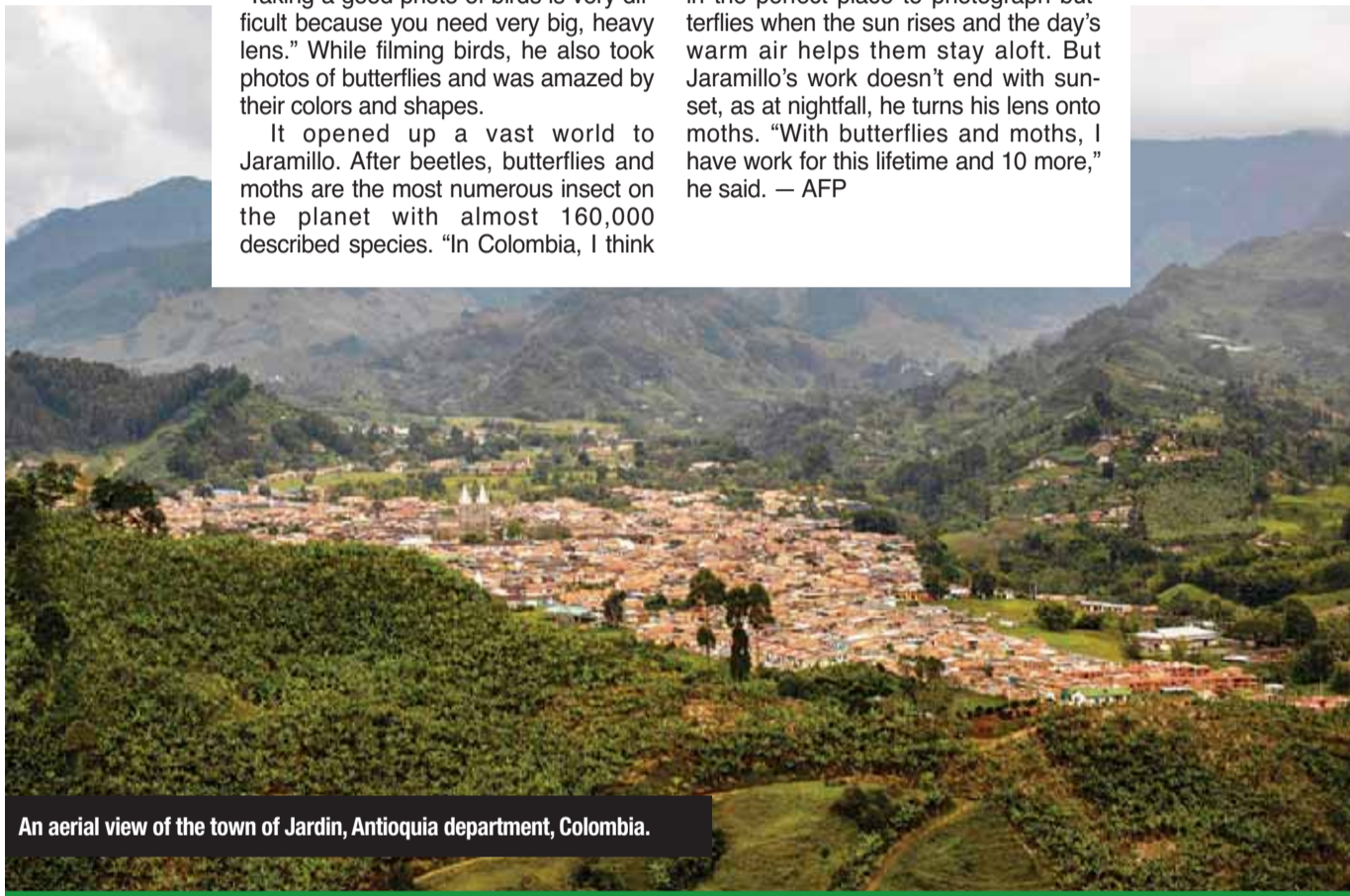
Jaramillo used to be a bird watcher and also compiled an inventory of the species he observed. Colombia boasts the widest varieties of bird species and orchids, according to the United Nations's Convention on Biological Diversity. It was the switch from film to digital photography that sparked Jaramillo's conversion to butterflies. "Taking a good photo of birds is very difficult because you need very big, heavy lens." While filming birds, he also took photos of butterflies and was amazed by their colors and shapes.

It opened up a vast world to Jaramillo. After beetles, butterflies and moths are the most numerous insect on the planet with almost 160,000 described species. "In Colombia, I think

there are about twice as many species of butterflies as birds," American Kim Garwood, Jaramillo's fellow inventory author, told AFP. "In the Andes I have been told there are about 10-15 percent of the butterfly species that are undescribed. We have many photos of undescribed species."

Near his farm on a road with little traffic, Jaramillo, who is retired, says he is in the perfect place to photograph butterflies when the sun rises and the day's warm air helps them stay aloft. But Jaramillo's work doesn't end with sunset, as at nightfall, he turns his lens onto moths. "With butterflies and moths, I have work for this lifetime and 10 more," he said. — AFP

A moth from the panther odes family is pictured in Jardin.



An aerial view of the town of Jardin, Antioquia department, Colombia.



People enjoy the afternoon in Jardin's main square, Antioquia department.

Partially shredded Banksy painting to go back on sale

A canvas by British artist Banksy, which was partially shredded moments after selling at auction in 2018, will go back under the hammer next month, Sotheby's said on Friday. The artwork—now called "Love is in the Bin"—will be offered for sale by the London auction house on October 14, with an estimated selling price of £4-6 million (\$6-8 million, 5-7 million euros). The painting, originally entitled "Girl with Balloon", sold for nearly £1.1 million at the same location in October 2018 and is now being resold by the unnamed collector who purchased it.

The canvas unexpectedly passed through a shredder hidden in the large Victorian-style frame moments after bidding ended, partially destroying it and stunning the art world. The prank was orchestrated by the elusive and irreverent Banksy, whose identity is said to be known to only a handful of friends. "That surreal evening three years ago, I became the accidental-but very privileged owner of 'Love is in the Bin'," the collector said in a statement released by Sotheby's. "It has been an incredible journey to have been

part of the story of how one of the most famous artworks in the world came to be, but now it is time to let the painting go."

The part-shredded canvas, which was exhibited for a month at a museum in Germany in 2019, depicts a small child reaching up toward a heart-shaped red balloon. It was originally stencilled on a wall in east London and has been endlessly reproduced, becoming one of Banksy's best-known images. The painting will go on public display at Sotheby's in London for two days from Saturday, before embarking on a global tour to Hong Kong, Taipei and New York ahead of returning to the British capital.

Alex Branczik, Sotheby's contemporary art chairman, said Banksy's stunt at its last sale "did not so much destroy an artwork by shredding it, but instead created one". "Today this piece is considered heir to a venerated legacy of anti-establishment art," he added, calling it "the ultimate Banksy artwork and a true icon of recent art history". The shredding was the latest in a long history of unpredictable moves by the street artist, who rose to fame for his stencilled graffiti pieces, often highly satirical, on buildings in Britain and worldwide. His latest works have appeared recently in several British seaside towns. Meanwhile in March, a work honoring caregivers during the pandemic fetched a record £14.4 million at auction, which was donated to the National Health Service. — AFP



Assistants pose by an artwork titled 'Love is in the Bin' by British street artist Banksy during a photocall at Sotheby's auction house in central London. — AFP

YouTube Music tops 50 million subscribers

YouTube's music streaming service reported Thursday of having more than 50 million subscribers, saying it is growing quickly as it tries to close the gap with market-leader Spotify. YouTube Music trails rivals Spotify, Amazon and

Apple but has been gaining ground, according to market tracker Midia Research. YouTube is a subsidiary of Google. "Google's YouTube Music has been the standout story of the music subscriber market for the last couple of years, resonating both in many emerging markets and with younger audiences across the globe," Midia analyst Mark Mulligan said in a post.

"The early signs are that YouTube Music is becoming to Gen Z what Spotify was to Millennials half a decade ago." Spotify had 32 percent of the global music streaming market in the first quarter of this

Blind video game champion takes on Twitch audience

With a joystick in one hand, a Braille device under the other and a mask over his eyes, BlindWarriorSven efficiently disposes of yet another opponent. "I put this mask on because sometimes people tell me I'm not really blind," he says with a smile, in reference to the sore losers he has beaten on the video game streaming site Twitch. Sven van de Wege was only six when he was struck by cancer. He lost his sight, but was determined not to let his disability get in the way of his childhood passion for video games.

And it hasn't: the 35-year-old Dutchman has beaten some of the world's best players at tournaments around Europe, and claimed a champion's title for playing the iconic "Street Fighter" series. His hearing is his crucial weapon. Van de Wege navigates his way around Street Fighter V, a game with "a very detailed sound design", using solely its sound effects. After years of training for several hours a day, the volume of his opponent's footsteps tells him how far away they are; the sound of each punch and blow tells him how to react. "By those audio cues, I'm able to know if I'm on the left, if I'm on the right, how I need to attack," he explains.

Streaming with no screen

It's a skill he's now monetizing via Twitch, a website with some 30 million users per day—most of whom log in to watch others play video games. Putting together a streaming studio adapted to van de Wege's needs required specialist equipment as well as a fair amount of creativity from the gaming champion, who works by day as an IT engineer. The studio, which sits within his apartment in The Hague, includes two computers hooked



Blind streamer and Street Fighter V champion Sven van de Wege poses in his apartment.



Blind streamer and Street Fighter V champion Sven van de Wege hosts a live on his Twitch channel 'BlindWarriorSven' in his apartment in The Hague. — AFP photos

up to a Braille display. This device translates comments from the stream's live chat into Braille that he can read by touch, allowing him to interact with the viewers watching him play.

There's no computer screen in front of him, just a wall. "I don't need a screen, and it saves energy," he points out. He finds that "the most difficult thing is keeping an eye on the chat": the comments, offering encouragement or wisecracks, whizz by and can be difficult to follow even for seeing players who are focused on trying to crush their rivals in the game. Van de Wege, who joined Twitch in 2017, challenges subscribers to his channel every Sunday in furious combat. "When I play versus my viewers, I think eight out of 10 matches I win," he says. A headset stays glued to his ears, so that he can track his enemies' every move via the side effects.

Accessibility features needed

The Street Fighter obsessive occasionally dips into other games, although he says too many titles lack the accessibility features needed for players with disabili-



Blind streamer and Street Fighter V champion Sven van de Wege hosts a live on his Twitch channel 'BlindWarriorSven' in his apartment.

ties. Twitch has faced pressure to encourage diversity on the platform, particularly since the best-paid players on the site are overwhelmingly able-bodied white men. In May, the site added some 350 tags to allow members of different communities to find each other more easily, including one for people with disabilities. — AFP

year, while Apple Music accounted for 16 percent and Amazon had 13 percent, according to Midia. YouTube Music accounted for eight percent, behind



China-based Tencent with its 13 percent share, Midia reported.

"We're seeing impressive growth in countries like Korea, India, Japan, Russia and Brazil where music is a top passion," YouTube global head of music Lyor Cohen said in a letter about passing the 50 million subscriber milestone. "The unique offerings of YouTube Music and Premium are resonating in established and emerging music markets alike." The overall number of streaming music service subscribers climbed more than 19 million to a total of 487 million in the first quarter of this year, according to Midia.

YouTube Music was the fastest-growing music streaming service last year, as its ranks of subscribers grew some 60 percent, said Mulligan. "We're in our own lane—there's no other place where fans can get uninterrupted access to the largest and most diverse catalogue of music, artists and culture," Cohen said in the letter. "We're making it easy for music fans to go deep and find their thing." YouTube said in June that it paid more than \$4 billion to the music industry during over the prior 12 months. — AFP

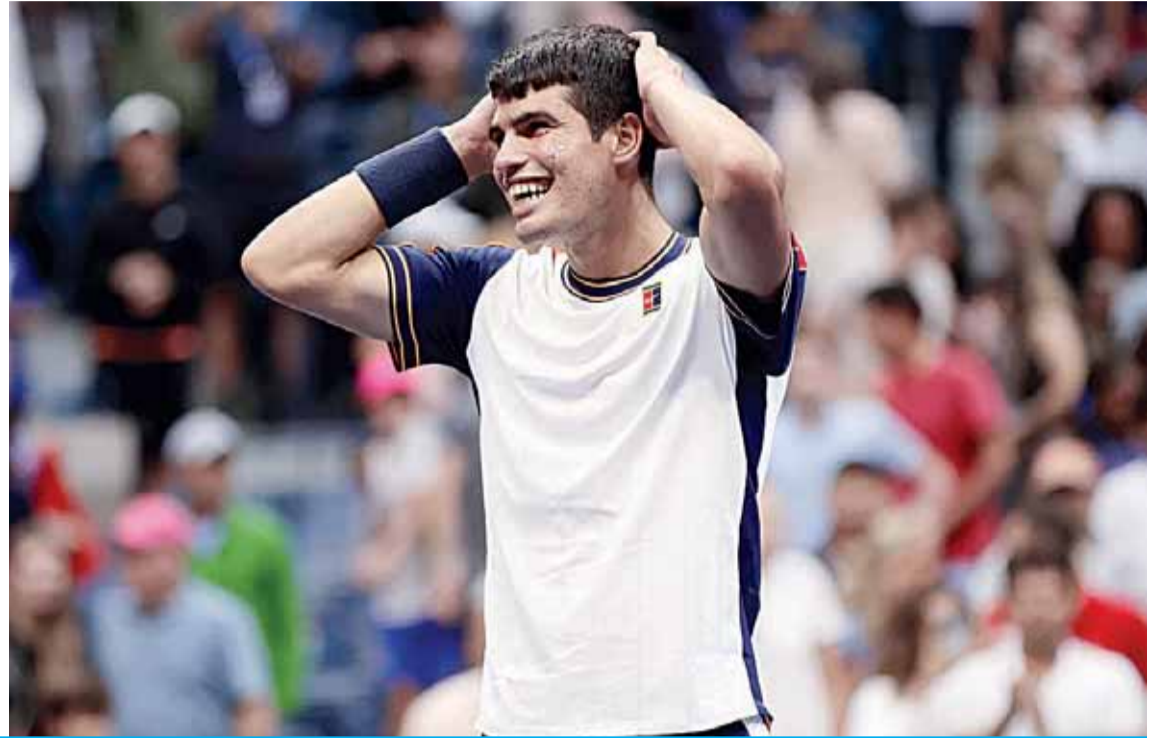
Sports

Teens shock defending champ Osaka, No 3 Tsitsipas at US Open

Osaka to take a break from tennis after loss



NEW YORK: Canada's Leylah Fernandez (left) celebrates after winning her 2021 US Open Tennis tournament Women's Singles third round match against Japan's Naomi Osaka, and Carlos Alcaraz of Spain (right) celebrates after defeating Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece during his Men's Singles third round match on day five at USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center on Saturday in New York City. —AFP



NEW YORK: Defending champion Naomi Osaka of Japan and Greek third seed Stefanos Tsitsipas were both ousted from the US Open by 18-year-olds in epic stunners on Friday at Arthur Ashe Stadium. Four-time Grand Slam champion Osaka was shocked by Canadian left-hander Leylah Fernandez 5-7, 7-6 (7/2), 6-4 after Spain's Carlos Alcaraz upset French Open runner-up Tsitsipas 6-3, 4-6, 7-6 (7/2), 0-6, 7-6 (7/5). "Honestly the Alcaraz match gave me motivation and gave me the energy to do the same," Fernandez said. "I saw his match and I saw the way he won and I'm like 'I'm going to do that next now.'"

After the upset, defending champion Osaka announced she was taking a break from playing tennis. "I honestly don't know when I'm going to play my next tennis match," Osaka said, wiping away tears. "I think I'm going to take a break from playing for a while." Osaka, who had won her prior 16 Grand Slam matches, was foiled in a bid for her third US Open crown in four years and the first back-to-back title since Serena Williams in 2014.

Alcaraz is the youngest man in the US Open fourth round since 17-year-old American Michael Chang in 1989, and at any Slam since Ukraine's Andrei Medvedev in the 1992 French Open. "Incredible. Incredible feeling for me,"

Alcaraz said. "This victory means a lot to me. It's the best match of my career, the best win. To beat Stefanos Tsitsipas is a dream come true and to win here is even more special for me."

Osaka had a major meltdown on court during the final moments of the second set after she was unable to hold serve for the victory. "From the very beginning, right before the match, I knew I was able to win," Fernandez said. "Thanks to New York fans. They helped me get the win."

Osaka, who hadn't played since Monday thanks to a second-round walkover, took the first set in 37 minutes on her sixth ace. But she was broken in the 12th game of the second set, an errant forehand sending her to a tie-breaker.

That began a sequence of repeated racquet smashings as she was humbled in the tie-break to force a third set. "I wanted to stay on court a little longer," said Fernandez, who turns 19 tomorrow. "One hour was just not enough for me."

Fernandez then hit a forehand winner to break Osaka to start the third set. Osaka saved

two break points to hold in the third game and from there both held to the finish, which came after two hours and four minutes, sending Fernandez against German 16th seed Angelique Kerber in her first Grand Slam fourth round appearance. "It'll be a battle," Fernandez said. "We're just going to have fun. I'll put on a show like I did tonight."

Fernandez, the daughter of an Ecuadorian father and Filipino-Canadian mother, won her first WTA title in March at Monterrey. She had never beaten so high-ranked a rival as third-rated Osaka and the same was true for Alcaraz when he sent home the men's world

number three. Alcaraz won his first ATP title at Umag in July, becoming the tour's youngest champion since 18-year-old Kei Nishikori in 2008 at Delray Beach. The teen nicknamed "Next Nadal" was the crowd darling at Arthur Ashe Stadium, with roars erupting as he blasted 33 winners past Tsitsipas. "Without this crowd, I haven't the possibility to win the match," Alcaraz said. "I was down at the beginning of the fourth set so thank you to the crowd for pushing me up in the fifth."

Tsitsipas opened the final tie-break with an ace but Alcaraz jumped ahead 5-2 and 6-3 before finishing matters with a forehand winner after four hours and seven minutes of play. He collapsed on the court to celebrate. "It's one of those matches where you feel like you're in control and it doesn't go your way," Tsitsipas said. "It's kind of bitter."

American Frances Tiafoe sprung an upset, ousting fifth-seeded Russian Andrey Rublev 4-6, 6-3, 7-6 (8/6), 4-6, 6-1 in a late-night encounter. Russian second seed Daniil Medvedev, the 2019 US Open and 2021 Australian Open runner-up, beat Spain's 74th-ranked Pablo Andujar 6-0, 6-4, 6-3. He will next face British 24th seed Daniel Evans. Women's second seed Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus also advanced with ease, beating American Danielle Collins 6-3, 6-3. —AFP



Alcaraz youngest man in fourth round since 1989

number three.

'It's kind of bitter'

Alcaraz became the youngest man to beat a top-three player at the US Open since the rankings began in 1973. World number 55 Alcaraz next faces 141st-ranked German qualifier Peter Gojowczyk, who ousted Swiss Henri Laaksonen 3-6, 6-3, 6-1, 6-4.

Croatian World Cup hero Mandzukic retires from football

ZAGREB: Iconic Croatian striker Mario Mandzukic, who scored the winning goal against England in the semifinals of the World Cup in 2018, has retired from the game, three years after playing his last international. The 35-year-old announced his decision in a post on Instagram, which included a photo of a pair of boots, on Friday night.

"While you put on these boots for the first time, you can't even imagine what you will get to experience in football," he wrote in a message in English addressed to his young self, "Dear little Mario", and signed "Your big Mario". "You'll recognize the moment to retire, to put these boots in a cabinet and you'll have no regrets."

Mandzukic appeared 89 times for Croatia scoring 33 goals, he also played Bayern Munich, Atletico Madrid and Juventus and appeared 11 times this year for AC Milan. Plagued by injury he was used mostly as a substitute and did not score a goal.

He won the Croatian league three times with Dinamo Zagreb, the Bundesliga, twice, and the Champions League at Bayern, and Serie A four times at Juventus. "You will score goals on the biggest stages and win the biggest trophies in the jerseys of the biggest clubs," he wrote. "In the jersey of greatest pride, the Croatian national team, you will write some of the most important moments of Croatian sport."

Juventus quickly responded. "Glad to have shared part of your story together," the club posted on Instagram. Croatian sports stars Miralem Pjanic, tennis player Marin Cilic and NBA small forward Bojan Bogdanovic all joined the on-line chorus of praise as did Blaise Matuidi, an opponent in the 2018 World Cup final and team-mate at Juventus. "Thank you mister no good!!!" wrote another French former Juventus team-mate Patrice Evra. "Such a warrior." Croatian coach Zlatko Dalic thanked Mandzukic in a statement calling him "a fighter on whom the team could always rely, a player for big games and the toughest challenges".

Born in Slavonski Brod, Mandzukic began his career in 2004 at hometown club Marsonia. He signed his first major contract with Dinamo Zagreb in 2007. He then played for Wolfsburg (2010-2012), Bayern Munich (2012-2014), Atletico Madrid (2014-2015) and Juventus (2015-2019). He ended his post by recalling his dramatic World Cup semi-final winner. "PS If you happen to play vs England in the World Cup, just be ready around 109th minute," he wrote, adding a smiley. —AFP

Raikkonen out of Dutch GP after testing positive for COVID-19

ZANDVOORT: Finnish driver Kimi Raikkonen has tested positive for COVID-19 and will miss today's Dutch Grand Prix, his Alfa Romeo team and the race organizers announced yesterday. The 2007 world champion Raikkonen, 41, who is retiring from Formula One at the end of the season, was replaced in Zandvoort by Alfa Romeo's reserve driver Robert Kubica.

"Kimi is displaying no symptoms and is in good spirits. He has immediately entered isolation in his hotel. The team wishes Kimi a speedy recovery," the Alfa Romeo team tweeted. "The team ran a thorough close contacts check and do not expect any further impact to our operations for the rest of the weekend."

Championship organizers and the International Automobile Federation (FIA) said that Raikkonen's posi-

Iheanacho stars as Nigeria make winning start

JOHANNESBURG: Leicester City forward Kelechi Iheanacho scored twice as Nigeria beat Liberia 2-0 in Lagos on Friday to go top of an African World Cup qualifying group. He struck after 21 and 45 minutes for a nation that has competed at six of the last seven World Cup tournaments, without ever getting past the second round.

Both goals in the Nigerian economic capital were set up by another English Premier League star, Everton midfielder Alex Iwobi. Nigeria were among the luckier teams in the African group draw, being paired with Cape Verde, the Central African Republic and Liberia.

Only Cape Verde, who drew away to the Central African Republic two days ago and host Nigeria on Tuesday, are expected to mount a serious challenge to the three-time African champions in Group C. Iheanacho and eight other Britain-based Nigerians cannot travel to Cape Verde because the island state is on the United Kingdom coronavirus "red list".

Any footballer returning to Britain from a red-listed country must quarantine for 10 days, and Premier League and Football League players have been barred from visiting such nations. Germany-born Nigeria coach Gernot Rohr insists all three rivals are "tricky opponents who we have got to be at our best against".

"The job has been done," he said, referring to the win

over Liberia. "We had to win our first game at home and we did not concede a goal. "We will be without nine players (in Cape Verde) — that means it will be another team and it is not easy to build a new team within days. We will also play on a synthetic pitch. This will be a challenge. It will be more difficult than against Liberia."

Meanwhile, South Africa drew 0-0 away to Zimbabwe in a scrappy Group G match that marked the debut of Belgian Hugo Broos as coach of underperforming Bafana Bafana (The Boys). South Africa will be notable absentees from the Africa Cup of Nations in Cameroon in January having finished only third in a group from which Ghana and Sudan qualified.

They face Ghana again in the World Cup and, judged by the performance in Harare, are unlikely to finish above the west Africans. South Africa threatened to score only twice — when a Teboho Mokoena shot was brilliantly fisted away by goalkeeper Talbert Shumba and when a goal-bound Bongokuhle Hlongwane shot was cleared.

Zimbabwe were even less dangerous, worrying South African goalkeeper Ronwen Williams just once as Khama Billiat unleashed a close-range drive that was tipped over. Later, Ghana edged Ethiopia 1-0 in Cape Coast through a Mubarak Wakaso goal on 35 minutes to occupy first place.

Zambia, another team that failed to secure a place at the upcoming Cup of Nations, made an impressive Group B debut by winning 2-1 in Mauritania. Enock Mpewu and Prince Mumba scored either side of half-time for the Chipolopolo (Copper Bullets) in Nouakchott before Mamadou Niass halved the deficit.

Tunisia lead Zambia on goal difference after Dylan



ZANDVOORT: Alfa Romeo's Finnish driver Kimi Raikkonen steers his car at the Zandvoort circuit during the first free practice session of the Netherlands' Formula One Grand Prix in Zandvoort on Friday. —AFP

Pierre Gasly, Lando Norris and Charles Leclerc tested positive during the winter break. —AFP



LAGOS: Nigeria's forward Kelechi Iheanacho (center) celebrates with teammates after scoring a goal during the FIFA Qatar 2022 World Cup qualification football match between Nigeria and Liberia at Teslim Balogun Stadium in Lagos, on Friday. —AFP

Bronn, Ellyes Skhiri and captain Wahbi Khazri scored in the second half to deliver a 3-0 victory over Equatorial Guinea in Rades, Cameroon, whose seven World Cup appearances is an African record, began their Group D campaign by beating Malawi 209 in Yaounde through goals from Vincent Aboubakar and Michael Ngadeu-Ngadjui.

In the same section, an Ivory Coast side lacking many first choices because opponents Mozambique are on the British "red list" drew 0-0 in Maputo, where Max Gradel came closest to scoring off a free-kick. Yesterday was a World Cup rest day in Africa and the 20-fixture second round kicks off today and lasts three days. —AFP

Sports

FIFA opens inquiry into racist abuse suffered by England players in Hungary

Johnson calls incident 'unacceptable'; Hungary warns against 'hypocrisy'

LONDON: FIFA on Friday opened a disciplinary inquiry after racist abuse was aimed at England players during their World Cup qualifier in Hungary as Prime Minister Boris Johnson labelled the incidents "completely unacceptable".

Monkey chants were directed at Raheem Sterling and unused substitute Jude Bellingham during Thursday's match at the Puskas Arena in Budapest, which Euro 2020 runners-up England won 4-0. Manchester City forward Sterling scored the first goal in the convincing victory, but the result was overshadowed by the abuse aimed at the visitors' black players. Missiles and a flare were also thrown onto the pitch by a hostile home crowd.

World governing body FIFA issued a statement which read: "Following analysis of the match reports, FIFA has opened disciplinary proceedings concerning the incidents last night at the game Hungary-England. Once again, FIFA would like to state that our position remains firm and resolute in rejecting any form of racism and violence as well as any other form of discrimination or abuse. We have a very clear zero tolerance stance against such aberrant behaviors in football."

British leader Johnson, writing on Twitter, condemned the abuse. "I urge

@FIFACOM to take strong action against those responsible to ensure that this kind of disgraceful behavior is eradicated from the game for good," he tweeted.

But Hungarian football chiefs robustly defended the "vast majority" of fans and Foreign Minister Peter Szijarto warned Johnson against "hypocrisy" after the Euro 2020 final at Wembley was marred by booing and crowd trouble. It is not the first time that Hungary has found itself under the spotlight over

against England because it is a FIFA competition. England's players were also booed before kick-off in the Hungarian capital after they took the knee as a gesture against racism and discrimination.

England manager Gareth Southgate has had to deal with previous episodes of racist behavior towards his team — Euro 2020 qualifiers in Montenegro and Bulgaria were tarnished by similar incidents. And Marcus Rashford, Jadon Sancho and Bukayo Saka were the victims of online racist abuse after missing penalties in England's Euro 2020 final defeat to Italy in July.



England's win overshadowed by abuse

fan misbehavior.

European football's governing body UEFA in July ordered the team to play their next three games behind closed doors, with one match suspended for two years, after finding supporters guilty of discriminatory behavior during Euro 2020. However, the ban did not come into effect for the World Cup qualifier

against England because it is a FIFA competition.

England manager Gareth Southgate has had to deal with previous episodes of racist behavior towards his team — Euro 2020 qualifiers in Montenegro and Bulgaria were tarnished by similar incidents. And Marcus Rashford, Jadon Sancho and Bukayo Saka were the victims of online racist abuse after missing penalties in England's Euro 2020 final defeat to Italy in July.

But the Hungarian Football Federation defended the bulk of the

60,000 fans in Budapest at the match, vowing to take action against those who "entered the field, threw flares and cups". Szijarto, in a video statement on his Facebook page, said: "Everyone could see at the Euro 2020 final how



BUDAPEST: Hungary's fans react throwing cups of beer at England's forward Raheem Sterling as he celebrates scoring the opening goal during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 qualification Group I football match between Hungary and England, at the Puskas Arena in Budapest on Friday. — AFP

60,000 fans in Budapest at the match, vowing to take action against those who "entered the field, threw flares and cups". Szijarto, in a video statement on his Facebook page, said: "Everyone could see at the Euro 2020 final how

the English fans behaved with the Italians. You couldn't even hear the Italian anthem due to the English fans' booing, not to mention the insults after the game, so hypocrisy has no place in either sport or politics." — AFP

Afghan refugees in Qatar's World Cup complex fear for families

DOHA: Qatar has staked much on hosting the 2022 World Cup, but the official accommodation has now assumed a different role from that envisaged by the organizing committee — housing Afghan refugees.

"In our home, we don't have facilities" like air conditioning or flat-screen TVs, says 28-year-old Ahmad Wali Sarhadi, who arrived a few days ago and is now one of around 600 refugees housed in the complex, most of them journalists. The Qatari capital Doha has become a major transit point for refugees fleeing the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan and who were brought out on evacuation flights.

Although he is comfortable in the clean, furnished ground floor space he shares with 24-year-old Khalid Andish, Sarhadi says he has sleepless nights worrying about his family back home. High doses of antidepressants have taken the edge off his emotions, and he unpacks his experiences in a swift, constant flow of words. Sarhadi's new situation would have been impossible to imagine as recently as late August, when he was still living in Kandahar in southern Afghanistan, with his wife and five children, aged between two and 13 years.

Having worked both as a journalist and for an American-funded aid group, he says he was on the Taliban's hit list for two-and-a-half years and sounds like a man still on the run even safely in Qatar. "When we heard them entering the street, there was a two-meter wall by my

place — I jumped over to the other side" to escape. He called his wife to say that he was on his way to get a taxi to go to Kabul, urging her not to tell anyone even as "she was crying".

"I put (on) a turban to look like a Taleban" to avoid detection, he adds. Later "I tried to call my family, but the telephone was down". Once in the capital, he turned up at the airport at 7:00 am every day in his efforts to get through the gates. Contacts at the Committee to Protect Journalists and other organizations helping Afghan media workers ultimately passed his name to the Qataris, who in turn got him on a plane out.

On the Taleban's list

Andish, who worked at a neighborhood radio station in Kabul, says he knew he "was on the hit list of the Taleban" before he left. With no wife or children of his own, he has had no news of his brothers and sister since he fled on August 15. "They are in danger," Andish says. "They might target my family if they don't find me."

His ambition is "to serve my country, as a journalist, a social activist, a teacher, a journalist trainer", but he adds that "for now I have no hope to go back to Afghanistan". Balancing his smartphone on a left hand whose fingers were destroyed by a Taleban bomb more than a decade ago, Sarhadi showed off pictures, a smiling selfie of his little daughter glowing out from the screen.

He and the other refugees chatted in one of the avenues separating rows



DOHA: Afghan refugees Khalid Andish (right), 24, and Ahmad Wali Sarhadi, 28, sit on a bench near their accommodation at Park View Villas, a Qatar's 2022 FIFA World Cup residence designated to host the event's guests and participants, transformed into a housing center for Afghan refugees, in Doha, on Thursday. — AFP

of identical houses in the Park View Villas complex, built to house 1,500 members of delegations, media and guests at next year's World Cup in November and December.

The ultra-rich Gulf state's aim was to surge out of relative obscurity by hosting one of the world's biggest sporting contests. As fate would have it, Qatar has enhanced its status on the world stage by mediating talks and facilitating the evacuation of around 50,000 people from Afghanistan since the Taleban claimed power on August 15.

Unknown destination

Sarhadi believes that "no-one but the Qataris cares about us". He says that weeks ago he turned down an offer to study for a master's degree in

journalism in India. "There'd need to be financial support," he says. "India can't support its own population, how could they help me?"

While others in the World Cup complex hope they will find asylum — in Ireland, Iraq, Rwanda, the United States, Britain — Sarhadi has no idea where he might end up. "I don't know who is going to accept me as a refugee," he says.

Beyond a rucksack, smartphone and computer, the only real wealth he was able to salvage from Kandahar is a sheaf of identity papers and qualifications — his whole life tucked into a plastic pouch. "Physically I'm in Doha, Qatar, but mentally I'm in Afghanistan with my family," Sarhadi says. "I'm afraid something will happen to them. I'm like a dead person." — AFP

Bale would back Wales walk-off over racist abuse

LONDON: Wales captain Gareth Bale would back his players if they ever left the pitch in protest at racist abuse as the Real Madrid forward demanded serial offenders be kicked out of international football. The behavior of fans is in the spotlight after Hungary supporters subjected England duo Raheem Sterling and Jude Bellingham to monkey chants and other racist taunts during Thursday's qualifier in Budapest.

FIFA has opened disciplinary proceedings over the incidents, with England players also barraged with paper cups thrown from the crowd and Borussia Dortmund midfielder Bellingham calling for "proper punishments". It has been suggested that players could walk off the field in future if the authorities fail to combat racist behavior and Bale would not rule out Wales taking that action.

"If things don't get sorted that will happen," Bale said ahead of Wales' qualifier against Belarus in Russia today. "If we felt we weren't getting protection and being treated the right way by the governing bodies, and the only way to get the best response was to walk off, I'd be fully for it. Football qualifiers are important, but these matters come way and above football. We haven't discussed it. But we'd have that discussion if it happened, and we'd all agree on it as we're a team that sticks together and if anyone is being targeted, we'll do the right thing." Wales have encountered racism on their travels to Eastern Europe in the past, and Bale said repeat offenders should be banned from international competition. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000	Khaldiya	24848075
Amiri Hospital	22450005	Kaifan	24849807
Maternity Hospital	24843100	Shamiya	24848913
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700	Shuwaikh	24814507
Chest Hospital	24849400	Abdullah Salem	22549134
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010	Nuzha	22526804
Adan Hospital	23940620	Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300	Qadsiya	22515088
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000	Dasmah	22532265
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9	Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
		Shaab	22518752
		Qibla	22459381
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NOTICE
August 10, 2021

Mr. Abdul Qadeer Sarwar Saiyed, son of Mr. Sarwar Sayed, resident of Mohalla Vaipariayn, Fatehpur, Shekhawati, Sikkar, Rajasthan and Ms. Harleen Kaur, daughter of Mr. Jaspal Singh, resident of H No 390 S Colony Govindpuri, Post Office Kalkaji, New Delhi-110019 both Indian nationals presently residing in Kuwait, have given notice of intended marriage between them under the Foreign Marriage Act, 1969. If anyone has any objection to the proposed marriage, he/she may file the same with the undersigned according to the procedure laid down under the Act/Rule within thirty days from the date of publication of this notice. Communications in this regard can be made by Email (cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in) / letters / telephonic calls (00965 - 22550171, 00965 - 22533125).

K. S. Rathore
(K.S. Rathore) First Secretary (CA)
and Marriage Officer,
Embassy of India, Kuwait



TOKYO: Japan's Shingo Kunieda poses in front of media after he won gold during his men's singles gold medal wheelchair tennis match against Netherlands' Tom Egberink at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games at Ariake Tennis Park in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

Japan's Kunieda strikes gold as pandemic Games lauded

TOKYO: Wheelchair tennis legend Shingo Kunieda claimed gold for Japan, as the successful staging of the Games was lauded as "remarkable" on yesterday's penultimate day of Paralympics action in Tokyo. Top seed Kunieda, who has won 45 Grand Slam titles in his storied career, was looking to reclaim the Paralympic singles crown he won in 2008 and 2012.

And he did not disappoint in the final against the Netherlands' Tom Egberink, dispatching the number eight seed 6-1, 6-2 in 1hr, 18min. He looked skywards after Egberink hit the net on match point, then sobbed before embracing his opponent. "I feel like I'm still in a dream," he said.

Kunieda, who had missed out on a doubles bronze the previous night, said his quarter-final loss at the 2016 Rio Games had haunted him to the point where he thought about retiring. "I gave everything for this day, and I'm glad it's paid off," he said. Bronze went to Gordon Reid, who beat Alfie Hewett 6-4, 3-6, 7-5 just a day after the British pair had teamed up to win doubles silver.

Earlier in the day, Hannah Cockcroft and Nick Mayhugh enjoyed yet more success on the athletics

track, with Britain's Cockcroft winning the seventh Paralympic gold of her career. "Hurricane Hannah" clocked 1min 48.99sec in the T34 800m, obliterating her own Paralympic record set in Rio by almost 12 seconds.

"I don't think it will ever sink in," Cockcroft said of winning her second Tokyo gold to go with her three golds won at Rio 2016 and two from London 2012. "Not many athletes get the privilege of doing this for 10 years or get to stand on the podium that many times."

American Mayhugh smashed his own world record, set only the day before, to take gold in the men's T37 200m in 21.91sec. "I know I'll never be able to run 9.5 for the 100m, but I want to be the Usain Bolt of the Paralympics," said the former footballer, who claimed his third Tokyo gold.



'Out of this world'
International Paralympic Committee spokesperson Craig Spence hailed "an amazing team effort" that enabled the Games to take place in a pandemic. "It's remarkable. There were doubts in the past two years when I thought these Games weren't going to happen," Spence told reporters. "We took inspiration from our athletes. They seem to make the impossible possible. The sporting performances have been out of this world."

'Hurricane Hannah' breaks own Paralympic record

But there was a note of controversy when Peter Genyn of Belgium claimed his wheelchair had been sabotaged and had to be patched up with duct tape before he won the T51 100m late on Friday night. "We had just arrived 45 minutes before the warm-up and we had three flat tires and a broken compensator," he said. "The day before we had a flat front tire, and it

looked like a knife but we didn't want to believe it." There was more success for Australia and Britain as the sprint canoeing program concluded at the Sea Forest Waterway. Australia's Curtis McGrath, who lost his legs when he trod on an explosive device while serving in Afghanistan, won his second gold in the men's VL3 final. Cheah Liek Hou of Malaysia had the honor of winning the first Paralympics badminton gold in history when he beat Indonesia's Dheva Anrimusthi 21-17, 21-15 in the men's Singles SU5 final at the Yoyogi National Stadium.

A few minutes later, Japan's Sarina Satomi became the first woman to win badminton gold when she came from a game down to beat Thailand's Sujirat Pookkham 14-21, 21-19, 21-13 in the wheelchair WHI singles. Midfielder Raimundo Mendes scored the only goal of the game as Brazil beat Argentina 1-0 in a clash of South American football giants in the five-a-side gold medal match. And Iran, featuring the Games' tallest athlete in 246-cm Morteza Mehrzadselakjani, topped the podium in men's sitting volleyball, beating the Russian team 25-21, 25-14, 19-25, 25-17. — AFP

France eyes 'British model' ahead of Paris 2024 Paralympics

TOKYO: As Tokyo's Paralympics draw to a close and focus shifts to Paris 2024, France is looking for inspiration to the so-called "British model" that has produced Games success. Team GB is riding high in the medal tables at Tokyo once again, trailing only China in terms of golds.

And London's Paralympics are widely cited as the benchmark for the biggest international event in para sports. "We all took note of the success of London 2012. It was a real turning point," says Tony Estanguet, president of the Paris 2024 organizing committee.

"We've met their teams and continue to work with them," he told AFP, adding that he talked during the Olympics with his London 2012 counterpart Sebastian Coe, who now heads World Athletics. "Their success was about very strong communication," says Estanguet, citing efforts by both the organizing committee, but also the advertising campaign of Paralympic broadcaster Channel 4.

The British channel famously rolled out its Paralympic campaign after the Olympics under the tagline "Thanks for the warm-up", in an unapologetic celebration of the sporting prowess of Paralympians. And it has run award-winning television promotions for the Paralympics under the theme "Meet the Superhumans."

"The investment that Channel 4 has put in us has shown disability in a really positive way," British sprinter Libby Clegg told AFP. The two-time silver medalist at Rio began her Paralympic career in Beijing in 2008 and has seen the evolution of coverage and focus on Paralympics. "It has been great for us as disabled people especially in the UK. It is great to see that this coverage has continued on," she said.

British Paralympic history

And it's not just British athletes who feel that way, with French judoka and Tokyo Games flagbearer

Sandrine Martinet recalling the famously packed stands in London as a turning point. "Culturally speaking, we felt the atmosphere was different in London. Something happened during those Games."

Estanguet credits "a really strong approach to ticketing, based on school audiences, which worked really well." And the communication, publicity and ticketing made a tangible difference: while only 18 percent of Brits could name a Paralympian in 2010, the figure was 41 percent by the end of the 2012 Games. Interest in the Paralympics and medal success have gone hand in hand for Britain, which hasn't come lower than third in the medal table in the last 20 years and has only slipped below second once. The Paralympics have a particularly British history, having been invented in the UK's Stoke Mandeville which hosted the first precursor to the Games in 1948.

But the Brits have also not rested on their laurels, managing to maintain their position even as other countries improve. That has contributed to a professionalization of the Games. "You can't win a medal here if you train two or three times a week," points out German long jumper Markus Rehm. "This has changed."

'Work to do'

One of the features of the British model has been the integration of disabled athletes into the federations in charge of each sport. France begun doing the same in December 2016 after a decree issued by the sports ministry.

"What we want is to do sport together," said Sophie Cluzel, French secretary of state for people with disabilities. But Stephane Houdet, France's other Tokyo Paralympics flagbearer and a wheelchair tennis player, believes his country is "still at the start of the road." "The Olympic delegation came with 24 staff members, we have three," he told AFP. "We don't have a physio, or a doctor," he added. "We still have work to do."

Cyclist Francois Pervis came to parasports as a sighted pilot working with visually impaired Paralympian Raphael Beaugillet and says the British model shows clear results at the Games. "They put disabled sport on the same level as non-disabled. They share training slots at the national velodrome," he said. "If we asked for that, they'd laugh in our face." — AFP

Verstappen beats Hamilton to pole for his home Dutch GP



ZANDVOORT: Red Bull's Dutch driver Max Verstappen celebrates in the parc ferme of the Zandvoort circuit after he clocked the best time of the qualifying session of the Netherlands' Formula One Grand Prix in Zandvoort yesterday. — AFP

ZANDVOORT: Red Bull's Max Verstappen claimed pole position for his home Dutch Grand Prix, edging championship leader Lewis Hamilton with a scintillating performance in qualifying yesterday. Roared on by the crowd, Verstappen, who trails Hamilton by three points in the title race, was just 0.038 seconds quicker than the Mercedes driver who joins him on the front row on the Zandvoort circuit's first race since 1985.

Home favorite Verstappen was already in flying form earlier yesterday, setting the fastest time in the final practice at Zandvoort. The Red Bull driver's time of 1min 9.623sec was half a second faster than second-best Valtteri Bottas whose Mercedes teammate Lewis Hamilton was third in 1:10.417. Verstappen earlier escaped sanction after being summoned to explain to the stewards why he overtook Lance Stroll's Aston Martin during Friday's second practice while red flags

were flying after Hamilton's Mercedes had ground to a halt on the track.

The Dutchman, who is just three points behind Hamilton in the championship standings, escaped a grid penalty with the stewards concluding that he "took every reasonable action to comply with rules". Stewards said that Verstappen, who was travelling at 260km/h when the red light was signaled, immediately braked but his "momentum carried him past Stroll" who was doing 110km/h.

Verstappen's Red Bull teammate Sergio Perez was fourth followed by an impressive Fernando Alonso in the Alpine and McLaren's Lando Norris. The Ferraris, which had dominated Friday's second session, lost their way as Carlos Sainz crashed heavily at the banked Hugenholtz corner while Charles Leclerc only managed ninth fastest. — AFP