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Taleban cement power with announcement of new govt

Protests dispersed in Kabul • Blinken, Austin hold Afghan crisis talks in Qatar

Direct flights arrive from India



KUWAIT: Indian residents arrive at Kuwait International Airport yesterday, as direct flights resumed between the two countries after a yearlong suspension. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (See Page 3)

KABUL: The Taliban announced the top members of their government yesterday, in a move that will cement their power over Afghanistan and set the tone of their new rule just days after a chaotic US troop pullout. The Islamist hardliners, who swept into Kabul on Aug 15 following a lightning offensive that decimated the former Afghan army, had pledged a more "inclusive" brand of rule than in their first stint in power in 1996-2001.

They have nonetheless made it clear that they will stamp out any insurgency, and yesterday they fired shots into the air to disperse hundreds of people who had gathered at several rallies in Kabul in a sign of defiance against a movement remembered for their brutal and oppressive rule.

Yesterday evening, chief spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told a press conference that the new government would be an interim one, and that Taliban veteran Mullah Mohammad Hassan Akhund would serve as its new acting prime minister. He had served as deputy foreign minister under the Taliban's old regime, and is on a UN blacklist.

Mujahid also said that Taliban co-founder Abdul Ghani Baradar will be the deputy leader. Previously he served as the head of his movement's political office, overseeing the signing in 2020 of the US withdrawal agreement. Mullah Yaqoob, the son of

the Taliban founder and late supreme leader Mullah Omar, was named defense minister, while the position of interior minister was given to Sirajuddin Haqqani, the leader of the feared Haqqani network who also doubled up as a Taliban deputy leader.

The Taliban have promised an "inclusive" government that represents Afghanistan's complex ethnic makeup - though women are unlikely to be included at the top levels. Asked why the government did not appear to be inclusive - with no women on the list - Mujahid said: "The cabinet is not complete, it is just acting. We will try to take people from other parts of the country."

Amir Khan Muttaqi, a Taliban negotiator in Doha and member of the first regime's cabinet, was named foreign minister. Overall, 19 ministries, three directorates, seven deputy ministers and an army chief were announced yesterday. The Taliban have named their government the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan".

Following their 20-year insurgency, the Taliban now face the colossal task of ruling Afghanistan, which is wracked with economic woes and security challenges - including from the Islamic State group's local chapter. Scattered protests in recent days have indicated that some Afghans are skeptical

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News in brief

Cuba starts jabs for toddlers

HAVANA: Cuba on Monday became the first country in the world to vaccinate children from the age of two against COVID-19. Having completed clinical trials on minors with its Abdala and Soberana vaccines, Cuba kicked off its inoculation campaign for children on Friday, starting with those 12 and older. On Monday, it started distributing jabs in the 2-11 age group in the central province of Cienfuegos. — AFP

Four killed, meth seized

MANILA: Four Chinese drug traffickers were killed yesterday and 500 kg of methamphetamine seized in a sting operation in the northern Philippines, police said, describing it as the biggest narcotics haul this year. The drugs, with an estimated street value of nearly \$70 million, were put on small boats in international waters and smuggled into the country, Philippine National Police said in a statement. — AFP

Manila back under lockdown

MANILA: The Philippines reimposed yesterday a virus lockdown in the capital Manila, a day after announcing the lifting of stay-at-home orders for more than 13 million people. But the government's COVID-19 task force reversed course yesterday, saying current rules would be extended until Sept 15 - or until a trial for targeted lockdowns was implemented. — AFP

Scholarship for robotics team

DOHA: Qatar has granted academic scholarships to members of a girls' robotics team from Afghanistan dubbed the "Afghan Dreamers", the Gulf nation's education and science foundation said yesterday. Qatar has been instrumental in efforts to evacuate at-risk Afghans and foreigners from Kabul airport, including members of the team who are being housed in Doha's Education City campus of schools and universities. — AFP (See Page 5)

Trial of 9/11 mastermind resumes

GUANTANAMO BAY NAVAL BASE, Cuba: Accused Sept 11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and four others appeared in court for the first time in more than 18 months yesterday as US military prosecutors seek justice two decades after the world-shaking terror attacks. Mohammed, with a dense, graying red beard, strode into the courtroom in the US naval base

in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, as the nine-year-old trial resumed after a long halt for the COVID-19 pandemic.

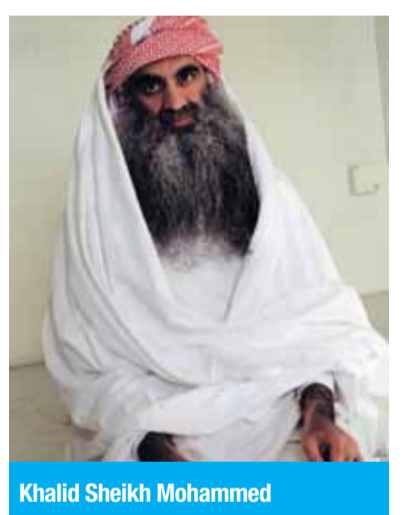
The military tribunal courtroom was packed with prosecutors, interpreters, and five defense teams for Mohammed and alleged co-conspirators Ammar Al-Baluchi, Walid bin Attash, Ramzi bin al-Shibh and Mustafa Al-Hawsawi. In the public gallery, behind thick glass, were members of the families of the 2,976 people that the defendants are accused of murdering almost exactly 20 years ago. The accused face possible execution if found guilty.

But the pretrial phase now in its ninth year and bogged down over what is now the central issue - that the five

were repeatedly tortured by the CIA after their capture. Without a political intervention - President Joe Biden had pledged during his campaign to close down the military prison at Guantanamo Bay - it could be more than a year before a full trial begins, let alone a verdict reached.

The trial resumed yesterday in the highly secure "Camp Justice" courtroom on a hilltop in the US naval base at Guantanamo Bay. The defendants entered one by one with military escorts, and each sat down at a table with their own defense team. Mohammed wore a blue turban and matching facemask which he removed

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Khalid Sheikh Mohammed

Bitcoin legal tender in El Salvador

SAN SALVADOR: El Salvador yesterday became the first country in the world to accept bitcoin as legal tender, despite widespread domestic skepticism and international warnings of risks for consumers. President Nayib Bukele's government claims the move will give many Salvadorans access to bank services for the first time and save some \$400 million in fees on remittances sent home from abroad every year.

"Tomorrow, for the first time in history, all the eyes of the world will be on El Salvador. #Bitcoin did this," Bukele said on Twitter Monday. He started the ball rolling Monday evening by announcing El Salvador had bought its first 400 bitcoins, in two tranches of 200, and promised more were coming. The 400 bitcoins were trading at around \$21 million, according to the cryptocurrency exchange app Gemini.

Recent opinion polls showed a majority of El Salvador's 6.5 million people reject the idea and will continue using the US dollar, the country's legal currency for the last 20 years. "This bitcoin is a currency that does not exist, a currency that will not

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SAN SALVADOR: A man wearing a protective facemask with the image of Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele poses for a picture at a bitcoin ATM yesterday. — AFP

Lebanese turn once again to Cyprus haven

LARNACA: Just as during the 1975-1990 civil war that ravaged their country, hundreds of Lebanese families are turning to neighboring Cyprus to escape the miseries of everyday life back home. Short-haul flights from Beirut to Larnaca, barely a

25-minute hop away, have been busy for months ferrying in Lebanese for whom their crisis-hit country with its dire shortages has become unlivable.

"I've had to leave my country and my parents to try to secure a future for my children," said Nanor Abachian, 30, emerging from the airport on the island's south coast with her husband, their two children and seven heavy suitcases. They leave behind a bankrupt country where daily 22-hour power cuts have become the norm and shortages have hit daily necessities, from fuel and gas to medicine and bread.

Since the start of the crisis in 2019, several thou-

sand Lebanese have emigrated, many of them to Cyprus. There is no official data on numbers, especially as many Lebanese hold second passports. Lebanon's ambassador to Cyprus, Claude El-Hajal, said the number of families resettled on the island has seen "a significant increase" especially since the devastating Aug 4, 2020 explosion in Beirut's port that killed over 200 people.

In the 1980s, at the height of the civil war, about 100,000 Lebanese families fled to Cyprus, Hajal said. However, many returned after the conflict. During the 2006 war between the Zionist entity and the

Continued on Page 2

Amir, Crown Prince receive Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah also received His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad yesterday at Bayan Palace. — KUNA



Defense Minister receives invitation to visit Turkey



KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah meets Turkish Ambassador to Kuwait Ayse Koytak. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah received yesterday a written letter from his Turkish counterpart Hulusi Akar inviting him to visit Turkey. According to a press statement by the General Staff, the Kuwaiti minister received the invitation during his meeting with Turkish Ambassador to Kuwait Ayse Koytak. He expressed his appreciation for the invitation and for the efforts made by the Turkish embassy in Kuwait which reflects the deep ties between the two countries. — KUNA

Kuwait, South Korea discuss economic relations

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Finance Minister and State Minister for Economic Affairs Khalifa Hamada held talks yesterday with the South Korean Ambassador to Kuwait Chung Ha, as part of efforts to forge closer economic relations. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed the role of South Korean companies in Kuwait that are executing large projects in light of efforts to achieve Kuwait's 2035 vision, said the Ministry of Finance in a press statement. Both sides praised the bilateral ties between the two countries in all fields, aimed to enhance cooperation, and discussed recent regional developments, it added. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Finance Minister and State Minister for Economic Affairs Khalifa Hamada meets South Korea's Ambassador to Kuwait Chung Ha. — KUNA

Kuwait gifts Bahrain commemorative coin to mark GCC inception

KUWAIT: Kuwait yesterday handed Bahrain a commemorative coin marking the 40th anniversary of the Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) inception, acknowledging the bloc's contribu-

tions towards regional development. The coin, made of pure gold, was given to Bahrain's King Hamad bin Issa Al-Khalifa by Kuwait Central Bank Governor Dr Mohammad Al-Hashel, with an iconic image of Gulf Arab leaders dating back to the GCC's formation in 1981 plastered on the heads, while the tails of the coin is emblazoned with the bloc's logo. The Kuwaiti central bank chief conveyed greetings from his country's political leaders to the Bahraini King, wishing the Gulf island-nation continued prosperity. The six-nation bloc comprises Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman. — KUNA

Lebanese turn once again to...

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Lebanese Shiite group Hezbollah, Cyprus served as a base for the evacuation of almost 60,000 civilians from Lebanon. Abachian said a "feeling of insecurity" was the main motivation for their flight abroad. "We are living in the unknown... My children have no future in Lebanon," she said.

Once in Larnaca, she settled with her family at a friend's house, waiting to rent an apartment near the school where the children have been enrolled. George Obeid, in his forties, also opted for Cyprus for the sake of his children's schooling. "There is no hope for the school year in Lebanon," he said, citing

the power cuts and fuel shortages that are crippling school services and activities. "We were also worried about our safety," he added, fearing a rise in crime due to widespread poverty and desperation.

According to the United Nations, 78 percent of Lebanese now live below the poverty line - up from less than 30 percent before 2019. In Nicosia, the Franco-Cypriot school, which has a curriculum similar to that of several French-language schools in Lebanon, has been flooded with an estimated 250 applications from newly-arrived Lebanese.

Cyprus is also attracting Lebanese companies and investors. According to Constantinos Karageorgis, a senior trade and industry ministry official, a fast-track procedure introduced last October for establishing foreign companies on the island has led to seven Lebanese firms relocating with nearly 200 employees, accompanied by their families. With this new mechanism, "the procedure now takes 10 to 15 days instead of two to three months", said Hajal, the ambassador. — AFP

be named to preside. McCall opened by asking each of the defendants if they understood the guidelines for the hearing. "Yes," each answered, some in English and some in their own languages. He then launched into a discussion of COVID-19 protocols, after the long delay forced by the pandemic.

Already in recent weeks several people who have joined hearings in other Guantanamo cases have tested positive, despite strict requirements for vaccinations and masks. Lowering his own mask to speak, McCall said that everyone should remain masked unless they were addressing the court. Defense attorneys said they were eager to continue where they stopped in Feb 2019, building a case to discredit the bulk of the prosecution's evidence due to the torture the five endured while in CIA hands between 2002 and 2006.

But the trial restart began slowly. The first day is focused on a procedure unique to the military commissions, a "voir dire" assessment of the judge's own background to probe for possible biases. The procedure is crucial as the judge, prosecutors and many of the defense attorneys are all part of the Defense Department legal corps. McCall said he had worked with others on both sides of the court in this case, but had no deep links or commitments to any. "I shut down all my social media," he said, to avoid potential "friends" from contacting him about the case. The voir dire review of McCall will consume two sessions this week, and the other days will involve him meeting with attorneys privately on the case. — AFP

Taleban cement power with...

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of the Taleban's capacity to translate their promise of a more moderate rule into reality.

"Afghan women want their country to be free. They want their country to be rebuilt. We are tired," protester Sarah Fahim told AFP at one rally yesterday, where more than 70 people, mostly women, had gathered. Videos posted on social media of a separate rally showed more than a hundred people marching through the streets under the watchful eye of armed Taleban members.

Scattered demonstrations have also been held in smaller cities in recent days, including in Herat and Mazar-i-Sharif, where women have demanded to be part of a new government. General Mobin, a Taleban official in charge of security in the capital, told AFP he

had been called to the scene by Taleban guards who said that "women were creating a disruption". "These protesters are gathered based only on the conspiracy of foreign intelligence," he claimed.

Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the Taleban had reiterated a pledge to allow Afghans to freely depart Afghanistan. The Taleban told the United States that "they will let people with travel documents freely depart", Blinken said at a news conference in Doha, where he and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin met their Qatari opposite numbers. US President Joe Biden has faced mounting pressure amid reports that several hundred people, including Americans, have been prevented for a week from flying out of an airport in northern Afghanistan. Qatar, a US ally that has emerged as a key player both in evacuations and diplomacy in Afghanistan, said it was working to restore the Kabul airport which has been in disarray since the chaotic end of the 20-year US war. A reopening would allow both a resumption of evacuations, if the Taleban follow through on commitments, and the shipment of badly needed humanitarian assistance. — AFP

Trial of 9/11 mastermind...

Continued from Page 1

to let free a long, flowing beard. He chatted animatedly with bin Attash while leafing through a pile of documents. Bin Attash, who allegedly helped plan the 9/11 attacks, wore a pink keffiyeh headdress and a military desert camouflage jacket, walking slowly with a prosthetic on one leg he lost in a firefight in Afghanistan in 1996.

Al-Shibh, a member of the "Hamburg Cell" of hijackers, also wore desert camouflage over his white cotton pants, seemingly to reflect his days as an Al-Qaeda jihadist. Baluchi, also known as Ali Abdul Aziz Ali and the nephew of Mohammed, revealed a short, black beard under his mask and wore a Sindhi cap of his native Balochistan, along with a traditional vest over his white robe. He is accused of handling money transfers in the plot.

The fifth defendant, Hawsawi, who worked together with Baluchi, entered in a Saudi thobe-style white robe. He also carried a pillow which he placed on the hospital chair reserved for him, due to rectal damage his lawyers say was incurred in the abusive interrogations by the CIA.

The hearing opened under a brand new judge, Air Force Colonel Matthew McCall, who is the eighth to

Bitcoin legal tender in...

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benefit the poor but the rich," said skeptic Jose Santos Melara, who took part in a protest by several hundred people in the capital San Salvador last week. "How will a poor person invest (in bitcoin) if they barely have enough to eat?"

In June, El Salvador's parliament approved a law to allow the crypto money to be accepted as tender for all goods and services in the small Central American nation, along with the US dollar. The bill, an initiative of Bukele, was approved within 24 hours of being presented to Congress - where the president's allies have held a majority since March. Experts and regulators have highlighted concerns about the cryptocurrency's notorious volatility and the lack of any protections for its users.

The government is installing more than 200 bitcoin teller machines, some guarded by soldiers to prevent possible arson by opponents. And Bukele has promised \$30 for each citizen who adopts the currency. "These are decisions the administration and lawmakers have taken without consulting" the population, said Laura Andrade, director of the Public Opinion Institute of the Central American University, which found in a poll that 70 percent of Salvadorans opposed the move. "We see that people do not perceive a positive impact to significantly transform their living conditions," she told AFP.

Nearly two-thirds of Salvadorans questioned for the poll said they had no interest in downloading the "Chivo" electronic wallet that will allow users to buy and spend bitcoin. Oscar Cabrera, an economist at the University of El Salvador, said the currency's high volatility will have a "negative impact" on consumers, affecting the price of goods and services.

The currency fell beneath \$30,000 in June, less than half its all-time high of more than \$64,000 just two months earlier. For its part, the Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development (FUSADE) said it was "unconstitutional" to make it compulsory for merchants to accept bitcoin as a form of payment.

Bukele, who is popular but under fire in several quarters for moves to tighten his grip on power, has accused opponents of seeking to "sow fear" among Salvadorans, few of whom have access to formal banking services. Remittances account for more than a fifth of GDP in the dollarized economy, mainly sent in dollars via agencies such as Western Union by an estimated 1.5 million expats.

According to World Bank data, El Salvador received more than \$5.9 billion in 2020 from nationals living abroad, mainly in the United States. And the country is relying on this money to boost a struggling economy that contracted 7.9 percent in 2020 due in large part to the coronavirus pandemic.

Economists and international bodies such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and Inter-American Development Bank have expressed concerns about El Salvador's bitcoin adoption. The United States has urged El Salvador to ensure a "regulated", "transparent" and "responsible" use of bitcoin. — AFP

Local

COVID-19 regressed clinically and on the field: Dr Jarallah

Health officials call for caution in road to recovery

KUWAIT: Kuwait has entered a stage where the COVID-19 epidemic has regressed both clinically and on the field, head of the Supreme Committee for COVID-19 Dr Khaled Al-Jarallah said yesterday. Stability of the health situation in Kuwait requires commitment to health precautions while easing restrictions, he noted.

Kuwait has seen a sharp decline in daily COVID-19 cases over the past weeks, coupled with an increase in vaccination rates. Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Hmoud Al-Sabah had given a presentation during the Cabinet's weekly meeting on Monday on the country's latest health situation through statistics showing a continued decline in daily infections and a rise in recoveries.

As a result, the Cabinet expressed reassurance about the continuation of positive health indicators in the country, calling for constant cooperation amongst the public to maintain those positive indicators. It also urged people to continue abiding by health precautions to prevent the spread of any new variants of the virus and eradicate it.

Road to recovery

The Ministry of Health announced 71 new cases on Monday; the lowest daily rate since April 2020, in addition to one death. Meanwhile, the number of patients receiving medical care in COVID-19 wards reached 137 as of Monday, including 64 in intensive care units, ministry spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said, adding that another 1,851 were receiving regular treatment.

Member of the Supreme Committee for COVID-19 Dr Khaled Al-Saeed said earlier this week that around 70 percent of targeted people have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19 in Kuwait, while Pediatrician Dr Dana Al-Haqan revealed that over 70 percent of the 12-15 age group have been vaccinated.

But health officials insist that Kuwait must move cautiously towards easing restrictions, encourage the public to continue to adhere to health precautions, and take measures that help limit the spread of the virus. For example, Dr Jarallah suggested yesterday that the more the country moves towards online transactions, the



KUWAIT: In this July 18, 2021 file photo, a health worker instructs people to proceed to take their COVID-19 vaccine doses at the Kuwait Vaccination Center in Mishref. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

better that would serve efforts to tackle the spread of the virus.

'Sahel' app

In this regard, the government had tasked state officials to set a mechanism regarding the activa-



Over 70% of 12-15 age group vaccinated

tion of services online through the 'Sahel' smartphone application and explain digital transformation within a specific timetable. During its weekly meeting on Monday, the Cabinet reviewed the gist

of the gathering held by Sheikh Sabah Khaled last Thursday at Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center, in the presence of the ministers and senior officials at state departments. During that gathering, the Premier reviewed efforts made by the government during the coronavirus pandemic, in addition to the plans and programs as well as major development and entertainment projects that are currently carried out.

In implementing the gist of the Premier's speech, the Cabinet decided to assign the ministers to follow up with the officials at the affiliated entities to set an executive action plan in line with a specific timetable. In addition, the Cabinet also asked the officials to cooperate to implement all government development projects and program axes.

And while the Cabinet discussed recommendations made by the ministerial coronavirus emergency committee and allowed 30 percent of the vaccinated fans to attend matches and sports activities in the 2021-2022 season, it stressed the necessity of sticking to the implemented health precautions during matches and training.



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah chairs the Cabinet's meeting. — KUNA

Meanwhile, the Cabinet discussed the National Assembly affairs and was informed about Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem's letter on interpellation submitted by MP Fayez Ghannam against Minister of

State for Municipality Affairs. The Cabinet affirmed that the interpellation is a constitutional right to any MP and expressed its confidence in the minister. It lauded efforts of athletes Ahmad Al-Mutairi and Faisal Soror who won the silver and bronze medals in the 100-m race and the shot-put contests respectively in the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games.

The Cabinet also focused on the political affairs in light of the latest developments on the political arena at both Arab and international levels. It expressed Kuwait's strong condemnation and denunciation of the continued Houthi militias' attempts to target Saudi civilians and residential areas and threaten the Kingdom's security with drones and ballistic missiles on the eastern province, and Najran and Jazan cities.

It affirmed that the continuation of these hostile practices and escalation that target the Kingdom's security and the region's stability is a flagrant violation of the principles of the international humanitarian law. The Cabinet went to say that such practice requires a rapid and decisive move from the international community so as to deter these threats and hold the perpetrators accountable. Finally, the Cabinet emphasized Kuwait's full support to the Kingdom in all measures it takes to maintain its sovereignty, security and stability. — KUNA

Cabinet calls for boosting cooperation with private sector

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Cabinet called for boosting cooperation with the private sector and removing all obstacles facing developmental and economic projects, and further demanded taking immediate measures against any corruption suspicion or misuse of public funds. This came during the Cabinet's weekly meeting led by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah at Seif Palace.

Meanwhile, the Cabinet called for providing the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers with the number of international and local indicators parting to each entity, its views, and ways to improve the state's indicators according to a specific timetable. It decided setting a mechanism linked to a timetable to address all observations and violations made by the supervisory authorities, and to inform the General Secretariat about the results and ways of taking necessary measures to avoid the observations and violations in the future.

Kuwait welcomes travelers on direct flights from India



KUWAIT: Passengers arrived to Kuwait yesterday on direct flights from India, for the first time since the Cabinet's decision to resume direct flights between the two countries. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Education ministry achieves near full digital transformation

KUWAIT: The coronavirus health crisis led some state departments to move gradually to digital dealings with the public, including the Ministry of Education, which opted for online learning using Microsoft Teams. People's transactions are now processed electronically for most administrative and educational services.

An educational source quoted in an Al-Rai newspaper report published yesterday said the volume of paper transactions at the ministry is small and mostly concentrated around salary certificates and residency renewal of non-Kuwaiti teachers, although appointments for these transactions is done online. He said the ministry has applied the digital transformation for most of its services and will soon cease paper transactions.

While the source said that a total digital transformation may lead to the cancellation of correspondence contracts and office boys appointed by companies may be let go, he pointed to the positives of the transformation, be it in the short or long term. The result is the quick processing of transactions and preventing them from getting lost.

Head of the online education project, former facilities undersecretary Dr Khaled Al-Rushaid, said office boys' services may be cancelled if the digital transformation is applied to all services presented by the education ministry, if their job is limited to moving and distributing correspondence.

He said the ministry has gone a long way in digital transformation during the coronavirus crisis and launched tens of electronic services in both the educational and administrative aspects. He said the number of employees at the ministry is very large, so the digital transformation will have a positive effect in the short and long run.

Crimes

400 caught up in major human trafficking case

KUWAIT: The public prosecution ordered the arrest of several suspects who allegedly brought in 400 residents of various nationalities to supposedly work at five "nonexistent" hotels, in what is considered the largest human trafficking case in the country, Al-Rai Arabic daily reported yesterday. The prosecution's order was made after immigration detectives learned about the visas used to bring in workers for the bogus hotels. The workers confessed to paying KD 1,500 each to come to Kuwait. Detectives were instructed to intensify their investigations after discovering the use of a Kuwaiti woman's signature, although she is out of the country for a long time, as documents were forged without her knowledge.

Meanwhile, a domestic helper killed her newborn baby at her employer's house, the same daily reported yesterday. Her sponsor told police that when he entered her room, he was surprised at the sight of the "slaughtered" baby. Police responded and arrested the maid, who was taken to hospital for treatment and will be questioned after she recovers.

Domestic violence

In the meantime, a woman stabbed her husband following a domestic dispute, Al-Rai reported quoting a police source. The man was taken to hospital as the woman gave herself up to police. Separately, a girl escaped a kidnapping attempt in Farwaniya, after the suspect asked for directions to a restaurant before grabbing her by the hand. The girl screamed loudly, which prompted the suspect to escape. Detectives are looking for him. The victim, 15, was taking things to relatives in the neighborhood when the incident occurred, reported Al-Rai.

In a separate case, detectives are searching for a broker and his wife after they were accused by a real estate owner of stealing KD 10,000 in rent money. A police source said a Kuwaiti told Hawally police that he asked a man and his wife he knows to collect rent from tenants. They did the job well for a few months, but disappeared last month after collecting the abovementioned amount, which they did not deposit at the bank.

Local

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Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A picture taken on Monday shows a night view of Kuwait City taken from the 'corniche'; a 10-kilometer-long waterfront that extends along Kuwait's coastal line. - Photo by Ghazi Qafaf/KUNA (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, in addition to a description showing the picture's location and date taken)

News in brief

Foreign Minister receives calls

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah received a phone call on Monday from Somali Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Mohamed Abdirizak, where they discussed several issues of mutual interest. Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Nasser also received a phone call from Sudan's Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr Mariam Al-Sadiq Al-Mahdi and discussed matters that concern both nations. During both calls, the strong relationship that combined Kuwait with the two brotherly nations was underlined. — KUNA

Consul calls upon entrepreneurs

BEIJING: Kuwait's consul in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou urged his compatriot entrepreneurs yesterday to take part in an import and export fair slated for next month, touting the event as a gateway to the world's most populous country. The fair on October 15 allows Kuwaiti entrepreneurs the chance to be acquainted with Chinese products and explore investment opportunities the country has to offer, Khalifa Al-Kharafi said after a press conference to hype the event. Kuwaiti presence at the Chinese expo would be a step towards better bilateral trade ties, said the Kuwaiti diplomat, pointing out that the annual event will feature some 26,000 local and international companies vying for global exposure. —KUNA

Kuwait mulls creating ministry for investment

KUWAIT: Kuwait's government is studying the possibility of splitting the Ministry of Finance into two separate ministries, with one of them dedicated to the investment sector, Al-Rai reported yesterday. "The government is contemplating splitting the finance ministry, be it at the

department level or the budget, in a way that allows the separation of the investment sectors from others such as auditing and budgets," the daily wrote yesterday.

Informed sources quoted in the report said this move comes as part of efforts to take investment and economic decisions away from traditional establishments, similar to steps taken by other countries such as Saudi Arabia, which established an office to take the responsibility of preparing the state budget instead of the finance ministry.

The sources said preliminary ideas in this regard are to separate the investment sector into an independent ministry that will include the

investment bodies that manage state finances, headed by the Public Institution for Social Security, Kuwait Investment Authority, Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority, Kuwait Authority for Partnership Projects, Kuwait Privatization Agency, Central Bank of Kuwait and others, adding that KIA board member Fahad Al-Rashed will most probably be the minister.

They said that the second ministry will include traditional departments and sectors such as budget preparation, taxes, reclamation, Public Authority for Assessment of Compensation and the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development.

Humanitarian society honors philanthropist

KUWAIT: Chairman of the Board of Kuwait Humanitarian Friendship Society Ahmad Al-Sarraf presented a plaque to Hassan Al-Hasawi in appreciation of his support of the society's goals. Sarraf said the board "appreciates the generous donation by Hassan Al-Hasawi, who does not hesitate to present relief to those who are unable to meet life's demands." Meanwhile, Hasawi said he was pleased to donate and help the society fulfill its goals, as well as support efforts to spread humanitarian action in Kuwait without regard to race, religion or nationality.



KUWAIT: Chairman of the Board of Kuwait Humanitarian Friendship Society Ahmad Al-Sarraf (right) honors philanthropist Hassan Al-Hasawi.

ICSK Khaitan ACCA students attain degree just after class XII

KUWAIT: Adding one more jewel in the bounty of achievements, five students of ICSK-Khaitan: Alpha Susan Jaimon, Lave Cleto Joanes, Thomson Babu, Afreen Ara and Malesa Rodrigues, perusing ACCA (The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants), have cleared all nine papers and are now on the verge of receiving the BSc degree in applied accountancy from Oxford Brookes University, as regular students. Remarkably, all these students passed class 12 just last year and all are below 20 years of age. Furthermore, the time and cost involved are the least anywhere in the world behind the achievement of these students. Their exemplary achievement is most inspiring to those students who aspire to pursue career in Commerce stream, specially ACCA. ICSK offers ACCA guidance to its stu-

dents as an integrated program during their 11th and 12th Commerce studies. ICSK is also the Computer Based Exam Centre in Kuwait for ACCA.

Many students are benefiting from this UK education as there is a very high demand of ACCA qualified candidates in job market, including Kuwait. Many audit firms offer the internship to these students and approach for their placements too. By the time students complete their class XII, many of them complete their Diploma Level and in a year or so, they are able to complete nine papers, a basic eligibility along with thesis for BSc from Oxford Brookes University, UK. The female students are also enjoying the benefit of their stay and complete their education in Kuwait even after class XII. Parents are highly appreciative of this program by school. The ICSK management, ACCA mentors Aqeel and Shafqat, the principal and the faculty of ICSK Khaitan expressed their heartiest congratulations to these students for their outstanding achievement. The ICSK Management has also appreciated these students for facing the challenges and working persistently and promised support until these students reach their final goal of ACCA.

Kuwait keen on sustainable development, reducing harmful emissions: Minister

KUWAIT: Oil Minister Dr Mohammad Al-Fares headed the delegation of the State of Kuwait participating in the Round Table Conference on Energy, Environment and Sustainable Development, which was held on Monday via video conference. According to a ministry press statement, Fares stressed the importance of holding the ministerial round table at this time, which comes before participating in the 26th climate summit, which will be held in the British city of Glasgow in November.

The minister noted that OPEC attaches special importance to preserving the environment and reducing emissions, as well as the need for consultation between producers within the international efforts to

confront climate change, in a manner commensurate with the commitment to the principles of justice common responsibilities and in light of the national conditions and capacities of developing countries.

Minister Fares praised the green initiative proposed by the sisterly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as part of its efforts to confront climate change. He also affirmed the State of Kuwait's orientations in supporting clean projects inside Kuwait that preserve the environment, and through the document of national contributions to climate change in partnership with the United Nations and in line with the Paris Agreement, stressing Kuwait's constant endeavor to achieve sustainable development and embrace advanced technologies to reduce harmful emissions and climate change.

Minister Fares participated with Hashem Sayed Hashem, CEO of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation and Vice Chairman of the Board, Sheikh Abdullah Ahmad Al-Humoud Al-Sabah, Chairman of the Board and Director General of the Environment Public Authority, Mohammad Al-Shatti, Governor of the State of Kuwait to OPEC, and Sheikh Abdullah Al-Sabah, Kuwait's national representative to OPEC. — KUNA

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S Korea launches a ballistic missile

'We live in fear': Once embracing, Turkey turns on migrants

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KABUL: Students attend a class bifurcated by a curtain separating males and females at a private university in Kabul yesterday, to follow the Taliban's ruling. — AFP

Afghan universities deserted

UN ramps up Afghan aid appeal as 'catastrophe' looms

KABUL: Universities in Kabul were almost empty on the first day of the Afghan school year, as professors and students wrestled with the Taliban's restrictive new rules for the classroom. The Taliban have promised a softer rule than during their first stint in power from 1996-2001, when women's freedoms in Afghanistan were sharply curtailed and they were banned from higher education. This time, the hardline Islamist group have said women will be allowed to go to private universities under the new regime, but they face tough restrictions on their clothing and movement.

Women can only attend class if they wear an abaya - a flowing robe - and a niqab - a face veil with a small window to see through - and are separated from men, the Taliban said. "Our students don't accept this and we will have to close the university," said Noor Ali Rahmani, the director of Gharjistan University in Kabul, on an almost empty campus on Monday. "Our students wear the hijab, not the niqab," he added, referring to a headscarf.

The Taliban education authority issued a lengthy document on Sunday outlining their measures for the classroom, which also ruled that men and women should be segregated - or at least divided by a curtain if there are 15 students or less. "We said we didn't accept it because it will be difficult to do," Rahmani said. "We also said that it is not real Islam, it is not what the Quran says."

From now on at private colleges and universities,

which have mushroomed since the Taliban's first rule ended, women must only be taught by other women, or "old men", and use a women-only entrance. They must also end their lessons five minutes earlier than men to stop them from mingling outside. So far, the Taliban has said nothing about public universities.

'Let's engage'

For some students, however, it was a relief that



Taliban promise a softer rule

women would still be able to attend university at all under a new Taliban regime. Zuhra Bahman, who runs a scholarship program for women in Afghanistan, said on social media she had spoken to some of the students. "They are happy to go back to university, albeit in hijab," she said. "Taliban opening universities for women is a key progress.

Let's continue to engage to agree on other rights and freedoms."

Jalil Tadjilil, a spokesman for Ibn-e Sina University in the capital, said separate entrances had already been created for men and women. "We didn't have the authority to accept or reject the decisions that have been imposed," he told AFP, blaming the "ongoing uncertainty" for the lack of students. The university posted a picture online of male and female students separated by a grey curtain running between them, as a male teacher wrote on a whiteboard.

'Everything changed'

Usually, campus corridors on the first day of the term would be packed with students catching up after the summer. But on Monday, there was a strikingly low turnout at Kabul's universities, leaving education leaders wondering just how many young, talented people have fled the country as part of the "brain drain". Rahmani said only 10 to 20 percent of the 1,000 students who enrolled last year came to Gharjistan University on Monday, although there were no classes scheduled.

He estimated up to 30 percent of the students left Afghanistan after the Taliban seized control in the middle of August. "We have to see first if stu-

dents come," he said. Reza Ramazan, a computer science teacher at the university said women students were particularly at risk when travelling to campus. "It can be dangerous at checkpoints," he said. "The Taliban can check their phones and computers." For 28-year-old computer science student Amir Hussein, "everything changed completely" after the Taliban takeover. "Many students are not interested anymore in studying because they don't know what their future will be," he said. "Most of them want to leave Afghanistan."

'Catastrophe' looms

Meanwhile, the United Nations appealed for almost \$200 million in extra funding for life-saving aid in Afghanistan after the Taliban's takeover sparked a host of new issues. The UN humanitarian agency OCHA said the extra sum meant a total of \$606 million in aid was now needed for Afghanistan until the end of the year.

"Basic services in Afghanistan are collapsing and food and other life-saving aid is about to run out," said OCHA spokesman Jens Laerke. The issue will be discussed next Monday at a ministerial meeting in Geneva hosted by UN chief Antonio Guterres. The country, now under the control of the Taliban after 20 years of war, is facing a "looming humanitarian catastrophe", Guterres's spokesman Stephane Dujarric warned last week when announcing the conference. — Agencies

Victorious Taliban gloat over ruins of CIA's Afghan base

DEH SABZ: After America's longest war, Taliban commander Mullah Hasnain contemplates all that is left of what was part of the last CIA base - demolished buildings, destroyed vehicles and piles of ammunition. "We let them go peacefully, and look what they've left behind," Hasnain said, a leader of the Taliban's elite Badri 313 unit. Hasnain, a thick-bearded man dressed in traditional brown robes with a waistcoat and black turban, surveyed the charred ruins of the sprawling complex on the edge of Afghanistan's capital Kabul.

"Before going, they destroyed everything," he told journalists being shown the site, flanked by Taliban guards cradling American M-16 rifles and equipped with the latest military kit. The complex was once one of the most secure sites in Afghanistan, sited on a dusty plain near the former US Eagle Base camp and close to Kabul airport. After a two-week blitz of Afghanistan, the Taliban capped their extraordinary victory by sweeping into Kabul on August 15. It would take two weeks more before the final US forces flew out, ending their 20-year war in the country.

'Lots of explosions'

As the CIA destroyed their base, from where they trained Afghanistan's intelligence agencies, the Taliban watched from nearby, the commander said. "We were there for nine or 10 days," 35-year-old Hasnain said, speaking in clear English. "There were lots of explosions." "We didn't stop them, even the last convoy that went by road to the airport. We didn't attack them, because we followed orders from our top officials."

Hasnain pointed at one crater he said had been "an ammunition warehouse". Only a heap of rubble and twisted metal remain. The US detonated the munition dump on August 27, with the huge blast echoing across Kabul and sparking terror. A day earlier, Islamic State-Khorasan, Afghanistan's



KABUL: Damaged and discarded vehicles parked near the destroyed Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) base in Deh Sabz district northeast of Kabul after the US pulled all its troops out of the country. —AFP

branch of the jihadist franchise and rivals of the Taliban, had attacked crowds at the airport trying to flee. They killed more than 100 Afghan civilians and 13 US troops.

Hasnain pointed to another area, where dozens of crates packed with hundreds of rockets were piled. "Please don't move the grenades," he told journalists. Piles of unused ammunition lay scattered around. "We can still shoot with them," he said. One building was left intact, a large games room with billiards, table football, darts and soft velvet armchairs. Its sign still dangled outside - "The Snooker Club". He looked out over a parking lot, packed with the incinerated wrecks of scores of vehicles. "We need everything for the country, including weapons - we don't have enough to ensure security," he said. "Now we have to buy them from other countries," he added, declining to specify which ones.

Deliberate destruction

The US said it left as little military equipment as possible behind for the Taliban, who carried out years of bloody attacks against foreign forces,

Afghan troops and the civilian population. At the nearby airport, US troops disabled or destroyed scores of aircraft and armored vehicles, as well as a high-tech defense system used to stop rocket attacks. Hasnain was angry at the deliberate destruction, seeing the burned wreckage as symbolic of America's two-decade stay. "The US came to Afghanistan saying that they would rebuild the country," he said. "This is their real face, they didn't leave anything."

The Taliban nevertheless seized a major arsenal of weapons elsewhere, as well as from the formerly US-backed government army, including fleets of armored vehicles. Ankle-deep in the ash of the burned base, Hasnain offered a message of conciliation, echoing his Taliban superiors. "We did not make war to kill Americans," he said. "We did it to free the country and restore sharia law." But many in Afghanistan remember the harsh 1996-2001 regime when the Taliban were previously in power all too well. With the hardline Islamists back in charge, they are holding their judgment to see if their pledge of a more moderate rule will become a reality. — AFP

Qatar awards scholarship to Afghan girls' robotics team

DOHA: Qatar has granted academic scholarships to members of a girls' robotics team from Afghanistan dubbed the "Afghan Dreamers", the Gulf nation's education and science foundation said yesterday. Qatar has been instrumental in efforts to evacuate at-risk Afghans and foreigners from Kabul airport, including members of the team who are being housed in Doha's Education City campus of schools and universities.

"They will receive scholarships that enable them to keep pursuing their studies through a partnership between Qatar Foundation (QF) and Qatar Fund For Development," QF said in a statement. The team of high-achieving high school girls has about 20 members, mostly still in their teens, and are now dotted around the world with some in Qatar as well as Mexico. The girls made headlines in 2017 after being denied visas to take part in a robotics competition in Washington - before then-president Donald Trump intervened and they were allowed to travel.

Last year, they worked to build a low-cost medical ventilator from car parts hoping to boost hospital equipment during the coronavirus pandemic. "These talented, creative students have been living through a time of uncertainty and upheaval, and at Qatar Foundation we want to do whatever we can," said Sheikhha Hind bint Hamad Al-Thani, vice-chairwoman and chief executive of QF. "By providing them with scholarships to study at Education City, their education can now continue uninterrupted." —AFP

International

Merkel goes all out for Laschet as German party lags in polls

German Chancellor to retire after 16 years in power

BERLIN: German Chancellor Angela Merkel yesterday lauded her party's candidate Armin Laschet as the best choice to succeed her, as polls showed the gaffe-prone Rhinelander still trailing badly ahead of this month's election. Laschet, the chancellor candidate for Merkel's conservative CDU/CSU bloc, was long the favorite to be the next German leader, but his ratings have plummeted following a series of missteps. The frontrunner is now Vice Chancellor and Finance Minister Olaf Scholz, whose centre-left Social Democrats (SPD) are enjoying a late spurt in the final weeks before the September 26 vote.

"It is a special election, not only because no incumbent chancellor is running for re-election for the first time since 1949," the outgoing Merkel said in what was likely her last speech in parliament ahead of the vote. "It is also a special election because it is a decision on the direction of our country in difficult times - and it is not irrelevant who governs this country," she said. "The best way for our country is a CDU/CSU-led federal government with Armin Laschet as chancellor, because his government would stand for stability, reliability, moderation and centrism."

Merkel to the rescue

Merkel, who is retiring after 16 years in power, did not get involved in the race to pick a candidate from her party to run in the elections. But with the Christian Democrats' poll ratings plummeting to their lowest in the post-war period, the party is now encouraging as many joint appear-

ances as possible between Merkel and Laschet. A poll for the NTV broadcaster published yesterday showed the conservative alliance on just 19 percent, with the SPD out ahead on 25 percent and the Greens - an early favorite in the race - on 17 percent. The CDU/CSU bloc won 33 percent at the last election in 2017 under Merkel, who remains immensely popular with the public.

Merkel appeared alongside Laschet at a digital summit on Monday, and also accompanied him at



Christian Democrats' poll ratings plummet to their lowest

the weekend on a tour of two towns hit hard by deadly floods in July. In North Rhine-Westphalia, where Laschet is the regional premier, Merkel told reporters he was "leading the largest state in Germany very successfully". "Anyone who can lead a state like this can also lead Germany as chancellor," she said after visiting local officials in charge of the reconstruction effort, insisting her heart was "very much in it" when it came to



BERLIN: German Chancellor Angela Merkel talks with North Rhine-Westphalia's State Premier and Germany's conservative Christian Democratic Union's (CDU) chancellor candidate Armin Laschet during a session at the Bundestag, the German lower house of parliament yesterday. — AFP

endorsing him as her successor.

Downward slide

Laschet's response to the floods in his state was the beginning of a downward slide for the 60-year-old, after he was caught on camera joking with local officials during a tribute to flood victims. Things then went from bad to worse when he said in a TV interview that it would be wrong to "change poli-

cies just because of one day", in what sounded to many like making light of the catastrophe. In a bid to reverse the trend, Laschet on Friday introduced eight allies who would serve as ministers or advisors on issues including renewable energy, digitalization and helping the ailing arts sector in the pandemic. If the alliance's fortunes don't improve soon, it could crash out of the chancellery in favor of an SPD-led government. — AFP



MEXICO CITY: The head of the Venezuelan Government delegation, Jorge Rodriguez, points to a document as he speaks to the press at the hotel where the negotiations between the Venezuelan government and the opposition are taking place in Mexico City. — AFP

Venezuelan rivals narrow differences in Mexico talks

MEXICO CITY: Venezuela's government and opposition on Monday found common ground on two fronts, including the country's pandemic response, in a tentative step towards ending a long-standing political crisis. The signing of two "partial agreements" came after representatives of President Nicolas Maduro and opposition leader Juan Guaido held four days of talks in Mexico City mediated by Norway. They agreed to meet again on September 24 to 27, with the key issues of elections and sanctions still to be resolved.

The accords involve social protection - including dealing with the coronavirus - and Venezuela's stance on a disputed border area controlled by Guyana. "The parties agreed to establish mechanisms for restoring and obtaining resources to meet the needs of the COVID-19 pandemic, including those from multilateral organizations," a joint statement said. That includes drawing on funds from the International Monetary Fund, head government negotiator Jorge Rodriguez said.

The two sides agreed to each "designate three representatives to form a National Board of Social Care to address the areas of health and food," according to the joint statement. Chief opposition representative Gerardo Blyde said that it was "important for all of us to have achieved a space that we hope will be depoliticized to agree on all these measures in humanitarian matters." He added: "We will do everything in our power, each one of the parties, to obtain funds for humanitarian matters."

'Success for Venezuelans'

The two sides also agreed Venezuela has a "historic and inalienable" claim to Guyana's Essequibo region, the focus of a century-old dispute. Venezuelan prosecutors have previously accused Guaido of treason for allegedly plotting to hand over Essequibo to multinational companies. A warning from Maduro on Sunday that the negotiations would not result in "impunity" was seen as a warning to the opposition leader, who faces multiple accusations in Venezuela. Maduro welcomed the outcome of the talks as "a success for Venezuelans," while Guaido said that progress on the humanitarian front would help to save lives. "We are clear that the tragedy in our country requires not only urgent attention, but also fundamental solutions for which we are fighting," Guaido tweeted. The talks have a seven-point agenda including electoral guarantees, easing sanctions and political rights - but not the departure of Maduro, accused by the opposition of fraudulent reelection in 2018. — AFP

Impunity rules as juntas take over in Mali, Chad, Guinea

BAMAKO: Power grabs in West Africa over the past year - in Chad, Mali and most recently Guinea - are enjoying newfound impunity, leaving citizens angry and distressed. "What's the use of constitutions, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and international diplomacy if after all anything goes?" asked Ahmed Sankare, a mobile telephone vendor in the Malian capital Bamako.

ECOWAS and many voices in the international community condemned the Guinea coup, as they did a year ago and again in May for Mali. The words have been the same: restore constitutional order, free detainees, set a timeline for elections. But a year later, Mali's military remain in command, with doubts growing over their promise to return the Sahel country to civilian rule through elections in February 2022.

In Chad, after Idriss Deby Itno died fighting rebels on April 20, his son

seized power. Former colonial power France, Chad's main trading and strategic partner, quickly gave its blessing to the new leadership, refraining from describing what took place as a coup. In Mali as in Chad, the new presidents are the product of special forces - Colonel Assimi Goita in Bamako, General Idriss Deby in N'Djamena. And in both countries, the constitution has been replaced by a "transition charter".

'A favorable climate'

"I do think that the international community has sacrificed its leverage, first by its acquiescence to the coup in Mali - the US is the only major external power to maintain a cut-off of military assistance to Bamako until constitutional order is restored," said Peter Pham, former US envoy to the Sahel. "And then by Chad, where France led the way by literally, in the person of Macron, embracing the son of the late President who took over," he added, referring to French President Emmanuel Macron.

Jean-Herve Jezequel of the International Crisis Group (ICG) think tank warned against the idea that the coups in Mali and Chad helped trigger Guinea's putsch. But "the way these recent coups in Chad and Mali were accepted, even validated, by regional and international actors has



CONAKRY: Members of Guinea's armed forces celebrate after the arrest of Guinea's president, Alpha Conde in a coup d'etat in Conakry. — AFP

probably created a favourable climate for what happened in Guinea," he said. Burkinabe news outlet Wakat Sera drew parallels between the coups in Guinea and Mali. The new strongman in Conakry, Lieutenant Colonel Mamady Doumbouya, simply "recited the formula for power grabs through arms... like a recording that all putschists everywhere use", it argued.

'Domino effect'

In Bamako, a top official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the coups in Mali and Chad could create a

"domino effect", with militaries elsewhere saying to themselves "why not us?" In Guinea's case, "experience tells us to be extremely cautious and not too naive," Fabien Offner of Amnesty International said. "Some see the end of the (Alpha Conde) regime as a good thing, (but) it's not the first time that there are hopes in West Africa and they are often dashed," he said. The message in the Wakat Sera editorial to the international community was clear: "Stop with the ostrich policy" and the "broken record" of toothless condemnations, it said. — AFP



KHAN YUNIS: A fireball rises following an air strike in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip, late on September 6, 2021. — AFP

Zionists strike Gaza after incendiary balloon attacks

GAZA: Zionists launched airstrikes against Gaza on Monday night, the army said, retaliating after incendiary balloons launched from the blockaded Palestinian enclave had started fires. Blaming Hamas for the balloons, the Zionist army said it had targeted locations belonging to the militant group that controls the Gaza Strip. "Overnight, IDF fighter jets struck a Hamas rocket manufacturing workshop, as well as a Hamas military compound in Khan Yunis," the Zionist army said in a statement.

"The strikes were in response to Hamas launching incendiary balloons into Zionist territory," the

statement added. Witnesses said that the army had also fired artillery at the north of Gaza. According to medical sources in the Palestinian enclave, no one was killed. Earlier in the day, Zionist firefighters had said that incendiary balloons had caused three bushfires at sites close to the Gaza Strip. Launching the makeshift devices is a common tactic of militants in Gaza, which Zionists has blockaded for nearly 15 years.

Zionists frequently responds with airstrikes. Monday's strikes come after six Palestinians broke out of a Zionist prison earlier in the day through a tunnel, triggering a massive manhunt. Hamas and Zionists fought a devastating 11-day conflict in May, the worst between the two sides in years. Though it ended with an Egypt-brokered ceasefire and a pledge for Qatari aid to ease poverty in the Palestinian enclave, incendiary balloons and occasional border clashes have continued in the months since. — AFP

Syrian refugees face torture and rape: Amnesty

BEIRUT: Dozens of Syrians who returned home from abroad have been subject to detention, disappearance and torture by security forces, Amnesty International said yesterday, warning Syria is not yet safe for repatriation. In a report titled "You're going to your death," the rights group documented a series of violations by security forces against 66 Syrians, including 13 children, who have returned since 2017. Amnesty said the cases proved "that no part of Syria is safe to return to."

"Syrian intelligence officers have subjected women, children and men returning to Syria to unlawful or arbitrary detention, torture and other ill-treatment including rape and sexual violence, and enforced disappearance," the rights group said. Among the cases listed, the rights group documented five cases of returnees who died in detention. The fates of 17 others who were forcibly disappeared remain unknown, Amnesty said. The rights group also documented 14 cases of sexual violence committed by security forces, including seven cases of rape, committed against five women, a teenage boy and a five-year-old girl.

"Any government claiming Syria is now safe is willfully ignoring the horrific reality on the ground," Amnesty said, calling on European governments to "immediately halt any practice directly or indirectly forcing people to return to Syria". More than 6.6 million Syrians have sought refuge abroad since the start of the conflict in 2011, with most resettling in neighboring countries such as Turkey and Lebanon. Denmark, Sweden, and Turkey have recently upped pressure on refugees to return home after a decade of war, arguing most of the country is now safe, Amnesty said. The Syrians interviewed by Amnesty include returnees from Lebanon, which for years has exerted pressure on refugees to return. The report cited testimony from a Syrian woman, Alaa, who was arrested along with her 25-year-old daughter at a border crossing as they came back from Lebanon. — AFP

International

Exhausted and abandoned: Why Afghanistan military collapsed

A crushing 'betrayal' by US-led forces with their hasty pullout

PARIS: When the Taliban swept into Kabul last month, capturing Afghanistan's capital without a fight, the sheer speed of the collapse of the Western-backed and trained army stunned the world. But senior officials in the former Afghan administration said that the lightning victory was not entirely unexpected, and the consequence of fundamental leadership failures, rampant corruption, slick Taliban propaganda - and a crushing "betrayal" by US-led forces with their hasty pullout.



Sheer speed of collapse stunned the world



DASHTAK: A burned down Humvee vehicle is seen along a road in Dashtak area in Panjshir province, after the Taliban claimed total control over Afghanistan. — AFP

One top official close to the centre of power said that just two days before Taliban forces entered Kabul on August 15, he was present as former president Ashraf Ghani held an emergency meeting with his senior ministers, and military and spy chiefs. "It was said that we had enough weapons, ammunition, and financial resources to hold Kabul for two years," said the official, who claimed \$100 million in cash was available to secure Kabul. "It didn't protect the city for two days," he said.

'Lying'

The official, who like most sources AFP spoke to for this article did not want to be identified for fear of reprisals, said he was not surprised by the capitulation. "Ministers were lying to Ghani, telling him that every-

thing was fine, so they could keep their jobs and their privileges," he said. As the Taliban raced through the country, the inner circle debated policy reforms. "We didn't get our priorities right," he added. "As the cities fell, one after the other, the National Security Council met to talk about recruitment and institutional reforms."

Taliban forces swept across the country in just two weeks, seizing provincial capitals often without a bullet being fired. Another top ex-government official said nobody at the top showed leadership. "None of them spoke to the media to reassure our men. None of them went into the field," he said. Ghani also made basic strategic mistakes, the close adviser added. "I suggested we leave the south, as we didn't have enough manpower to defend it in the long term. "But the president dis-

agreed. He said that all Afghanistan belonged to the government," he said.

Corruption

But for the Afghan army, holding everywhere against the Taliban was an impossible task. Despite the billions of dollars of US-led military support, equipment and training, the army's capacity had been hollowed out by years of rampant corruption. Senior officers creamed off what they could, stealing salaries from lower ranks, as well as selling fuel and ammunition supplies.

The situation worsened after Washington struck a deal with the Taliban in February 2020 for a troop withdrawal agreement. "We were betrayed," said Sami Sadat, a general recognized for his bravery against the Taliban,

who was brought in to lead the special forces in Kabul just days before its fall. Without the critical protection of US air support - and with the former government's own air force grounded after foreign contractors maintaining the fleet were pulled out by Washington - the army lost its strategic advantage.

'Surreal'

"The Taliban were emboldened," Sadat said, writing in the New York Times. "They could sense victory... Before that deal, the Taliban had not won any significant battles against the Afghan Army. After the agreement? We were losing dozens of soldiers a day." The final days of fighting were "surreal", Sadat added. "We engaged in intense firefights on the ground against the Taliban as US fighter jets circled overhead, effectively spectators," he wrote. Sadat dismissed the claim by US President Joe Biden that the Afghan had collapsed sometimes "without trying" to fight. "We fought, bravely, until the end," Sadat said. "We lost 66,000 troops over the past 20 years; that's one-fifth of our estimated fighting force." For the soldiers on the frontlines, they saw little reason to die when top leaders were fleeing. "When the Taliban got to the gates of Kabul, the soldiers knew the president was leaving - that's why they didn't fight," said a former senior army officer who asked not to be named.

At the same time, the Taliban deployed a savvy use of media messages to persuade soldiers to surrender, undermining morale even further. "We had already lost the social media war," the first presidential confidante said. "The Taliban were telling the soldiers that they were fighting needlessly, because at a higher level an agreement had already been signed." Abandoned and exhausted, soldiers saw little point in fighting on. On August 15, 2021, Kabul fell without a fight. — AFP



GEOJE: This handout photo provided by South Korea's Defense Ministry shows the locally-developed, diesel-powered 3,000-ton submarine, named after revered independence activist Ahn Chang-ho, during its commissioning ceremony on the southern island of Geojje. — AFP

S Korea launches a ballistic missile

SEOUL: South Korea has test-fired a homegrown submarine-launched ballistic missile, a report said yesterday, as it seeks to build up its forces to defend itself from the nuclear-armed North. Pyongyang has long sought to develop submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) technology, and showed off four such devices at a military parade overseen by leader Kim Jong Un in January, with state media KCNA calling them "the world's most powerful weapon". But while North Korea has released pictures of underwater launches, most recently in 2019, analysts believe that was from a fixed platform or submersible barge, rather than a submarine.

South Korea's Agency for Defense Development last week carried out underwater ejection tests of the SLBM from a new, locally developed 3,000-tonne class submarine fitted with six vertical launching tubes, Yonhap reported, citing unnamed military sources. The SLBM is believed to be a variant of the country's

Hyunmoo-2B ballistic missile, with a range of around 500 kilometers, and will be mass produced for deployment after another round of tests, it added.

South Korea joins only a handful of countries to have successfully developed an SLBM. Seoul on Monday allocated nearly 1.5 trillion won (\$1.3 billion) for defense technology research and development next year in a budget request submitted to parliament. If approved, it will represent a 76 percent jump in the research budget of the Defense Acquisition Program Administration, which will be used to "actively develop cutting-edge, future technologies", according to a press release. Pyongyang is also looking to further enhance its submarine forces.

In January, Kim told a congress of his ruling Workers' Party that the North had completed plans for a nuclear-powered submarine. Any such vessel is likely to be years away from going into service, but analysts say it could be a strategic game-changer, enabling Pyongyang to launch a surprise strike underwater even if its land-based forces had been destroyed. Kim inspected a newly built submarine in 2019, when pictures showed him standing next to a gigantic vessel accompanied by officials. State media said it would soon be deployed for operations, without giving details of its capabilities. — AFP

84 million now hosts five million migrants and refugees - an estimated 3.7 million of them from Syria and up to 420,000 from Afghanistan. But economic instability exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic has engendered public fear of migrants to levels rarely recorded before.

A survey by the Aksoy pollster showed 85 percent of respondents were "worried" by the prospects of a mass arrival of Afghans fleeing Taliban fundamental-

Turkey: 'No need to rush' recognizing Taliban

ISTANBUL: Turkey said yesterday there was "no need to rush" in recognizing the Taliban's rule in Afghanistan, adding that Ankara was still holding discussions about operating Kabul's strategic airport. In a wide-ranging television interview, Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu sounded a cautious note about Turkey's future relations with the fundamentalist Islamist group. He said Afghanistan's new government needed to be "inclusive", adding that women and a range of ethnic groups should be given ministerial posts.

The Taliban on Monday claimed total control over Afghanistan, saying they had won the key battle for the Panjshir Valley, the last remaining holdout of resistance against their rule. But Cavusoglu said the international community should take a wait-and-see approach before recognizing its rule, sounding a similar tone to one adopted by the European Union at a meeting last Friday. "There is no need to rush," he said. "This is our advice to the entire world. We should act together with the international community."

Turkey has been holding talks with the Taliban in Kabul, where it still has a diplomatic presence, about the conditions under which it could help operate the Afghan capital's airport. US officials say they no longer control the airspace in Afghanistan and that the main airport in Kabul, which the US military seized in August for evacuations, is in disrepair. Cavusoglu said Turkey was working with Qatar and the US on the terms under which the airport could reopen to regular flights needed to deliver humanitarian aid, evacuate stranded civilians and re-establish diplomatic missions in Kabul.

But he said security remained a key sticking point, stressing that commercial flights could never resume until airlines-and their insurers-felt that conditions were sufficiently safe. "In my view, the Taliban or Afghan forces could ensure security outside the airport," Cavusoglu said. "But inside, there could be a security company trusted by the international community or all other companies," he said. "Even if airlines, including Turkish Airlines, are keen to fly there, insurance companies would not allow it." — AFP

'We live in fear': Once embracing, Turkey turns on migrants

ISTANBUL: Ghawsuddin Mubariz was already spending restless nights worrying about being sent back to Afghanistan when a stadium full of Turkish football supporters broke into a chant calling for migrants to go home. The 20-year-old had felt welcomed when he fled the northeastern Afghan city of Kunduz and crossed into Turkey after a three-week trek across Pakistan and Iran nearly two years ago. He eventually found a job at a fast-food joint in Istanbul and sent half his earnings to his Afghan relatives so they can better cope with poverty and endless war.

But things changed when the police began rounding up Afghans and placing them in deportation centres in response to growing public anger at migrants that coincides with a new spell of Turkish economic malaise. "When I first came to Turkey, it was easy," Mubariz said at his restaurant outside Istanbul's ancient city walls serving Afghan customers. "Now it's quite tough. Wherever we go, we live in fear," he said. "We are illegals. We are scared of being caught and sent back to Afghanistan."

'Refugee warehouse'

Turkey turned into the home of one of the world's largest migrant populations when it struck a deal with Brussels to help resolve Europe's 2015-16 refugee crisis. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan says the nation of



ISTANBUL: Ghawsuddin Mubariz, 20-year-old, who came from Afghanistan 2 years ago, works in a fast food restaurant in Istanbul's Zeytinburnu district. — AFP

ists who retook the country after 20 years of war. Erdogan has responded by telling Western states - just as anxious about a destabilizing new wave of migration - that Turkey was not about to become their "refugee warehouse". The public resentment spilled over onto national television screens when thousands of football fans began chanting "we don't want any refugees in our country" during a World Cup qualifying match last week.

'The Afghans are here'

Mubariz has more immediate reasons to be alarmed. The Istanbul governor's office is reporting almost daily roundups of Afghans and other irregular migrants it then places in holding centers. The staunchly anti-migrants CHP party - in control of big cities such as Istanbul and Ankara - has also hung banners on buildings showing their leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu declaring: "The border is our honor." Convenience store owner Habib Uzbek feels the pressure even though he received Turkish citizenship in 1993. "Whether it's on a bus or on the street, people point and say: 'The Afghans are here,'" the 69-year-old said. Mubariz said he hears many of the same things. "I have sleepless nights thinking about what I'll do if I'm caught and deported," he said. "The Taliban have seized whatever we have," he said. "We are desperate." This fear has forced many Afghans to keep as low a profile as they can. A field locals had used to play cricket matches against their Pakistani neighbors on Sundays has stood empty for months.

The CHP's Istanbul branch deputy chairman Burak Duzce defended his party's rhetoric in the runup to a general election, due no later than June 2023. "We aren't saying these people should be delivered to the Taliban," Duzce said. — AFP

News in brief

Man jailed for spreading COVID

HANOI: A Vietnamese man has been sentenced to five years in jail for spreading COVID-19 after he breached home quarantine rules. Le Van Tri was convicted of "spreading dangerous infectious diseases to other people" after he travelled to his home province Ca Mau from coronavirus hotspot Ho Chi Minh City in July, according to a report on the website of the provincial People's Court. The 28-year old was accused of breaching a 21-day home quarantine regulation in the southern province, which had a lower case rate than Ho Chi Minh City, and he tested positive for COVID-19 on July 7. "Tri's breach of the home medical quarantine regulation led to many people becoming infected with COVID-19 and one person died on 7 August 2021," according to the court report. State media said eight people became infected because of Tri. — AFP

Bus plunges off cliff; 23 dead

LA PAZ: At least 23 people, including three children, were killed after a bus plunged off a cliff in central Bolivia, police and witnesses said. The bus, carrying 33 people, plummeted 400 meters down a cliff in Cochabamba state at around 11 am Monday. "I stepped on the brake and there was no brake," said the driver, whose wife died in the accident. The dead also included three children aged one, two and six, according to the police Facebook statement. Five other victims remain to be identified, it added. The 13 people injured in the incident, which occurred about 50 kilometers from the regional capital, were taken to nearby hospitals. Police said the cause of the accident was being investigated. Bolivia has a poor road safety record. — AFP

Women linked to IS nabbed

STOCKHOLM: Swedish police said Monday they had arrested two women linked to the Islamic State group after they flew back from Syria, as media reported that one was being investigated for war crimes. Stockholm police spokesman Ola Osterling said the prosecutor leading the investigation into the two women had ordered their arrest. "We executed that decision when the plane arrived in Stockholm in the afternoon," Osterling told AFP. A third woman had been taken in for questioning, he added. A statement from the Prosecution Authority Monday said multiple investigations were underway against men and women returning from areas that had been controlled by the Islamic State group (IS). "The international crimes that are relevant for people for people returning from IS-controlled areas are war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity," public prosecutor Reena Devgun said in the statement. — AFP

Nine miners plummet to death

KIEV: Nine miners plummeted to their deaths and another 19 received injuries when a steel rope of a cage broke at a coal mine in Ukraine's separatist-controlled east, local authorities said yesterday. The workers were descending into the mine shaft in the town of Voznesenovka in the eastern Lugansk region on Monday when the accident occurred. "The rope of a cage which was lowering the miners to their workplaces broke," the emergency service of the self-proclaimed Lugansk People's Republic said in a statement. The emergency service said that the bodies of nine people were brought up to the surface, while 19 people were hospitalized. "A government commission that will investigate the accident has been put together," the statement added. Deadly accidents are common in Ukrainian mines, most of which are located in the country's industrial east. — AFP

Business

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2021

European tourists boost sector, but can't top Americans, Asians

Tourism sector banked on vaccination campaigns, easing of travel curbs

PARIS: European travellers helped plug a gap left by Asian and North American tourists stranded at home by the pandemic, staving off a total washout this year for Europe's hospitality industry. After a disastrous 2020 tourism season, the sector had banked on vaccination campaigns and the easing of travel restrictions to see brighter days this summer.

While European visitors might have shored up numbers, the recovery was patchy with tourists spending in different places, on different things—and not with the same largesse as the big-spending Chinese or Americans. Fears over suddenly changing COVID travel restrictions and—for the UK, especially—the cost of mandatory COVID-19 tests have also driven the disruption to travel patterns this summer.

Tourism-dependent Greece hosted more than two million visitors in July and August—"something we haven't seen since 2019," said Haris Theocharis, the tourism minister until a cabinet reshuffle in late August. Napoleon, the owner of a bar in Athen's Plaka tourist hot-spot, said he had exceeded his targets "by more than 50 percent" this summer.

But at the nearby Byron Hotel, co-manager Zimi Mistiopoulos said they only had 10 days of full occupancy. Two years ago, there wasn't a room to be had all season, he said. "Even if the tourists were there, they didn't buy that much," said Dimitris Papachristodoulou, owner of several souvenir shops, lamenting the loss of Americans and Chinese, "who consume the most".

Not quite there

Those groups were also absent from Italy, where the Hotel Cosmopolita in the heart of Rome has had "an average of three or five occupied rooms out of 82", said Walter Pecoraro, the owner and president of the hoteliers' association of Lazio, the capital region. "Roman tourism is 80 percent foreign, 80 percent of which are Americans and Asians," he said. According to the association, 600 hotels out of 1,200 in Rome were open this summer, with average occupancy at only 30-35 percent.

Spain, the world's second-largest tourist destination behind France in 2019, welcomed 4.4 million visitors in July, 78 percent up on a year earlier, national statistics institute data show.

But that's a far cry from the 9.9 million in pre-pandemic 2019. The Mediterranean coast was the most favored destination: Establishments in Catalonia recorded an occupancy rate close to 95 percent in August. The French were Spain's top visitors, with 874,000 vacationing there, ahead of the Germans (707,000) and the British (555,000).

Brits, in pre-COVID times the largest contingent, this year largely opted to stay at home. Bookings are "running at a fraction of a normal year with the main barriers to travel being concerns about the traffic light system" of color-coded restrictions and the cost of tests, the British federation of travel agents said.

Those who decided to go anyway opted mainly for the islands of Spain and Greece. "What stands out this summer is that very few destinations were



VATICAN CITY, Holy See: In this file photo taken on August 6, 2021 visitors show their UE digital COVID-19 certificate for scanning before entering the Vatican Museums in the Vatican. —AFP

open," said Ana Domenech, France director of booking site lastminute.com. "Greece was clearly the new destination of the summer, with 79 percent more travellers than in 2019," she said.

Holiday at home

In fact, more than 450,000 French made their way to Greece this year. But as with the UK, peo-

ple travelling within their own countries also created "a beautiful summer" for the domestic industry, said Sebastien Manceau, an expert in tourism at the Roland Berger consulting firm.

Of the 37 million French people who went on holiday this summer, 85 percent stayed in the country, according to Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne, junior minister for tourism. —AFP

VW's electric push 'can't go any faster': CEO

MUNICH: Volkswagen chief executive Herbert Diess said it was "impossible" for the German car giant's electric transformation to happen any faster, but he accused Angela Merkel's government of holding back change with generous diesel subsidies. In an interview with AFP and the Financial Times at the IAA motor show in Munich, Diess said the VW group "was really fast in changing" as it sets its sights on becoming a global leader in environmentally-friendly, battery-powered vehicles.

"Can we do it faster? No, it's impossible," said Diess. "Because this transition is so complicated, requires so much investment" and capacity building, he said, from battery cell production to new factories. Germany's biennial IAA exhibition comes as the industry is in the midst of a painful rebirth, spurred by climate concerns and tougher pollution rules. Several carmakers have already set dates for phasing out the internal combustion engine, even if critics say their self-imposed deadlines are vague and non-binding.

Nevertheless, the clock is ticking with the European Union recently proposing to end the sale of new diesel and petrol cars by 2035. The 12-brand VW group—which includes Audi, Porsche and Skoda—is pouring billions into the transition and aims to become the world's largest electric carmaker by



MUNICH: Visitors inspect a Volkswagen ID.3 car by German carmaker Volkswagen (VW) at the International Motor Show (IAA) Germany, yesterday in Munich. —AFP

2025. "Can someone be faster than us? I would question that," the 62-year-old Austrian said, adding that even electric car pioneer Tesla took over a decade to get going.

Diesel roadblock

Diess said Germany's electric shift had "definitely" been slowed by the low taxation of diesel in Europe's top economy. Germany's powerful car industry for decades championed diesel as a more environmentally-friendly fuel than petrol, leading to favorable tax breaks that kept diesel cheap at the pump. But diesel's clean image was shattered in 2015 when Volkswagen was forced to admit it had installed cheating software in millions of diesel vehicles to dupe pollution tests.

The "dieselgate" scandal saw the popularity of such cars plummet and

hastened the electric revolution, but diesel prices have remained relatively low. To drive forward the electric push, "you need the right environment", said Diess, one that is not fostered when diesel is kept artificially cheap, including under the successive governments of outgoing chancellor Merkel.

Merkel legacy

Merkel, who is bowing out at Germany's September 26 general election after 16 years in power, spoke at the IAA yesterday.

Looking back at her tenure, Diess praised Merkel for "the stability she brought" and her support in keeping the German auto industry competitive with China and the United States. But Merkel could have been "a bit more decisive" in some areas, the CEO said, such as incentives for electric vehicles.

Diess said Germany was nonetheless on the right track, with electric car sales "performing really well".

"I'm more concerned about eastern Europe, southern Europe where there's a long way to go," he added. A pre-IAA announcement by German climate campaigners threatening legal action against Volkswagen and other carmakers to push them to phase out the internal combustion engine by 2030 felt "a little bit unjust", Diess said. While he understood the logic of going after those benefitting "from burning oil or coal or gas", Diess said activists should first look at big oil-producing nations like Saudi Arabia.

'No alternative'

With Germany in the final weeks of campaigning ahead of a vote that will end the Merkel era, Diess said he was pleased that "most of the parties now are taking climate change very seriously". Surveys suggest the race is wide open but Diess said VW "can live with every possible outcome". He however criticized chancellor candidate Armin Laschet, the leader of Merkel's center-right CDU party, who recently asked Tesla CEO Elon Musk if hydrogen cars could be the future—much to the latter's bemusement.

"Electrification is the way forward. There's no other alternative. No competitor is serious about any alternatives anymore," Diess said. Turning to the global semiconductor shortages currently plaguing the auto industry, forcing VW and its rivals to trim production at some plants, Diess said he hoped to see "an alleviation" of the chip crunch by the end of September. —AFP

Sri Lanka admits forex crisis 'dangerous'

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's finance minister said yesterday the island faces a "dangerous foreign exchange crisis" but the government denied it would seek an international bailout. Basil Rajapaksa, 70, the youngest brother of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, said state coffers had also suffered huge revenue losses in the COVID-19 pandemic.

The president declared a state of emergency last week as most private banks ran out of foreign currency to finance imports of essentials, triggering food shortages. The government had already banned imports of cars, other goods and some cooking oils and spices in a bid to save currency.

"We are facing a dangerous foreign exchange crisis," the finance minister told parliament.

"We are also facing a shortage of rupee revenues because of lockdowns." He said the fall in revenue

was between \$7.5 billion and \$8.0 billion more than anticipated. The pandemic brought the country's key tourism industry to a standstill and the Sri Lankan economy contracted by a record 3.6 percent in 2020.

Basil Rajapaksa did not say how the government would solve the foreign exchange shortage, which has also held up imports of medicines. The main opposition SJB party said the government should seek an International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout to avoid a sovereign debt default by next year.

However, junior finance minister Ajith Cabraal has insisted Sri Lanka will not default. "I want to reassure all those who may have been concerned, as a result of these reports that Sri Lanka would not be able to meet its debt, that we are very much having the ability to do so," Cabraal said before yesterday's parliamentary debate.



COLOMBO: Customers buy vegetables at a market in Colombo. —AFP

Official figures show Sri Lanka's foreign reserves fell to \$2.8 billion at the end of July. It has to repay about \$2.0 billion to service its foreign debt during the rest of the year.

Former central bank deputy governor W.A. Wijewardena told AFP that Colombo would be forced to seek a bailout unless a friendly country

helps. "It is inevitable that Sri Lanka will have to go to the IMF," Wijewardena said. "Right now the country doesn't have sufficient forex to maintain its import program unless China or India helps." International rating agencies have downgraded Sri Lanka's credit status, expressing fears that it could soon default. —AFP



HONG KONG: Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam speaks at a ceremony for the completion of the third Runway pavement at Chek Lap Kok airport in Hong Kong yesterday. —AFP

Hong Kong completes third runway; COVID keeps city isolated

HONG KONG: Hong Kong marked the completion of a third runway at its airport yesterday at a time when the once thriving international travel hub remains cut off from most of the world. City leader Carrie Lam presided over a topping-off ceremony for the 3.9-kilometre runway, which took five years to construct on reclaimed land. Thanks to its location and comparatively relaxed entry requirements, Hong Kong has long hosted one of the world's busiest international airports. But it faces increasing competition from regional rival Singapore as well as rapidly expanding airports in mainland China.

The city's reputation as a travel hub was also dented by months of political unrest in 2019, which at one point paralyzed the airport, and China's subsequent crackdown on dissent. The business hub currently remains inaccessible to most people during the coronavirus pandemic because it maintains some of the world's strictest quarantine measures. Almost all arrivals must complete one to three weeks of mandatory hotel quarantine, a move that has kept the coronavirus at bay but hampered the travel industry and left the city isolated.

The construction of new runways often faces strong opposition from environmental groups in western nations but Hong Kong's airport expansion saw little protest. Before the coronavirus, the two runways were already operating well beyond their capacity of receiving and sending 420,000 flights per year. The third runway is expected to start operations sometime in 2022. It is unclear whether Hong Kong will have loosened its travel restrictions by then.

Despite ample supplies, the city has one of the worst COVID-19 vaccination rates in the industrialized world and the government has given no details on when it might move towards living with the coronavirus. International businesses have grown increasingly frustrated, with the European Chamber of Commerce recently warning that residents were "indefinitely trapped". But last week Lam doubled down on her zero-COVID policies and said opening travel with the Chinese mainland was more important than doing the same for the rest of the world. —AFP

Business

UK awaits fallout from end of jobs support scheme

The move could risk a spike in unemployment

LONDON: The British government's furlough scheme that has supported millions of private-sector jobs during the pandemic is close to ending, a move that risks a spike in unemployment according to economists. Experts, however, do not expect sectors seriously affected by a shortage of staff owing to the virus outbreak and Brexit—such as road haulage—to necessarily benefit from the bigger pool of available workers.

"The furlough scheme has played a key role... protecting nearly 12 million jobs over the last 18 months," the Treasury told AFP in a statement ahead of the multi-billion-pound program finishing at the end of September. With the UK economy in recovery mode thanks to the lifting of lockdown restrictions at home and abroad, Britain's unemployment rate stands at 4.7 percent, down from a pandemic peak of 5.2 percent at the end of last year.

But the UK already has more than one million job vacancies despite the furlough scheme supporting jobs at a cost of almost £70 billion (\$95 billion, 82 billion euros). "It is certainly possible, if not likely, that there will be a temporary fall in employment and rise in unemployment in October," noted Paul Dales, chief UK economist at Capital Economics research group.

"But we think that the strength of the economy will mean that either most of those workers will find a job



LONDON: Experts don't expect the end of the government scheme to support private-sector jobs will help the hard hit logistics sector recruit more drivers. — AFP

before long or, more likely, that other unemployed people will find work and offset the decline."

Britain's economy rebounded 4.8 percent in the second quarter as the government began relaxing lockdown restrictions amid its fast-paced vaccination program. However the country's factories, restaurants and supermarkets are facing stubborn supply problems.

COVID helped spark a supply-chain crisis around the world. In the UK, multiple lockdowns prompted also a fresh exodus of EU workers who filled many jobs in the logistics, construction and hospitality sectors. The UK has faced major border delays after Britain's exit from the European Union on January 1, while new immigration rules have disrupted recruitment.

'Not a panacea'

Such labor supply problems could last up to two years and will not be solved by the end of the furlough scheme, the head of Britain's main business lobby group warned Monday. "While the CBI and other economists still predict growth returning to pre-pandemic levels later this year, furlough ending is not the panacea some people think will magically fill labor supply gaps," said CBI Director General Tony Danker. He said for example that hotels faced a lack of housekeeping staff while restaurants had been forced to cut their opening hours.

Swedish furniture giant Ikea this week became the latest major retailer to warn of supply issues at UK operations after McDonald's ran out of milkshakes and supermarket giant Tesco forecast shortages to its Christmas products. Carsten Jung, senior economist at the Institute for Public Policy Research, believes the government should prolong the furlough scheme "until the labor market has genuinely recovered, rather than put the lowest earners at an unnecessary risk".

The number of people on UK furlough has fallen from a peak of 8.9 million in May last year to around two million at the end of June, according to official data. —AFP



Toyota to spend \$13.6bn on electric car batteries by 2030

TOKYO: Toyota said yesterday it will invest \$13.6 billion into batteries for electric and hybrid cars by 2030, as the world's biggest automaker pushes to make its production carbon-neutral. The Japanese car giant said in a presentation it plans to pour 1.5 trillion yen into the development and supply of batteries for electric vehicles and that it aims to cut battery costs by half per car by 2030.

Toyota said in June it aimed to make its production carbon-neutral by 2035, replacing the previous target

date of 2050. One of the ways the company hopes to realize its goal is by introducing new technologies for painting vehicles—one of auto production's most power-gobbling procedures—such as replacing paint with adhesive film. Toyota is a pioneer of hybrid vehicles and autos using hydrogen fuel, and is also stepping up its development of battery-powered electric cars.

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

In November, engineering giant Toshiba said it would stop constructing new coal-fired power plants and shift to renewable energy in a bid to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. — AFP

Shares fall, ratings cut at ailing China giant Evergrande

BEIJING: Shares of embattled Chinese real estate giant Evergrande plunged yesterday, deepening an investor retreat with analysts cutting its credit and stock ratings again. The Hong Kong-listed company is one of China's largest and most indebted private conglomerates, and fears have mounted that it is on the brink of bankruptcy after years of rapid growth and a buying spree. On Tuesday, its Hong Kong traded shares plummeted as much as 8.8 percent to HK\$3.53 — sliding down towards the price it initially listed at in 2009 — before closing 7.75 percent down.

The stock rout comes on the same day Moody's Investors Service downgraded Evergrande's credit rat-

ing, indicating it is "likely in, or very near, default". "The downgrades reflect Evergrande's heightened liquidity and default risks given its sizable amount of maturing debt over the next six to 12 months," said Moody's senior analyst Cedric Lai.

The moves are also a sign of the "weak recovery prospects of Evergrande's creditors, if there is a default," Lai added. Last week, Evergrande said its total liabilities had swelled to 1.97 trillion yuan (\$305 billion) and that the group faced mounting legal challenges and "risks of defaults on borrowings".

Goldman Sachs has cut the stock from neutral to sell, Bloomberg News reported Tuesday, adding that the stock has dropped 76 percent this year. Moody's said Evergrande would have to rely on asset sales or investments to generate funds for debt servicing. Evergrande is one of the largest private companies in China, with a presence in more than 280 cities.

Any possible bankruptcy of the group—which claims to employ 200,000 people and indirectly generate 3.8 million jobs in China—would have major repercussions on the country's economy. — AFP



HONG KONG: In this file photo, China Evergrande Centre is seen in the Wan Chai district of Hong Kong. - AFP

London City risks losing financial hub status: Lobby

LONDON: Britain must cut taxes on banks and make it easier to hire foreign finance staff to prevent London's Brexit-battered City financial district from losing its global hub status, the sector's lobby group pleaded yesterday.

"The UK's status as a world leading financial center is at risk unless industry, government and regulators work together to boost long term competitiveness, deepen key trade links, and focus on new key areas of future global growth," TheCityUK said in a statement. Britain finalized its divorce from the European Union late last year, but a Brexit trade deal omitted the powerhouse financial services sector and has hampered its access to the continent.

TheCityUK yesterday unveiled a five-year strategy to regain top finance hub status for London, which faces fierce competition from Amsterdam, Frankfurt, New York and Singapore. The organization wants lower taxation on banks in order to boost foreign investment in Britain, and calls for a liberalization of trade with developing and emerging markets.

It also wants the government to make it easier to hire foreign workers in the key finance sector, which lost thousands of jobs to Europe in the wake of Brexit. The industry grouping meanwhile urges the City to develop new global markets like digital trade. "The last decade has been one of growth for our industry, yet global competitors have grown faster," added TheCityUK head Miles Celic. "However, with the right strategy in place and a clear focus on delivery, the UK can pull away once again from its competitors. "It is an ambition that needs industry, government, and regulators to work together. It will take sustained focus, cooperation and determination." —AFP

China trade enjoys forecast-beating surge in August

BEIJING: China's exports and imports enjoyed forecast-beating growth in August, with data yesterday showing overseas demand for cars, electronics and consumer goods surged as a domestic coronavirus outbreak was brought to heel. The figures follow a recent spate of weak numbers that had suggested the recovery in the world's second-biggest economy was flattening owing to a spike in the Delta variant that has forced some countries to impose containment measures and hit consumer sentiment.

They also came despite the shutdown of a major port caused by the virus outbreak, which observers had expected to hit shipments. Exports jumped 25.6 percent on-year, while imports rose 33.1 percent, according to China customs authorities. The readings were both sharply up from July and far better than estimates in a Bloomberg survey of 17.3 percent and 26.9 percent, respectively.

The eye-popping numbers were boosted by last year's low base of comparison when the virus was rap-

idly spreading. Analysts said outbound shipments were helped by improving overseas demand for consumer goods. A rebound in electronics, furniture and recreational products likely reflected that retailers were "replenishing their inventories ahead of the Christmas shopping season", said Capital Economics assistant economist Sheana Yue. ING's chief economist for Greater China Iris Pang added that a sharp jump in car exports was an "amazing" feat, given a global semiconductor shortage that has weighed on the auto industry.

"It shows that (China) has the production capacity for semiconductors and also cars, and therefore can grow its exports," she said. Exports of electronic products rose over the first eight months of the year, the customs administration said in a statement.

But Yue of Capital Economics expected trade volumes to fall in the coming quarters, with factory activity edging down in recent months. "The PMI (Purchasing Managers' Index) export orders indices—which measure the share of firms seeing rising orders—has remained under 50 for three consecutive months," she said, suggesting that foreign demand is coming off the boil. Meanwhile, customs authorities said imports were boosted by a surge in the cost of commodities such as iron ore, oil and coal, which offset a fall in the amount of goods entering the country.

China's trade surplus came in at \$58.3 billion, up 2.2 percent on-year and higher than the \$53.2 billion expected. — AFP



LIANYUNGANG, China: A crane loads a container onto a truck at Lianyungang Port in Lianyungang in China's eastern Jiangsu province yesterday. — AFP

South Africa economy grows for fourth consecutive quarter

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa recorded a fourth consecutive quarter of economic growth between April and June, the national statistics agency said yesterday, while warning the current quarter could be less rosy because of violent looting in July. The continent's most industrialized country saw its gross domestic product (GDP) rise by 1.2 percent in the second quarter of 2021, following a 1 percent increase in the first quarter over the October to December 2020 period.

"Despite the gains made... the economy is 1.4 percent smaller" than before the coronavirus pandemic, Statistics South Africa announced in a statement. GDP plunged when authorities implemented a first hard lockdown in March last year, closing borders and shutting non-essential businesses for over a month. Rolling restrictions have since continued to stifle economic activity, with a curfew and lockdown measures still in place as the country battles with a prolonged third coronavirus wave.

GDP "has seen consistent growth since that (March 2020) shock, but not enough to return to pre-Covid-19 levels," Stats SA said. "We're not out of the woods yet." Already in recession before the pandemic, South Africa took another blow in July when a deadly spree of unrest and looting flared after the jailing of ex-president Jacob Zuma.

At least 40,000 businesses were vandalized in the eastern KwaZulu-Natal province and the financial hub Johannesburg, costing the country billions in losses. Stats SA said the impact of that "severe economic disruption" would show in third quarter GDP results, scheduled for release in December.

The main drivers of this year's second quarter growth were transport and communications industries, personal services and trade. Household consumption expenditure increased by 0.5 percent and exports rose four percent—mainly due to growing trade in minerals, precious stones and vehicles among others. South Africa's economy shrank seven percent last year because of the pandemic, its first annual contraction in 11 years. — AFP

Business

NBK economic report

Kuwait's fiscal deficit reaches all-time high of KD 10.8 billion

Oil revenues fell to KD 8.8bn due to low oil prices, OPEC+ cuts

KUWAIT: Similar to its GCC peers, Kuwait's fiscal position was heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the oil price shock that ensued. The deficit swelled from KD 3.9 billion in the previous fiscal year to KD 10.8 billion, or 33 percent of GDP, in FY20/21. The fall in the price of Kuwait Export Crude (KEC) was one of the main drivers of the deficit. The government tried to limit the increase in the deficit through compressing capital expenditures to compensate for the increase in the hard-to-reverse current expenditures. Total government spending rose at a mild rate of 0.7 percent to reach KD 21.3 billion as capex was pared back while current spending rose by 4.7 percent due in part to COVID-19-related emergency measures. Budget financing needs remained large in the absence of parliamentary approval to issue new debt (the last issuance was in October 2017) or the ability to tap into the Future Generations Fund (FGF). The General Reserve Fund (GRF) remained the only source of financing, with its liquid assets almost exhausted.

Significant fall in revenues

The sharp decline in oil prices and lower non-oil revenues on account of slower economic activity led to a much higher budget deficit. Total revenues declined in FY20/21 by 38.9 percent to reach KD 10.5 billion. Oil and gas revenues, which constituted 83.6 percent of total revenues, fell by 42.8 percent, driven mainly by the collapse in oil prices (KEC fell by 29.3 percent y/y to an average of \$43.5/bbl) and the decline in oil production (-13.7 percent to 2.34 mb/d) due to the OPEC+ production cuts.

The pandemic took a toll on non-oil revenues, which fell by 6.5 percent to KD 1.7 billion. Taxes and fees were hit hard (down 10.6 percent y/y), following the weak performance of local and foreign companies amid the pandemic and the steep decline in revenues from import duties due to much lower imports (-15.8 percent in 2020). Other non-oil revenues followed the same trend, declining by 2.6 percent, with receipts from electricity and water down 14.1 percent and 8.0 percent y/y, respectively. Moreover, paid compensations for the Iraqi invasion remained relatively stable at \$ 1 billion in FY20/21 (approximately \$ 2.1 billion in war reparations remains outstanding as of end-January 2021).

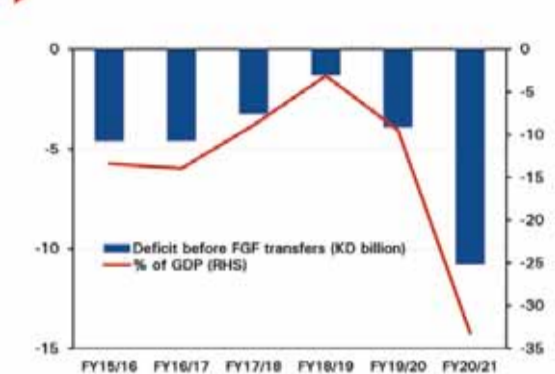
Total expenditures rise

Current spending increased at a solid pace while capex spending fell sharply as it bore the brunt of the government's cutbacks amid short-term liquidity constraints. Yet, the increase in current spending (by 3.8 percent to KD 19.4 billion), which represents the bulk of total spending (about 91 percent), pushed the latter up 0.7 percent y/y (to KD21.3 billion) though came in below its budgetary provision.

The rise in current spending during FY20/21 was due to COVID-19-related spending as the government allocated KD 0.5 billion in emergency funds to support pandemic containment measures and a budgetary supplement of KD 0.6 billion to pay bonuses for front-line workers. By excluding these two items, current spending actually declined last year by around 4.8 percent to KD 20 billion.

The government made an effort to reduce the non-wage current spending. Purchases of goods & services plummeted by 10 percent to KD 2.9 billion, while the cost of electricity generation and water distillation declined by 11.3 percent to KD 1.4 billion, reflecting partly the decline in oil and gas prices as well as electricity generation by 0.4 percent in 2020. Excluding

Chart 1: Kuwait fiscal deficit



Source: Ministry of finance, CSB

Chart 2: KEC oil price and production



Source: OPEC monthly oil market report

this item, government purchases of goods and services declined by 8.8 percent y/y.

Compensation of employees (38.1 percent of current spending) declined by 1.8 percent to KD 7.4 billion, lower than the three-year average of around 4.1 percent. The decline is likely a reflection of a lower wages for employees under contracts, which fell by -18.7 percent y/y to KD 0.6 billion, perhaps due to the departure of expatriates. In addition, bonuses and allowances (constitute 57.6 percent of compensation of employees' category) fell by 0.4 percent to KD 4.3 billion.

Moreover, fuel subsidies fell largely on the back of both lower oil prices and domestic consumption, the latter on pandemic-related restriction measures including the closure of the airport. In addition, social benefits declined 11.7 percent, with overseas health-care services falling 18.9 percent to reach KD 0.4 billion. In contrast, grants (including transfers to public authorities and independent entities), which represents 25.5 percent of total spending increased by 3.8 percent, while other current spending shot up in FY20/21 due to COVID-19 related spending (KD 0.5 billion of emergency funds and the supplementary budget for front line workers' bonuses of KD 0.6 billion).

Capital spending was hard hit by the govern-

ment's rationalization of spending amid tighter liquidity and mobility restrictions, which resulted in the delay, reappraisal or cancellation of some projects. Capital spending declined 24.3 percent to KD 1.7 billion, about 75 percent short of the full-year budget provisions.

The accumulated deficit for the last 7 years has resulted in the near depletion of the General Reserve Fund (GRF), with total withdrawals reaching KD 41 billion from FY15/16. The audit bureau recently reported that the GRF's net assets fell to KD 9.6 billion at the end of 2020, and by the end of March 2021 that figure had fallen further to around KD 1.6 billion in available liquidity. However, the government has taken several measures during FY20/21 to reduce the rate of depletion and ensure the availability of cash. These include halting transfers to the FGF and assets swaps with the GRF (of around KD 7.5 billion). The rise in oil prices since the beginning of 2021 has, however, helped in alleviating some of the pressures on the GRF.

FY21/22 budget relatively expansionary

The FY21/22 budget, which was approved by the national assembly last June, will result in a financing gap that will be hard to fill without incurring debt or tapping into the Future Generations Fund. Total

spending is expected to reach KD 23.0 billion, or 6.9 percent higher than last year's budget, with a 20 percent increase in capex provision to KD 3.5 billion and an increase in current spending by 4.9 percent. Revenues on the other side are expected to increase slightly based on an oil price assumption of \$45/bbl (avg.) and an oil production assumption of 2.4 mb/d (avg.). As such, oil revenues would increase to KD 9.1 billion while non-oil revenue should remain insignificant (KD 1.8 billion). The official budget deficit is estimated at KD 12.0 billion, but with the recent cabinet decision to cut spending by at least 10 percent, the deficit should come out lower at KD 9.7 billion. However, we believe that the oil price prices could end up higher than the one assumed in the budget leading to an even lower deficit of KD 5.2 billion (13.1 percent of GDP).

Although this fiscal year deficit will likely be markedly lower than last year's, still financing this deficit remains a challenge in the absence of parliamentary approval for a new debt law or lack of access to alternative sources of financing. In addition, the government has to repay some KD 1.1 billion in maturing bonds next March. With GRF assets nearly depleted, passing the debt law is necessary if FGF resources are not to be tapped. In our view, using the FGF resources should be the last resort and will need to be temporary and linked to a clear and sustainable financing strategy. This will surely require, in a longer-term perspective, substantial fiscal reforms involving both the revenues and expenditures fronts.

Whether the General Assembly will approve the debt law or critical fiscal reforms, including those that would make the budget less vulnerable to oil prices, remains an open question. However, the recent S&P downgrade of Kuwait's sovereign credit rating for the second time in less than two years may provide the needed incentive for undertaking such reforms. Further delays in passing the debt law or coming up with alternative financing measures could lead to further downgrade in the future. A closer coordination between the government and the national assembly is essential to hasten the reform process and put the public finances on a more sustainable path.

Table 1: Kuwait's fiscal balance (KD billion, unless otherwise indicated)

	FY2018/19	FY2019/20	FY2020/21	% y/y	
				FY2019/20	FY2020/21
Revenues	20.6	17.2	10.5	-16.2	-38.9
Non-oil	2.1	1.9	1.7	-13.1	-6.5
Oil	18.4	15.4	8.8	-16.6	-42.8
Total Expenditures	21.8	21.1	21.3	-3.2	0.7
Current Expenditures	19.2	18.8	19.6	-2.1	3.8
Compensation of Employees	7.2	7.6	7.4	5.6	-1.8
Goods & Services	3.0	3.2	2.9	6.4	-10.0
Subsidies	1.4	0.6	0.6	-56.6	-10.1
Grants	5.2	5.3	5.4	0.2	3.4
Social Subsidies	1.0	1.0	0.8	-2.2	-11.7
Miscellaneous & Transfers	1.4	1.2	2.4	-12.0	94.7
Capital Expenditures	2.6	2.3	1.7	-12.0	-24.3
Budget Balance (Surplus/ Deficit)	-1.3	-3.9	-10.8	----	----

AUB appoints Zaghoul as senior deputy CEO, Banking Group

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank (AUB) has announced the appointment of Hisham Zaghoul as Senior Deputy Chief Executive Officer - Banking Group as of September 1st, 2021, after obtaining the approval of the Central Bank of Kuwait. Zaghoul was Senior Deputy CEO (Acting).

Hisham Zaghoul has over 20 years of extensive experience in corporate banking, treasury and trade finance following working in several banks and financial institutions, including BNP Paribas Bank (Egypt), Commercial International Bank (Egypt) and United Bank for Commerce & Investment (Libya).

Zaghoul is a member of the boards of directors of a number of banks and financial institutions in the



Hisham Zaghoul

Middle East; Commercial Bank of Iraq PSC (CBIQ) in Iraq, United Bank for Commerce & Investment in Libya and Middle East Financial Investment Company (MEFIC) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

It is worth mentioning that Zaghoul, since joining Ahli United Bank in 2007, has succeeded in developing the banking services business, which has been reflected in the growth of the credit portfolios and the expansion of the customers' base, in addition to the continuous development in the products & services provided to the bank's customers, within AUB's vision as a leading bank in the Islamic banking business. Furthermore, the notable efforts made by Zaghoul has contributed in obtaining several prestigious awards as the best bank in Kuwait within several banking sectors and services over the past years.

Zaghoul holds a Bachelor's degree in Economics

from the Faculty of Economics and Political Science, Cairo University. On this occasion, Jihad Saud Al-Humaidhi, CEO at AUB, said, "Since joining Ahli United Bank team, Hisham Zaghoul has proven solid leadership capabilities and has been able to attain tangible achievements in the Bank's success journey, with his outstanding professional record, which makes him a wealth of banking experience that we are proud of among the group of our executive leaders. Moreover, he has a future vision for the mechanism of developing the banking business group in line with the Bank's strategy to enhance innovation in the new solutions we provide to the market."

For his part, Hisham Zaghoul commented on the decision of his appointment to the new position, saying, "I would like to thank AUB Board of Directors, headed by Dr Anwar Ali Al-Mudhaf, the Board chairman and the Bank Executive Management led by Jihad Al-Humaidhi, CEO of the Bank. I also extend special thanks to all my colleagues in the Banking Group, who have spared no effort during the last period to provide all support to our customers, to provide banking services based on international standards and criteria that live up to the aspirations of our valued customers."

change in the Bank's work culture and enhance Gulf Bank's customer service by increasing printer mobility, allowing staff to print necessary documents from any location. The latest initiative also aims to reduce wasteful printing by encouraging users to shift to digital practices whenever possible. The new initiative also enables Gulf Bank employees to complete printing operations on any printer by using only their staff IDs. In addition, Gulf Bank employees can now print from their mobile phones directly from email, and are encouraged to switch to electronic documentation.

On this initiative, Deputy General Manager-Information Technology at Gulf Bank, Osamah Al-Abdullah, said: "The initiative to replace and consolidate office printers falls within Gulf Bank's integrated strategic plan, and paves the way for a complete digital transformation. Through this initiative, all office printers will be replaced and consolidated into a more effective amount of multifunction printers, which will



Osamah Al-Abdullah

not only increase work efficiency and speed, but also encourage digital transformation at the employee level. The printer consolidation initiative is one of many currently underway at Gulf Bank's IT Department, and we are looking forward to announcing new and exciting developments very soon."

To learn more about Gulf Bank's various initiatives, customers can visit one of the Bank's branches, or visit the Gulf Bank website at www.e-gulfbank.com. Customers can also use the WhatsApp service on 1805805 for round-the-clock assistance from Gulf Bank representatives, or call the Customer Contact Center on the same number.

Tycoon JD.com founder steps back as scrutiny deepens

BEIJING: The billionaire founder of Chinese e-commerce giant JD.com is to step back from daily operations, his company announced, making him the latest A-list CEO to retreat from the limelight as Beijing squeezes the tech industry. Richard Liu, who founded the firm in 1998, will "devote more time to formulating the company's long-term strategies", JD.com said in a statement late Monday.



Richard Liu

Liu follows a number of Chinese tech leaders in stepping away from more prominent public roles as some of the country's largest firms come under intensifying official scrutiny.

China has launched antitrust probes and rolled out tighter rules on everything from video games to protections for gig economy workers in a wide-ranging effort to curb what the government calls "disorderly" expansion in the tech sector. JD.com is an e-commerce juggernaut in China and an aggressive competitor of industry leader Alibaba.

Liu, also known by his Chinese name Liu Qiangdong, was arrested in the United States in 2018 over allegations of criminal sexual conduct, before being allowed to return to China. JD.com did not give a specific reason for the management shift, and said Liu would remain chairman and CEO of the company. Shares in the firm were flat at the break in Hong Kong yesterday. His main rival Jack Ma, the founder of Alibaba, has kept a low public profile since affiliate Ant Group's Hong Kong and Shanghai initial public offering was cancelled just days before its planned launch in November 2020. Alibaba was hit with a record antitrust fine around about the same time. —AFP

Gulf Bank adopts sustainable approach to office printing

KUWAIT: As part of its ongoing efforts to support sustainability, Gulf Bank is spearheading a new initiative to more effectively address internal printing requirements, consolidating printers to support the existing print volume and current business needs. Gulf Bank's Information Technology (IT) Department is leading this initiative, consolidating and replacing the Bank's printers with the latest multifunction printers available in the market.

Gulf Bank launched this initiative with the aim of using the latest technology to instigate positive

Lifestyle | Features

What the 'foo': Australian duck mouths off

Move over parrots: scientists have stumbled across an impersonating bird whose repertoire goes well beyond demanding a cracker. An Australian musk duck was able to memorize and reproduce sounds and speech-imitating the noise of a door slamming and someone muttering the phrase "You bloody fool". Biologist Carel ten Cate

specimen who was four years old at the time and living on the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, near Canberra. "You bloody foo," the duck says, over and over, "You bloody foo," dropping the "l", which is apparently hard for ducks to articulate. The sounds accompanied Ripper's mating display, according to the study published Monday in the journal

duck by approaching the cage, the report said. Ripper would begin his dance-but then quack out the insult instead of making ordinary duck noises. And his vocal skills went further. Fullagar also recorded Ripper imitating the sound of a light door slamming. Sonogram analysis revealed the sound to be strikingly similar to one made by a screen door next to the sink, in which Ripper was kept as a duckling. Ten Cate says the fact that Ripper reproduced sounds he most likely heard when he was young is a key finding of the research. "Vocal learning of the type shown by Ripper was thought only to be present in songbirds, hummingbirds and parrots," he said.

Elephants vocalize too

Besides ducks, the special animal vocal learning issue of Philosophical Transactions delves into sounds made by elephants, dolphins and seals. Research collected from adult African elephants in Botswana, South Africa, Germany and Austria explored their ability to reproduce specific trumpeting and snorting sounds on cue. A male named Jabu who began learning to vocalize on cue when he was a calf was able to produce seven distinct sounds on cue with nearly 100 percent accuracy. The other elephants who learnt in adulthood still managed to respond correctly over 80 percent of the time, suggesting a "complex level" of vocal on-cue learning in the species, the study says. — AFP



Police officer of the French Office for Biodiversity (Office Français de la Biodiversité - OFB) Benoit Girard (not seen) shows a GPS beacon placed on the back of a duck at the 'Domaine des Grandes Cabannes du Vaccares sud' protected area, in Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, southwestern France. — AFP

says he found it "hard to believe" when he discovered a claim that musk ducks could parrot human speech.

But he decided to go hunting to see if it was true. Hours of searching through archives brought him to an eerie 1987 recording of "Ripper"-a hand-raised

Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B. A male musk duck usually fends off competitors with repetitive sounds accompanied by kicking, while "the tail is kept in different positions".

Peter Fullagar, who made the recordings, would deliberately "enrage" the



Italy holds tobacconist after lottery ticket 'grab and run'

When his client came to claim the winnings from a 500,000-euro lottery scratch card, a tobacconist in Naples grabbed it and fled the city, Italian investigators said. A man was detained at Rome's Fiumicino airport, police said on Monday, as he was about

to board a plane to the Canary Islands. According to investigators, the man grabbed the winning ticket on Thursday and reportedly jumped on his scooter and rushed to the town of Latina between Naples and Rome.

His plan, they said, was to deposit the ticket in a bank with a view of returning later when things had calmed down. He denied stealing the ticket and said he would make an official complaint against his customer, a 70-year-old woman. Prosecutors have opened a probe for aggravated robbery. The man's tobacconist license has been suspended and the precious ticket itself has been seized. — AFP

Payne praises Parker's 'strength' amid cancer battle

Liam Payne has praised Tom Parker's "strength and courage" amid his battle with a brain tumor. The 'Strip That Down' hitmaker reached out to the former Wanter singer when he heard about his devastating diagnosis last year because he wanted to show his support and help in any way he could. Speaking to the MailOnline, Liam, 28, said: "When I heard about what Tom was going through I wanted to reach out to him, he's showing so much strength and courage and I wanted to offer help and support in any way I could." Tom recently revealed he is "grateful" that the treatment he's undergoing is starting to work



Cardi B has given birth to her second child

The 28-year-old rap star has taken to social media to announce the arrival of her new baby, posting a behind-the-scenes photo of herself, her child and husband Offset in a hospital bed. Alongside the sweet snap, Cardi - who also has Kulture, three, with Offset - wrote on Instagram: "9/4/21 [dinosaur, heart and teddy bear emojis] (sic)" In the snap, Cardi's baby is wrapped in a blue blanket, while the rapper's legs are covered by a brown Louis Vuitton blanket. However, neither of the celebrity couple have revealed the gender or the name of their new baby. Cardi announced her pregnancy in June, when she performed alongside her husband at the BET Awards.

The 'WAP' hitmaker - who has 108 million followers on Instagram - proudly showed off her growing bump while performing 'Type S***' at the awards ceremony. Cardi subsequently wrote on the photo-sharing platform: "#2! [heart emoji] (sic)"

The rapper previously explained that motherhood has given her more motivation than ever. The chart-topping star revealed that she's determined to give her children the best possible chance of success. Cardi - who worked as a stripper before finding success in the music business - explained: "All the time I'm thinking about my kid. "I'm shaking my a**", but at the same time I'm doing business, I'm on the phone with my business manager saying, make sure that a percentage of my cheque goes to my kid's trust. "I give my daughter so much love, and I'm setting her up for a future. I want to tell her that a lot of the things that I have done in life - no matter what I did, knowing that I wanted to have kids made me go harder to secure a good future for my kids." — Bang Showbiz



as his recent scan showed that the malignant mass on his brain has decreased in size since his last MRI (magnetic resonance imaging). Taking to his Instagram account last month, he said: "Ok..here goes. The last couple of days have been filled with dread and worry but I'm pleased to announce that the results of yesterday's scan (lovely birthday present), are stable with a slight reduction in the tumor if anything. "I can't tell you how grateful I am to receive this news. We left it a little longer between scans this time just to give time for the medication to work etc but overall a great day. Thanks to all our healthcare team. You are truly wonderful. "And thank you all you lovely people out there sending love and support. It really is so appreciated. Time to celebrate (sic)"

Despite his worrying prognosis when he was first diagnosed with the brain tumor, the 33-year-old singer is determined to beat the disease. He said: "It's been an emotional few months for me and my family. But I'm determined to both fight the disease and the terrible situation of the chronically low level of research that goes towards finding a cure and treatment for glioblastoma." Tom and his wife Kelsey - who have daughter Aurelia, two, and 10-month-old son Bodhi together - are now looking towards the future and are hoping to have at least two more children later down the line. — Bang Showbiz

Cuoco has wiped her ex from her Instagram

The 'Big Bang Theory' alum and the 30-year-old equestrian recently announced that they are set to divorce after just three years of marriage, and Kaley has since removed all mention of Karl from her bio on the social media app. Her profile did read: "Mrs @mrtan-cook. Many 4-legged kid. I play pretend. Adopt don't shop - giddy up! Yes, Norman

Productions. 'What, like it's hard?'" And now, it simply says: "Yes, Norman", the name of her production firm. The Instagram change comes after it was revealed Kaley had an "ironclad prenup in place" before tying the knot with Karl in 2018. A source told Us Weekly: "Her assets are protected." The pair released a joint statement over the weekend confirming their split. However, the duo also insisted there was no "anger or animosity" towards each other. Their statement read: "Despite a deep love and respect for one another, we have realized that our current paths have taken us in opposite directions. — Bang Showbiz



A man paints over murals on a concrete wall along a street in Kabul. — AFP photos



A man looks out of a car window as commuters make their way along a road in Kabul.

Afghan art activist defiant as Taliban erase Kabul murals

Afghan activist Omaid Sharifi's art collective spent seven years transforming stretches of Kabul's labyrinthine concrete blast walls with colorful murals-then the Taliban marched in. Within weeks of the Islamists taking the capital, many of the street art pieces have been painted over, replaced by drab propaganda slogans as the Taliban reimpose their austere vision on Afghanistan. The images of workers rolling white paint over the art were deeply foreboding for Sharifi, whose ArtLords collective has created more than 2,200 murals across the country since 2014.

"The image that comes to my mind is (the Taliban) putting a 'kaffan' over the city," he told AFP in a phone interview from the UAE on Monday, referring to the white shroud used to cover bodies for Islamic burials. But even as the Taliban erase the work of the ArtLords and despite being forced to flee for his safety, Sharifi said he would continue his campaign. "We will never stay silent," said the 34-year-old, speaking from a facility housing Afghan refugees. "We will make sure the world hears us. We will make sure that the Taliban are shamed every single day." Among the erased murals was one showing US special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad and Taliban co-founder Abdul Ghani Baradar shaking

hands after signing the 2020 deal to withdraw American troops from Afghanistan.

'Everybody was running'

Sharifi co-founded ArtLords in 2014, using art to campaign for peace, social justice and accountability. The prolific group often shamed the powerful in Afghanistan with street art, including warlords and allegedly corrupt government officials. Their murals honored Afghan heroes, called for dialogue instead of violence, and demanded rights for women. ArtLords members braved death threats and were branded infidels by Islamist extremists. They remained unrepentant, and kept at it until the end. On the morning of August 15, with the Taliban at the gates of Kabul, Sharifi and five of his colleagues went to work on a mural outside a government building.

Within hours, they saw panicked people rushing out of government offices and decided to return to the ArtLords gallery. "All roads were blocked," Sharifi said. "The army, the police were coming from all sides, abandoning their cars and everybody was running." When the group finally made it to the gallery, they learned that Kabul had fallen.

'It never goes away'

Sharifi was 10 years old in 1996 when the Islamists first came to power, and he witnessed their harsh rule until US-led forces toppled them five years later. This time around, he said, "I expect that not a lot has changed." Like Sharifi, many Afghans are skeptical of Taliban claims of a softer government. Few have forgotten the public executions, and the blanket ban on entertainment-including on TVs and video cassette players. Sharifi told AFP he "vividly remembers" the public punishments at a football stadium in Kabul, including beheadings and ampu-

tations for various crimes. "When I was riding my bicycle to go to the central market... (I) would see a lot of broken TVs, broken cassette recorders and all these tapes," he added. "That is always in my mind. It never goes away." There was no local media to speak of during the Taliban's first stint in power, and images of humans and animals were banned.

'This is not the end'

Tens of thousands of Afghans rushed to Kabul airport as the capital fell, fearful of life under the Taliban, among them scores of artists and activists such as Sharifi. "It's a very difficult choice (to leave), and I just hope nobody ever experiences what we went through," he said. "Afghanistan is my home, it's my identity... I cannot take out all my roots and plant myself in another part of the world." Sharifi's primary concern was not violence, as he had lived with death threats for years. "The scary part was that I will not have a voice," he said. "What really forced me was that I want my voice... I want my freedom of expression."

The chaotic airlift from Kabul airport ended with the last US troops leaving by August 31, and Western governments admitted most Afghans identified as vulnerable to Taliban reprisals were left behind. Sharifi said he was able to help 54 artists escape with their families, but more than 100 are still in the country. "All of them are in hiding, all of them are fearful... They're just trying to find a way to get out of Afghanistan." And he vowed to continue campaigning and creating art. "I left (everything) behind," Sharifi said. "The only thing that keeps me going is that I think this is not the end." — AFP



Afghan workers walk past a wall mural along a roadside in Kabul.



An Afghan municipality worker cleans a road next to a wall mural in Kabul.

Lifestyle | Features

Iran's controversial spy thriller series back on TV

Loathed by Iran's moderates, television spy series "Gando" with its plots mirroring the headlines has gone back on air since ultra-conservative President Ebrahim Raisi's election victory. Named after a local species of crocodile known to ambush its prey, Gando's stars are counter-espionage agents of the Revolutionary Guard, operating from a control room festooned with monitors, much like in the US thriller "24". The series is lauded by ultra-conservatives, but the real draw for many—and the possible reason why state television pulled it for several months before its return in July—has been its attacks on former president Hassan Rouhani's government.

Rouhani oversaw the 2015 nuclear deal with world powers to curb Iran's nuclear program; the US withdrew under Donald Trump and the deal was also anathema to Iran's own ultra-conservatives. Rouhani served two consecutive terms, the maximum permitted by the constitution, and was succeeded by Raisi, who won a June presidential election. In March, the sixth episode of Gando's second season triggered fierce debate with a plotline featuring a spy among Iran's nuclear negotiators.

By the 13th episode of the show, broadcast five days a week, the plug was pulled without explanation. It had been portraying the government, especially the foreign ministry, as packed with weak figures, cowards and the corrupt. In contrast,



A young man watches an episode of the Iranian television series "Gando" at his home in Iran's capital Tehran. — AFP

protagonist Mohammad—the counter-espionage hero of the Guards—is shown shadowing foreign agents from the moment they reach Iranian soil, especially spies from Britain's MI6.

'Revelations'

Last month, Iran's judiciary authority announced that two people had been convicted, one for corruption and another for espionage, after verification of certain "revelations" made in the series. The show itself was widely seen by commentators in Iran as part of efforts to undermine Rouhani. Following the end of broadcasts in the spring, some media reported that the Rouhani government

had written a complaint to Iran's supreme leader Ali Khamenei about the show, arguing it was harming the functioning of the government.

Several ultra-conservatives accused the Rouhani government of being behind the halt, a charge it denied. Rouhani's foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, one of the figures ridiculed in the series, said it was nothing but "lies from beginning to end" and had damaged him personally.

For its part, the ultra-conservative newspaper Kayhan in August hailed the "revelations" made in Gando, including of alleged links between senior officials and foreign missions, "in particular the British

embassy". Although Iranian officials usually hold the US and Israel as the Iranian state's greatest foes, neither has an embassy in Tehran.

'Let BBC broadcast it'

One character, British spy Charlotte who is in Tehran under cover as a diplomat, is played by Beaina Mahmoudi, a member of Iran's Armenian Christian minority. Defying typical Iranian censorship practice, under which women on TV are shown wearing headscarves even in situations where they would not be required to in reality, Charlotte is depicted in several indoor scenes going bareheaded. Fars news agency, reputed to be close to Iran's ultra-conservative camp, has described Charlotte as a fictionalized version of Kylie Moore-Gilbert.

Moore-Gilbert is an Australian-British researcher convicted of spying for Israel and freed two years later in a 2020 prisoner exchange for three Iranians held over an attack allegedly planned in Bangkok. She has always denied the charges against her. A third season of Gando has already been floated that would deal with the nuclear talks. "In any case, I like Gando season 2 very much," British ambassador to Iran, Simon Shercliff, wrote on Twitter in Persian. The response from Iran's state broadcasting chief Abdollahi Ali-Asgari: "We suggest the BBC broadcasts it if he likes it." — AFP



In this file photo actor Michael K. Williams poses in Miami, Florida. — AFP

'The Wire' star Michael K Williams dead at 54

US actor Michael K. Williams, one of television's most memorable stars of recent years for his role as Omar Little in "The Wire," has been found dead in his New York City apartment, police said Monday. News of the death of the 54-year-old, who starred as the iconic Baltimore stick-up man in the groundbreaking television series, triggered an outpouring of grief among fans and former colleagues. The actor's representative said it was "with deep sorrow that the family announces the passing of Emmy nominated actor Michael Kenneth Williams." "They ask for your privacy while grieving this," said the statement from Marianna Shafran of Shafran PR.

An officer for the New York Police Department told AFP that Williams had been found dead in his apartment in Brooklyn by a family member. The Brooklyn native had been widely hailed for his role in gritty thriller "The Wire," in which he played a gay armed robber who specialized in holding up drug dealers. The series became one of the most popular shows on television and ran through five seasons from 2002 until 2008.

Williams was also well-known for the role of Albert 'Chalky' White on the HBO series "Boardwalk Empire." He received multiple Emmy nominations for his work, including for his turn in the series "Lovecraft Country," ahead of the 2021 ceremony that will take place in just under two weeks. Williams was also nominated for his work playing the husband of blues singer Bessie Smith in the 2015 film "Bessie."

He was additionally a nominee for 2016's "The Night Of" and for "When They See Us" in 2019, about a group of young Black men wrongly accused of rape in Central Park in the 1980s. "While the world is aware of his immense talents as an artist, we knew Michael as a dear friend who was beloved by all who had the privilege to work with him," HBO said in a statement. No official cause of death was given, but several US media quoted law enforcement sources as saying they suspected a possible drug overdose. Williams had spoken openly of his past struggles with drug addiction, and had told US media that he had spent much of his earnings from "The Wire" on narcotics. The NYPD told AFP the cause of death will be determined by a medical examiner.

'Crushed'

News of Williams' death was met with grief among fans, many of whom considered him one of the most talented actors of his generation. David Simon, the former Baltimore crime reporter who wrote the show, said on Twitter that he was "too gutted right now to say all that ought to be said." "Michael was a fine man and a rare talent and on our journey together he always deserved the best words. And today those words won't come."

Tray Chaney, who played a drug dealer on the show, said he was "crushed." "No words. I love you bro. RIP to the legend Michael K Williams aka one of the dopest Actors/Brothers in the world," he said on Twitter. Bestselling horror writer Stephen King tweeted: "Horrible, sad, and unbelievable to think we've lost the fantastically talented Michael K. Williams at the age of 54." His work attracted the attention of a future president, with then senator Barack Obama calling Williams' role in The Wire his favorite and "a fascinating character".

Williams' role as Omar Little was enhanced by a facial scar he said he received during a New York street fight on the night of his 25th birthday, when a man slashed him with a razor. He told NPR in an interview the pronounced scar actually helped advance his career, as he climbed from being a back-up dancer in music videos for stars such as Madonna and George Michael to getting speaking roles playing rough characters in drama shows. His first big onscreen break came when rapper Tupac Shakur was filming a movie in New York and cast Williams as his little brother after seeing a Polaroid picture of him. — AFP

Tiny, pink and identical: Giant panda twins born at Madrid zoo

A giant panda gave birth to twin cubs at Madrid zoo on Monday in what officials hailed as a "great contribution" to the conservation of the vulnerable species. Madrid's Zoo Aquarium said its female panda-Hua Zui Ba-gave birth to the first cub at around 8:30 am after more than four hours of labour, while the second followed just after midday. Footage of the first one being born showed a tiny pink hairless cub squeaking furiously after emerging into the light, its mother gently cleaning it up and placing it onto her stomach. The newborns will be "totally dependent" on their mother for the first four months until they can walk on their own, a zoo statement said.



Two technicians from China's Chengdu panda breeding center will help local vets care for the pair, whose sex has not yet been determined, it added. The cubs are the fifth and sixth of Hua Zui Ba and her partner Bing Xing, it added. Their birth is "a great contribution to the field of conservation of threatened species," the zoo said. Female pandas often have two offspring at a time. Panda reproduction-in captivity or in the wild-is notoriously difficult, experts say, as few of the animals get in the mood or, even when they do, they do not know how to mate. Further complicating matters, the window for conception is narrow since female pandas are in heat only once a year, for about one or two days. The giant panda is listed as a vulnerable species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, with fewer than 2,000 thought to remain in the wild. — AFP



Mexican actor Hernan Mendoza (left) and his companion wear Mexican death masks as they arrive for the screening of the film 'La Caja' (The Box) presented in competition during the 78th Venice Film Festival at Venice Lido.

'The Box' gets inside Mexican sweatshop at Venice film festival

Getting access to a "maquiladora", one of the hundreds of factories that line Mexico's border with the United States, was the biggest challenge of shooting Lorenzo Vigas' latest film at Venice, the director said Monday. "The Box" is in competition for the top prize at the Venice Film Festival, to be announced on Saturday. It was shot in Chihuahua, the site of hundreds of foreign-owned factories assembling cheap goods and apparel for the United States just across the border, and one of Mexico's most violence-plagued states.

The cheap labour that fuels the maquiladoras has made Mexico a major exporter, but at the cost of its poor and uneducated workers, many of whom work in sweatshop conditions for rock-bottom wages. "How do you put a camera inside a real maquiladora? It's nearly impossible," the Venezuelan director, who lives in Mexico, told journalists Monday. "They're very jealous of not exposing their production line," said Vigas, who in 2015 became the first Latin American to win Venice's prestigious Golden Lion with his first feature, "From Afar".

"They're very jealous of not exposing the condition of their workers—so how do

you shoot a film?" The production team spent nearly a year trying to find a maquiladora that would allow the crew to shoot inside, before finally getting the green light from a company that was ready to close for bankruptcy. "We didn't get any roadmap from people who had done this before—because nobody was allowed before to do this," said one of the film's producers, Jorge Hernandez Aldana.

Missing women

The film tells the story of a 13-year-old boy (first-time actor Hatz'n Navarrete), who travels halfway across Mexico to



Miss Italy 2020 Martina Sambucini arrives for the screening of the film "La Caja" (The Box) presented in competition. — AFP photos

recover the remains of his father, whose body has been found in a mass grave. On the way, he hooks up with a man, played by Hernan Mendoza, who supplies workers for the maquiladoras. He signs up poor people in remote villages with a pitch that they must protect Mexican jobs from Chinese competition.

When we finally see inside the jeans assembly factory where the workers are taken, in the middle of a bleak, unforgiving desert, we immediately wish they could turn back—it's loud, hot, and the pace is non-stop. Besides its central theme of replacing absent fathers, "The Box" touches on the brutal reality of thousands of women there—many of them maquiladora workers. Since the 1990s hundreds have been abducted, either vanishing entirely or their bodies turning up discarded or buried in the desert.

"More than 20,000 women in the north of Mexico have disappeared," said Vigas. "Nobody knows why." More than 73,000 people in Mexico are missing, the government said in 2020, a quarter of them female. Another Latin American film in competition is "Sundown" from Mexico's Michel Franco. His "New Order" with its searing indictment of the gap between rich and poor in Mexico, won Venice's Silver Lion last year. "Sundown" stars Tim Roth as a man escaping his obligations at a time of family crisis to hang out on an Acapulco beach. But, just as in Vigas's film, an undercurrent of social tension pervades the quiet drama, keeping the viewer on edge—and even a tranquil beach holiday in Mexico is not enough to keep violence at bay. — AFP

Extinct Tasmanian tiger brought to life in color footage

Century-old footage of the last known Tasmanian tiger in captivity has been brought to life by colorization, offering a tantalizing glimpse of the now-extinct creature. The wolf-like thylacine, known as the Tasmanian tiger because of its striped coat, roamed in Australia and on the island of New Guinea before dying out about 85 years ago. Fewer than a dozen snippets of footage—totaling about three minutes of silent, black-and-white film—are known to have survived of the elusive beast.

The National Film and Sound Archive of Australia said the longest of these rare clips, an 80-second film of the last known Tasmanian tiger, called Benjamin, has now been colorized. The government agency handed the footage to Paris-based Samuel Francois-Steininger, of Composite Films, who completed the painstaking colorization process over 200 hours. The footage was "stunning" for its age but "very challenging to colorize because, apart from the animal, there

were few elements in the frame", Francois-Steininger said in a post on the archive's website. "And because of the resolution and quality of the picture, there were a lot of details—the fur was dense and a lot of hair had to be detailed and animated," he added.

The clip shows the carnivorous marsu-

pial pacing around a small enclosure, lying down, sniffing and scratching—its sandy brown coat punctuated by thick dark stripes. It was released Tuesday to mark National Threatened Species Day in Australia, which is held each year on September 7 to commemorate Benjamin's death on the same date in

1936. The footage was shot by David Fleay in December 1933 at the city of Hobart's now-defunct Beaumaris Zoo, where the naturalist was reportedly bitten on the buttocks while filming. — AFP



Handouts screengrabs obtained from the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia (NFSAA) show colorized pictures of the last-known surviving Tasmanian tiger from footage taken in 1933. — AFP photos



French cinema's 'national treasure' Belmondo dies at 88



Actor Jean-Paul Belmondo, one of postwar French cinema's biggest stars whose charismatic smile lit up the screen for half a century, has died aged 88 at his Paris home, his family announced Monday. Belmondo, who first came to fame as part of the French New Wave cinema movement with films like "Breathless" by Jean-Luc Godard, went on to become a household name, acting in 80 films covering a multitude of genres, including comedies and thrillers. "He had been very tired for some time. He died peacefully," the family said in a statement sent to AFP by Belmondo's lawyer, Michel Godest. Belmondo, who was born on April 9, 1933 in the wealthy Paris suburb of Neuilly-sur-Seine, grew up in a family of

artists. His father was a well-known sculptor. Belmondo, who was bad at school but good at boxing, started his acting career in theatre before embarking on a film career that was to span half a century, with 130 million cinema tickets to his films sold. Known in France as "Bebel", Belmondo was also often called "Le Magnifique" (The Magnificent), after a 1970s secret agent satire in which he starred. "He will always be The Magnificent," President Emmanuel Macron tweeted. Calling Belmondo "a national treasure", Macron added: "We all recognized ourselves in him".

'Solar, talented... and so French'
Former president Francois Hollande

said that "everybody would have loved to be friends with him", while ex-premier Manuel Valls called Belmondo "magnificent, solar, talented ... and so French". Fellow iconic French actor Alain Delon both a friend and a rival of Belmondo said he was "completely crushed" by the news of Belmondo's death. French director Bertrand Blier said "it was so easy to film with Belmondo. It's always easy with great actors." French actor Richard Berry said of Belmondo that "he was everybody's friend" and Michel Boujenah, also a French actor, called him "our very own Eiffel Tower".

Spanish actor Antonio Banderas said that "this is a sad day for culture. A great actor and an icon of French and European cinema has left us". Many

others, including politicians, the French Foreign Legion and film fans the world over also paid homage to Belmondo on social media. "It's impossible not to feel that this is the end of an era," tweeted Uruguay's national film library. "The world is mourning a monument of film," wrote a fan in Italy, Peter Patti, also on Twitter. Apart from Godard, Belmondo also worked with famous French directors Francois Truffaut, Alain Resnais, Louis Malle and Jean-Pierre Melville. He later turned to film production, and returned to his first love, theatre.

Belmondo's acting career was cut short in 2001 when a stroke he suffered while on set left him handicapped. He won France's highest film prize, the Cesar, in 1988 for his role in "Itinerary

of a Spoiled Child"-which he didn't accept-and an honorary Cesar in 2017. Many of his films became international hits, and Time magazine in 1964 even declared Belmondo the face of modern France. He won several lifetime achievement awards, in 2010 from the Los Angeles Film Critics Association, in 2011 at the Cannes film festival, and in 2016 at the Venice festival. "His generosity, both as a man and as an actor, created some of film history's greatest moments," Cannes festival director Thierry Fremaux tweeted on Monday. "Thank you, Jean-Paul." — AFP

Belmondo's most memorable movies

From the cool thug roving the Champs-Elysees to a globe-trotting action man and swash-buckling adventurer, here are some of the most striking roles played by Jean-Paul Belmondo, who has died aged 88.

'Breathless' (1960)

In the Parisian love story that launched his career and the French New Wave internationally, Belmondo plays a petty crook who meets a grim end in an alley after falling for a young American girl.

'Leon Morin, Priest' (1961)

Donning a cassock and collar in Jean-Pierre Melville's World War II film noir, Belmondo shows gravitas and subtle sexual tension as a French priest in the grips of a moral dilemma during the Occupation.

'Cartouche' (1962)

Belmondo joins Jean Rochefort and Claudia Cardinale for Philippe de Broca's swashbuckling 18th-century romp about a gang of robbers that delighted audiences.

'Pierrot le fou' (1964)

With his blue-painted face and yellow explosives tied to his body, Belmondo stages a memorable art-house suicide in Jean-Luc Godard's experimental road trip. It charts a family man's disenchantment with modern life that prompts him to take off to the Mediterranean with the babysitter.

'That Man From Rio' (1964)

Excelling again as the action hero in this fast-paced Oscar-nominated James Bond spoof also by de Broca, Belmondo's jaunt to Brazil to see his fiancée turns into a mad-cap adventure to save her from kidnappers.

'Is Paris Burning?' (1966)

His only major role in an English-language film, Belmondo joins a host of Hollywood stars including Kirk Douglas and Orson Welles for this elaborate wartime epic about the liberation of Paris.

'Itinerary of a Lost Child' (1988)

Belmondo won a Cesar—a French Oscar—for his portrayal of a founding raised in a circus who loses his moral compass when he becomes a businessman in Claude Lelouch's saga on modern values. — AFP



In this file photo taken on February 11, 1964 French actor Jean-Paul Belmondo takes a picture of US actress Jean Seberg at the Billancourt Studios, as they just start the filming of "Backfire", directed by Jean Becker.



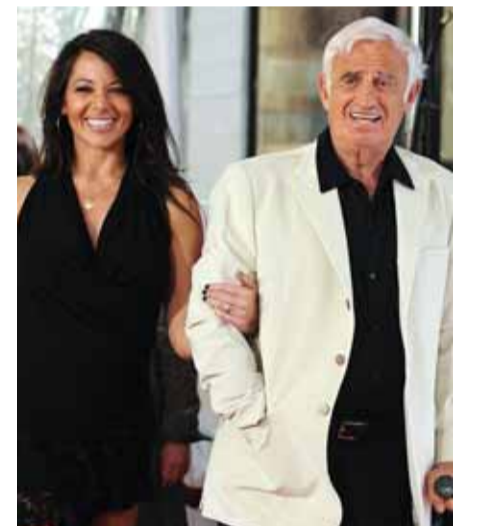
In this file photo French actor Jean Paul Belmondo attends the Monte-Carlo Million Dollar Super Four boxing event in Monaco.



In this file photo French actor Jean-Paul Belmondo (center), wearing a white "kepi" (flat-topped French military cap) of the French Foreign Legion, meets soldiers in Aubagne, southern France at the museum of the French Foreign Legion.



In this file photo French actor Jean-Paul Belmondo leaves the Armenian Cathedral of St John the Baptist in Paris during the funeral ceremony for French actor, screenwriter and director Charles Gerard, born Gerard Adjemian.



In this file photo taken on April 23, 2010 French actor Jean-Paul Belmondo arrives with his partner Barbara Gandolfi at the world premiere of the restored "A Star is born" during the opening Night Gala of the 2010 TCM Classic Film Festival in Hollywood, California.

France set for rare national tribute to film star Belmondo

France will this week pay film star Jean-Paul Belmondo the rare honor for an actor of a tribute at its national memorial site, the presidency said yesterday, as colleagues and public mourned the passing of one of the great icons of French cinema's golden age. Over six and a half million people in France watched special TV screenings of Belmondo films after his death was announced Monday, audiovisual data showed, as schedules were cleared for an actor whose swaggering smile and one-liners are inscribed in the national consciousness.

Fellow French film legend Brigitte Bardot, who starred with Belmondo in several movies including the 1961 "Famous Love Affairs", said in a statement to AFP

she felt "great grief" and was "thinking of him". "I feel great grief just like his dog Chipie who was his last and so faithful companion," said Bardot, who is now a prominent animal rights activists and from whose foundation Belmondo adopted the crossbreed dog Chipie abandoned by previous owners. "I miss him and I don't want to talk more about it. The greatest pains can only be expressed through silence," she said.



In this photo taken on September 14, 2010 French actor Alain Delon (right) puts his arm around fellow actor Jean-Paul Belmondo in Boulogne-Billancourt during the inauguration of the Paul Belmondo museum dedicated to the work of Jean-Paul Belmondo's father, in Boulogne-Billancourt, outside Paris.



In this file photograph taken on February 22, 1987, actor Jean-Paul Belmondo, one of France's biggest screen stars and a symbol of 1960s New Wave cinema, performs at The Marigny Theater in Paris, the part of Kean, written by French playwright Jean-Paul Sartre, adapted from Alexandre Dumas.

The office of President Emmanuel Macron said the national tribute to Belmondo would take place at the Invalides memorial complex in Paris on Thursday, an extremely rare honour for an actor although singer Charles Aznavour who appeared in several films was celebrated with such a homage when he died in 2018. "We have lost a guide," Jean Dujardin, one of the most prominent of the current generation of French actors, said on BFM TV. "He was a guide, Jean-Paul, someone who told us: Do not burden yourself with anxieties, have fun". Fellow iconic French actor Alain Delon—both a friend and a rival of Belmondo—said Monday he was "completely crushed" by the news of Belmondo's death. Even France's police force hailed an actor who starred in numerous crime thrillers such as the 1979 "Cop or Hood". "Even if it was just cinema you were in a way one of us, Mr Belmondo," the national police tweeted.

Belmondo, who first came to fame as part of the French New Wave cinema movement with films like "Breathless" by Jean-Luc Godard, went on to become a household name, acting in 80 films covering a multitude of genres, including comedies and thrillers. He died peacefully aged 88 at his Paris home, his family announced Monday. — AFP



In this file photo taken on April 4, 1996 french actor Jean-Paul Belmondo, one of France's biggest screen stars and a symbol of 1960s New Wave cinema, flips through his biography in Paris.—AFP photos

Sports

Three things learned from fourth Test between England and India

Anderson bowled 163.3 overs in series so far

LONDON: India beat England by 157 runs in the fourth Test at the Oval on Monday, taking all 10 of the home side's second-innings wickets on the last day. It was just India's second Test match win at the Oval, coming 50 years after a four-wicket triumph at the south London ground gave them a first such success on English soil. AFP Sport looks at some key aspects of a match which left Virat Kohli's men 2-1 up with one to play ahead of the fifth Test at Old Trafford starting on Friday.

Anderson burden

James Anderson, whose 632 wickets are the most taken by any fast bowler in Test history, has long been England's spearhead. But in this match, at any age where most quicks have long since retired, the 39-year-old was a workhorse too, with captain Joe Root unable to rely on Craig Overton or off-spinner Moeen Ali.

The result was that Anderson — in an attack without long-term absentees Stuart Broad, Jofra Archer and Ollie Stone, as well as Mark Wood, with all-rounder Ben Stokes missing due to a mental-health break — ended up sending down 47 overs at the for a meagre match return of 2-120.

Anderson has now bowled 163.3 overs in the series, having featured in all four Tests. That workload could mean England, looking ahead to the Ashes tour, decide to rest Anderson from the India finale even though the match is taking place at his Lancashire home ground, with Root admitting: "It's a delicate balancing act."

Sharma rights a wrong

One of the more curious statistics prior to this match was that Rohit Sharma had never scored a

Test hundred outside of India. But the opener filled that gap in his CV with an excellent 127 in India's second innings of 466.

Sharma now leads the India batting averages this series with 368 runs at 52.57, a tally that also includes two fifties. Five of Sharma's eight Test hundreds have come since he moved to the top of the order in 2019, with the 34-year-old right-hander averaging 58.48 as an opener compared to an overall career mark of 46.87.

Sharma has been prepared to rein in the attacking instincts that make him such a dangerous one-



Sharma leads India batting averages

day batsman when conditions have favored England's bowlers. "The four Test matches I've batted (in this series), the biggest takeaway is spending time in the middle," he said. "The runs will come."

Thakur returns in style

One of Shardul Thakur's nicknames is 'Beefy', a tag once applied to Ian Botham and, while no one is suggesting the 29-year-old all-rounder is in the same class as the England great, he is becoming a highly effective Test-match cricketer.



LONDON: India's captain Virat Kohli (right) celebrates with India's Mohammed Siraj (center) after England's James Anderson (unseen) lost his wicket during play on the fifth day of the fourth cricket Test match between England and India at the Oval cricket ground in London on Monday. —AFP

His comeback match after a hamstring injury in the drawn first Test in Nottingham saw Thakur star with both bat and ball. He scored two fifties, with his first-innings 57 particularly valuable as it helped India recover from 127-7 to a total of 191 that kept them in the game.

The bustling medium-pacer also took three wickets in the match, including the prize scalp of

Root on Monday, after some questioned whether he ought to be included in an attack without either the dropped Mohammed Shami or star off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin, who has yet to feature this series. "His effort was massive," said India quick Jasprit Bumrah of Thakur, who now averages an impressive 38 with the bat and 22.71 with the ball in his four career Tests. —AFP

Europe defeat US for second straight Solheim Cup

NEW YORK: Europe, fueled by rookies Matilda Castren and Leona Maguire, beat the United States 15-13 to retain golf's Solheim Cup on Monday. Finland's Castren fired out of a bunker and drained her putt at the 18th to secure a 1-up victory over American Lizette Salas for the point that ensured Europe would retain the trophy it won in 2019 at Gleneagles in Scotland.

The Europeans came into the final day of the biennial match-play showdown between European and US women needing five points from 12 singles matches to gain the 14 they needed to take the Cup back home from Inverness Club in Ohio.

Ireland's Maguire — like Castren, the first woman from her country to play in the Solheim Cup — fittingly delivered Europe's first point of the day with a dominant 5&4 victory over Jennifer Kupcho. Maguire, who had already partnered to deliver 3 1/2 points over the first two days in fourball and foursome matches, seized the lead with an eagle at the par-five second and never looked back.

"Just so proud of getting 4 1/2 points on the board for Europe," said Maguire, who became only the third player to earn 4 1/2 or more points in the Solheim Cup. "I just tried to get off to a really good start and that eagle on the second — couldn't have started any better than that," she said. "Made birdie on six, which is a hole I haven't played well all week," said Maguire, whose approach at the sixth flew over the pin and left her an eight-footer for birdie. "I just wanted to put pressure on Jen from the get-go," she added after sealing the victory with a par at the 14th hole.

Sweden's Madelene Sagstrom, who was involved in a rule's controversy on day one, put the next point on the board for Europe with a 3&2 victory over Ally Ewing. And France's Celine Boutier polished off a 5&4 victory over Mina Harigae before a tense tussle between Sweden's Anna Nordqvist and Lexi Thompson ended tied, giving the Americans their first half-point of the day.

The Americans, backed by rowdy crowds, were able to dial up the pressure as the afternoon wore on. World number one Nelly Korda was 2-down early but rallied to win a back-and-forth battle with England's Georgia Hall 1-up.

American Brittany Altomare, with the aid of a couple of monster putts, won four of the last five holes for a 2&1 victory over Spain's Carlota Ciganda. But after Denmark's Nanna Koerstz Madsen halved her match with Austin Ernst, the remaining six matches were must-wins for the United States.

Castren knew the stakes were high when she took a 1-up lead to the final hole against Salas, and she was elated after getting the job done. "It's hard to put it into words," she said. "Right now I'm shaking. I was looking at the scoreboard, and I knew it was going to be an important putt. We read it perfectly and it went in. I'm just so happy now." Europe's players — who because of coronavirus travel restrictions played in front of an overwhelmingly pro-American crowd — were able to celebrate in full after Emily Pederson completed her 1-up victory over Danielle Kang in the final match to seal the outright win. —AFP

Buttler, Leach return to England squad for 5th Test against India

LONDON: England yesterday recalled left-arm spinner Jack Leach and wicketkeeper-batsman Jos Buttler to the squad for the final Test against India as they seek to level the five-match series. The hosts trail 2-1 after their 157-run defeat at the Oval ahead of Friday's decider at Old Trafford but head coach Chris Silverwood has made only minor alterations to his squad.

Leach, who gives England a second spin option alongside off-spinning all-rounder Moeen Ali, has not played a Test since March despite taking 28 Test wickets in six matches on tours of Sri Lanka and India.

Buttler missed the fourth Test to attend the

arrival of his second child but is ready to return and, if he reclaims his place as vice-captain, there may only be room for one of Jonny Bairstow or Ollie Pope. Silverwood and captain Joe Root must decide whether pacemen James Anderson and Ollie Robinson, who have both been ever-present in the series, can rally for one last crack at the Indians.

"I think they (Anderson and Robinson) have been exceptional. I'm proud of the way they have contributed to the games, the way they have gone about their business and the effort they have put in for the team," said Silverwood. "But it is something we have got to keep an eye on."

Root's men lost a two-match series earlier in the season to New Zealand and need a sharp reversal of fortunes to avoid becoming the first England side to suffer twin defeats on home soil since 1986. "India have proved a really tough nut to crack," Silverwood said. "They've showed why they are arguably the number one team in the world. It seems they get half an opportunity and they push the door open and go for it." —AFP



LONDON: England's head coach Chris Silverwood reacts after play on the fifth day of the fourth cricket Test match between England and India at the Oval cricket ground in London on Monday. —AFP

Rafa Nadal Academy celebrates anniversary

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Rafa Nadal Academy Kuwait (RNAK) celebrated its first anniversary in the presence of President of Kuwait and Arab Tennis Federations Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The celebration was held at the academy's premises at Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah International Tennis Complex. The celebration was also attended by the KTF secretary general and treasurer.

Sheikh Ahmad presented the academy with a memento, with the attendance of General Manager Martijn Belgraver, Tennis Head Coach Nuno Marques and other academy employees. Sheikh Ahmad thanked RNAK for its efforts in training Kuwait's national tennis team players and appreciated its invitation to hold a training camp at its main location in Majorca in preparation for the Davis Cup. Kuwait will participate in the third group of Asia and Oceania to be held in Jordan from Sept 13 to 18, with nine countries participating.



KUWAIT: President of Kuwait and Arab Tennis Federations Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (right) presents a memento to Rafa Nadal Academy Kuwait's General Manager Martijn Belgraver.

Teenager Fernandez brings football spark to US Open tennis

NEW YORK: When Leylah Fernandez was cut from a Canadian youth tennis development program, her father Jorge, an Ecuadorian soccer player, became her coach in a sport he knew almost nothing about. What he did know was how to be a professional athlete and he infused his daughter with mental toughness, patience, focus and confidence — the same attributes he learned the hard way on the football field. The results have made his daughter, a left-hander who turned 19 on Monday, a formidable force at this year's US Open.

Leylah ousted third-seeded defending champion Naomi Osaka, a four-time Grand Slam winner, and 16th seed Angelique Kerber, a left-hander with three Slam titles, to reach the last eight in her best Grand Slam run. "With him being my coach, him teaching me, just being competitive in sports has definitely impacted my game and my mentality," Fernandez said. "I've been working hard, training super well. My coach, my dad, is saying be patient, have confidence in your game, it will show in matches. I'm glad it finally did."

World number 73 Fernandez, who faced Ukraine's fifth-seeded Elina Svitolina in the quarter-finals yesterday, won her first WTA title in March at Monterrey. Fernandez, whose mother is of Filipino



NEW YORK: Leylah Fernandez of Canada is interviewed after defeating Angelique Kerber of Germany during her women's singles round of 16 match on Day Seven of the US Open on Sunday. —AFP

heritage, is also guided by pro coach Romain Deridder. Her father is at home but still sending in plans for matches.

"My dad, he would tell me what to do, like for tennis-wise, just give me a game plan, and I try to execute it as much as possible," she said. "He's at home with my younger sister. He has been calling every day, telling me what to do, so it has been great. He's just telling me what to do in the day before and then he trusts in me and my game that

I'm going to execute it as much as I can. He decided to stay back, but he has his reasons, and obviously his reasons are working tremendously right now."

Fernandez has a confidence built upon years of work, running sprints when she made too many errant shots to hone her skills and toughen her for the challenges she now faces. "From a very young age, I knew I was able to beat anyone who is in front of me," she said. "Even playing different sports, I was always that competitive, saying I'm going to win against them, I'm going to win against my dad in soccer, even though that's like impossible. I've always had that belief. I've always tried to use that in every match that I go on."

'Pinch myself a little'

Fernandez has her mother and fitness coach in her box cheering her on, as well as having become a fan darling with crowds at Arthur Ashe Stadium. "Having them cheering me on every point has been very helpful. In those tough moments when I'm feeling down, with their positivity I was able to get back into it and forget about the mistake that I just did," she said. "Keep fighting, keep pushing through. Just, like I said, have fun on the court and trusting my game. Having fun on the court, I think that's the key to anybody's success."

The upsets she has pulled off have added to the joy she feels at living the tennis dream that once seemed dead. "I did have to pinch myself a little bit to see that it actually happened," Fernandez said of her two upset wins. "I'm just going to enjoy it at 100 percent, and tomorrow is going to be a new day." —AFP

Sports

Ex-West Ham striker Haller stars as Ivory Coast trump Cameroon

South Africa edge Ghana, Mali force draw with Uganda

JOHANNESBURG: Former West Ham attacker Sebastien Haller scored twice in nine minutes to give the Ivory Coast a 2-1 World Cup qualifying win over fellow African top-10 nation Cameroon in Abidjan on Monday. Haller, who moved to Ajax Amsterdam last January after scoring 14 goals in 54 outings for the Hammers, converted a penalty on 20 minutes and later outpaced a defender and fired into the far corner of the net.

Moumi Ngamaleu pulled one goal back from another penalty, on 61 minutes, to set up a tense finish to the Group D showdown. Ivory Coast top the table with four points after two rounds. Cameroon have three, and Mozambique one and Malawi none. Group D is the only section of 10 in Africa featuring two

countries among the 10 highest ranked in the continent — the Ivory Coast were 12th when the draw was made two years ago.

Meanwhile, South Africa edged Ghana 1-0 in Johannesburg through a 83rd-minute Bongokuhle Hlongwane goal and replaced them as Group G leaders. Fielding a young, inexperienced side under recently hired Belgian coach Hugo Broos, the South Africans should have broken the deadlock earlier.

Percy Tau, who has quit English Premier League club Brighton to join Egyptian and African giants Al Ahly, had a first-half headed goal wrongly disallowed for offside. Evidence Makgopa, one of many new faces after Broos complained about inheriting an "old" squad, missed a sitter just after half-time, poking the ball wide

of an unguarded goal.

But with time running out and weakened Ghana looking like taking a point home, Hlongwane connected with a low cross and the ball rolled into the net via the far post. Ghana lacked Premier League trio Daniel Amartey, Jordan Ayew and Jeffrey Schlupp as South Africa is on the British coronavirus "red list", which requires travelers to isolate for 10 days when they return.

Goal-shy Uganda

South Africa have four points and Ghana three from two matches, and Zimbabwe one and Ethiopia none. Mali, who are seeking a first World Cup appearance, took a firm grip on Group E by forcing a 0-0 draw away to 10-man Uganda. Defender Murushid Juuko was shown a straight red card on 65 minutes and Uganda had to settle for another goalless stalemate, after holding Kenya last week.

Benin failed to build on a matchday 1 win in Madagascar and had to come from behind to draw 1-1 with Group J rivals the Democratic Republic of Congo in Cotonou. Both goals were headed by senior players during the opening half with Dieumerci Mbokani, 35, putting the Congolese in front and Jordan Adeoti, 32, levelling. Benin have four points and DR Congo two.

Niger equaled their record for the number of goal scored in a World Cup qualifier by coming from behind to trounce Djibouti 4-2 in Group A with Victorien Adebayor bagging a brace. Djibouti are ranked 182nd in the world, making them the lowest of the 40 African World Cup hopefuls, and have conceded 12 goals in two outings.

The section is set to be dominated by African champions Algeria and Burkina Faso, both matchday 1 winners who clashed yesterday in Morocco because the Burkinabe lack an international-standard stadium. Djibouti, who have also created a base in Morocco, and Burkina Faso are among nine countries forced to use neutral venues either because the stadium facilities or the pitch are not up to scratch. The Central African Republic and Liberia are other nations forced to play home matches abroad and they met in the Cameroonian port city of Douala, where Liberian Kpah Sherman scored the only goal. — AFP



ANYAMA: Ivory Coast's and Cameroon's players fight for the ball during the FIFA Qatar 2022 World Cup qualification football match between Ivory Coast and Cameroon at the Alassane Ouattara Ebimpe stadium Anyama on Monday. — AFP

Southgate fears two-year World Cup risks tradition

LONDON: England boss Gareth Southgate voiced fears yesterday that the World Cup could lose some of its luster if it were held every two years, warning other competitions would have to be sacrificed to make it happen.

Former Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger, who is now director of development at world governing body FIFA, has called for football's showpiece competition to become a biennial event. Southgate revealed after England's 4-0 World Cup qualifying win over Andorra on Sunday that he had spoken to the Frenchman about the proposals.

The England manager is keen for an overhaul of the football calendar, with players under increasing strain from the demands of the club and international game. But Southgate is wary of tinkering with the format of a competition that has been played every four years, apart from cancellations as a result of World War II, since the inaugural edition in 1930.

"I can see the game always needs to evolve and be forward-thinking, but also there are some traditions that are very special and worth protecting," Southgate said ahead of today's World Cup qualifier in Poland. "It's a welcome decision to discuss the overall calendar and that includes the demands on the players. We don't need to put more into the calendar. If something is going in, something else has to come out so that requires all the governing bodies to come together and make sure that calendar gets sorted out."

UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin warned on Monday that holding the World Cup every two years would "dilute" the tournament. "We think that the jewel of the World Cup has value precisely because of its rarity," Ceferin said at a general assembly of the European Club Association.

"But holding it every two years will, by our opinion, lead to more randomization, less legitimacy, and it will unfortunately dilute the World Cup itself." The interna-

tional match calendar does not need that. Our players don't need to see more of their summers spent on consuming tournaments rather than devoted to relaxing and recuperation."

Wenger's plan to compensate for the increased tournament load on players would include fewer qualifiers, collated into one international window during the season, and compulsory rest periods after the final stages of major tournaments. — AFP



LONDON: England's manager Gareth Southgate attends a training session at Hotspur Way, the Tottenham Hotspur training ground, in Enfield, north of London yesterday ahead of their FIFA World Cup 2022 qualifying matches against Poland. — AFP



SAO PAULO: In this handout file photo released by WEF and taken on March 14, 2018, Brazilian football legend Pele smiles during the opening plenary at the World Economic Forum on Latin America 2018 in Sao Paulo, Brazil. — AFP

Brazil legend Pele recovering after tumor operation

SAO PAULO: Brazilian football great Pele has undergone surgery for a suspected colon tumor and is recovering, the hospital in Sao Paulo treating him announced on Monday. "The tumor was identified during routine cardiovascular and laboratory examinations and the material was sent for pathological analysis," said the Albert Einstein Hospital, where Pele has been treated since August 31.

"I thank God for feeling very well," the 80-year-old wrote on his Instagram page on Monday. "Fortunately, I'm used to celebrating great victories alongside you. I will face this match with a smile on my face, a lot of optimism and joy for living surrounded by the love of my family and friends."

Pele was due out of intensive care yesterday, the hospital said in a statement. His former club Santos shared a message of support for the star on Twitter. "It will be one more victory in your life, we wish you a good recovery!" the club said.

Pele, whose real name is Edson Arantes do Nascimento, has been in poor health in recent years, and has had various spells in hospital, most recently in April 2019, in Paris, because of a severe urinary tract infection. Back in Brazil, he had a kidney stone removed.

At the end of 2014, he suffered from a serious urinary tract infection and was placed in intensive care and on dialysis. He also has hip problems and needed a walker to move around during his latest public appearances. In February 2020, Pele reassured his fans about his mental health, after remarks by his son Edinho saying that he was "reclusive" and suffering "from a certain form of depression."

Three World Cups

The only player in history to win three World Cups (1958, 1962 and 1970), Pele is considered by many to be the greatest footballer of all time. He burst onto the global stage at just 17 with dazzling goals, including two in the final against hosts Sweden, as Brazil won the World Cup for the first time in 1958.

Four years later, Pele gave a tantalizing glimpse of his ability with an electric individual goal against Mexico in Brazil's opening 2-0 win. But he aggravated an existing injury in the second game, against the Czechs, and was forced to sit out the remainder of the tournament as his countrymen successfully defended their title. Nicknamed "O Rei" (The King), Pele scored the opener in Brazil's 4-1 final win over Italy in Mexico in 1970. After retiring from international football, Pele went on to play for the New York Cosmos, before ending his career with over 1,000 goals to his name. — 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
		Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
		Mirqab	22456536
		Sharq	22465401

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144

CHANGE OF NAME

I, BHAVIN KUMAR CHANDRABHUSHAN, holder of Passport Number P5628353, do declare adding surname MASIH along with given name BHAVIN CHANDRABHUSHAN. Full name to be BHAVIN CHANDRABHUSHAN MASIH. (C 0644) 8-9-2021

I, GAFFAR SYED HUSSAIN SHANAWAS, Tindivanam V.R.P. Dist, Tamil Nadu, hereby declare that I have changed my name as SYED SHANAWAS S/o SYED HUSSAIN, Tindivanam V.R.P. Dist, Tamil Nadu. (C 0642)

I, SHABBIR TAHER BHAI SAMPLEWALA hereby declare that I have changed my name as SHABBIR TAHER BHAI RATLAMWALA. So, from now and in future I will be known by my new name. Shabir Taheer Bhai Ratlamwala, Add: 501, Noorani Nagar, Dhar Road, Indore (M.P.). (C 0643) 6-9-2021

EMERGENCY 112

LOST

My B.SC Engineering Degree semester mark lists in Mechanical Engineering Branch from University of Calicut were lost in Kuwait during travel. The details of semester register numbers with year are given as follow:

I Semester	198	April, 1978
II Semester	199	October, 1978
III Semester	198	April, 1979
III Semester	163	March, 1980
III Semester	121	October, 1980
IV Semester	237	February, 1980
IV Semester	263	November, 1980
V Semester	246	October, 1980
V Semester	133	April, 1981
VI Semester	167	May, 1981
VII Semester	214	December, 1981
VII Semester	102	July, 1982

If found, kindly return to me at the following address. If the same is not found in one week time from the date of this advertisement, I will be applying for the duplicate semester mark lists.

Siby Joseph Aricatt
Flat No.14, 4th Floor, Building No.127, Street 27, Block 3, Mangaf.
Mob: 66834687



NEW YORK: Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates his win over USA's Jenson Brooksby during their 2021 US Open Tennis tournament men's singles fourth round match at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in New York, on Monday. — AFP

Djokovic tested but wins at US Open to advance Slam quest

NEW YORK: Novak Djokovic struggled but advanced within three matches of completing the first men's singles calendar-year Grand Slam in 52 years on Monday by outlasting American Jenson Brooksby at the US Open. World number one Djokovic rallied past 99th-ranked Brooksby 1-6, 6-3, 6-2, 6-2 to book a quarter-final encounter with Italian sixth seed Matteo Berrettini in a rematch of July's Wimbledon final.

"It's going to be exciting," Djokovic said. "He loves the big stage. Big serve, big game overall. I know what to expect. Going to try to prepare a good game plan and hope for the best." The 34-year-old Serbian star would become the first man since Rod Laver in 1969 to sweep all four major titles in the same year by capturing his fourth career US Open crown.

Djokovic also seeks a men's singles record 21st Slam trophy, which would boost him one ahead of "Big Three" rivals Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal, both absent with injuries. An epic shocker seemed possible when Brooksby, a 20-year-old American wildcard who hadn't played Djokovic before, broke in the second and sixth games and fired a service winner to claim the first set in 29 minutes.

"He just played a perfect first set," Djokovic

said. "I could do nothing. I was still finding my footing on the court. I must say it wasn't a great start. Jenson was pumped. He had a clear game plan. He was executing his shots tremendously. I was on my back foot. He was reading the play well for a set and a half."

Djokovic broke in the second game of the second set, but was broken in a electrifying 20-minute fifth game, netting a backhand on Brooksby's sixth break chance. "Definitely I had confidence I could beat him," Brooksby said.

But Djokovic broke back in the sixth game, ripping a cross-court forehand winner for a 4-2 lead, and held from there to take the 68-minute set. "After that, I started hitting more cleanly and through the court," said Djokovic. "Whenever I needed a serve I found my spot well. It was physical, a lot of exhausting rallies."

In all, Djokovic won 15 of the last 20 games, rolling to victory in the stamina test after two hours and 59 minutes. Berrettini advanced by

defeating 144th-ranked German qualifier Oscar Otte 6-4, 3-6, 6-3, 6-2.

Olympic champs advance

Tokyo Olympic champions Alexander Zverev and Belinda Bencic advanced with straight-set triumphs, as did British 18-year-old qualifier Emma Raducanu. German fourth seed Zverev stretched his win streak to 15 matches by beating Italian 13th seed Jannik Sinner 6-4, 6-4, 7-6 (9/7).

Swiss 11th seed Bencic eliminated Polish seventh seed Iga Swiatek, last year's French Open champion, 7-6 (14/12), 6-3. And 150th-ranked Raducanu ripped 43rd-ranked American Shelby Rogers 6-2, 6-1 in 66 minutes.

Raducanu is only the third qualifier to reach the US Open women's quarter-finals after Estonia's Kaia Kanepi in 2017 and American Barbara Gerken in 1981.

Zverev, last year's US Open runner-up, reached his seventh career Slam quarter-final and fourth in

the past five Slams. He saved two set points on his serve in the 12th game of the third set and three more in the tie-breaker before Sinner netted a forehand to end matters after two hours and 25 minutes.

"That's the last few months for me," Zverev said. "Players with confidence know what to do in these situations. I'm happy to get through in straight sets." He will next face 46th-ranked Lloyd Harris of South Africa, who eliminated US 22nd seed Reilly Opelka 6-7 (6/8), 6-4, 6-1, 6-3.

Swiatek beat Bencic in their only prior meeting in February's Adelaide final, but the Swiss hasn't dropped a set. "I've improved my game a lot," Bencic said. "I'm glad to turn it around and get through." Bencic next plays Raducanu, a US Open debutant who hasn't dropped a set in four matches. "Belinda is a great player who is in great form," Raducanu said. "I'm going to just have to bring it."

Czech fourth seed Karolina Pliskova, this year's Wimbledon runner-up, beat Russian 14th seed Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova 7-5, 6-4. She next faces Greek 17th seed Maria Sakkari, who ousted 2019 US Open winner Bianca Andreescu 6-7 (2/7), 7-6 (8/6), 6-3. The Canadian sixth seed was limping with a left thigh injury in the final games before suffering her first US Open loss after three hours and 30 minutes. — AFP



Zverev, Bencic advance with straight sets

Russell confirmed as Hamilton's new teammate at Mercedes

LONDON: George Russell was confirmed as Lewis Hamilton's new teammate at Formula One team Mercedes for next season yesterday after Valtteri Bottas sealed a switch to Alfa Romeo. The 23-year-old British driver earned his much-anticipated move to the Silver Arrows, with whom he has signed a long-term deal, after catching the eye during three years with Williams.

He also impressed in a one-off appearance for Mercedes at last year's Sakhir Grand Prix as a stand-in for seven-time world champion Hamilton, who had tested positive for coronavirus. Russell, who will form an all-British line-up with Hamilton, said it was a "special day".

"I'd be lying if I said I wasn't absolutely buzzing," he said in a Mercedes statement. "It's a huge opportunity and one I want to grab with both hands. But I'm under no illusions as to the scale of the challenge. It's going to be a steep learning curve."

He added: "I've looked up to Lewis since I was in go-karts and the opportunity to learn from someone who has become a role model both on and off track can only benefit me as a driver, a professional, and a human being."

Hamilton, who is currently second in this year's driver standings, three points behind Red Bull's Max Verstappen, welcomed his future teammate. "Through hard work he has rightly earned his spot," tweeted the 37-year-old reigning world

champion, who on Monday paid a warm tribute to the departing Bottas. "I look forward to seeing him grow as a driver with this great team and working with him to raise @MercedesAMGF1 higher. See you next year."

Mercedes boss Toto Wolff said it had not been a straightforward decision, praising Bottas for his contribution to the team's success over the past five seasons. "Looking forward to 2022, we are very happy to confirm that George will have the opportunity to take the next step in his career and join Mercedes," he added.

"He has been a winner in every racing category — and the past three seasons with Williams have given us a taste of what the future could hold for him in F1. Now, it is our challenge together to help him continue learning within our environment and alongside Lewis, the greatest F1 driver of all time."

Bottas, 32, has spent the past five seasons alongside Hamilton at Mercedes, having replaced Nico Rosberg, who retired after winning the 2016 title. The Finn has won nine races and claimed 17 pole positions with the team but has not consistently been able to challenge Hamilton. Alfa Romeo announced on Monday that Bottas had signed a multi-year deal to join the team from 2022.

Alpha Tauri retains drivers

Elsewhere, Alpha Tauri announced yesterday that Japanese youngster Yuki Tsunoda and Frenchman Pierre Gasly will stay with the team for the 2022 Formula One season. The 21-year-old Tsunoda has impressed in his rookie season, winning 18 points with a best finish of sixth at the Hungarian Grand Prix. Gasly has been with Alpha Tauri since joining in 2017, except for a short stint with sister team Red Bull in 2019.

"I have a very good relationship with Pierre. I

have learnt a lot from him already this year and his experience has helped me to keep developing my own skills, so it's great to be continuing my F1 journey with him," said Tsunoda. Next season will see the introduction of new regulations in F1 which are expected to give the smaller teams a chance of closing the gap to the recent front-runners.

"Consistency and stability are crucial heading into the new era of F1, with the introduction of the 2022 regulations," said Alpha Tauri in a statement. "The team believes that the current duo will be

able to deliver good results."

Gasly, who was dropped by Red Bull midway through the 2019 campaign, has been in excellent form since, notching three podium finishes including his maiden victory at last year's Italian Grand Prix. "I'm very excited to see what we can accomplish in the new era of F1 and to keep working with the team as best as I can to bring us forward in the team standings," said the 25-year-old. Gasly sits eighth in the 2021 drivers' standings with 66 points. — AFP



MOGYOROD: In this file photo taken on August 1, 2021, Williams' British driver George Russell looks on during a 'We Race As One' ceremony ahead of the Formula One Hungarian Grand Prix at the Hungaroring race track in Mogyorod near Budapest. — AFP