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V O L V O

US reaffirms support for Kuwait's security, stability

Qatar says Taliban show 'pragmatism' • Washington seeks common ground



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin at Bayan Palace yesterday. — AFP

KUWAIT: Visiting US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin reaffirmed yesterday the United States' supportive position for the security and stability of Kuwait. During a meeting with HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Austin conveyed appreciation by US President Joe Biden, expressing his country's gratitude for Kuwait's cooperation in Washington's evacuation process in Afghanistan while facilitating the transit of evacuees through its airport, KUNA said.

Austin stressed the US' firm and supportive position for the security and stability of Kuwait, KUNA added. HH the Amir conveyed his appreciation to US President Biden, wishing him everlasting health and wellbeing and for his country further development and progress. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed ways to strengthen bilateral relations and enhance cooperation in various fields. The two sides also addressed top issues of common interest and the latest developments in the region.

On Aug 24, Alina L. Romanowski, the US ambassador to Kuwait, said the first flight of Afghans evacuated from Afghanistan on their way to the United States arrived in Kuwait for transit. "These Afghans at risk have been safely evacuated to a coalition military facility in Kuwait," the ambassador had said on Twitter.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken warned yesterday that the Taliban would have to earn legit-

imacy from the world, after talks with allies on how to present a united front to the hardline new government in Afghanistan. "The Taliban seek international legitimacy. Any legitimacy - any support - will have to be earned," Blinken told reporters at the US air base in Ramstein, Germany, after leading a 20-nation ministerial meeting on the Afghan crisis.

Standing alongside him, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said the international community expected the Taliban to uphold human rights, including those of women, grant access to humanitarian aid and allow those wishing to leave the country to do so. Maas said he believed yesterday's talks were "the starting point for international coordination" on how to deal with the Taliban. Among the countries that participated in the virtual meeting were European allies and historic Taliban backer Pakistan.

Blinken and Maas both criticized the caretaker government announced in Afghanistan on Tuesday, which has no women or non-Taliban members and includes an interior minister the United States wants to arrest on terrorism accusations. Blinken said the caretaker cabinet would be judged "by its actions", while his German counterpart added he was "not optimistic". US officials have stressed that any official recognition of a Taliban government is far off.

Blinken's stop in Ramstein was his second base visit in as many days, after he visited Qatar on Tuesday.

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News in brief

Saudi security chief sacked

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's King Salman has dismissed the director of public security, Khalid bin Qarar Al-Harbi, ordering his investigation on corruption charges. Harbi - along with 18 others in both the private and public sectors - has been accused of embezzling public money, forgery, bribery and abuse of influence. The kingdom announced Tuesday night it has uncovered more than dozen cases of corruption in recent months for sums worth 290 million riyals. — AFP

78 killed in Yemen clashes

DUBAI: Nearly 80 Yemen rebels and pro-government troops have been killed as fighting intensifies for the northern city of Marib, officials said yesterday. Scores of rebels were killed in airstrikes after they renewed their attempt to capture the strategic city, the internationally recognized government's last outpost in the north, according to loyalists. — AFP (See Page 5)

Saudi lifts ban on UAE travel

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia said yesterday it was lifting a ban on travel to three countries after imposing the restrictions to stop the spread of COVID-19. The kingdom will reopen its land, sea and air ports to the UAE, South Africa and Argentina. Riyadh's decision to lift the ban came hours after a phone call between Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed. — AFP

Newborns switched in 'error'

MADRID: A 19-year-old woman is seeking millions of euros in damages after it emerged that she was accidentally swapped with another newborn at a Spanish hospital nearly two decades ago. The babies were mixed up in 2002 after they were born five hours apart and placed in incubators at the San Millan de Logrono in northern Spain, due to a "one-off human error", regional health authorities said. — AFP

Five MPs call to liquidate Touristic Enterprises Co

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Five lawmakers yesterday submitted a draft law calling on the government to liquidate the troubled state-owned Touristic Enterprises Co (TEC) and replace it with various entertainment projects. MPs Hasan Jowhar, Muhallal Al-Mudhaf, Abdullah Al-Mudhaf, Hamad Rouh El-Din and

Muhammad Al-Sayer said in the bill that TEC has reached a stage where it cannot perform the tasks it had been established for several decades ago.

They said TEC has been unable to cope with the changes in the entertainment industry. They added Kuwait currently has a dearth of essential entertainment projects although almost half of its native population is under 20 years of age, who need entertainment the most.

The bill calls on the Kuwait Investment Authority, which owns TEC on behalf of the state, to dissolve the company within six months because it can no longer achieve its purposes. It also calls for offering existing touristic facilities for investment under the private-public partnership (PPP) system, where private investors can manage the entertainment facili-

ties and develop them.

Meanwhile, the civil aviation authority yesterday called on all arriving passengers to install the Shlonik application, which is used to monitor those who are under quarantine. The authority reminded arrivals to carry a vaccination certificate of vaccines approved in Kuwait - Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson.

The certificate should have a QR code that can be read electronically. In case there is no QR Code, the certificate must be uploaded to the ministry of health website for verification. Kuwaiti authorities have also allowed expats who have been vaccinated with Chinese and Russian vaccines to enter the country, provided they get a third dose of one of the four approved vaccines.

Egypt, Jordan, Syria agree energy plan for Lebanon

AMMAN: Energy ministers from Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon yesterday agreed a plan to bring gas and electricity to crisis-hit Lebanon at a meeting in Amman. Egypt's Minister of Oil and Mines Tarek Al-Molla said that his country would "be ready to transfer gas (to Lebanon) as soon as possible" via the transnational Arab Gas Pipeline.

But damage to the pipeline and

electricity lines during the decade of civil war in Syria means that energy supplies cannot start flowing before repairs are carried out. In the push to help revive the stricken Lebanese economy, the US has given rare approval for the Arab neighbors to escape punishment under sanctions targeting the Syrian regime.

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AMMAN: (From left) Egypt's Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources Tarek Al-Molla, Jordan's Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Hala Zawati, Lebanon's Energy Minister Raymond Ghajar and Syria's Minister of Oil and Mineral Resources Bassam Tohme hold a joint press conference yesterday. — AFP

2 workers killed, one rescued after collapse at airport site



KUWAIT: Rescuers work to extract three workers buried in sand at the Kuwait airport construction site yesterday. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Two workers were killed while firefighters and rescue teams managed to rescue a third at Kuwait International Airport's Terminal 2 construction site after they were engulfed by sand for about four hours, according to the Kuwait Fire Force. Minister of Public Works Rana Al-Fares said a committee will conduct an "immediate and impartial investigation" after the three construction workers were buried under sand after a collapse.

The committee, which includes representatives from Kuwait University and the Kuwait Municipality, will look into the reasons behind the incident and the extent of adherence to safety standards, the minister said in a statement. Fares, also State Minister for Communications and IT, said all the parties involved have not been allowed to leave the premises until the probe is complete, underlining that those found culpable would face legal measures. — KUNA

Local

Kuwait's Amir receives Prime Minister



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah at Bayan Palace yesterday. Meanwhile, His Highness the Prime Minister met at Bayan Palace yesterday with the new Qatari Ambassador to Kuwait Ali bin Abdullah Al Mahmoud. — KUNA photos

Prime Minister receives US Defense Secretary

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Prime Minister His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, in the presence of Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah, received yesterday at Bayan Palace the visiting US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and his accompanying delegation. The meeting was attended by head of the Diwan of His Highness the Prime Minister Abdulaziz Dekheel Al-Dekheel, Kuwait Army Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Sheikh Khaled Saleh Al-Sabah and Deputy Assistant for Foreign Minister for American Affairs Salah Suleiman Al-Haddad. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Prime Minister His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin. — KUNA

Google sees future of work as 'hybrid'

SAN FRANCISCO: Google yesterday ramped up cloud collaboration tools for businesses, expecting "hybrid" work routines to remain even after the pandemic has ended. The Internet titan competes with Microsoft, Zoom, Facebook and others with online services that employees can use to collaborate remotely. Tech giants turned to their own tools after abandoning campuses early in the pandemic, which fueled a fierce remote work trend.

"We've seen a radical transformation, and a lot of that transformation is here to stay," Google product management director Dave Citron said during a briefing on new Workspace offerings. "But I think it is too early to say that the 40-hour work week in a cubicle is permanently dead across all industries and regions." Major tech companies themselves have postponed workers returning to offices and expect the new norm to become "hybrid" routines

that mix being on-site with working remotely.

Google said it has created a hybrid work handbook for how to take advantage of tools, as well as software for employees to conduct efficient meetings no matter where they are working from. "We're really excited to bring this to our customers to give them some best practices as they're working to redesign their offices," Citron said. Google also announced enhancements to its Workspace portfolio that integrate the tech giant's apps for meetings, email, calendars, documents, chat and more.

"As some people return to the office, teams need that ability to flexibly collaborate from anywhere, anytime," said Workspace senior director of product management Sanaz Ahari. "The innovations we're bringing to customers today help bridge the gaps of virtual and in-person collaboration."

Workspace added a dedicated online venue for working on projects, and unveiled interactive Series One displays designed specifically for conferencing. An all-in-one desktop model of Series One was priced at \$2,000, while a larger model designed for conference rooms was priced at \$7,000. "Based on the price points, we think the vast amount of the customers will be companies buying it for their employees," Citron said. — AFP

US reaffirms support for...

Continued from Page 1

Thanks were offered to US civilian and military officials behind one of history's largest airlifts after Afghanistan fell to the Taliban. Blinken also toured a makeshift home for some of the children who have lost their parents. Blinken vowed to press the Taliban to allow charter flights out of Afghanistan after criticism the US administration was not doing enough to help those still stranded. "We are working to do everything in our power to support those flights and to get them off the ground," Blinken said.

The new Taliban interim government drawn exclusively from loyalist ranks formally began work yesterday, with established hardliners in all key posts and no women - despite previous promises to form an inclusive administration for all Afghans.

As they transition from militant force to governing power, the Taliban are already facing opposition to their rule, with scattered protests - many with women at the forefront - breaking out in cities across the country. A small rally in the capital Kabul yesterday was quickly dispersed by armed Taliban security, while Afghan media reported a protest in the northeastern city of Faizabad was also broken up.

As Afghans anxiously wait to see what kind of Taliban rule awaits the country, spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid announced the reinstatement of the feared Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. The ministry had under the Taliban's former rule been responsible for arresting and punishing people for failing to implement the movement's restrictive interpretation of sharia law.

Beijing said yesterday it welcomed the end of "three weeks of anarchy", adding it "attaches great importance" to the announcement of an interim government. Foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said China hoped the Taliban would "pursue moderate and steady domestic and

foreign policies, resolutely crack down on all kinds of terrorist forces, and get along well with all countries, especially neighboring countries".

Qatar, the central intermediary between the Taliban and the international community in recent years, also said the Taliban should be judged on their actions and said they had demonstrated "pragmatism" of late. "Let's seize the opportunities there," Assistant Foreign Minister Lolwah Al-Khater told AFP in an exclusive interview, but she stopped short of announcing formal recognition of the government. "They are the de facto rulers, no question about that."

Khater, Qatar's spokeswoman on the world stage as well as face of the nation's coronavirus response, noted "some good gestures" from the new Taliban rulers of Afghanistan. Qatari recognition of the Taliban would not come immediately, Khater said. "We don't rush to a recognition. But we don't completely disengage with the Taliban... we take the middle way."

Khater said that since returning to power, the Taliban had largely left Afghan health authorities, including female medics, free to continue their coronavirus response. "Afghanistan is a sovereign country... the people of Afghanistan should have their own say," said Khater. "When we talk about Afghanistan being responsive to the international community, it does not mean that the international community can or should control the fate of the people of Afghanistan."

Qatar, a US ally that has emerged as a key player both in evacuations and diplomacy on Afghanistan, is host to the largest US airbase in the region. Asked if Qatar's actions had contributed to the Taliban's re-emergence, Khater said: "Don't kill the messenger". "Qatar has been the messenger... we have been facilitating," she added.

Former president Ashraf Ghani, meanwhile, who fled the country on Aug 15 as the Taliban entered Kabul, apologized yesterday to the Afghan people for how his rule ended. In a statement on Twitter, Ghani said he left at the urging of the palace security in order to avoid the risk of bloody street fighting, and again denied stealing millions from the treasury. "I apologize to the Afghan people that I could not make it end differently," he said. — Agencies

Paris attacker in court as historic Bataclan trial begins

PARIS: The last surviving assailant of the Nov 2015 attacks on Paris appeared in court yesterday at the start of a historic trial over the night of horror that sent shockwaves through France. The suicide bombing and gun assaults by three teams of jihadists on bars, restaurants, the Bataclan concert hall and the national stadium - planned in Syria and later claimed by the Islamic State group - left 130 people dead and around 350 physically injured.

The biggest trial in France's modern history is expected to last nine months. Only one of the 10 attackers survived. Salah Abdeslam, a dual French-Moroccan national, was captured in Brussels after discarding his suicide vest and fleeing the French capital in the chaotic aftermath of the bloodshed. After remaining silent for years during questioning by investigators, the 31-year-old gave evasive or provocative answers to basic questions at the start of the hearing, stating his Islamic faith when asked to identify himself.

Wearing a black T-shirt and sporting a long, black beard and swept-back hair, he then replied that he was a "fighter for the Islamic State" when asked for his profession. During a pause in the proceedings after a co-defendant fell ill, the one-time petty criminal shouted angrily that the accused had been "treated like dogs", but was cut short by the presiding judge.

A total of 14 defendants are being tried in person and six others will be judged in their absence, with most of them facing life sentences. The trial will last until May 2022 with 145 days of scheduled hearings involving about 330 lawyers, 300 victims and testimony in November from Francois Hollande, who was French president at the time of the attacks.

The start of proceedings has been long-awaited by some witnesses and victims' families who are hoping for clarity and closure, while for others it represents an unwelcome reopening of painful wounds. The attack on the Bataclan, where 90 people mostly in their 20s and 30s were massacred as they watched a rock concert, represented the most traumatic of a string of separate attacks claimed by Islamic State over the course of several years.

"I have to be here for his memory," Cristina Garrido, whose 29-year-old son Juan Alberto died in the Bataclan, told AFP yesterday. She said she hoped Abdeslam would be given a full life prison term, but "I know, too, that the sentence the court hands down will not reduce my pain. I will suffer and I'll miss Juan Alberto to the end of my days." Arthur Denouveaux, a survivor of the Bataclan attack and president of Life for Paris, a victims' association, said that the trial meant "we are entering the unknown". "We're eager for it to start, but



PARIS: This court sketch made yesterday shows Salah Abdeslam, the last surviving member of the jihadist cell of the Nov 2015 Paris attacks, during the first day of trial. — AFP

we're wondering how it's going to go over the next nine months," he told AFP.

The files for the trial run to one million pages bound in 542 volumes, detailing an investigation that revealed links between jihadist cells in Paris and Brussels, and their handlers in Syria. Details of how the squad of killers managed to enter Europe undetected, using the flow of migrants from Islamic State-controlled regions of Syria as cover, is likely to be one of the areas of interest during proceedings.

Some victims' families are also wondering if there were any missed opportunities by security forces to prevent the bloodshed. As well as Abdeslam, the other 13 accused were present in court on charges ranging from providing logistical support to planning the attacks, as well as supplying weapons. They include Osama Krayem, a Swede whom Belgian investigators identified as one of the killers of a Jordanian pilot burnt alive in a cage by IS in early 2015 in Syria. He is also under investigation in Sweden for war crimes.

Of the six tried in absentia, five are presumed dead, mainly in air strikes in Syria. The horror was unleashed late on Friday, Nov 13, 2015, when the first attackers detonated suicide belts outside the Stade de France stadium where Hollande was watching France play a football match against Germany. A group of gunmen later opened fire from a car on half a dozen restaurants and Abdeslam's brother Brahim blew himself up in a bar. The massacre culminated at the Bataclan. — AFP

Egypt, Jordan, Syria agree...

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Fuel and power shortages are one of the most acute symptoms of Lebanon's economic collapse, paralyzing the economy and vital services like hospitals. The World Bank has labelled Lebanon's situation the worst economic crash since the mid-19th century. Yesterday, Lebanese Energy

Minister Raymond Ghajar said the country needed "600 million cubic meters of gas to provide 450 megawatts of electricity".

The gas pipeline linking Jordan and Syria was hit in Aug 2020 in a blast dubbed a "terrorist act" by Damascus. Meanwhile "it will take several months to repair the damaged electric lines in Syria," Jordan's Energy Minister Hala Zawati said. Zawati added that the infrastructure is "almost ready, but there are still repairs" to do. Lebanon is also "working with the World Bank to ensure the financial resources needed to pay for energy imports from Egypt," Ghajar said. — AFP

Local

President Sisi praises Kuwait's role in resolving challenges facing Arab world

Kuwait, Egypt discuss ties, issues ahead of Arab League meeting



CAIRO: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi reads a letter from His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, delivered by Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah.



Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry. —KUNA photos

CAIRO: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi praised yesterday the "important role" played by the State of Kuwait and its leadership in dealing with issues facing the Arab world. "The security of the Gulf region is connected with the Egyptian national security," Sisi stressed. This came during a meeting held between President Sisi and Kuwait's Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, where he delivered a written message from His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the spokesman of the Egyptian Presidency Ambassador Bassam Radhi said in a statement.

In the letter, His Highness the Amir "expressed the Kuwaiti government and people's pride of the strong historical ties, relations uniting both countries and its people in various fields," the spokesman said in its statement. The letter also conveyed Kuwait's appreciation for the strategic Egyptian role in protecting Arab national security and defending the issues of the Arab nations,

as well as Egypt's tireless efforts to consolidate security, stability and development at the regional and international levels.

In a reply to the message, President Sisi extended his greeting to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, stressing on the "special status" of the rooted and fruitful bilateral relations, as well as coordination between the two countries toward issues of mutual concerns at international and regional forums. President Sisi stressed also the keenness of his country to develop the standing bilateral cooperation to achieve the interest of the people of both countries, and other Arab nations. In the presence of Egypt's Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry and Kuwait's Ambassador to Egypt Mohammad Al-

Thuwaikh, the meeting witnessed discussions on various aspects of bilateral relations in light of the upcoming meeting of the joint committee between the two countries. They also discussed latest developments on the Arabic and regional scenes, especially the situation in Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's Foreign Minister discussed with his Egyptian counterpart yesterday the deep ties between the two countries. The latest regional and international developments were discussed during the meeting. Sheikh Dr Ahmad also met yesterday with Arab League Secretary General Ahmad Abul-Gheit, discussing with him issues of mutual Arab interest. The two meetings came a day prior to the 156th minis-



Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets Arab League Secretary General Ahmad Abul-Gheit.

terial meeting for the Arab League, which will be chaired by Kuwait today. The meeting will focus on Arab cooperation and recent happenings in the region. —KUNA

Speaker suggests committee for social media misuse

VIENNA: Speaker of Kuwait's National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem submitted a proposal on forming a parliamentary committee to discuss the possibility of avoiding the misuse of social media networks, with maintaining the values of freedom and democracy. This came in Ghanem's speech before the fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament in Vienna on Tuesday. The committee is expected to include representatives from all geopolitical groups to discuss all ideas relating to this topic, with the aim of making balance between the values of freedom and democracy on the one hand and ensuring not to use social media in a "bad and destructive way" on the other.

Ghanem stressed that there is no ready-made formula on organizing regulations regarding filtering "dangerous" content on social media, calling for holding discussions amongst all parties - countries, governments, parliaments and others involved in establishing these networks. Social media networks are positive and encouraging in general, and contributed to boosting freedom and democracy, he added. "As parliamentarians, we have benefited from social media in communicating with people. Building awareness is important but it is a long-term process," he said.



VIENNA: Speaker of Kuwait's National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem attends the fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament in Vienna on Tuesday. —KUNA

He called for avoiding hatred, racism, abolitionist and exclusionary speech under the pretext of freedom, saying this may contribute to destroying "our societies and dragging them into the unknown." When talking about social media, we do not necessarily talk about known people, but in most cases, we deal with unidentified entities, intelligence services, gangs, terrorists and others, he said. The Kuwaiti top lawmaker called for further discussions and sharing expertise in this file at varied levels. —KUNA

stc greets returning passengers with special gift

KUWAIT: In an additional step to welcome back travelers to the country, Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced that it greeted arriving passengers at gates T1 and T4 in Kuwait International Airport by distributing special gifts as they welcomed them back to Kuwait.

The initiative falls under stc's commitment to support the government's battle against the pandemic as restrictions ease with the increased number of administered vaccines, as well as the company's extensive corporate social responsibility framework. The company continues to work hard to satisfy its valued customers by implementing programs and introducing services that fulfill their needs, especially during times of hardship.

This comes as a continuation of the various activities implemented by the Company to support the community since the coronavirus outbreak. To showcase the joy of returning travelers, stc invited local media hosts and social media influencers including Yousif Al-Hajri and Bibi Al-Khudari, to cover the initiative and distribute the welcome back gifts to travelers.

stc stated, "Given the ongoing circumstances nations around the world are facing due to the pandemic, and stemming from our deep understanding of our customers' needs, we will continue to introduce and design new concepts that cater to our market and the community. With the reopening of the Kuwait International Airport to foreign travelers, we saw this as an opportunity to assist arriving passengers in connecting with their loved ones."

The company added "stc takes pride in its



ability to utilize the breadth of its resources to contribute towards, and support those that have been affected by the repercussions of the pandemic. While this may only serve as a small gesture from stc, we continue to activate our dynamic CSR strategy across various social, environmental, and health aspects. We believe that through the government's support and the companies within the private sector, we can mitigate the risk and uncertainty that this virus has triggered within our community."

stc contributed to numerous programs and activities that are in line with the precautionary measures that it has implemented. Consequently, the company collaborated with various entities to support causes and sectors throughout Kuwait including sports, education, and entrepreneurship. Additionally, stc worked side by side with government entities and medical suppliers to help prevent the spread of infection. Throughout these initiatives stc encouraged the public to practice the precautionary health guidelines and preventative measures released by the Ministry of Health to

Kuwait Airways re-launches flight to 11 destinations

KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways announced re-launching commercial flights scheduled to 11 destinations in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka starting from Tuesday. The destinations include Mumbai, Delhi, Kochi, Chennai and Trivandrum; with two flights a week scheduled, in addition to Bangalore and Ahmadabad with one flight a week, the airline said in a statement yesterday. Furthermore, Kuwait Airways operates two flights a week to Islamabad and one flight to Lahore, in addition to one flight a week to Colombo and five flights a week to Dhaka, it noted.

Last Sunday, Kuwait Airways announced the resumption of commercial operations to Cairo with two daily flights. Public Relations and Information Director Faysal Al-Enezi said the first scheduled flight to Cairo will be at 12:25 pm, while the second will be at 11:35 pm. He said this destination is highly important and has large demand.

Enezi said Kuwait is ready with operational and backup centers to complete the resumption of commercial operations of all flights from and to Kuwait, in addition to being ready to increase operational as well as passenger capacity. He said Kuwait Airways continuously seeks to offer its passengers wider

choices to meet their traveling needs.

Meanwhile, Kuwait Airways announced that its first flight to Amsterdam took off yesterday, noting that two flights will be scheduled each week. The airline had earlier announced it had launched its first commercial flight to Munich, Germany on July 17, with schedule flights to this destination two times a week; Thursdays and Saturdays. KAC had launched on July 10 its first commercial flight to Geneva, Switzerland, as it schedules two flights a week to this destination: On Mondays and Fridays. On July 8, the airline announced increasing weekly flights to London to three, on Saturdays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. Kuwait Airways had resumed operations to the British capital in the middle of June at a rate of a single flight a week. It has also announced renewing operations to Paris, Malaga, Frankfurt and Sarajevo.

On June 15, it announced starting three flights per week to Bodrum on Saturdays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. And on June 18, it began organizing three flights a week to Trabzon on Sundays, Mondays and Fridays, in addition to the regular flights to Istanbul. Moreover, the national carrier announced two flights per week to Tbilisi on Mondays and Fridays, in addition to several summer tourism destinations. The corporation has affirmed its readiness to restore full operations of commercial flights in line with approval of the health authorities and resumption of air navigation in other countries. KAC had relaunched its first commercial flight to Paris in August. Flights to this destination operate thrice weekly on Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays.



mitigate the risks of the virus. Relative to the decisions taken by the executive management, and in line with stc's social responsibility strategy tied to enabling digital transformation for new and existing customers, whether individuals or corporates, stc aims to utilize its resources to provide the community with a helping hand and protect the nation from the harmful effects of the coronavirus.

stc added, "Emphasizing on its strategic vision to move the business forward, stc continues to see its actions transform into results. Various departments within the company have worked diligently to optimize operations, enhance systems and continue developing the 5G network in Kuwait, allowing stc to inch closer towards achieving its vision."

Since the early stages of the pandemic, stc had set its sights on launching various initiatives and programs with the aim of backing the decisions strategically taken by the government and official authorities within the country to overcome these at unprecedented times. This level of support is an ongoing and reoccurring commitment that stc and



companies within the private sector uphold to back the Kuwaiti community and economy.

Aside from its objectives to spread awareness in this regard, stc strives to host and organize community-based events to enhance its role in backing the local education, environmental, and sports scene through numerous contributions of all sorts.

The company also mentioned that it will spare no effort in effectively executing its health awareness campaigns and corporate social responsibility initiatives to shed light on important health aspects that impact the community. The company collaborated with the Central Blood Bank, Tabeey App, as well as other organizations to continue spreading a positive impact in the Kuwaiti society.

stc is committed to enhancing the quality of its products, services, customer relationships and operational efficiency in order to maintain its market position during difficult times and economic uncertainties in addition to the ongoing societal changes.

Local

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News in brief

Kuwait launches work visas online

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) has launched the filing of work visas online (e-forms). Al-Qabas Arabic daily reported yesterday. PAM stipulated that the printing of the visa should be through the online system after the approval is issued, then it should go to the concerned official. PAM also activated the online cancellation of work permits, in addition to the cancellation of work permits to transfer to family visas and allowing applications to issue a work permit to transfer from the government to the private sector (article 18). PAM asked residents, Gulf nationals and bedoons who wish to adjust their status to go to the concerned agency, while providing the same service for citizens online.

60 age cap for labor support?

KUWAIT: The Council of Ministers' Secretariat General asked the Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) to prepare a study on the possibility of making the age of 60 the maximum age at which a worker can receive labor support. A document obtained by Al-Qabas Arabic daily shows that the Cabinet secretariat asked PAM to inform the committee reviewing various types of support given by the state about the possibility of stopping payment. The instructions asked that PAM's opinion should be ready by September 26. The Cabinet had officially asked PAM two weeks ago to study the possibility of stopping payment of labor support in the private sector for those whose salaries are KD 3,000 and higher.

Candidates trained for senior posts

KUWAIT: Informed sources at the Secretariat General of the Supreme Council for Planning Development said the government's plan to establish a national center for government training and development of employee skills is the result of flagrant defects that appeared during the past five years in creating a workplan for various government agencies. The sources who were quoted in an Al-Jarida daily report published yesterday said there is a proposal to prepare a three-month program for candidates for supervisory positions. At the end of the program, candidates who deserve to take leadership posts in a way that achieves equal opportunities will be selected.

Labor shortage delays projects

KUWAIT: Although life has started to return to normal, project and construction sectors at various ministries and agencies are still suffering from delays by companies executing government projects. Informed sources said there are government agencies that signed contracts with several companies to execute many projects that are yet to start due to a shortage of labor under their sponsorship, adding that most companies sent requests to the coronavirus emergency committee with the numbers needed to be brought to Kuwait to start executing their projects. State departments cannot in the current situation impose any fines on companies due to circumstances beyond their will. Al-Rai Arabic daily reported yesterday, quoting the sources. They hoped that requests of companies will be considered quickly to move ahead with state development projects.

Deputy FM receives UNHCR office chief

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Deputy Foreign Minister Majdi Al-Dhafiri received yesterday Director of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Office in Kuwait Dr Samer Haddadin on the occasion of the end of his tenure. During the meeting, the Kuwaiti official wished Dr Haddadin success in his next mission. Assistant Foreign Minister for the Deputy Foreign Minister's office Ambassador Ayham Al-Omar attended the meeting.

Kuwait crude oil gains 33 cents

KUWAIT: Kuwait's crude oil rose 33 cents during Tuesday's trading session to reach \$72.70 per barrel, compared with \$72.37 pb the day before, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. West Texas Intermediate dropped 94 cents to stand at \$68.35 pb and benchmark Brent lost 53 cents to \$71.69 pb.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A Eurasian hoopoe is pictured in midflight in Kuwait City yesterday. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (To have your picture featured in the Kuwait Times' 'Photo of the Day' section, please send your high resolution, unedited photos to local@kuwaittimes.com, along with the full name and Instagram account, in addition to a description showing the picture's location and date taken)

Indemnity for domestic helpers eligible to all visa 20 workers

Law only covers claims for periods starting from 2017

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Domestic helpers in Kuwait can claim their end of service benefits (indemnities) from their employers as stipulated in the domestic labor law signed and approved by the National Assembly in 2015. The new domestic labor law includes the right of domestic workers to a weekly day off, 30 days of annual paid leave, a 12-hour working day with rest, and an end-of-service benefit of one month's salary for each year of work at the end of the contract, among other rights. Speaking exclusively to Kuwait Times, Philippine Labor Attache to Kuwait Nasser Mustafa said the indemnity provision in the law is for all domestic helpers regardless of nationality, provided they hold an article 20 visa. "This is cited in the domestic labor law of Kuwait. We are informing our people about this law, which we believe many of our workers are unaware of," he said.

Mustafa said Overseas Filipino Workers can seek the Philippine Embassy's help if an employer refuses to pay their end of service benefits. He however clarified that since the law was only passed in 2015 in Kuwait, there can be no guarantee that domestic helpers can claim the entire indemnity if they have been working with their employers before that.

"The implementation rules only came out in 2017, so we can only ask for the indemnity from 2017 onwards. The years prior to the approval of the domestic labor law are not covered. The law is not retroactive. However,

if the OFW insists, we try to resolve the matter amicably with their employers, but we cannot promise anything. From 2017 onwards, we can help claim the indemnities and that is our mandate - to help our people in case of nonpayment of their benefits/salaries," Mustafa added.

The embassy informs OFWs who have concerns about their claims for indemnity to visit the Philippine Overseas Labor Office (POLO) so they can be properly



We have around 40 requests for indemnity

assisted, or email their complaints at jadpolokuwait@gmail.com. The labor attache has created a team composed of Assistant Labor Attaché Catherine Duladul, Louella Marie Calanza and Lovelyn Saban to handle all cases pertaining to claims of indemnity of domestic workers.

"Considering the long process, we advise workers to file their complaints at least one month

before their flight to the Philippines. We will try our best to help you get your rights. To those who have worked with their employers for many years, even prior to the 2015 passing of the domestic labor law - while we do not promise anything, we will try our very best by filing your claims at the Public Authority for Manpower. I already spoke to the head of PAM, and they promised us their full cooperation whenever we have this type of claim from Filipinos. To date, we have around 40 requests for indemnity, and we are going to file these claims at the PAM and inshallah, we will get what we want," Mustafa said.

The domestic labor law passed by the National Assembly is the country's first regulating the labor rights of domestic workers. Kuwait has more than 600,000 such workers, most of them women from Asia and Africa. A 2010 Human Rights Watch report documented many abuses against domestic workers, including non-payment of wages, long working hours with no rest days, physical and sexual assault, and no clear channels for redress.



Philippine Labor Attache to Kuwait Nasser Mustafa

Kuwait mulls increasing fees to cover deficit

KUWAIT: In an effort to reduce the budget deficit, the Ministry of Finance began a series of meetings with various state departments to discuss the frameworks of implementing government instructions to reduce spending by 10 percent and increase non-oil revenues. The government aims to save around KD 2.3 billion in spending, in addition to increasing the fees of some services presented by some departments.

Informed sources said the finance ministry asked the state departments to present their views on increasing fees, starting with fees that can be

increased through decisions that do not need laws and legislations. They said the Cabinet asked all departments to coordinate with the finance ministry to execute requests of reducing spending, while the finance ministry will inform the government about agencies that are complying, Al-Qabas Arabic daily reported yesterday, quoting the sources.

Meanwhile, the sources who spoke on the condition of anonymity did not exclude the possibility of failures in austerity measures due to the difficulty in implementing some procedures to reduce spending, especially since ministries and government agencies are committed to contracts with private sector companies to implement many services including security, office staff, cleaning, hospitality and others, which may expose some departments to large fines in case signed contracts are violated, adding that it is possible to reduce expenses according to the tenders law by 25 percent only.



IRBIL: Irbil Governor Omid Khoshnaw (left) meets Kuwait's Consul General in Irbil Dr Omar Al-Kandari. —KUNA

Irbil governor praises Kuwait's support

IRBIL: Irbil Governor Omid Khoshnaw praised yesterday Kuwait's support for refugees in Iraqi Kurdistan region. In a press statement after meeting with Kuwait's Consul General in Irbil Dr Omar Al-Kandari, the governor said that Kuwait was always the first to support and aid the needy in the region.

Khoshnaw also praised the humanitarian acts of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and his continuous support towards the region over the years especially during the times of need.

The Kuwaiti Consul said meanwhile that Kuwait's support comes as per the instructions of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah towards their brothers in Iraq. Kuwait's aid for Iraq will continue and will be varied to include all people in many different fields. —KUNA



KUWAIT: An archive picture taken on August 31, 2021 shows a view of high-rise buildings in Kuwait City. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Eyes on turnout: Moroccans elect new parliament

Mass COVID testing launched in Bangkok biggest slum

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SANAA: Fighters loyal to Yemen's Houthi rebels stand guard while supporters of Yemen's Shiite Muslim Houthi rebels attend a speech given on a screen by the group's leader Abdulmalik Al-Houthi in the Yemeni capital Sanaa. —AFP

78 killed as Yemen war rages

Violence triggers a major humanitarian crisis

DUBAI: Nearly 80 Yemen rebels and pro-government troops have been killed as fighting intensifies for the northern city of Marib, officials said yesterday, nearly seven years into a war that has triggered a major humanitarian crisis. Scores of rebels were killed in airstrikes after they renewed their attempt to capture the strategic city, the internationally recognized government's last outpost in the north, according to loyalists.

"Sixty Houthi rebels were killed—most of them in air strikes conducted in the last 24 hours—while 18 pro-government troops were killed and dozens injured in clashes over the past 48 hours," a government military official said. The figures were confirmed by other military sources, while the rebels rarely report casualty numbers. Battles between Yemen's government, which is backed by a Saudi-led military coalition, and the Iran-allied Houthi rebels have intensified in recent days in Marib province, according to the military official, who

spoke on condition of anonymity.

The fighting was concentrated in the north and west of the governorate. The official said air strikes had intensified. The rebels also reported early yesterday that the coalition had carried out at least 30 such strikes across Marib province. "The Houthis launched last night a military offensive that continued into the early hours of yesterday," the pro-government official said, adding loyalist troops were able to repel the insurgents despite a small advance on the northern front.



60 Houthi rebels and 18 pro-govt troops die

Houthis' attacks on Marib a "dangerous escalation", according to the official Saba news agency.

"It confirms once again the terrorist Houthi mili-

tia's defiance of the international community... and the rebels aims to undermine (peace) efforts and intensify conflict in Yemen and the region no matter the costs," he said. In February, the Houthis escalated their efforts to seize Marib in fighting that has killed hundreds on both sides. Control of the oil-rich region would strengthen the Houthis' bargaining position in peace talks. As well as the bloody offensive in Marib, the Houthis have also stepped up drone and missile strikes on Saudi targets.

Two children were hurt and 14 homes damaged as Saudi forces intercepted ballistic missiles fired across the border by Yemeni rebels on Saturday. And four days earlier, a drone hit Saudi's Abha International Airport in the south, wounding eight people and damaging a civilian plane. While the UN and Washington are pushing for an end to the war, the Houthis have demanded the re-opening of Sanaa airport, closed under a Saudi blockade since 2016, before any ceasefire or negotiations. —AFP

'Dangerous escalation'

The latest fighting comes nearly seven years

Fire at overcrowded Indonesia jail kills 41

TANGERANG: A fire tore through an overcrowded Indonesian prison in the early hours of yesterday when most inmates were asleep, killing 41 people and injuring dozens of others, an official said. Firefighters extinguished the blaze—which was mostly contained within one block that housed prisoners jailed on drug charges—at around 3 am and evacuated the victims. A video released by the Justice Ministry office showed the ceiling collapsing as the fire tore through the block.

"Forty died on the scene and one died on his way to the hospital," said Yasonna Laoly, Indonesia's justice minister, adding that eight were seriously hurt and 31 sustained minor injuries. Jakarta police chief Fadil Imran earlier told media that 72 had minor injuries. The police said they are now working to identify the victims after receiving body bags from the rescue team. "The team hopes that families will come forward to give data on the 41 people to help expedite the process," National Police spokesman Rusdi Hartono said.

Authorities were still investigating the cause of the incident at Tangerang Penitentiary, just outside the capital Jakarta, but suspected an electrical fault may have been to blame. "Based on early observation, it is suspected (the fire) happened because of a short circuit," Imran said. Laoly said the prison's electrical system had not been upgraded since it was built over 40 years ago, in 1972.

"The fire spread quickly and there was no time to open some cells... When the guards found out, the fire had already spread, and that's where we found the victims," Laoly added. Marlinah, who like many Indonesians goes by one name, raced to the local hospital after officials called her home to say her

younger brother Muhammad Yusuf had died. "I just hope the procedure is not complicated so I can bring my brother's body home for burial," she said, tearing up. Laoly confirmed that there were two foreign nationals, a South African and a Portuguese, among the dead, but did not elaborate on their convictions.

Among the dead, one was convicted on a terrorism charge, one for murder and multiple others on drug charges. "I would like to convey deepest condolences to the victims' families. I don't want this to happen again," Laoly said. The South African Embassy in Jakarta confirmed that a national serving jail time on a drugs related case had died. "We are still waiting for further information to see how we are going to take the matter forward in terms of repatriation of the remains," South African ambassador to Indonesia Hilton Fisher told AFP.

Over capacity

The penitentiary department's website showed the jail had just over 2,000 inmates, more than three times as many prisoners than it was designed to hold. The block where the fire broke out had a maximum capacity of 40 prisoners but housed 120, penitentiary directorate general spokesperson Rika Aprianti told Metro TV. Overcrowded, unsanitary conditions are common in Indonesian prisons, which contain about 270,000 inmates, and jailbreaks are frequent.

In 2019, at least 100 prisoners escaped from a jail in Riau province, Sumatra after a riot and fire broke out. In April last year, Indonesia released about 29,000 inmates in a bid to stop Covid-19 from rampaging through a prison system known for its unsanitary conditions. Fire safety measures are often lacking in the Southeast Asian country of nearly 270 million. In 2019, 30 people—including several children—were killed when a matchstick factory exploded in North Sumatra after a worker accidentally dropped a lighter on some flammable materials. —AFP

Haqqani network: Afghanistan's most feared militants

KABUL: The Taliban's interim government in Afghanistan includes two representatives from one of their most feared factions—the Haqqani network. As expected, they have emerged as key players in the new setup, after the Taliban routed the US-backed Afghan military and captured Kabul on August 15.

Who are the Haqqanis?

The shadowy group was formed by Jalaluddin Haqqani, who gained prominence in the 1980s as a hero of the anti-Soviet jihad. At the time, he was a valuable CIA asset as the United States and its allies such as Pakistan funneled arms and money to the mujahideen. During that conflict and following the Soviet withdrawal, Jalaluddin Haqqani fostered close ties with foreign jihadists—including Osama bin Laden. He later allied with the Taliban who took over Afghanistan in 1996, serving as a minister for the Islamist regime until it was toppled by US-led forces in 2001.

Jalaluddin Haqqani died after a long illness and his son Sirajuddin formally became the network's chief in 2018. Thanks to their financial and military strength—and a reputation for ruthlessness—the Haqqani network is considered semi-autonomous while remaining within the Taliban fold. Mainly based in eastern Afghanistan—with alleged bases across the border in Pakistan's northwest—the group became more visible in the Taliban leadership in recent years, and Sirajuddin Haqqani was appointed deputy leader in 2015.

Why are they feared?

The Haqqani network is blamed for some of the deadliest and most shocking attacks in Afghanistan during the last two decades. They have been designated a foreign terrorist group by the United States, and are also under United Nations sanctions. The Haqqanis have a reputation for frequently using suicide bombers—including drivers of cars and trucks packed with huge amounts of explosives—and have demonstrated the ability to carry out complex, high-casualty assaults on major targets including military installations and embassies.

They have also long been suspected of links with the Pakistani military establishment—US Admiral Mike Mullen described them as a "veritable arm" of Islamabad's intelligence in 2011. Pakistan denies the allegation. The Haqqanis have also hugely contributed to the Taliban's fighting ranks, and are the group's "most combat-ready forces", UN monitors said in a June report. The monitors also described the network as the "primary liaison" between the Taliban and Al-Qaeda.

New Taliban government

Sirajuddin Haqqani has been given one of the highest-profile ministries—interior. The post would give him control over Afghanistan's entire internal security apparatus. This is a major role change, following years of violent attacks by his group. As interior minister, Sirajuddin will have to deal with the threat of the regional chapter of the Islamic State group, myriad challenges posed by Afghanistan's deep ethnic divides, as well as crime. His uncle Khalil Haqqani has been given the refugees ministry. Sirajuddin and Khalil are both still listed as wanted by the United States, with millions of dollars in bounties on offer. —AFP

International

World faces a 'code red' on climate change, Biden warns

'The nation and the world are in peril'

NEW YORK: President Joe Biden said Tuesday the world faces a "code red" on climate change danger as he visited damage from the aftermath of Hurricane Ida in New York and New Jersey. "We've got to listen to the scientists and the economists and the national security experts. They all tell us this is code red," Biden said in the hard-hit New York borough of Queens, which he toured after visiting Manville, New Jersey.

"The nation and the world are in peril. That's not hyperbole. That is a fact," he said. Biden—who is pushing a giant infrastructure spending bill, including major funding for the green economy—argues that extreme weather across the United States this summer is a harbinger of worse to come. "This is everybody's crisis," he said in the speech. "These disasters aren't going to stop. They're only going to come with more frequency and ferocity."

Systemic upgrading and hardening of the nation's infrastructure is an urgent need, he asserted, pointing to proposed changes such as flood-proofing power stations, raising up buildings and burying electrical lines. "You can't just build back to what it was before, because another tornado, another 10 inches of rain is going produce the same kind of results," Biden said in earlier remarks in New Jersey.

"I think we're at one of those inflection points where we're going to act or we're going to be in real, real trouble. Our kids are going to be in real trouble." Ida struck the US Gulf Coast as a

Category 4 hurricane, bringing major flooding and knocking out power to large parts of the heavily populated region, which is also a main hub for the oil industry. Just last week, Biden made a similar tour to Louisiana, where Ida had originally made landfall.

However, the departing remnants of the hurricane then caught authorities in the New York region by surprise, with ferocious rainfall triggering flash flooding. The final blast of the storm killed at least



Storm turns streets into raging rivers

47 people in the US Northeast as it turned streets into raging rivers, inundated basements and shut down the New York subway. And while one part of the country buckles under hurricane fallout, California and other parts of the western region are struggling to combat ever-fiercer wildfires.

With his presidency straining from the aftermath of the Afghanistan pullout and surging Covid infec-



NEW JERSEY: US President Joe Biden tours a neighborhood affected by Hurricane Ida in Manville, New Jersey on September 7, 2021. — AFP

tions at home, Biden faces a difficult coming few weeks, including a struggle to get his infrastructure plans through the narrowly divided Congress. The White House hopes that the dramatic impact from Hurricane Ida in two different parts of the country

will galvanize action on the spending bills. "It's so imperative that we act on addressing the climate crisis and investing... through his 'Build Back Better' agenda, which is working its way through Congress," White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said. — AFP

News in brief

Two more victims of 9/11

NEW YORK: The remains of two more victims of 9/11 have been identified, thanks to advanced DNA technology, New York officials announced Tuesday, just days before the 20th anniversary of the attacks. The office of the city's chief medical examiner said it had formally identified the 1,646th and 1,647th victim of the Al-Qaeda attacks on New York's Twin Towers which killed 2,753 people. They are the first identifications of victims from the collapse of the World Trade Center since October 2019. "Twenty years ago, we made a promise to the families of World Trade Center victims to do whatever it takes for as long as it takes to identify their loved ones, and with these two new identifications, we continue to fulfill that sacred obligation," chief medical examiner Barbara Sampson said in a statement. — AFP

Vicious attack shocks Spain

MADRID: Spain's government on Tuesday strongly condemned a vicious attack in broad daylight on a young gay man in Madrid as police sought eight masked assailants. Sunday's attack came just two months after a young gay man was beaten to death in northern Spain in another suspected homophobic attack that shocked Spain. The victim, 20, was attacked by eight masked assailants at the entrance to his apartment building in the trendy Malasana district, a police spokeswoman said. Spitting homophobic insults, they cut his lower lip with a knife then scored the word "maricon" into his buttocks, the Spanish equivalent of "faggot", she said, confirming details first published by El Periodico news website. The savage nature of the attack has shocked Spain, a country with a very open approach to sexuality where a recent YouGov survey showed 91 percent of people would be supportive if a family member came out as lesbian, gay or bisexual. — AFP

Gunmen snatch dozens

KANO: Nigerian gunmen kidnapped more than 40 people in two mass abductions in the northwest, police said yesterday, near where the army is carrying out air strikes and raids against criminal kidnap gangs. Northwest and central Nigeria have seen a surge in attacks by heavily-armed groups known as bandits who carry out mass abductions for ransom and raids on villages to loot and steal cattle. On Monday night gunmen attacked Keke community in Chikun in Kaduna State, kidnapping 17 people, though five were later rescued by security forces, state police spokesman Mohammed Jalige said. "Twelve hostages are still in captivity and our tactical response teams are combing the area with the mission to rescue them," he said. Gunmen also attacked Dange Shuni village in Sokoto State late Tuesday, snatching 28 people, although eight were later freed, Sokoto police spokesman Sanusi Abubakar said. — AFP

Africa COVID death toll tops 200,000

JOHANNESBURG: More than 200,000 people have died from COVID-19 in Africa since the start of the pandemic, according to an AFP tally compiled from official records as of 1700 GMT. The 54 countries of the region may not have suffered as badly as other parts of the world - at least according to the officially recorded figures. They seem to have avoided the catastrophic scenarios some feared at the start of the pandemic.

But Africa, home to more than 1.3 billion people, has still recorded a total of 200,254 deaths since

Minister dies trying to save filmmaker in Arctic drills

MOSCOW: Russia's emergencies minister has died trying to save a filmmaker who slipped from a cliff during training exercises in the Arctic region, officials said yesterday. Yevgeny Zinichev, who previously served in President Vladimir Putin's security detail, "tragically died trying to save a person's life" near the city of Norilsk, the ministry said in a statement that was carried by Russian news agencies.

The ministry identified the filmmaker as 63-year-old Alexander Melnik who produced several films set in the Arctic region and who also died in the incident. Margarita Simonyan, the editor-in-chief of the state-funded news outlet RT, said the 55-year-old minister had fallen to his death trying to save the man later identified as Melnik. "He and the cameraman were standing at the edge of a cliff. The cameraman slipped and fell... Before anyone even figured out what happened, Zinichev jumped into the water after the fallen person and crashed against a protruding rock."

"Without thinking for a second he acted not like

Inside the storming of Bataclan concert hall

PARIS: The head of France's BRI commando police unit remembers every detail of the warm evening of November 13, 2015, before his life and those of his colleagues would be permanently marked by the nightmarish scenes of the Bataclan concert hall. "I was at home. There was football on television," Christophe Molmy told AFP in a rare interview ahead of the start of the trial for the attacks. "I don't like football so we were watching something else as a family."

As head of the Research and Intervention Brigade (BRI), Molmy was used to tracking emergencies and operations from home, but at 9:47 pm he remembers receiving a message from a journalist that shots had been fired at people in restaurants and bars. From that moment on, confusing information flowed as three groups of gunmen with suicide belts spread terror through Paris, attacking the national football stadium, restaurants, and finally the packed Bataclan concert hall.

"That night, in the space of 33 minutes, Paris was the victim of eight attacks. Eight attacks!" Molmy said.

the virus emerged in China in December 2019. The worldwide total stands at more than 4.57 million. After several deadly months, including some 27,000 deaths in July and 26,000 in August, the pandemic appears to be easing on the continent, with current daily figures of 617 compared to as many as 990 in late July, a record for the region.

The figures are based on tolls communicated daily by health authorities in each country or by the UN's World Health Organization (WHO) and include the countries of North Africa. The WHO has said that if excess deaths directly or indirectly linked to coronavirus are taken into account, the real toll could be two or three times higher. The total number of infections is also likely to be an under-estimate, given insufficient testing capacity in Africa. "It's probably a lot higher than that," said

a minister, but like a rescuer," Zinichev's deputy Andrei Gurovich said in televised remarks. "This is how he lived all his life," Gurovich added. Putin expressed his "deep condolences" to the minister's relatives in a statement. "The president and the emergencies minister worked together for many years," it read. Zinichev was a member of the KGB security service in the last years of the USSR and his career took off after he served in Putin's security detail between 2006 and 2015.

Lauded as a 'hero'

He held a number of high-profile jobs, briefly serving as acting governor of Russia's exclave region of Kaliningrad and then as deputy head of the Federal Security Service (FSB). He was appointed head of the emergencies ministry in May, 2018. He was also a member of Russia's Security Council. As head of the emergencies ministry, he held one of the highest-profile cabinet jobs, dealing with natural and man-made disasters and other rapid-response situations across the vast country. The two-day drills he was participating in across several Arctic cities including Norilsk, kicked off on Tuesday and involved over 6,000 people.

Condolences poured in from top officials, with Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin praising Zinichev as a "true Russian officer" and Chechen strongman Ramzan Kadyrov saying the minister "died like a



Russian Emergencies Minister Yevgeny Zinichev is pictured aboard a helicopter as he surveys damage from wildfires in some areas of the Chelyabinsk Region. — AFP

hero." "I knew him personally. We worked together closely and fruitfully. So unfortunate," the head of the Russian space agency Roscosmos, Dmitry Rogozin, said on Telegram. Melnik was an award-winning film director and had travelled to Norilsk to work on a new film about the development of the Arctic and the Northern Sea Route. The development of the Arctic is a strategic priority for Moscow and it has huge projects to exploit the vast region's natural resources. — AFP

"They were so spread out that we didn't know where to go exactly." They received instructions to head to the Bataclan where men armed with Kalashnikovs had been seen rushing in and a hostage crisis was under way.

Tangled bodies

In the vicinity of the venue, people were running for safety. The injured were collapsed on the pavement, or crying for help. Molmy stopped to speak to a policeman and his driver who had followed the gunmen into the premises with only handguns and light bullet-proof vests for protection. They had shot and injured one of them, who blew himself up, before retreating under a hail of gunfire. Molmy headed into the hall himself, packed with thousands of fans of that night's band, Eagles of Death Metal.

The strong stage lighting illuminated hundreds of tangled bodies on the floor. The silence was total. "I didn't understand how they'd managed to kill so many people in such a short space of time," he remembered. The BRI officers had no idea where the killers were. "We didn't know who was in the room, how many terrorists there were, if they're hiding in a dark corner to shoot at us, if they'd rigged up the room with explosives," he explained.

'Terrible weapon'

Surveying the scene, Molmy realized that among the casualties were people who were either playing dead,



PARIS: French Gendarmes officers stand guard outside the Palais de Justice of Paris - Paris' courthouse, yesterday, ahead of the start of the trial of the November 2015 Paris attacks' defendants, which takes place in a temporary courtroom set up for the proceedings. — AFP

or in shock. "The Kalashnikov is a terrible weapon that does awful things to a human body," Molmy remembered. Having swept the ground floor, they took the decision to explore the upper levels at around 11:00 pm, less than an hour after they arrived on the scene. "We found some injured people, there were others who had piled into the toilets, or were hiding in the ceiling cavities or cupboards... at least a hundred," Molmy said. Fifteen minutes later, they came to a blocked door in front of a narrow passageway. A hostage screamed at them not to enter, saying they were "being held by two terrorists with Kalashnikovs and suicide belts".

She gave her mobile phone number.

A specialist negotiator was assigned to call. "From the first call... we realised quickly that they weren't going to surrender," Molmy said. There was no option to release the hostages "other than with an assault". Some of the 12 hostages had been forced to position themselves against the windows to prevent police snipers getting a sight of the gunmen. "Going through a door, into a corridor to attack terrorists hiding behind hostages... on paper, it's the worst of all scenarios," Molmy said. Despite the dangers, the decision was taken to go ahead. — AFP

cent respectively from the previous week.

The figures are well below those of July, which were described by the government as "catastrophic", with as many as 7,900 cases and 207 deaths daily. Tunisia's summer was also marked by a sharp acceleration in its vaccination drive, with nearly 37 percent of the population having received at least one dose, compared to just 11 percent on July 1. Africa has seen the lowest vaccination rate to date of all the continents, with only eight jabs administered per 100 inhabitants, according to an AFP tally, compared with 102 in Europe and 116 in the United States and Canada. According to the WHO, around three percent of sub-Saharan Africa's population are fully vaccinated. By comparison, 52 percent of people are fully vaccinated in the United States of America and 57 percent in the European Union. — AFP

researcher Glenda Davidson of South Africa's Cape Peninsula University of Technology. "Testing resources are very low on the continent." Death registration processes were often delayed and inaccurate, she added.

Fall in cases, deaths

The current drop in the continent's tally is a result of declining numbers in the hardest-hit countries. South Africa has recorded 83,899 deaths so far. But last week's daily average of 7,400 new cases and 234 deaths is significantly lower than in late July, when the daily average was as many as 20,000 new cases and 420 deaths. The decrease has been even more striking in Tunisia, which has recorded a daily average of 1,680 cases and 64 deaths: declines of 41 percent and 39 per-

International

Eyes on turnout as Moroccans vote in parliamentary and local elections

Tourism-dependent economy making a patchy recovery

RABAT: Moroccans voted yesterday in parliamentary and local elections that will decide the fate of Islamists who have governed the kingdom since the Arab Spring uprisings. The vote comes as the tourism-dependent economy is making a patchy recovery from a pandemic-induced seven percent contraction last year, and enthusiasm is limited in a country where the monarchy retains key decision-making power.

"Everyone to the ballot boxes!" urged local daily newspaper the Economist, noting that turnout represented the "real stakes in today's polls" after only 43 percent of eligible voters cast ballots last time around in 2016. Polling stations opened at 8:00am local time and will close at 7:00pm. The vote was unfolding "in normal circumstances," the interior ministry said, and preliminary results were expected in the evening.

Eighteen million voters are on the electoral roll, and citizens will vote for 395 national lawmakers, alongside more than 31,000 local and regional officials. King Mohammed VI will name a prime minister from the party that leads the parliamentary poll to govern the nation of 36 million for the next five years. "Today is an important day for Morocco. I am voting because it is my duty," one voter said in a polling station in the economic capital Casablanca.

'Above suspicion'

Swept to power in the wake of the 2011 uprisings around the Middle East and North Africa, the Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD) hopes to secure a third term leading a ruling coalition. Compared with demands back then for an end to

"corruption and despotism", this year's two-week election campaign was less lively, with no large gatherings due to the coronavirus. In the final days, however, PJD and its close rival the National Rally of Independents (RNI) have exchanged heftier blows.

Former prime minister and PJD leader Abdelilah Benkirane attacked the RNI boss, billionaire businessman and Agriculture Minister Aziz Akhannouch, in a fiery Facebook video on Sunday. "The head of



Elections will decide the fate of Islamists

government must be a political personality with integrity who is above suspicion," he said. Akhannouch, who is said to be close to the royal palace, retorted in an interview on Monday that the attacks were "an admission of failure" by his opponents, vowing not to respond.

Following the last elections in 2016, the RNI leader secured critical ministerial jobs for his party, including the economy and finance and industry portfolios. Besides the PJD and RNI, the liberal Authenticity and Modernity Party (PAM), formed by an influential royal adviser, and the

of an interim government and some important personnel arrangements," said foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin at a press briefing. "This has ended more than three weeks of anarchy in Afghanistan and is a necessary step to restore order and rebuild the country." While much of the world has adopted a wait-and-see approach to engagement with the Taliban, China has already said it is ready to build friendly relations with the group following their takeover.

Analysts have said a stable and cooperative administration in Kabul would open economic opportunities for China and allow for expansion of its massive overseas infrastructure drive, the Belt and Road Initiative. The Taliban may also see China as a crucial source of economic support and potentially a key ally. Last week a Taliban spokesman said Beijing had promised them increased aid and COVID-19 assistance.

However, Beijing is wary of the militant group providing support to Muslim-minority Uyghur separatists looking to infiltrate its sensitive border region of Xinjiang. Wang said yesterday that China would "not interfere in Afghanistan's internal affairs", but



SALE, Morocco: Aziz Akhannouch, president of the National Rally of Independents (RNI), casts his ballot in Sale yesterday as Moroccans vote in parliamentary and local elections. — AFP

centre-right Istiqlal Party are both seen as front-runners in local media. The election campaign has been marked by PAM's allegations that RNI was buying votes - denied by Akhannouch's party - while PJD blasted excessive political spending without naming names.

The tepid campaign has frustrated some voters and expectations for turnout are low. Whatever the

result, political parties are expected to adopt a charter for a "new model of development" with a "new generation of reforms and projects" in the coming years, the king announced recently. All parties are expected to sign up, regardless of who wins the election. The plan's major aims include reducing the country's wealth gap and doubling per-capita economic output by 2035. — AFP

China welcomes 'end of anarchy' with new Afghan government

BEIJING: Beijing said yesterday it welcomed the end of "three weeks of anarchy" in Afghanistan with the establishment of a new interim government in Kabul, calling on the Taliban to restore order in the country. The Islamists seized control of Afghanistan as US troops withdrew last month and have set up a new administration that started work yesterday.

Despite previous promises that their rule would be inclusive, the government is drawn exclusively from loyalist ranks with established hardliners in all key posts and no women. China has been scathing about the American withdrawal, which it criticized as ill-planned and hasty. Yesterday it said the new government would help bring stability.

"China attaches great importance to the announcement by the Taliban of the establishment

of an interim government and some important personnel arrangements," said foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin at a press briefing. "This has ended more than three weeks of anarchy in Afghanistan and is a necessary step to restore order and rebuild the country." While much of the world has adopted a wait-and-see approach to engagement with the Taliban, China has already said it is ready to build friendly relations with the group following their takeover.

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However, Beijing is wary of the militant group providing support to Muslim-minority Uyghur separatists looking to infiltrate its sensitive border region of Xinjiang. Wang said yesterday that China would "not interfere in Afghanistan's internal affairs", but



KABUL: A member of the Taliban Fateh fighter, a 'special forces' unit, patrols on a vehicle at Massoud square in Kabul yesterday. — AFP

hoped the Taliban would "pursue moderate and steady domestic and foreign policies, resolutely crack down on all kinds of terrorist forces, and get along well with all countries, especially neighboring countries". — AFP

Hong Kong police arrest Tiananmen vigil organizers

KONG: Hong Kong police yesterday arrested four members of the group behind the city's Tiananmen Square vigils, a day after they refused to cooperate with a national security investigation. The Hong Kong Alliance is the latest target of a sweeping national security law that China imposed on the city last year to quash dissent after huge and often violent democracy protests. Prominent barrister Chow Hang-tung, vice-chairwoman of the alliance, was led away by security police in handcuffs from her office building in the city's central business district.

Three other members of the group - Simon Leung, Sean Tang and Chan To-wai - were arrested yesterday morning, the alliance said in a statement. Police confirmed that they arrested three men and one woman for "not providing information" according to the national security law. The alliance is one of several pro-democracy groups being investigated by the city's newly created national security unit. Last month, police ordered the group to hand over financial and operational details, accusing it of working as a "foreign agent".

The request included the personal details of all members since its founding in 1989, all meeting minutes, financial records and any exchanges with other NGOs advocating for democracy and human rights in China. On Tuesday, the deadline for them to hand over the information, members of the alliance handed police a letter saying the request was illegal, arbitrary and that no evidence of their wrongdoing had been presented. The alliance also rejected the accusation that they are foreign agents, saying they are a domestic group that campaigns for Hong Kongers.

Security office statement

The arrests prompted a rare statement from Beijing's secretive national security office in Hong Kong, which took over a state-owned hotel shortly after last year's law was enacted and is currently building a permanent headquarters in the city. "Anyone who has violated the national security law of Hong Kong and other laws of Hong Kong must be punished by the law," the office said.

That office has only issued two previous such statements - following the arrests of media tycoon Jimmy Lai and law professor Benny Tai - even though more than 120 people have been arrested under the security law. China is currently remoulding Hong Kong in its own authoritarian image. Dozens of democracy figures - including multiple alliance members - have been arrested on national security charges and an official campaign has been launched to purge the city of anyone deemed "unpatriotic". The business hub's once outspoken vibe has been transformed over the course of the last year, with each month bringing new rules and restrictions.

Films are now censored for political content, curriculums have been rewritten, dissident artists and popstars find themselves unable to find venues and dozens of civil society groups have disbanded. Former Hong Kong lawmaker Nathan Law, a democracy campaigner who fled to London after the imposition of the security law, said the arrests were "absolutely absurd and unacceptable". "Even before a trial begins, Hong Kong Alliance is presumed guilty. It completely violates the presumption of innocence in the past," he said. — AFP

India restricts festivals over COVID surge fears

MUMBAI: Indian authorities are restricting major religious festivals that start this week and attract huge crowds, warning that a new COVID-19 wave had already begun in the financial capital Mumbai. State governments across the country of 1.3 billion people, which saw a devastating coronavirus surge in April-May, are clamping down on mass gatherings. "The third wave is not coming, it is already here," Mumbai's mayor Kishori Pednekar told reporters on Tuesday.

"We can celebrate festivals later. Let us first prioritize the lives and health of our citizens," added Uddhav Thackeray, the chief minister of Maharashtra, of which Mumbai is the capital. He was speaking ahead of the 11-day Hindu Ganesh Chaturthi festival, which starts Friday. The last COVID-19 wave overwhelmed India's hospitals and was known to have killed more than 200,000 people. It struck after one of the world's biggest religious gatherings, the Kumbh Mela, which attracted some 25 million Hindu pilgrims.

That gathering, large state election rallies and the infectious Delta virus variant - first detected in India



MUMBAI: People through a market in Mumbai. — AFP

- were blamed by experts for fuelling the surge. Authorities said a recent spike in cases in the southern state of Kerala after the Onam festival in August should be cause for alarm. But festive crowds had still packed markets in Maharashtra and other states in recent days, ignoring the warnings. The state government will limit the height of effigies of the elephant-headed god Ganesha to reduce the number of devotees carrying them during the festival.

Processions on the festival's first and last days

with 10 people in a house... of maybe 20 square metres, which means if one has COVID, the rest have it," foundation co-founder Friso Poldervaart told AFP. "It's usually the case that if people (test positive), they get given a home isolation kit. The issue is here that they cannot home isolate." Rice donations, mangosteen juice and a free lunch were among incentives the charity used to encourage hesitant residents to undergo a swab test.

Since April, Thailand has been reeling from a deadly third wave of infections, with more than 1.3 million cases and 13,000 deaths. The kingdom is also experiencing its worst economic performance since the 1997 Asian financial crisis. Lockdown restrictions have meant many people already on the poverty line in Khlong Toei lost jobs or income. Among those getting tested Monday was Praoiphai Jaroenpong, 23, who said many slum-dwellers have no welfare safety net and feel like they have fallen through the cracks.

"It's bad. Some people in the community are out of jobs and they could hardly put food on their tables," she said. As well as testing, the foundation has been delivering 3,000 meals a day to the community along with care packages and medications. Volunteer tester Ekkachai Moolla, an out-of-work



BANGKOK: A woman receives a dose of the AstraZeneca/Oxford COVID-19 coronavirus vaccine in a 'Mobile Vaccination Unit' set up inside a bus in Bangkok yesterday. — AFP

flight attendant, said helping the foundation got him through difficult times and put his basic medical training to good use. "I can't wait for the time I can go back to work, but in the meantime, I just enjoy this-coming to help, it's the best," he said. — AFP

Mass COVID testing launched in Bangkok biggest slum

BANGKOK: For families struggling to survive on \$150 a month in Bangkok's biggest slum, coronavirus swab tests are a luxury that few can afford. The Khlong Toei slum, where an estimated 100,000 people live packed into tiny, overcrowded dwellings, has been a major concern as Thailand battles its third wave of the pandemic.

Now the Bangkok Community Help Foundation, a charity, has launched a mass testing drive to try to identify cases and help stop Khlong Toei from becoming a reservoir that reinfests the whole city. The foundation said the program-linked to guaranteed hospital beds for positive cases-was long overdue. Almost 1,000 people have been swabbed in recent days, it said, with close to 50 coming back positive.

"There are many people living in very tight and confined spaces. In many cases people are living

Business

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2021

No milk or water: Shoppers face shortages at UK grocery stores

Brexit and pandemic cause serious supply chain troubles

LONDON: The supply chain troubles caused by Brexit and the pandemic have been so bad for Satyan Patel that the shelves at his convenience store in central London are seriously lacking water and soft drinks. "Last week I ran out of Coca-Cola. I haven't had large bottles of Evian for three weeks," said Patel.

"Without products, there's no business. With empty shelves like this, no one is going to come in the shop anyway," he added. A wide range of businesses have suffered through shortages for several months in the UK—from milkshakes at McDonald's to beer at a pub chain to mattresses at Ikea.

But shoppers are also facing empty shelves for things as basic as water and milk at UK supermarkets and grocery stores. The coronavirus crisis has severely disrupted the global supply chain, but Britain's divorce from the European Union late last year has exacerbated the problem in the UK.

Shops are not getting products delivered to them as rules making it harder to hire EU citizens has left haulage companies with a drastic shortage of lorry drivers. Many people who returned to their home countries from Britain during the lockdown have not returned. Co-op, a cooperative supermarket group, said it was "impacted by some patchy distribution" to its deliveries but it was working with suppliers to restock quickly. The group said it was recruiting 3,000 temporary workers "to keep depots working to capacity and stores stocked as quickly as possible".

Where's the milk?

According to recent estimates, the UK currently faces a shortage of about 100,000 lorry drivers. "We had already decided to reduce our stock because of COVID... but now we're finding it hard to get some products as well because they're just not available,"

Patel said. At a supermarket near his store, the soft drinks aisle was a little short of bottles and cans but other shelves were full.

But 22-year-old sales assistant Toma said the situation was grim. "We don't have stock, we have nothing in our warehouse," said Toma, who declined to give her last name. "We have gaps everywhere," she said. "Sometimes we receive only a certain amount (of some products). We don't even have water."

The shortages began when the pandemic hit and got worse after Brexit came into force on January 1, Toma said. Some customers complain to supermarket staff and "say it's us to blame", she added. At another major supermarket in southeast London, water bottles were sparse and milk was missing from shelves. Frozen-food group Iceland and retail giant Tesco have warned of Christmas shortages.

Iceland head Richard Walker said the company has reduced deliveries as it has 100 fewer drivers than it needs. "Every day we are missing around 10 percent of the stock we have ordered into our depots," he wrote in a blog, adding that "when things were at their worst" its sole bread supplier was unable to deliver to as many as 130 stores per day.

'Perfect storm'

Shortages of goods in the UK "will probably last for a while and may even intensify further", according to a note by Capital Economics, a research consultancy. A report this week from the Confederation of British Industry cited the Road Haulage Association as saying it would take at least 18 months to train enough Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) drivers to replace those who have left.

For the CBI, the dual effects of Brexit and COVID-19 are a "perfect storm". Stock levels in relation to expected sales fell by more than 20 percent to



LONDON: A shopper looks at empty shelves where chilled foods would normally be stocked, inside a Waitrose supermarket in London Tuesday. —AFP

a record low across the retail and distribution sector in August, according to the CBI. The group has urged the government to be more flexible on immigration and add skilled lorry drivers to a list of professions that are short on workers.

Road transport companies and businesses dependent on deliveries are offering bonuses and higher wages in an attempt to retain drivers, but

the moves have raised concern that they could contribute to rising inflation. Ryan Koning, a 49-year-old project manager at a company in the City of London, said his colleagues often discussed the situation and "the question of costs: will they rise because drivers are paid premiums?" He too said he had noticed shortages of "day-to-day products". —AFP

Turkish lira tumbles over CB comments

ISTANBUL: The Turkish lira took one of its biggest tumbles of the year yesterday over speculation that the central bank was about to cut rates in the face of soaring inflation.

Turkey's annual rate of inflation accelerated to 19.25 percent last month, above the central bank's policy rate of 19 percent. The central bank has been vowing for months to keep real interest rates positive so that Turks are not incentivized to spend money instead of placing them in their accounts.

That would require it to hike its policy rate to at least 19.5 percent at its next policy meeting on September 23. But central bank governor Selahattin Selçuk told investors that consumer prices were expected to drop in the months ahead and the bank will now use "core" inflation—which is

below 17 percent after excluding volatile items such as food and fuel—in future decisions.

"Extraordinary conditions that have arisen due to the pandemic have increased the importance of core inflation indicators," Turkish media quotes Kavcioglu as saying. "While determining the global monetary policy stance, basic indicators excluding temporary factors arising from areas outside the sphere of influence of monetary policy are taken as a basis."

The Turkish lira fell by as much as 1.5 percent against dollar and was trading around the 8.45 mark yesterday afternoon. Turkey's central bank is nominally independent but has been under constant pressure from President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to lower interest rates.

The Turkish leader has fired three central bankers since 2019 because they were either raising borrowing costs or not lowering them rapidly enough. Erdogan is famous for subscribing to the unorthodox belief that high interest rates cause inflation instead of tamping it down by hiking the cost of doing business.



Kavcioglu has kept the bank's policy rate unchanged for five months and had previously vowed to focus on fighting inflation. But Erdogan has indicated that he expects borrowing costs to start coming down quickly to help stimulate growth. Timothy Ash, an analyst at BlueBay Asset Management in London, said Kavcioglu's comments showed that his "promise to keep positive real interest rates means nothing really

from a market perspective".

"He is obviously determined not to hike rates if in any way he can get away with it, and will cut at the very earliest opportunity," he said in an email to clients. The central bank this week raised its year-end inflation forecast to 16.2 percent from 14.1 percent.

Analysts expect the Turkish economy to expand by roughly eight percent this year. —AFP

Car industry 'can be part of climate solution': Merkel

MUNICH: Outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel said Germany's car industry could be "part of the solution" to the climate emergency, as she opened a major motor show for the last time. Germany's leader of the last 16 years said she was convinced the transition to a climate-neutral economy by 2045 would be "a success" and touted her government's steps to support it by subsidising electric vehicles and the development of charging infrastructure.

The German car industry was previously seen as "reluctant" to embrace the switch to environmentally-friendly electric cars. Merkel said at the IAA motor show, before praising the progress that has been made. The move to electric was accelerated by the "dieselgate" scandal in 2015, when German car giant Volkswagen admitted to fitting millions of vehicles with emissions-cheating devices.

Merkel, who has been a regular at the IAA over the years, earned the sobriquet the "car chancellor" for her efforts in the past to shield German carmakers from tougher EU pollution rules. "The auto industry is not just part of the climate problem, but above everything else a central part of the solution," she told the conference hall in Munich. Merkel cautioned, however, that European coordination would be needed in future to ensure "security for jobs" in the face of competition from countries where climate rules are less stringent.

Her opening speech at the IAA was her last as chancellor, before she steps down after the German elections on September 26. The biennial IAA is mired in controversy this year as Germany struggles to adapt its flagship industry to the electric and digital revolution. Environmental activists blocked motorways around



MUNICH: BMW CEO Oliver Zipse (right to left), German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Bavaria's State Premier Markus Soeder, Hildegard Mueller, President of the VDA association of the automotive industry, Baden-Wuerttemberg's State Premier Winfried Kretschmann, visit the stand of German carmaker BMW at the International Motor Show (IAA) Germany, on Tuesday. —AFP

Munich on Tuesday, while others brandished slogans like "Stop driving climate change".

Merkel was among those to express their anger when the "dieselgate" scandal broke. But in Brussels, her government had sought to slow the shift to e-mobility by watering down toughened emissions regulations that German carmakers would struggle to comply with, the Sueddeutsche newspaper said. On the eve of Merkel's visit, the boss of Volkswagen even blamed her government for slowing down the electric revolution by incentivising diesel fuel for years.

"A car company cannot do this transition (alone) because you need the right environment," Volkswagen CEO Herbert Diess told AFP. "If you keep diesel cheap... nobody will buy an electric car, it's impossible." Ferdinand Dudenhoeffer, director of the Center for Automotive

Research at the University of Duisburg-Essen, called the government's diesel strategy "depressing and incomprehensible". "The state fuelled a diesel boom through tax breaks, and now diesel passenger cars are practically unsellable," he told AFP. Merkel's government has always treaded gingerly because of the 800,000 jobs at stake in the industry.

But the Sueddeutsche daily lamented in August that "with her overly generous attitude towards the car industry, the chancellor has helped neither the companies nor the country in the medium term". Dudenhoeffer agreed. "Scrap schemes, incentives to buy electric cars, subsidies for battery production, aid for recycling, short-time working allowances — this has been the strategy for 16 years. This alleviates short-term economic problems, but does not build a new structure," he said. —AFP

Bitcoin price soars as it wins support from investors

LONDON: Bitcoin, which struck a world first by becoming legal tender in El Salvador, has been on a roller-coaster ride since becoming the first cryptocurrency 13 years ago. Following wild price swings, bitcoin has over the past year increasingly won support from small and large investors, including on Wall Street and from Tesla boss Elon Musk.

What is bitcoin?

Created following the 2008 global financial crisis, bitcoin initially promoted a libertarian ideal and aspired to overthrow traditional monetary and financial institutions such as central banks. The founding white paper, published on October 31, 2008, was penned by Satoshi Nakamoto, a pseudonym whose identity remains unknown. The eight-page document included the key goal of processing online payments between two parties without passing via a financial institution. A first block of 50 bitcoins was created in January 2009, which has risen to 18.8 million units currently in circulation. No more than 21 million can be created, helping bitcoin's price to trade way above its rivals. Thousands of other cryptocurrencies have meanwhile since been created, led by the likes of ethereum, ripple and tether.

How to obtain bitcoin?

There are two ways to get hold of bitcoin. Historically, individuals have "mined" for it by using computers to solve complex mathematical puzzles. But as bitcoin's price soared, so did the number of miners, reducing the chances of accessing units this way. Mining also requires huge amounts of energy, meaning the cost of accessing a bitcoin can exceed the gain, notwithstanding the environmental impact amid global efforts to tackle climate change. The alternative way is to buy a whole or fractions of bitcoin on an exchange platform using traditional currencies. Purchased funds are held in protected virtual wallets, but with hacks still possible, some investors have decided to hold portfolios offline.

How much is it worth?

Initially worth almost nothing, bitcoin exceeded \$1,000 in 2013, causing it to attract the attention of financial institutions. Since then it has experienced extreme volatility, reaching almost \$20,000 in 2017 before plunging. It recovered to hit \$15,000 in late 2020 and in April rocketed to a record \$64,870 on the back of a speculative wave.

Yet two months later, it was trading at less than half that amount, before climbing back above \$50,000 in September. Such volatility coupled with drawn-out transaction times remain obstacles to bitcoin's adoption as a means of payment. With transactions in bitcoin taking between a few minutes and several hours, some of its supporters are seeing the world's first cryptocurrency as a future digital store of value, rather than a means of payment. This would put it in competition with gold, a traditional haven investment and which is held in great amounts by bitcoin's nemesis central banks. —AFP

Business

Ooredoo Kuwait signs strategic partnership with New Market

Exclusive Ooredoo offers in celebration of its partnership with Falcon Company



A group photo taken during the signing ceremony



KUWAIT: Abdulaziz Yaqoub Al-Babtain and Bader Jeragh during the signing ceremony

KUWAIT: Stemming from its constant enthusiasm to enrich individuals' digital lives and provide the best and latest devices, solutions, products and services to its valuable customers, Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, has partnered with Falcon company, owned by New Market and the leader in Kuwait and the region in providing the latest services and technology related to drones. The partnership embraces the launch of the latest drone products and accessories in the Kuwaiti market, with the best packages offered by Ooredoo exclusively to all its customers, in which they will have the opportunity to purchase the DJI Mini SE drone starting from KD 6 per month, through the MyOoredoo app, the online store www.ooredoo.com.kw, or by visiting any of the company's branches throughout Kuwait.

The signing ceremony took place yesterday in Ooredoo Tower and was attended by Abdulaziz Yaqoub Al-Babtain - Chief Executive Officer; Mijbil Alayoub - Senior Director, Corporate Communications; Thamer Al-Tahous - Government and VIP Relations; Essa Al-Moosa - Executive Director Customer Care; and Fatima Dashti - Senior Manager, Public Relations, Internal Communications and Social Responsibility, Ooredoo Kuwait. Further, New Market was represented by Bader Jeragh - CEO; Hussein Ezzedine - Business Development manager; Nezar Beidas - Technical Manager; Ahmad Burahmad - Department Manager (enterprise); and Ali Bazzi - Marketing Manager.

DJI Mini SE weighing under 249 grams, which is almost as light as an average smartphone. This makes it exceptionally portable and places it in the lowest and safest weight class of drones, which may exempt it from certain regulations in many countries. Further, the DJI Fly application offers a simple and intuitive user experience, enabling the end-user to create cinematic shots with just a few taps. It also includes flight tutorial, a feature to help customers get started with DJI Mini SE



quickly and safely. The DJI Fly app offers a variety of creator templates that generate exceptional videos with just a tap.

Commenting on the new partnership, Abdulaziz Yaqoub Al-Babtain, Chief Executive Officer, Ooredoo Kuwait, said: "We take pride of our partnership with New Market, which goes in line with our strategy that aims to offer the latest innovative products to all our customers. Today, capturing real time pictures has become critical for photography lovers, and the public in general in which the value of such pictures is drastically increasing in which they are now competing to provide the best creative visual content. By providing the DJI Mini SE, Ooredoo customers will be able to go creative that leads to conveying a more enjoyable picture of life and all that goes on around us."

This cooperation also came as an integrated and massive building structure between the telecommunications and technology sectors on the one hand and the security and implementation of solutions with the highest quality and accuracy using the Drones on the other hand. This strategic partnership is seen as a bright future through which the latest solutions are presented to the Kuwaiti market in its governmental and private sectors.

It is worth noting that Falcon's great effort began in 2014 when the distinguished team gained paramount brand confidence in the Drones technology, such as DJI, and became the first authorized distributor in Kuwait. The aim was always to distinguish the company's services, and therefore Falcon was able to be the leader in Kuwait and the region in providing the latest services and technology related to drones. Less than a year later, Falcon was appointed in 2015 as the first certified work-



Abdulaziz Yaqoub Al-Babtain and Bader Jeragh

shop in the Middle East, and in 2018, the first authorized store was opened in the Middle East. The company has also made a significant contribution to the Kuwaiti market through the creation and implementation of many solutions in various fields such as aerial survey services, facilities protection and surveillance services, search and rescue, environmental studies, agriculture, quality control of electricity cables and oil pipelines, and inventory of trees on farms and other areas. Among the most important beneficiaries of these services in the government sector is the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of the Interior, Oil & Gas, and other sectors.

From his side, Bader Jeragh, CEO of New Market, said: "We take pride of our partnership with the Ooredoo being the leading provider of innovative digital services in Kuwait, which will give us the opportunity to provide the most demanded DJI Mini SE drone for all lovers of travel and excursions."



ANNAPOLIS JUNCTION, US: In this file photo the Boeing Company logo is seen on a building in Annapolis Junction, Maryland. —AFP

sight claim against the board," Vice Chancellor Morgan Zurn said Tuesday, dismissing two other claims. Boeing told the BBC it would "consider next steps".

The Delaware ruling noted the real victims of the crashes were the deceased and their loved ones, however, "corporate law recognizes another set of victims: Boeing as an enterprise, and its stockholders." Following the two crashes, the company has faced steep fines.

At the beginning of the year Boeing agreed to pay \$2.5 billion in fines and settle a criminal charge over claims they defrauded regulators overseeing the 737 MAX. Then in May Boeing also agreed to pay a \$17 million fine and improve its supply chain and production practices after installing unapproved equipment on hundreds of planes. Boeing's 373 MAX aircraft were only cleared to return to the skies in late 2020, and the firm has also suffered from the collapse of the travel industry due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Boeing did not respond to AFP's request for comment. —AFP

Boeing's board faces lawsuit from shareholders

WASHINGTON: Boeing's board of directors must face a lawsuit from shareholders over two fatal crashes that killed hundreds of people, a US judge has ruled. The manufacturer's 737 MAX was grounded for 20 months worldwide in March 2019 after 346 people died in two crashes—the Lion Air disaster in Indonesia in 2018 and an Ethiopian Airlines crash the following year.

The lengthy ruling stated that "the Board should have heeded but instead ignored" a "red flag" about the aircrafts' safety systems, known as MCAS, following the first crash.

"The stockholders may pursue the Company's over-

PayPal to buy Japanese firm Paidy for \$2.7bn

TOKYO: US online payment giant PayPal is set to buy the online Japanese credit specialist Paidy for \$2.7 billion, the US company said in a statement Tuesday, a new sign of the development of the "buy now pay later" sector. Created in 2008 in Tokyo, Paidy allows online merchants to offer payment on credit and in installments to their customers.

The company, which now boasts six million clients, had already raised around \$400 million from investors, including Goldman Sachs and PayPal Ventures, the private equity arm of PayPal.

For the buyout, the latter put 300 billion yen (\$2.7 billion) on the table, "mainly in cash," according to a statement released Tuesday. The two groups expect the transaction to be finalized in the fourth quarter of 2021, subject to the necessary regulatory approvals. Following the takeover, Paidy will retain its brand and continue to operate under its name.

In April, the two companies had already entered into a partnership that allowed Paidy users in Japan to make purchases on credit from all e-merchants that used PayPal as a payment service around the world. The deal announced on Tuesday confirms the growing development of "buy now pay later" companies. —AFP

China media tries to reassure investors over crackdown

BEIJING: China's recent clampdowns on a range of industries including tech firms and the education sector will not detract from its goal of opening up the economy, state media said yesterday, as Beijing rushes to reassure rattled investors. Sweeping regulatory changes over the past months have targeted everything from monopolistic behavior to data security, rattling share prices and wiping billions off companies' valuations.

Authorities have ordered some of China's biggest tech firms to stop "disorderly expansion", scuppered the bumper listing of financial giant Ant group, and launched a series of antitrust and cybersecurity probes. A fresh push by President Xi Jinping targeting the country's uber-rich and calling for "common prosperity" has added fire to public debate, as have moves to tighten oversight of pop culture.

But a widely shared article by a well-known blogger calling the clampdowns a "profound revolution" has prompted a scramble by public figures and state media to counter growing fears that the changes amount to a second Cultural Revolution.

"Opening to the outside world is China's basic national policy, and this will not waver at any point," a front-page People's Daily editorial proclaimed yesterday. "Unswervingly, the principles

and policies of encouraging, supporting and guiding the development of the non-public sector of the economy have not changed," the state outlet added.

The editorial yesterday added that the regulations are to guide enterprises to obey the ruling party's leadership and serve the country's broader interests of economic and social development.

Its timing also sends a message that authorities recognize "the significance of the private economy and private tech companies... and will continue to have their back", said Ether Yin, a partner at consultancy Trivium China. "The crackdown is a correction of previous regulatory lapse and (marks) the pains of growing up," he added.

And Feng Chucheng, at research firm Plenum, said: "I think there is a lot of misunderstanding in terms of what Beijing really wants to achieve with its latest regulatory actions."

Yesterday, China's foreign ministry defended the government's regulatory moves, saying they were aimed at promoting "the fair, orderly and sustainable growth and development of China's economy".

Observers believe Beijing is trying to ease the fears of foreign investors. Business groups have warned that China's business environment had become more politicized last year.

"The Chinese Communist Party has some very ambitious techno-nationalist goals that it has not yet reached," said Hinrich Foundation research fellow Alex Capri. "It still needs outside investors, it still needs technology transfers," he said. "The end game is still going to be self-sufficiency... but they have to spin this very carefully." —AFP

Opinion

Oil still key in energy security game

By Badar Chaudhry



A storm is brewing - one we all cannot allow to gain too much momentum. A pullback in financing for traditional energy platforms, notably oil, has emerged at a time when the volume of greener energy resources are not sizeable enough to plug the gap.

Essentially, the "sunrise" aspect of lower carbon energy and the "sunset" aspect of oil markets risk becoming misaligned - and we do not want to be left in the dark. Worst case, this could jeopardize energy security: A throw of the dice that no public, company, nor country can afford. This is especially true considering rising population rates and their subsequent energy demand. UNICEF expects the population in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) to double during the first half of the 21st century, while the UN said the global population will expand by nearly 25 percent to 9.8bn people by 2050. Ensuring everyone can reliably flick on the light switch and power their vehicles is paramount, especially as we are still lagging; 1bn people worldwide still lack reliable access to power.

Intensifying pressure points

Multifaceted drivers are propelling the pullback on oil markets, a commodity market at the core of a modern-day civilization that billions of people have benefitted from for nearly 100 years. The primary drivers are the surge in global momentum for decarbonization - greener energy markets are a linchpin to success - and the reduction in demand amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, oil and gas companies cut their capex by 34 percent in 2020, slightly more than the initial 28 percent reduction following plummeting oil prices in 2014, according to BCG.

We are also seeing a contraction in the Middle East, the world's historical epicenter of fossil fuels. Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have been selling energy assets, with Saudi Arabia and the UAE spearheading the charge. Aramco sold 49 percent of its pipeline network to a US-led consortium in a \$12.4 billion deal in April, for example, while ADNOC raised \$10bn by selling gas pipeline leasing rights. Such moves are partly geared at sustainably pursuing their energy transitions without generating debt bundles, especially amid lower oil prices - a smart move. This is also timely considering the risk of stranded assets. Around \$900 billion would evaporate if governments more aggressively attempted to restrict the rise in temperatures to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels for the rest of this century, according to the Financial Times' Lex. The recent landmark Net Zero report from the International Energy Agency (IEA) is also expected to feed sentiment to pullback, saying sales of new internal combustion engine passenger cars must be halted by 2035 and all unabated coal and oil power plants must be phased out by 2040. This is not just another blip in this boom-and-bust industry. After decades of analysts placing varying bets, peak oil is very much upon us. BP, Total and others have suggested that oil demand could peak this decade and OPEC expects world crude demand to peak somewhere around 2040; a major statement from black gold's prime organizer and cheerleader. But don't write off oil just yet.

Timing is everything

That greener energy will dominate in time, instead of black gold, is rightly inevitable. But pinning down the right pace of transition is both hard and critical - and some may be acting too soon. Of course, oil dynamics have taken a hit amid the aforementioned drivers. Global oil demand is unlikely to catch up with its pre-COVID trajectory. In 2020, the start of the IEA's forecast period, oil demand was nearly 9 mb/d below the 100mb/d level seen in 2019, and it is not expected to return to that level before 2023. But unless there are rapid policy interventions and behavioral changes - this is viable considering today's change of pace - then the longer-term growth drivers will push oil demand to 104.1mb/d by 2026, which equates to a 14.2 percent climb. Without a crystal ball, we can't determine the speed of oil recovery in different countries and regions. But there is no doubt that it will recover to some degree, helping soak up some of the glut from 2020 and further support prices - more good news for oil-centric economies in the Middle East. Energy forecasts up to 2050 are valuable in giving investors goalposts, but we can't lose sight of sustaining energy security in the near-term: we cannot forget the here and now. So, when it comes to reallocating oil-related investments and divestments, a lighter touch may not be a bad idea - until the pandemic-triggered dust settles at least. Note: Badar Chaudhry is Senior Vice President, Unit Manager, Energy Sector at Mashreq Bank

Business

Power cuts stall industrial revival in Syrian city Aleppo

Despite an end to war, electricity supplies still hampered

ALEPPO: Workshops in Syria's Aleppo used to clatter on into the night before the war, but these days the machines grind to a halt at 6 pm sharp because of power cuts. Fighting ended almost five years ago in the country's former economic hub, but limited electricity supply has hampered a full return to work in its manufacturing neighborhoods that produce everything from plastic to food.

In the Karm Al-Qatari district famous for textiles, Mahmud Majkani, 31, said his business weaving medical gauze was still reeling from the effects of the decade-old conflict. "I can't say the war has really ended as my machines haven't gone back to working around the clock," he said. The conflict has ravaged electricity networks as well as oil and gas infrastructure across the country.

Syria's largest oilfields remain beyond the government's reach in the country's Kurdish-held northeast, and Western sanctions have hampered fuel imports from abroad. Syrians in government-held areas have had to adapt their lives at home and work around power cuts of up to 20 hours a day. Aleppo's industrial districts may receive a little more power than residential neighborhoods, but Majkani says it is still not enough for his business to fully get back on its feet. Nowadays only half of his eight weaving machines shuttle back and forth in his narrow workshop on the third floor of a building with gutted walls. He says he hardly dares fix the machine nearest to the gaping facade in case he slips over the edge and falls off.

'Dicing with death'

"If we had electricity for longer, we could have worked more and fixed the wall," he said. But instead, "we're dicing with death". In industrial areas of the northern city, the state is supposed to provide power from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm four days a week,

though in practice even that supply is often punctuated by electricity cuts. Outside these hours, the public network runs dead. Businessmen who can afford it buy diesel fuel to operate private generators, but many more are forced to shut up shop. In residential neighborhoods, where power cuts last longer, many subscribe to private generators.

Government forces retook control of east Aleppo from rebels in late 2016, after years of deadly bombardment on the besieged opposition-held half of the city. The fighting heavily scarred its industrial neighborhoods, most of them in the east. The city's electrical network was all but obliterated. Mohammed Al-Saleh, Aleppo chief of Syria's state



Everything from plastic to food produced in Aleppo

electricity company, said the authorities had slowly been working to rehabilitate power lines since 2017. "But it's not easy," he said. "When we returned to eastern parts of Aleppo, there were no transmission stations, no pylons, no power stations. We're starting over from scratch."

'Make the most of each minute'

In February, the electricity company said it had started repairing the province's power plant - one of

13 million by the end of the year if left unchecked, the government said. It announced an initial package of \$5.4 billion (6.3 billion euros, \$7.5 billion) in extra funding for the NHS to help clear the backlog over the coming months.

The new national insurance levy will then raise £36 billion over the next three years for the NHS, before it is targeted directly to funding elderly care. While national insurance is paid by all UK workers except the low-paid, the government said a 1.25 percent levy would also be slapped on share dividends, to capture the better-off who rely on investments for income.

Another manifesto breach

At present, anyone with assets over £23,250 has to pay in full should they need to go into a care home, for instance if they develop dementia. That has led to many elderly Britons being forced to sell their homes and liquidate their life savings. Under the new plan, from October 2023, anyone with assets of £20,000-£100,000 will contribute to their care but will also get means-tested support.

No one will have to pay over £86,000 over their lifetime. Johnson, who entered Downing Street in 2019 claiming to have a plan ready on social care, said successive governments had ducked the electorally tricky challenge for too long. "There cannot be any more dither or delay," he told parliament. "You can't fix the NHS without fixing social care."

The government also announced another manifesto breach in scrapping a guarantee that would have seen retirees get an annual raise to their state pension by some eight percent next year.

With wages frozen for many state employees but labor shortages driving up private-sector salaries,



ALEPPO, Syria: A Syrian child is pictured at a workshop in the northern city of Aleppo. —AFP

the country's largest - with support from key government ally Iran. It followed a 2017 deal between Damascus and Tehran on "cooperation in the electricity sector", including to fix the Aleppo power station and build a new one in the government stronghold of Latakia. Until the network is restored, manufacturers are having to adapt. In Karm Al-Qatari, Abdel Salaam Mazzyk, 52, said he missed the good old days when the neighborhood was alive with the constant swishing back and forth of textile machines. "We used to work non-stop," said Mazzyk, who owns a workshop producing colorful materials. But today he only works four days a week, desperately trying to "make the most of each minute of electricity". — AFP



LONDON: Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak reacts during a press conference inside the Downing Street Briefing Room in central London Tuesday. —AFP

Johnson said the "statistical freak" for pensioners was unjustified. Opposition parties seized on the latest U-turns by Johnson's government, which has also broken with its electoral pledges by slashing the foreign aid budget. Employers' union the CBI accepted social care reforms and greater investment were "long overdue" but said businesses already faced a corporation tax hike in 2023.

CBI president Karan Bilimoria said a national insurance increase "will directly hurt a business' ability to hire staff, at a time when businesses have faced a torrid 18 months and are now fighting crippling labor shortages". But the government says its massive spending during the pandemic must force a fiscal reckoning, and takes comfort in opinion polls that suggest solid support for overhauling social care. — AFP



plastic," he said. Meanwhile, nets can kill long after the fishing boats leaves them behind.

Plastic waste can alter life cycles and the floating debris can even transport some species far from their habitats. "A Noah's ark", said Galgani, adding there are "no other examples of species transport of this magnitude".

To change the situation, everyone needs to play their part. Philippos Drousiotis head of the Cyprus sustainable tourism initiative. "I was in the tourism trade and very much liked the idea of being sustainable (but) environmentalists didn't care about people," he said, adding that he was driven by economic realism. With initiatives like the "keep our sand and sea plastic free" project, his organization tries to steer tour organizers, boat rental firms and hotels to stop using single use plastics.

It has also installed water fountains on beaches to make it easier for holidaymakers to give up their plastic bottles. "The solutions are on land and not at sea," said Romy Hentinger of the Tara Ocean Foundation.

It is also necessary to increase knowledge of the

sources of pollution and how it circulates.

The Tara Oceans schooner led an expedition in 2019 to trace plastic pollution in the major European rivers. According to Nathalie Van Den Broeck, oceanographer and vice-president of Surfrider Europe, some "80 percent of waste on beaches and in the seas comes from rivers".

The French NGO has also launched a study using artificial intelligence to find waste in images taken on mobile phones by citizen scientists.

Volunteers have recently travelled along the banks of the Rhine, in the six countries crossed by the river. There are a host of initiatives looking to use the Marseille congress to develop networks and partnerships. Although Middle Eastern and North African countries from the southern shores of the Mediterranean—which often have far fewer resources—are conspicuous by their absence.

But more needs to be done, said Mercedes Munoz Canas, from the IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation, who wants to bring in business interests. We must "build a community", she said. — AFP

KFH announces winner of Jeep Wrangler Sport

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) has announced Abdullah Al-Azmi as the winner of the Jeep Wrangler Sport, under the campaign "Win with Hesabi" for youth. The car is the first of the 3 cars offered in the campaign that includes cash prizes worth 250 dinars for 10 winners per month.

Al-Azmi expressed his happiness by winning the car that he received from KFH Auto Showroom in Shuwaikh. This campaign comes as part of KFH continuing efforts to add value to Hesabi customers including advantages, discounts, prizes, and exclusive rewards.

Once the social allowance is transferred to Hesabi program, customers enter the monthly draw on 10 prizes of KD 250 each, in addition to three special draws on Jeep Wrangler Sport cars. KFH offers "Hesabi for Youth" with a variety of privileges as part of its continued endeavor to provide adequate customer care, innovate new products and services and fulfill the needs of all customers of various age categories and interests. Services and products are tailored to suit customers' needs and provide distinguished service as per global standards regarding quality, accuracy and speed.

"Hesabi" program has been designed to meet the needs of youth and aspire for their active lifestyle. This program presents for youth many exclusive offers and a wide range of privileges including Hesabi ATM card with a unique design, eligibility to issue Hesabi prepaid card (as per credit regulations of KFH), distinguished offers and discounts etc. KFH continues to launch marketing campaigns to reward youth customers. Hesabi for Youth represents the ambitions and expectations of youth category and copes with KFH aspirations to attract the largest portion of youth who represents the major part of Kuwaiti society. Also, the account represents KFH initiative to diversify banking services and products.

IMF gives Tanzania \$567m in COVID economic support

NAIROBI: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has loaned Tanzania more than half a billion dollars in emergency financing as the coronavirus pandemic drags on its economy and critical tourism sector. The Washington DC-based lender approved \$567 million (479 million euros) in COVID support for Tanzania, which until recently was an outlier in the global fight against the coronavirus and dismissed the gravity of the disease.

Its economy slowed to 4.8 percent in 2020 as travel restrictions battered the tourism sector, a key earner in the East African country where growth was expected to remain muted in 2021. The IMF said Tanzania faced "urgent" health, economic and humanitarian costs as a reported third wave of the pandemic swept the country.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted Tanzania's macroeconomic outlook, and the health and wellbeing of its population," Bo Li, IMF deputy managing director, said in a statement announcing the emergency funding on Tuesday. The IMF said the pandemic-induced economic downturn had increased poverty and unemployment and increased debt risk, mainly due to the "collapse" of the tourism sector.

Tanzania launched a coronavirus vaccination drive in July in a clear departure from the deeply COVID-skeptic policies of John Magufuli, the country's late leader who downplayed the disease for most of the pandemic. Magufuli, whose uncompromising leadership style earned him the nickname "the Bulldozer", shunned foreign-made vaccines in favor of the healing power of prayer and dismissed masks and testing as unnecessary. —

UK's PM breaks tax pledge to fund new care for elderly

LONDON: Breaking an election pledge not to raise taxes, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Tuesday announced hefty new funding to fix a social care crisis and a pandemic surge in hospital waiting lists. The government said the tax hike brings Britain into line with France, Germany and Japan, which have all raised social insurance levies to help care for ageing populations.

Johnson conceded that the 1.25 percent levy on UK national insurance contributions—paid both by workers and their employers—violated Conservative manifesto promises ahead of the December 2019 election. "No Conservative government wants to raise taxes," he told a news conference, after an uproar among many of his backbenchers and reports of a cabinet rift over the plan.

At the weekend, senior minister Jacob Rees-Mogg recalled George H.W. Bush's declaration in 1988: "Read my lips: No new taxes." Bush broke his pledge and lost the US presidential election four years later. But arguing "COVID wasn't in our manifesto either", Johnson said "nor could we in good conscience meet the cost of this plan simply by borrowing the money and imposing the burden on future generations".

The coronavirus pandemic has fuelled a record backlog of 5.5 million routine procedures on the state-run National Health Service (NHS), rising to

Med pollution under spotlight at conservation meet

MARSEILLE: Plastic packaging and discarded fishing nets bob in the tranquil waters of the Mediterranean, signs of the choking pollution that has stirred strong feelings at the world conservation congress in the French port city Marseille this week. "The Mediterranean is the most beautiful sea in the world... and one of the most polluted," said Danielle Milon, vice-president of the Calanques National Park on the edge of the city, where the International Union for Conservation of Nature is holding its congress.

While the quantity of rubbish in the sea is well documented—the IUCN released a report on the issue last year entitled "Mare plasticum"—it is driving growing alarm among countries whose economies rely on tourism drawn to pristine beaches and sparkling waters. At the opening of the IUCN Congress, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and French President Emmanuel Macron pledged to greatly increase the size of conservation areas off their Mediterranean coasts—as well as the rigor with which they are preserved.

"Marine protected areas must no longer be paper parks but must have defined conservation measures," Mitsotakis said at the opening ceremony. "We must promote sustainable tourism (and) put biodiversity at the heart of tourist coastal planning."

'Noah's Ark'

Near the coasts the main types of plastic pollution in the almost closed sea are packaging and fishing debris, said Francois Galgani, a specialist on maritime waste at Ifremer, a top marine research center in France. "Turtles confuse the packaging with jellyfish and in some areas in the Mediterranean 80 percent of turtles have ingested

Lifestyle | Gossip



Marilyn Monroe assassinated over UFO knowledge, book claims

Marilyn Monroe was assassinated after she learned President John F Kennedy's UFO secrets, a book on the Hollywood icon has alleged. The original blonde bombshell, who was found dead aged 36 in 1962, was allegedly thought to be a threat to national security after obtaining the information. Author Nick Redfern said[Marilyn's death] "was because of her being told Government secrets ... One of them being about crashed UFOs and strange dead bodies

held at military bases". His book 'Diary of Secrets: UFO Conspiracies and the Mysterious Death of Marilyn Monroe' makes the claim that the death of the screen legend was an intentional act that masked Marilyn as a drug addict. After becoming a model during the height of World War II, Marilyn - real name Norma Jeane Baker - went on to light up the silver screen during a short but incredibly memorable career. Some of her most famous films include 'Some Like it Hot' and 'Gentleman Prefer Blondes', in

which she performed the classic 'Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend'. During her decade of stardom, Marilyn was thought to have been romantically linked with US President JFK and his brother Robert. The striking claims made in the book come just a week after another woman claiming to be a mistress of JFK revealed her story. Diana de Vegh, 83 claimed to have had a four-year affair with JFK while he was married to Jackie Kennedy. She wrote in Air Mail News: "I was 20 years old, with a full supply of

hormones and madly in love with this compelling man." The alleged affair supposedly fizzled out when JFK discovered that Diana's father was an economist he worked with. The president - who himself was assassinated by former US Marine Lee Harvey Oswald in November 1963 - is also rumored to have had affairs with other Hollywood icons like Marlene Dietrich and Angie Dickinson.

Kylie Jenner has confirmed she's pregnant

The 24-year-old make-up mogul has taken to Instagram to reveal she's expecting her second child with rap star Travis Scott. Kylie - who already has Stormi, three, with Travis - posted a video featuring her positive pregnancy test and a behind-the-scenes look at her undergoing an ultrasound scan. The video clip also features Kris Jenner, Kylie's mom, being given photos of her scan results and then being overcome with emotion as she realizes that her daughter is expecting another baby. Later in Kylie's Instagram post, she is seen cradling her growing baby bump and celebrating the news with the rest of her family. Rumors about Kylie's pregnancy first emerged last month, but until now, the Jenner/Kardashian clan have all remained tight-lipped amid the speculation. Kylie's post - which attracted more than five million likes in less than an hour - quickly prompted a host of supportive messages from her family. Kris wrote in reply to the sweet video: "Crying all over again [hearts and praying emojis] what a special and amazing



Blessing and gift God has given you!!!! [praying emojis]" Kourtney Kardashian wrote: "Crying this is so beautiful my blessed angel [heart emoji] (sic)" Khloe Kardashian responded by simply saying: "Awwwww (sic)" And Kim Kardashian wrote in reply to Kylie's post: "Crying!!!! [heart emojis] (sic)" Elsewhere, Kendall Jenner - Kylie's older sister - also admitted to feeling emotional about the video. The 25-year-old model wrote on the photo-sharing platform: "i can't handle it [tears and hearts emojis] (sic)" Kylie previously revealed she enjoys the challenge of motherhood. The reality star also admitted she'd love to have another child one day - although she wasn't sure on the timescale at the time. Seven months after Stormi's arrival, Kylie shared: "I do want to have more - when, is the question."



Gomez has 'group email chain' with Short and Martin

Selena Gomez is in a "group e-mail chain" with Martin Short and Steve Martin. The 29-year-old actress stars alongside the two veterans in new Hulu series 'Only Murders in the Building' and she has found it fascinating chatting to them about what Hollywood "used to be like". She told PEOPLE magazine: "They immediately made me feel like I was a part of a trio. They're just the best. They are extremely humble and kind, and they just have a different human perspective on life than anyone I've ever met. "I asked them about how life used to be, and it was always so interesting to hear about the industry and what it used to be like. I felt like a sponge, just absorbing everything I could. We're all on a group e-mail chain." The 10-episode mystery-comedy show sees Selena star as Mabel Mora alongside Steve (Charles-Haden Savage) and Martin (Oliver Putnam) as three true crime-obsessed neighbors in an upscale Manhattan apartment when they team up to investigate as suspicious death. Although she has appeared on the big

screen over the years, her last TV acting role was Disney Channel's 'Wizards of Waverly Place' over four seasons from 2007 to 2012. Reflecting on the early success of the new show, she said: "My friend sent me a picture that we got 100 percent on Rotten Tomatoes and I just freaked out. "I don't know if something's going to be good - I do that all the time, with my music and everything. I just go with my gut, so I'm just so happy that people like it." Meanwhile, Selena - who also serves as an executive producer on the project alongside her co-stars - recently said she isn't sure if she can claim to be a "good actor". She explained: "To be honest I don't know if I'm a good actor. I just do my job and hope I can live up to these incredible people. "I will say, though, that I learned a lot from the first episode to the end. I even joked to [co-creator] John [Hoffman] that I wished I could redo the first episode because I felt I had developed a lot."

to have a brother/bestie like him. "I hope that getting to share our stories will make people laugh with and at us." Ryan thinks the series will show people that there's much more to Meghan than they realize. Looking forward to the show, he explained: "I might be biased but I think that Meghan is the funniest person in the world. "I can't wait for everyone to realize that she's not just 'that Bass' girl."



Meghan Trainor launches a podcast series

Meghan Trainor is launching her own podcast series. The 27-year-old pop star is teaming up with her brother Ryan Trainor for a new series called 'Workin' On It', which is set to set premiere on September 15. The 'All About That Bass' hitmaker said: "Ryan is one of my favorite humans ever. He always keeps me humble and real and I'm so grateful

Western co-produced by Jay-Z to open London Film Festival

The London Film Festival will return to big screens next month with the world premiere of "The Harder They Fall", a Western co-produced by Jay-Z and starring Idris Elba, organizers confirmed Tuesday. The British capital's annual cinema showcase, forced largely online last year because of the pandemic, will open on October 6 with the hotly anticipated Western, featuring a primarily Black cast that also includes Regina King. The Netflix movie is directed by Londoner Jeaymes Samuel, who made his directorial debut with the 2013 Western "They Die by Dawn". The 12-day London festival, now in its 65th year, will close with Joel Coen's "The Tragedy Of Macbeth", starring the acclaimed director's Oscar-winning wife Frances McDormand and fellow Academy Award winner Denzel Washington. Hollywood star Kristen Stewart's portrayal of Princess Diana, "Spencer", will also screen at the festival, after getting its premiere at the Venice Film Festival earlier this month. The London line-up of 159 films also features Kenneth Branagh's autobiographical movie "Belfast" and "The Power Of The Dog", starring Benedict Cumberbatch. Other star-studded entrants include "King Richard", featuring Will Smith as the father of tennis stars Venus and Serena Williams and "Mothering Sunday", starring "The Crown" actors Olivia Colman and Josh O'Connor. Meanwhile, the opening two episodes in the third series of hit HBO show "Succession" will get their European premiere as part of an expanded list of television entries. "Across the whole of the

program, artists are exploring a range of serious themes: the impact of the global pandemic, the climate emergency, racial and wealth inequality," festival director Tricia Tuttle said as she unveiled the full line-up. "And like the rest of us, filmmakers and artists are searching for answers to impossible questions." Organizers announced earlier this year that the 2021 festival's biggest premieres will move



from Leicester Square to the Royal Festival Hall on London's South Bank. A selection of the films will also be shown at 10 venues in cities and towns across the UK, in what Tuttle said was an effort to "remove geographical barriers" and introduce "greater access and more free ways to engage." - AFP



Billie Eilish feels 'conflicted' about social media

The 19-year-old singer has more than 90 million followers on Instagram and more than six million followers on Twitter, and she admits to having a complicated relationship with social media platforms. She shared: "I feel conflicted about [sharing her life with fans]. I don't always want to tell the world intimate details about my life, I don't really want people to know everything about me, but at the same time I want people to be able to feel seen and heard if they've experienced the same things I have. "I want to be helpful. I want people to realize that it's OK, that everyone goes through this. You can speak for people who don't have a voice. "But also, it's conflicting, because sometimes you also don't want to talk about it. It's a tough responsibility because it's also not my responsibility. I don't owe anyone anything." Billie actually enjoys spending time online. But she also feels as though she "can't avoid" herself wherever she looks. She told i-D magazine: "I like the internet. I like memes and something like that. But no matter what I do, I can't avoid myself. I'm everywhere. I feel sorry for all the people who hate me because they can't avoid me either. "But I don't want to read about Billie Eilish doing this or that from someone who doesn't know a thing about me. Like, please. I want to make music. I get annoyed about it. But it's funny. "Why do people need to have an opinion about everything I do or say or wear or look like and feel? I just want to make music. I'm just a random girl who likes to sing. It's not that deep. "Just listen to the music and shut up about my life."

Rihanna drops lawsuit against dad

Rihanna has dropped her lawsuit against her dad. The 'Diamonds' singer - whose real name is Robyn Rihanna Fenty - has reached a settlement with Ronald Fenty and agreed to drop her case against him, just weeks before they were due to appear in court for a trial. Rihanna had first sued her father and his company, Fenty Entertainment, in 2019 and accused him of using her name to make money without her approval, alleging he booked shows for her even though he had no professional capacity to do so, including a \$15 million overseas tour and a number of gigs in Los Angeles. She said in her lawsuit: "Although Mr. Fenty is Rihanna's father, he does not have, and never has had, authority to act on Rihanna's behalf." Rihanna argued her reputation was damaged when it came to dealing with the venues and promoters because she had no idea about the concerts Ronald had scheduled. And the 33-year-old star was further angered when her dad tried to trademark 'Fenty' and use it to open a hotel chain, though his



application was rejected by the US Patent & Trademark Office. Rihanna had asked the court to grant her an injunction against her father to stop him using the Fenty name and booking gigs for her. In his response to the lawsuit, Ronald demanded it be thrown out of court as he was the first to use his surname. The pair had originally meant to explore the matter in court in June but the trial was delayed until September 22 by mutual agreement because Rihanna was in the UK and unable to return to Los Angeles because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Lily Collins ties the knot with Charlie McDowell

Lily Collins and Charlie McDowell tied the knot over the weekend. The 32-year-old actress has taken to Instagram to post photos from her wedding day, revealing she married Charlie, 38, in a romantic ceremony in Dunton Hot Springs, Colorado. Alongside a snap of them sharing a kiss on their wedding day, Lily wrote: "I've never wanted to be someone's someone more than I do yours, and now I get to be your wife. On September 4th, 2021 we officially became each other's forever. I love you beyond @charliemcdowell...? (sic)" In another behind-the-scenes snap from their wedding, Charlie is seen lovingly embracing the 'Emily in Paris' star. Lily - who is wearing a white wedding dress and smiling broadly in the photo - captioned the sweet image: "Never been happier... (sic)" In a separate photo, Lily described their romance as a fairytale that's been turned into her "forever reality". The actress - who is the daughter of music star Phil

Collins - wrote on the photo-sharing platform: "What started as a fairytale, is now my forever reality. I'll never be able to properly describe how otherworldly this past weekend was, but magical is a pretty good place to start... (sic)" Charlie - who got engaged to the actress in September last year - has also posted the same images on his own Instagram account. The director wrote: "I married the most generous, thoughtful, and beautiful person I've ever known. I love you @lilycollins (sic)" In another snap, the loved-up couple are seen sharing a kiss by a waterfall. And Charlie admitted that the moment will play "forever" inside his own head. The filmmaker - who is best known for his 2014 comedy movie 'The One I Love' - wrote: "This moment will forever play inside my head."



Lifestyle | Features



Emad Attiyat, co-founder of "Atan Donkey Milk Soaps", speaks at a farm he manages in Madaba.



A worker milks a jenny (female donkey) at a farm managed by "Atan Donkey Milk Soaps" in Madaba.

Donkey milk soap soaking up fans in Jordan

Friends and family initially mocked one Jordanian family's new venture making soap from donkey milk. But now, a year on, the company is cleaning up as customers bray for more. Atan Donkey Milk Soaps produces 100 percent natural soaps from its farm in Madaba, 35 kilometers (21 miles) southwest of Amman, where it keeps 12 donkeys, and a small manufacturing workshop in the Jordanian capital. Although other regions around the Mediterranean produce soap from donkey milk, this is the first for Jordan. "At the beginning, many laughed at the idea," said Emad Attiyat, 32, co-founder of the project which takes its name from the Arabic for a jenny or female donkey, "atan".

Skeptics scoffed they "would use nothing on (their) skin related to donkeys," added Attiyat who has a degree in Management Information Systems. But "after trying the soap, all that changed, and now we produce more than 4,500 bars of soap per month to meet the demand," he said, standing next to the barn where the animals are housed.

'Reducing ageing'

Donkey's milk is said to be rich in minerals and proteins that can help moisturize the skin. It also has high levels of antioxidants, which protect the skin from sunlight and the effects of ageing, according to beauticians. One liter of milk produces around 30 bars of soap, but milking each female is a painstaking task done with the



Emad Attiyat, co-founder of "Atan Donkey Milk Soaps", pours into a mold a mix of natural ingredients with donkey milk during the production of soap.

help of a hand-held electronic pump. Each donkey has to be milked three times a day in order to get about a liter of fluid, and leaving about another liter for its foal. The milk is frozen and then transferred to the company's workshop in Amman to be turned into soap.

Research has shown donkey milk can "help regenerate skin cells, reduce signs of

ageing and help cure some skin diseases such as eczema," said Attiyat's mother Salma Al-Zubi. She was the one who came up with the idea of trying the venture. An environmental activist and retired teacher, she said donkey's milk soap contributes to balancing the skin's moisture levels, removing wrinkles as well as the effects of spots and acne. Now in her 60s, she helps mix ingredients in their company's Amman workshop in a large steel bowl, wearing a white face mask and blue gloves. Olive oil, almond oil, coconut oil as well as shea butter are added to the donkey milk to produce the soap which is then sold via their Facebook page.

A small, 85-gram bar of soap costs eight Jordanian dinars (\$11), while a large 125-gram bar of soap is sold for ten dinars (\$14). By comparison, a liter of donkey's milk in Europe can reach as high as 60 euros, and is used in making some expensive cheeses.

Providing jobs

Attiyat is now hoping to expand production to face and hand creams and lotions. Donkey's milk is "rich in proteins and minerals including magnesium, copper, sodium, manganese, zinc, calcium and iron, all of which are very important for the skin," said dietician Susanna Haddad, who works at a beauty center in Amman.

It contains "higher percentages of whey, which has antimicrobial properties" and can also prevent the growth of viruses and bacteria. As she poured the mixture into special silicon molds to shape the bars



Emad Attiyat, co-founder of "Atan Donkey Milk Soaps", mixes natural ingredients with donkey milk.

over the next month, Zubi said the venture had provided jobs to several family members "including my son Emad, who has suffered from unemployment for many years". Jordan's already weak economy has been badly hit by the year-long restrictions and closures imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The poverty rate, according to official figures, rose to about 15.7 percent by late 2020, while estimates say it could soar to more than 24 percent this year. Unemployment also increased in the first quarter of 2021 to reach 25 percent, or 50

percent among the youth in a country whose public debt exceeded \$48 billion, or more than 108 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP). Loyal customer, lawyer Esraa Al-Turk, 48, said she had been attracted to the donkey milk soap because it is a natural product. "I take care of my skin," she said, adding that although she did not wear much make-up, she had now "become more daring to leave home without any cosmetics on my face". —AFP



This picture shows a man watering plants on the balcony of his home in Hanoi, during the government-imposed lockdown to stop the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus. — AFP photos



A woman looking out from the balcony of her home in Hanoi.



A woman looking out from the balcony of her home in Hanoi.



A woman looking out from a balcony of her home in Hanoi.



A man looking out from the balcony of his home in Hanoi.

'My savior': Hanoi's tiny balconies a refuge in lockdown

Overlooking deserted streets, Hanoi's tiny balconies have become places of refuge as the city's locked-down residents squeeze desks, yoga mats and comfy seats for coffee drinking into their share of fresh air. Eight million people living in the Vietnamese capital have been under a strict stay-at-home order since late July, allowed out only for trips to get food or hospital visits. Although the lockdown is

beginning to ease in some parts of the city, most residents must stay home for at least another two weeks as the nationwide death toll from COVID-19 continues to climb.

"My only connection to the outside world has been through my tiny balcony," said Nguyen Xuan Anh, an office worker who lives in a high-rise residential block. Anh has squeezed a desk onto her three-square-meter (32-square-foot) balcony, once home to ornamental trees. It's small, but large enough for her to work there on a laptop and drink her morning coffee while surveying the silence of a street once jam-packed with motorbikes and cars.

"Before, I had no time to even stand for five minutes on my balcony. Now, it's become my savior," Anh told AFP. With outdoor exercise banned, it's not uncommon to see people linger for hours in their limited outside space. "I hide on my

balcony, my corner, almost the whole day," said Tran Trung Quan, an IT engineer. "It's not nice to stay indoors all day, with the kids causing so much trouble that you cannot concentrate on your work".

Vietnam, widely praised last year for its handling of the pandemic, has been badly hit by COVID-19 since a fourth wave began in April. The country has reported more than 500,000 infections and over 13,000 deaths. Several cities and provinces, including the southern business hub Ho Chi Minh City, have been under lockdown for months. "My only wish now is the lockdown order be removed, so that I can go back to work," Trung said. "It's just too much for me to handle from this tiny balcony." — AFP



A woman exercising on the balcony of her home in Hanoi.



Lifestyle | Features

Marie-Antoinette diamonds up for auction in Geneva

Two splendid diamond bracelets that belonged to French queen Marie-Antoinette will go under the hammer in Geneva later this year, the auction house Christie's said yesterday. The bracelets, each coated in 112 diamonds, will be sold together and are estimated to fetch between \$2-4 million when they go under the hammer on November 9. That estimate "includes not only the intrinsic value of the diamonds, but also the possibility to wear jewelry that was once worn by the famous queen Marie-Antoinette," Christie's jewellery specialist Marie-Cecile Cisamolo told AFP.

The historic jewels could meanwhile easily go for far more than the asking price. "As seen in recent Geneva sales, the market for jewels of noble provenance continues to perform extremely well," Francois Curiel, the chairman of Christie's luxury division, said in a statement. In 2018, a natural pearl and diamond pendant that belonged to the ill-fated French queen was estimated by the Sotheby's auction house at \$1.2 million but was snapped up for \$36 million.

Marie-Antoinette, the last queen of France before the revolution, was guillotined in Paris in October 1793 at the age of 37. But Cisamolo said that it was not just her history that made the bracelets extraordinary, pointing to the large size of the diamonds, which range from around one to four carats. "It is very difficult to measure their exact size, because these



This picture taken in Geneva shows two bracelets belonged to French Queen Marie-Antoinette adorned with three rows of 112 old cut diamonds, that will be offer for the first time for sale at an estimated price of \$2 - 4 millions (Euro 1,8 - 3,7 millions) by Christie's auction house in Geneva.

are antique diamonds, and back then the sizes were less precise," she explained.

While lacking the precision of today's laser-cut gems, Cisamolo stressed the charm and uniqueness of antique diamonds. In total, Christie's estimates that the bracelets comprise 140 to 150 carats. They are each composed of three rows of gems and can be connected together and worn as a necklace.

Paris, Brussels and Vienna

According to Christie's, Marie-Antoinette ordered the bracelets from jeweler Charles August Boehmer in Paris in 1776, two years after she ascended the throne. She paid 250,000 livres, "a huge sum at the time," Christie's said. Then the revolution arrived. Before attempting to flee France with King Louis XVI and their children, Marie-Antoinette first made sure her jewels



This picture shows two bracelets belonged to French Queen Marie-Antoinette adorned with three rows of 112 old cut diamonds. — AFP photos

were sent out of the country. They were sent to Brussels, governed by her sister Archduchess Marie-Christine, before being sent on to the French queen's native Austria, ruled by her nephew, the emperor.

In 1792, the royal family was imprisoned in Paris. The king and queen were executed the next year, and their 10-year-old son Louis XVII died in captivity. Only their daughter, Marie Therese of France, survived. She was freed in December 1795 and sent to Austria, where she was

given her mother's jewels. "These jewels can thus be traced all the way back to Marie-Antoinette," Cisamolo said, adding that she hoped whoever bought them "will cherish them for the rest of their life." "Not only are you wearing something that Marie-Antoinette wore," she said. "The diamonds are extraordinary." The bracelets, she said, showing off the gems glistening on her wrists, "flow. It is as though you are wearing fabric." — AFP



(From left) Patriarch of Venice Francesco Moraglia, Italian actress Cristiana Capotondi, Italy's Minister for Tourism, Massimo Garavaglia, Italian designer and businessman Renzo Rosso, Italian tenor Andrea Bocelli, President of the Veneto region Luca Zaia and Venice mayor Luigi Brugnaro pose during a ceremony at the 16th-century stone arch Rialto Bridge over the Grand Canal in Venice, after the bridge underwent major restoration. — AFP photos

Bocelli serenades Venice's Rialto Bridge after restoration

Venice celebrated the completion of a full restoration of its Rialto Bridge Tuesday, with tenor Andrea Bocelli singing opera atop the gem of Renaissance art spanning the Grand Canal. With its elegant low arch and distinctive arcades, the gleaming white bridge spanning the Grand Canal at its narrowest point is one of Venice's most photographed tourist attractions—and until the mid-19th century, the only way to cross besides by boat. The 5-million-euro (\$6-million) head-to-toe restoration of the bridge, funded by Diesel founder Renzo Rosso, was completed in 2019 after beginning in 2015, organizers said. But a planned inauguration ceremony twice had to be delayed because of Covid-19.

"This bridge is the bridge of Venice," Luca Zaia, president of the Veneto region of which Venice is the capitol, told invited guests at the bridge's apex. "It's a piece of history, it's an open-air museum." Bocelli

sang the famous Puccini aria "Nessun Dorma" during a brief ribbon-cutting ceremony, as the Grand Canal's stream of gondolas, water taxis and barges passed underneath. "It's been 450 years since it was built. It required meticulous work," Rosso told AFP.

Collapsing bridges

The bridge with three walkways and a 6.5-metre high arch is the oldest that currently crosses the Grand Canal, connecting the district of San Marco to the Rialto, the city's commercial centre and famous Rialto market. It is considered an architectural masterpiece for its two arcades of shops, for centuries the exclusive domain



(From left) Italian tenor Andrea Bocelli, Italian designer and businessman Renzo Rosso and President of the Veneto region Luca Zaia attend a ceremony at the 16th-century stone arch Rialto Bridge.

of goldsmiths, and pedestrian walkways with balustrades facing the water—all supported by 6,000 wooden piles. Built between 1588 and 1591, it replaced earlier versions, such as a 12th century pontoon bridge and later wooden covered bridges that burnt or collapsed.

But over 400 years of wind, water and pollution—and the modern-day influx of tourists—had taken their toll on the bright white Istrian stone. The bridge's entire 5,000 square meter surface area was restored, including its decorative bas-reliefs. The restoration also involved the flooring, the roofs of the shops lining the bridge and the balustrades. Millions of tourists visit the UNESCO heritage site of Venice each year, and in July, Venice narrowly avoided being placed on UNESCO's endangered list. The UN body warned of the need for a sustainable tourism management plan.

City officials have already decided the best way to manage crowds lies in making tourists book ahead and pay. "They can't all fit! So you have to book and if there's room you can enter," Mayor Luigi Brugnaro told AFP. Although a proposal to control entry via turnstiles had been met with widespread skepticism, including from Italy's culture minister, Brugnaro said it will take time to test different systems. "No city in the world has ever done an experiment like this," he added. — AFP

Britney's father files to end conservatorship

Britney Spears' father has filed a petition to end his daughter's court-ordered conservatorship, US media reported Tuesday. The filing comes weeks after Jamie Spears said he was prepared to step back from his role as conservator, and after repeated requests from the pop star to remove him from what she and her supporters say is a cruel and exploitative arrangement. "Recent events related to this conservatorship have called into question whether circumstances have changed to such an extent that grounds for establishment of a conservatorship may no longer exist," the filing states, according to CNN.

"Ms. Spears has told this Court that she wants control of her life back without the

safety rails of a conservatorship. She wants to be able to make decisions regarding her own medical care, deciding when, where and how often to get therapy. "She wants to control the money she has made from her career and spend it without supervision or oversight. She wants to be able to get married and have a baby, if she so chooses. "In short, she wants to live her life as she chooses without the constraints of a conservator or court proceeding," the petition says.

The filing adds that Jamie Spears wants "what is best for his daughter" and that she



Britney Spears and Jamie Spears

"believes that she can handle her own life." Mathew Rosengart, Britney's lawyer, said the petition was a "vindication" for his client, NBC News reported. AFP has contacted representatives from both sides but has received no immediate reply to inquiries. Britney, 39, rocketed to fame in her teens but suffered a highly public 2007 breakdown, attacking a paparazzo's car at a gas station. That led to her being placed under the unusual legal guardianship largely governed by her father.

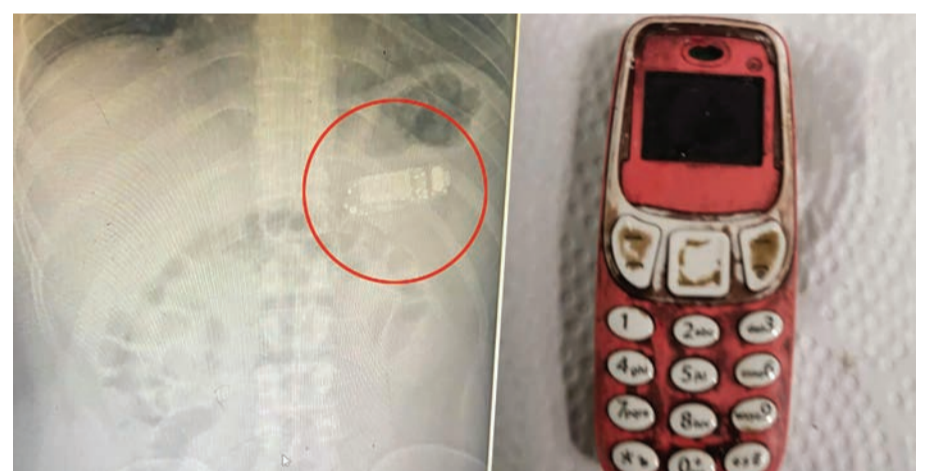
She has repeatedly lashed out at her father over the conservatorship, claiming in court testimonies and social media posts the arrangement amounted to "cruelty," and accusing him of profiting from the system. Britney alleged in court that she had been prevented from having a contraceptive IUD removed, despite wanting more children, and was forcefully put on medication that made her feel "drunk." Jamie Spears' removal has been a longstanding demand of devoted global fans campaigning under the #FreeBritney slogan. — AFP

Doctors remove cell phone from prisoner's stomach in Kosovo

A Kosovo surgeon said Tuesday he had successfully removed a mobile phone from the stomach of a prisoner four days after he had swallowed the entire device. The 33-year-old man, whose identity was not revealed, was admitted to the Pristina university hospital gastroenterology clinic last week after complaining of stomach pain for several days. The doctors realized that he had swallowed a small phone and managed to take it out, Skender Telaku, who led the medical team that performed the intervention, told AFP.

"By endoscopic means, so without cutting the stomach, we took out the phone divided into three parts," he told AFP.

The patient told the doctors that the phone was in his stomach for four days. The procedure, which lasted more than two hours, was performed without complications, Telaku said. "It was the battery that concerned us the most ... the corrosive battery acid could have leaked into his stomach," he added. "It was like walking in a minefield but luckily everything went smoothly." Police then took with them both the patient and the mobile phone, a model from the early 2000s. It was not clear yet how or why the man had swallowed the phone. The medical team believes that the device was smuggled into the prison where he was serving his sentence to be used illegally to contact the outside world. Police neither confirmed nor commented on the incident. — AFP



Toni Servillo, Italy's everyman, in limelight at Venice

He's one of Italy's most familiar faces, but even by Toni Servillo's standards it has been a busy week, with no less than three films premiering at the Venice Film Festival. The 62-year-old's expressive face has lent itself perfectly to everything from larger-than-life politicians like Silvio Berlusconi to a mob boss in "Gomorrah". He is perhaps best known abroad for his decades-long collaboration with director Paolo Sorrentino, including his starring role in the Oscar-winning "The Great Beauty". Sorrentino, who describes Servillo as an older brother, cast him once again in his latest film, "The Hand of God", which premiered to strong reviews in Venice last week.

It sees Servillo take on the role of the director's father in the autobiographical film set in Naples during the heady years when

football legend Diego Maradona delivered big dreams to the gritty southern city. Twenty years ago, the pair were together in Venice with Sorrentino's feature film debut, "One Man Up", and they have worked together on almost all the director's Italian projects since. Yesterday, he was back again for the premiere of "The King of Laughter", directed by Mario Martone, in which he plays famous turn-of-the-century Neapolitan actor Eduardo Scarpetta. Both "The Hand of God" and "The King of Laughter" are competing for the Golden Lion this year.

And Servillo also stars in "Ariaferma", playing out of competition, as a prison guard in a facility awaiting imminent closure. Asked by AFP about his omnipresence on the red carpet this year, he gave one of his trademark smiles, saying: "Despite myself." While the movie business has certainly kept him busy, Servillo said he was anxious to return to the theatre as soon as possible. "Like many of my colleagues, Covid blocked my theatre activities. As soon as it's easy, I will return to the theatre," he told AFP. "I'm not one of these actors who considers theatre a waiting room for film. I am a theatre militant!" — AFP



(From left) Italian actors Marzia Onorato, Eduardo Scarpetta, Salvatore Battista, Alessandro Manna, Italian actor Toni Servillo, Italian director Mario Martone (center), Italian actress Iaia Forte (second right) and Italian screenwriter Ippolita Di Majo (right) arrive for the screening of the film "Qui Rido Io" (The King of Laughter) presented in competition during the 78th Venice Film Festival at Venice Lido. — AFP photo

Sports

Medvedev, Fernandez move on to US Open semi-finals

Leg injury forces Alcaraz to retire vs Auger-Aliassime

NEW YORK: Daniil Medvedev advanced to his third straight US Open semi-final on Tuesday while Canadian 19-year-old Leylah Fernandez delivered another stunner to reach the last four of a Grand Slam for the first time.

Russian second seed Medvedev, chasing his first Slam title, eliminated 117th-ranked Dutch qualifier Botić van de Zandschulp 6-3, 6-0, 4-6, 7-5 at Arthur Ashe Stadium. "I just want to do a little bit better than the last two times and get this extra step, which is the toughest one, actually," Medvedev said. Medvedev moved one victory from a possible championship match against history-chasing Novak Djokovic.

The 25-year-old from Moscow was a 2019 US Open runner-up and lost this year's Australian Open final to top-ranked Djokovic, who seeks his fourth US Open title to complete the first men's singles calendar-year Grand Slam since Rod Laver in 1969. "I don't think about him, because as we saw, anybody can beat anybody," Medvedev said. "If he's in the final, and if I'm there, I'm happy. He's also happy, I guess."

Fernandez, who had already ousted defending champion Naomi Osaka and three-time Slam winner Angelique Kerber, defeated Ukraine's fifth-seeded Elina Svitolina 6-3, 3-6, 7-6 (7/5). "I told myself to trust my shots," Fernandez said. "Even if I lose, I've got to go for it.

And I'm glad I did."

Fernandez, ranked 73rd, was inspired by pre-match strategy from her father/coach Jorge, a former Ecuadoran football player. "He told me to go out and have fun, fight for every point," she said. "It's your first Grand Slam quarter-final. Don't make it your last. Don't make it your last match over here. Fight for your dream."

Medvedev will next face Canadian

Nadal, guides Auger-Aliassime. "The communication has been great, the work is good and the results are coming," Auger-Aliassime said.

Van de Zandschulp hoped to become the first qualifier to reach the US Open semi-finals and only the sixth to do so at any Grand Slam event. But the Russian dominated the first two sets before the Dutchman fought back to take the third. Medvedev's first lost set of the Open.

"First two sets he was missing, I was controlling the game," Medvedev said. "Third set he started missing less." Medvedev took the only break of the final set on match point when the Dutchman netted a forehand drop volley to end matters after two hours and 23 minutes. "In the fourth, he served amazing," Van de Zandschulp said. "He's the guy who deserved to win."



Sabalenka beats Krejčíková to advance

12th seed Felix Auger-Aliassime, 21, who reached his first Slam semi-final when 55th-ranked Spanish 18-year-old Carlos Alcaraz retired trailing 6-3, 3-1 with a leg injury. "It's an amazing milestone," said Auger-Aliassime. "It's a weird way to end but I'll have a chance to play one of the best players in the world. I'm happy I'm through and I'll try to win the next one."

Medvedev won his only meeting with Auger-Aliassime in Canada in 2018. Nadal's uncle and former coach, Toni

Fernandez shocks again

Left-hander Fernandez, who turned 19 on Monday, snapped the Tokyo Olympic bronze medalist's nine-match win streak with clutch shotmaking, firing 42 winners, as spectators roared their delight. "Throughout the whole match, I was so nervous," Fernandez told the crowd. "Thanks to you, I was able to push through."

Fernandez broke for a 4-2 lead and captured the first set in 38 minutes, the first Svitolina surrendered at the Open. In



NEW YORK: Daniil Medvedev of Russia returns against Botić van de Zandschulp of Netherlands during his Men's Singles quarterfinals match on Day Nine of the 2021 US Open at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center on Tuesday in the Flushing neighborhood of the Queens borough of New York City. — AFP

the second set, Svitolina broke twice to lead 5-1 but Fernandez broke in the seventh game and forced three break points in the last game before a Svitolina ace mandated a third set.

Fernandez and Svitolina exchanged four breaks on the way to the tie-breaker, in which the teenager never trailed, advancing after two hours and 24 minutes with a service winner. Fernandez booked a semi-final matchup against

second seed Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus, who defeated Czech eighth seed and reigning French Open champion Barbora Krejčíková 6-1, 6-4.

"She's playing well," Sabalenka said of Fernandez. "She's moving well and the crowd cheers for her. I'd say nothing to lose for this one." Sabalenka matched her deepest Slam run from July at Wimbledon with a WTA-best 43rd match win of 2021. — AFP

Two Kuwaitis head to Jordan for Toyota Gazoo Racing MENA cup

AMMAN: Jordan is slated to host the first-ever Toyota Gazoo Racing MENA Digital Cup in the region on Saturday September 11, 2021, with the participation of 24 eager contestants. The mega sporting event, which simulates actual international racing tracks, is organized with the support of Toyota Motor Corporation - represented by Toyota Gazoo Racing - as Title Sponsor, Bank Al Etihad as Gold Sponsor, Umniah as Silver Sponsor, Desert Fox Racing, Fanatec and Jordan Digital Sports Federation, as well as Jordan Motorsport as organizers, all under the official sponsorship of the Federation Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA).

Twenty two contestants will represent 11 countries: Lebanon, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Cyprus, Tunisia, Mauritania, Oman, and Jordan whereby two racers, Ali Al-Qallaf and Khaled Dashti, will represent Kuwait. An additional two female contestants will also participate in the cup.

The championship will replicate the real racing world with unprecedented accuracy thanks to a partnership with one of the most advanced online driving simulator games - Gran Turismo Sport - and the latest hardware and software technologies pertaining to racing rigs and racing simulators. One day before the event, a welcoming ceremony will be held at the Royal Automobile Museum in Amman in the presence of prominent influencers and motorsport fans, during which exhibition races will take place.

Toyota Gazoo Racing MENA Digital Cup Project Lead, Nadim Haddad stated, "With around 330 million video racers in the MENA region alone, taking motorsports into the digital realm with an official event like this will enable a wider segment of youth to experience the thrilling and competitive world of racing. Given its accessibility, safety and affordability compared with real-life racing, digital motorsports have been rapidly growing, bringing together drivers from all over the world. We are excited to have Toyota Motor Corporation - represented by Toyota Gazoo Racing - support such an outstanding event that presents youth throughout the region with a prime platform to showcase their talents in digital motorsports and compete within the global arena. We eagerly look forward to further competitions in the upcoming years."

In turn, Jordan Motorsport CEO, Zaid Balqez, expressed his excitement at the Kingdom's hosting of the first digital motorsports championship in the region. "This one-of-a-kind event is a true chance for young individuals to explore and grow their talents before making serious investments in motorsports, especially as accessibility becomes more difficult and more expensive. Moreover, the championship is an excellent opportunity for advancing motorsports in the Kingdom, while exporting exceptional Arab talents within this field to the world."

Smells like teen spirit as youngsters chase US Open nirvana

NEW YORK: Canadian left-hander Leylah Fernandez has led a youthful US Open charge by a group of teenagers whose time for Grand Slam glory might just have arrived. Fernandez, who turned 19 on Monday, defeated Ukraine's fifth-seeded Elina Svitolina 6-3, 3-6, 7-6 (7/5) to reach the US Open semi-finals after earlier shockers over defending champion Naomi Osaka and 16th seed Angelique Kerber. Combined with last-eight runs by 18-year-old British qualifier Emma Raducanu and 55th-ranked Spaniard Carlos Alcaraz, the US Open is a coming out party for what could be the next generation of stars.

"I think we're all just super hungry to make a difference in the tennis world," Fernandez said. "I've known a few of them from the junior tours. We've always talked about and joked around that we're going to be on the big stage together. I'm just glad we're doing such great jobs and doing just that."

Alcaraz dispatched Greek third seed Stefanos Tsitsipas and Raducanu hasn't dropped a set after making her Slam debut with a fourth-round run at Wimbledon.

"We want to make a difference. We want to make an impact in tennis. This tournament just proves how well we're adapting to everything," Fernandez said.

"It's so fun to see all of us being so happy and having fun on the court. I think it just motivates us to do even more. We want to make something special out of this tournament."

Fernandez has done that already, seizing a global spotlight by ousting four-time Slam winner Osaka and holding it with two more upsets to put herself two wins from a shock title on the New York hardcourts.

"Well, the first few days it was definitely a little bit hard," Fernandez said. "I was very lucky to have doubles the next day to keep me grounded. Now I feel like I'm a little bit more used to it. I have a great team around me who helps me keeping my head a little bit level and just think about my next match, not think about all the good things that are happening to me."

The world number 73 had a chat and photo with Juan Martin del Potro, the 2009 US Open champion, and met tennis legend Billie Jean King. "She told me to go out on court, have fun, and keep going for my shots. I just did that today. So that obviously worked," Fernandez said. "It was awesome to see them, to meet them. They honestly inspired me to do well today."

'It's the maple syrup'

Fernandez received a Twitter mention from Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who noted the quarter-final run of Canada's Felix Auger-Aliassime. So what's the Canadian secret? "I'd say it's the maple syrup," Fernandez said. "The Canadian maple syrup is pretty good."

Staying grounded, her first WTA title in March



NEW YORK: Canada's Leylah Fernandez reacts after winning her 2021 US Open Tennis tournament women's quarter-finals match against Ukraine's Elina Svitolina at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in New York, on Tuesday. — AFP

at Monterrey only spurred Fernandez to work even harder. "I always went back to work. Went back home to work harder, try to improve my game," she said. "I was glad every match I played I was improving little by little. Today I was able to showcase all the sacrifice I've made the past year so I can get to this point." Fernandez called her father/coach Jorge at home in Florida after the match. "He honestly told me that I put him through hell and back with this match, but he's very happy for me." Fernandez said. — AFP

Thompson-Herah headlines stars for Diamond League finale

ZURICH: Jamaican sprint queen Elaine Thompson-Herah will be one of 19 Olympic champions vying for prize money and glory in the Diamond League final in Zurich, just a month after the end of the Tokyo Games. Thompson-Herah picked up three golds in the Japanese capital in the 100m, 200m and sprint relay, and will not have to face her compatriot and great rival Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce in Zurich. The Olympic champion timed the second fastest 100m ever run in Eugene last month, her time of 10.54sec just five-hundredths short of the record set by American Florence Griffith-Joyner in 1988.

Action at the bumper season finale got under way yesterday, with the shot put, long jump, men's and women's 5000m and women's high jump finals all held at the Sechseläutenplatz square on the shores of Lake Zurich. All 25 other finals are slated for today at the iconic Letzigrund Stadium, where more than 20,000 spectators traditionally create a raucous atmosphere. The winner in each discipline at the final receives \$30,000 and a Diamond League trophy.

Norwegian Karsten Warholm takes to the track for the first time in the 400m hurdles since setting a sensational world record of 45.94sec when winning Olympic gold. His American rival Rai Benjamin is absent, but Olympic bronze medalist Alison Dos Santos of Brazil will offer some competition.

Venezuela's Yulimar Rojas, another world record setter in Tokyo, will be in Zurich and is seemingly in good enough form to challenge the 15.67m mark she set in the triple jump. Also present will be Sweden's Armand Duplantis, at 21 already the dominant force in men's pole vaulting. A Diamond League winner at both Paris when he cleared 6.01m and Brussels (6.05m), the US-born vaulter tried on both occasions to get over 6.19m to better his own world record. He was not far away, and it is surely now just a matter of time before he sets a new benchmark. Ethiopian-born Dutch runner Sifan Hassan, who won two golds and a bronze in an unprecedented distance showing in Tokyo, races in the 1500m. — AFP



ZANDVOORT: Williams' Canadian driver Nicholas Latifi races at the Zandvoort circuit during the qualifying session of the Netherlands' Formula One Grand Prix in Zandvoort on September 4, 2021. — AFP

Alex Albon to return to Formula One with Williams

LONDON: Alex Albon will return to the Formula One grid next season after agreeing a deal to race for Williams, the British-based team announced yesterday. The London-born Thai will take George Russell's seat following confirmation of the British driver's deal to join Lewis Hamilton at Mercedes in 2022.

Albon, 25, was replaced by Sergio Perez at Red Bull after he struggled to keep pace with Max Verstappen in his first full season with the team in 2020. But following 12 months on the sidelines, Albon will be handed a second chance in the sport, racing alongside Canadian Nicholas Latifi, 26, who has been retained by Williams for a third season.

"I am really excited and looking forward to returning to a Formula One race seat in 2022," said Albon. "When you take a year out of F1 it's never certain you will make a return so I'm extremely thankful to Red Bull and Williams for believing in me and helping me on my journey back to the grid." Albon made his F1

debut for Red Bull's second team Toro Rosso in 2019 before being promoted midway through the season and going on to secure two podium finishes in 2020.

Just Capito, CEO of Williams Racing, said: "We are extremely excited by our new line-up, with both drivers bringing a great blend of youth and experience that will not only be a great fit for the team but also help us take the next step in our journey. Alex is one of the most exciting young talents in motorsport, yet comes with a large amount of F1 experience from his time at Red Bull. His multiple podium finishes highlight his speed as a driver, and we know he will immediately feel at home with the team."

Red Bull said they had worked to help Albon secure a drive for 2022 to help his development. "We rate Alex very highly and with our line-up for 2022 fixed, our objective was to help find him a seat in another team where he could gain more F1 mileage and experience and we are delighted to have done that with Williams," said Red Bull team principal Christian Horner. Russell, 23, whose much-anticipated move to Mercedes was finally confirmed on Tuesday, tweeted: "Mega happy for @WilliamsRacing, @NicholasLatifi and @alex_albon. Awesome line-up for 2022, very well deserved." Current Mercedes driver Valtteri Bottas is switching to Alfa Romeo next season, paving the way for Russell's move. — AFP

Sports

Mane scores as African giants make mark in WCup qualifying

Nigeria and Tunisia take significant steps

JOHANNESBURG: Liverpool star Sadio Mane was among the goals for Senegal who, along with Nigeria and Tunisia, took significant steps on Tuesday toward qualifying for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. All three nations are seeded first in mini-leagues and have a maximum six points after two rounds having started with home victories over the lowest-ranked sides before winning away to the second seeds.

Another of the 10 four-team groups is led by lowly Tanzania, who scored off a penalty awarded after just five seconds when defeating Madagascar. Reigning African Footballer of the Year Mane shrugged off being yellow-carded in Congo Brazzaville to complete a 3-1 victory by converting an 87th-minute penalty.

Boulaye Dia gave Senegal a lead cancelled by a Silvere Ganvoula penalty in first-half added time before Watford forward Ismaila Sarr nudged the visitors ahead again and Mane put the result beyond doubt. Seeking a second straight World Cup appearance, Senegal have six points in Group H, Namibia four, Congo one and Togo are pointless. Ahmed Musa made his 100th appearance for Nigeria, who overcame the handicap of lacking seven players because of British coronavirus travel

restrictions to defeat Cape Verde 2-1 in Mindelo. Among the absentees was Leicester City star Kelechi Iheanacho, whose two goals got the Super Eagles off to a winning start in Group C four days ago against Liberia. Victor Osimhen equalized on 29 minutes for Nigeria after Dylan Tavares put the hosts ahead and the Group C clash was settled by a Kenny Rocha own-goal 14 minutes from time. Nigeria, six-time qualifiers for the World Cup, have six points, Liberia three and Cape Verde and the Central African Republic one each. Early and late goals sealed a 2-0 triumph for Tunisia over Zambia in Ndola, giving the north Africans an early three-point advantage in Group B.

Algeria held

Former Premier League forward Wahbi Khazri converted a ninth-penalty and substitute Anis Ben Slimane pounced on a loose ball to net from close range two minutes into stoppage time. Tunisia have six points, and Equatorial Guinea share second place with Zambia after an Ivan Salvador penalty earned a 1-0 win over Mauritania in Malabo. Libya also have maximum points, winning 1-0 in Angola through a Omar al Khoja goal to build a two-point lead over Egypt in Group F. Algeria stretched an

unbeaten run to 29 matches after drawing 1-1 with Burkina Faso, who levelled through Abdoul Tapsoba on 64 minutes after Feisal Salum goal seven minutes into the second half in Dar es Salaam. Tanzania and Benin have four points each, the Democratic Republic of Congo two and shock 2019 Africa Cup of Nations quarter-finalists Madagascar are pointless. The 10 group winners after six matchdays are completed in November progress to two-leg play-offs next March, which will decide the five nations to represent Africa at the 2022 World Cup. — AFP

There are no official records of the fastest penalties awarded in international football. After Tanzania surrendered a two-goal lead by half-time, they won 3-2 thanks to a Feisal Salum goal seven minutes into the second half in Dar es Salaam. Tanzania and Benin have four points each, the Democratic Republic of Congo two and shock 2019 Africa Cup of Nations quarter-finalists Madagascar are pointless. The 10 group winners after six matchdays are completed in November progress to two-leg play-offs next March, which will decide the five nations to represent Africa at the 2022 World Cup. — AFP

France end winless run; Scotland revive World Cup hopes

PARIS: Reigning champions France beat Finland 2-0 in a World Cup qualifier on Tuesday thanks to Antoine Griezmann's double strike to snap a five-game winless streak while Scotland kept their hopes alive with a 1-0 win in Austria. In other action, Portugal and the Netherlands stayed on track to reach the finals in Qatar next year, with Memphis Depay grabbing a hat-trick for the Dutch in a 6-1 demolition of Turkey.

France were roared on by 57,000 passionate spectators in Lyon where Griezmann - who ended an unhappy spell at Barcelona with a loan move back to Atletico Madrid in the transfer window - combined well with Karim Benzema as their side overcame a disjointed start. Benzema's delightful backheel released Griezmann inside the box and he supplied a smooth finish after 25 minutes.

Griezmann made it 41 goals for his country when he beat Finnish keeper Lukas Hradecky at the near post to make it 2-0 in the 54th minute. After a frustrating 1-1 draw with Ukraine in their last game, the victory was a welcome boost for the French who are still smarting after crashing out of Euro 2020 at the last 16 stage this summer. "We did not do everything well but we have rediscovered our confidence," said France coach Didier Deschamps. "This puts our fate in our hands and we must finish the job in November."



LYON: France's midfielder Adrien Rabiot (left) heads the ball next to Finland's forward Joao Pohjanpalo during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Group D qualification football match between France and Finland at the Groupama stadium in Decines-Charpieu near Lyon on September 7, 2021. — AFP

Scotland grabbed a valuable three points in their bid to qualify for Qatar with a 1-0 win against the Austrians in Vienna as Australian-born Lyndon Dykes' VAR-awarded penalty proved the difference. The victory moved the Scots up to second in Group F, seven points behind Euro 2020 semi-finalists Denmark who are cruising with a 100 percent record after thrashing Israel 5-0.

"Some people in (Scotland) don't believe in this

group of players, but I do," Scotland manager Steve Clarke told Sky Sports. "I love my players. We're a good team." The Netherlands were ruthless against Turkey as Depay's hat-trick took the Barcelona forward's international goal tally to 33 goals. The Dutch led 3-0 by half-time and any remaining chance for the Turks vanished when Leicester defender Caglar Soyuncu was sent off for a second bookable offence shortly before the break. — AFP

Grant's first international goal and ended Vietnam's 17-match unbeaten streak at home. Australia had beaten China 3-0 in Doha last week and Tuesday's victory means they have a perfect 10 wins from 10 matches starting with the first round of qualifying. Japan also bagged three points against China on Tuesday to revive their campaign after they lost 1-0 to Oman in the first match of the final round of qualifying. Despite the narrow margin of victory, Japan were clearly the dominant side at the Khalifa International Stadium in Doha.

Efforts by Yuya Osaka and Spain-based Takefusa Kubo hit the post in the first half but China's luck ran out in the 40th minute. Junya Ito produced a brilliant pass after getting past Wang Shenchao and Osaka made amends for his earlier miss with a fine volley. In a late match Iran eased to a 3-0 win over Iraq at the Khalifa International Stadium in Doha. Iran struck through Alireza Jahanbakhsh in the second minute before Mehdi Taremi and Ali Gholizadeh scored in the second half to put the outcome beyond doubt.

Saudi Arabia bidding for a second successive appearance at the finals grabbed their second victory, edging out Oman 1-0 in Muscat with Saleh al-Shehri's 42nd minute strike proving decisive. Both teams were fresh from their opening wins but failed to come up with an inspired display at the Sultan Qaboos Stadium. However, the Saudis, who beat Vietnam last week, went ahead in spectacular fashion. Fahad al-Muwallad deftly backheeled Salman Faraj's lofted pass onto al-Shehri who blasted a low shot past Oman goalkeeper Fayiz al-Rusheidi.

Earlier on Tuesday, 2002 World Cup semi-finalists South Korea got their qualifying campaign back on track by beating Lebanon 1-0 in Suwon. Aiming for a 10th successive appearance at football's showpiece, South Korea needed to rebound from an opening goalless draw against Iraq last week. But just hours before the match, the Korea Football Association announced star player Son Heung-min was out with a calf injury. The first half ended goalless, mostly thanks to Lebanese goalkeeper Mostafa Matar. — AFP

News in brief

Open to return to Royal Portrush

LONDON: The British Open is to return to Royal Portrush Golf Club in Northern Ireland in 2025, organizers the R&A announced yesterday. The links course previously hosted the championship in 1951 and again in 2019, when Irishman Shane Lowry won the claret jug. R&A chief executive Martin Slumbers said: "We could not be more thrilled to be bringing the Open back to Royal Portrush in 2025. "There will be huge excitement among golf fans around the world to see the best men's players facing the challenge of this magnificent links once again." US golfer Collin Morikawa won this year's British Open at Royal St George's in July. The 150th Open next year will be played at St Andrews in Scotland, with the following two championships being held at Royal Liverpool and Royal Troon. — AFP

'Pray for me': Phoenix ex-ace

LOS ANGELES: Former NBA player Cedric Ceballos said Tuesday he has been battling COVID-19 for the past 10 days, asking for prayers and support in a Twitter post made from his hospital bed. Ceballos, 52, who spent 11 seasons in the NBA, helping the Phoenix Suns reach the NBA finals in 1992-1993, said he was struggling to fight off the effects of the deadly virus. "On my 10th day in ICU (intensive care unit), COVID-19 is officially kicking my but(t)." Ceballos wrote alongside a picture of him breathing through an oxygen mask. "I am asking ALL family, friends, prayer warriors healers for your prayers and well wish for my recovery. "If I have done anything to you in the past, allow me to publicly apologize. My fight is not done.. Thx." Ceballos enjoyed two stints with Phoenix during his career after being chosen as the 48th overall pick in the 1990 NBA Draft. — AFP

England to host NZ, S Africa

LONDON: England will play home Test series against world champions New Zealand and South Africa in 2022, cricket chiefs announced yesterday, unveiling a packed schedule. Joe Root's Test team will begin their home summer with a three-match series against New Zealand, starting at Lord's on June 2, before games at Trent Bridge and Headingley. The Black Caps beat England 1-0 in a two-match series in June before defeating India in Southampton to win the first-ever World Test Championship final. England will also host South Africa for a three-Test series, with the first match starting at Lord's on August 17 before games at Edgbaston and the Oval. India, who are currently touring England, return for a three-match Twenty20 series and three one-day internationals in July. — AFP

On seeks Wall Street debut

NEW YORK: Swiss sneaker brand On, which has partnered with tennis star Roger Federer for a shoe line, is set to make its New York Stock Exchange debut valued as high as around \$5.5 billion. Launched in Zurich in 2010, On initially specialized in high-end running shoes using their "CloudTec" soles with iconic perforations. The company, co-founded by former Swiss long-distance triathlon world champion Oliver Bernhard, quickly established itself as a big deal in an already competitive industry. It reached a revenue of 425 million Swiss Francs, or about \$482 million, in 2020. — AFP

Record-breaking Australia beat Vietnam 1-0; Japan bounce back

DOHA: Australia beat Vietnam 1-0 on Tuesday to become the first AFC nation to win 10 successive World Cup qualifiers while Japan edged China by the same score to rebound after a shock defeat to Oman last week. Australia's victory, courtesy of Rhyen Grant's first-half winner, left the Socceroos on two wins from two in Group B. Played behind closed doors at My Dinh National Stadium in Hanoi because of Covid-19 restrictions, Australia struggled to get past Vietnam's disciplined defense before Grant's header in the 43rd minute from an Ajdin Hrustic cross broke the deadlock. It was

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
Adalya	22517144

CHANGE OF NAME

I, BHAVIN KUMAR CHANDRABHUSHAN, holder of Passport Number P5628353, do declare adding surname MASHI along with given name BHAVIN CHANDRABHUSHAN. Full name to be BHAVIN CHANDRABHUSHAN MASHI. (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 Taher Bhai Ratlamwala, Add: 501, Noorani Nagar, Dhar Road, Indore (M.P.). (C 0643) 6-9-2021



NOTICE
September 2, 2021
Mr. Imran Ali Karvinakar, son of Mr. Karvinakar Ali Mohammed Saleh, resident of At Post Mhapral, Taluka Mandangad, Distt Ratnagiri, Pin-415204 and Ms. Aartifa Noor Hasan Harge, daughter of Mr. Noor Hasan Yunus Harge, resident of At Post Wadavai, Tal Mangaon, Raigad, Maharashtra-402103 both Indian nationals presently residing in Kuwait, have given notice of intended marriage between them under the Foreign Marriage Act, 1969. If anyone has any objection to the proposed marriage, he/she may file the same with the undersigned according to the procedure laid down under the Act/Rule within thirty days from the date of publication of this notice. Communications in this regard can be made by Email (cw2.kuwait@mea.gov.in) / letters / telephonic calls (00965-22550171, 00965-22533125).

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



HOUSTON: Tom Brady #12 of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers during action in the first quarter of an NFL preseason game against the Houston Texans at NRG Stadium on August 28, 2021 in Houston, Texas. — AFP

Age-defying Brady eyes NFL encore as season kicks off

Bucs launch back-to-back championship quest in clash with Cowboys

NEW YORK: Tom Brady embarks on the latest chapter of his age-defying career today as the Tampa Bay Buccaneers launch their quest for back-to-back Super Bowls in a season-opening clash with the Dallas Cowboys.

It is almost 20 years since Brady's NFL odyssey began in earnest, when the quarterback replaced the injured Drew Bledsoe for the New England Patriots in a game against the New York Jets on September 23, 2001.

No-one knew it at the time, but it effectively marked the start of the Patriots dynasty, with Brady retaining the starter's jersey for the remainder of a season which culminated in the first of his seven Super Bowl titles. Two decades later, and the 44-year-old Brady remains, incredibly, at the sharp end of one of the most unforgiving crucibles in professional sport, where the average span of a playing career is just 3.3 years.

Last season, Brady flouted conventional wisdom once more, leading Tampa Bay to an upset 31-9 Super Bowl victory over the defending champion Kansas City Chiefs in his first season with the club since leaving the Patriots. Many critics wondered whether last season's Super Bowl represents the greatest achievement of a career already studded with milestones and records that may never be surpassed.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic decimating pre-season training in 2020, making it harder for

the new quarterback to settle in, Brady turned the Bucs into a championship-caliber team over the course of a single season. "He brought a winning mentality to a really talented team that didn't know how to win," was the verdict of Bucs coach Bruce Arians.

Room to improve

Moreover, Brady revealed during the close season that he had done it effectively on one leg, having played the entire 2020 season with a torn knee ligament. Never one to dwell on his past achievements, Brady has already left last season in the rear-view mirror.

His eyes are firmly fixed on the challenges that lie ahead in what will be the 22nd season of his career. "It's really just a whole another year and experience," Brady said on Tuesday. "We've got a chance to play as the 2021 team, as the best we possibly can. And our coaches have put us in the best possible position to be successful."

Unusually, Brady will have a familiar supporting cast as he chases back-to-back championships for the first time since leading the

Patriots to titles in 2004 and 2005. The Buccaneers head into the season with all 22 of their Super Bowl starters on offense and defense returning for the new campaign — the first time that has happened since the Oakland Raiders brought back their championship roster in 1977.

"We've got a lot of continuity, we've got a lot of things to build on, we're a lot more experienced together," Brady said. "That's really all you can ask for as players. I'd like us to go out there and take advantage of that. As good as we were last season, as well as we played, with the same group of guys, I'd love to see how good we can be this year. But it's not about hype, or BS, or build-up. We've got to go and do it."

Ominously for the rest of the league, Brady believes there is plenty of scope for improvement in a team which finished second in the NFC South behind the New Orleans Saints last season with an 11-5 record. "It's not like we won 60-0," Brady said. "We had a lot of games where we struggled — struggled to move the ball, struggled against certain blitzes, struggled to run the ball, struggled to complete passes. We can improve in a lot of areas."

New generation

It remains to be seen which teams will be capable of matching the Buccaneers if they improve as Brady envisages. After last February's Super Bowl mauling, Kansas City moved quickly to strengthen their offensive line, bringing in Joe Thuney and Kyle Long to give added protection to quarterback Patrick Mahomes. Few would be surprised to see the Chiefs back in the Super Bowl for a third straight season.

Elsewhere, all eyes will be on the latest class of rookie quarterbacks joining the league, with number one draft pick, Trevor Lawrence looking to refire the Jacksonville Jaguars and Zach Wilson tasked with attempting to transform the New York Jets into a competitive force. New England meanwhile hope to have found their long-term successor to Brady in the shape of rookie Mac Jones, while Justin Fields will be hoping to make the starter's jersey his own with the Chicago Bears.

NFL stadiums across the United States will welcome back capacity crowds again after the pandemic-hit 2020 season saw many teams play games in empty stadiums. New COVID-19 protocols in force will encourage players to get vaccinated, with unvaccinated players facing more stringent rules and more frequent testing than their vaccinated counterparts. — AFP



Unvaccinated players face more stringent rules

Social media giants failing on racist abuse: Anton Ferdinand

LONDON: Social media companies need to act immediately to end racial abuse, former footballer Anton Ferdinand said yesterday, warning that online hate could even be fatal. The ex-West Ham defender's call came as he gave evidence to a parliamentary committee scrutinizing the British government's plan to tighten online safety laws. It also followed fresh racist abuse targeting England's black footballers both on and off the field.

Ferdinand, 36, highlighted the addictive nature of social media and the "mental health issue of not being able to escape it". "My worry is, what are the social media companies waiting for? Are they waiting for a high-profile footballer

to kill themselves, or a member of their family to commit suicide?"

"Is that what they're waiting for? Because it they're waiting for that, it's too late," he added, accusing companies of talking a good game but failing to act. England pair Raheem Sterling and Jude Bellingham were subjected to monkey chants during the national side's 4-0 World Cup qualifying win against Hungary in Budapest last week.

That followed police investigations into messages directed at some of England's black players after the Euro 2020 final defeat to Italy in July. The UK Football Policing Unit in August said it had identified 207 potentially criminal posts, 123 of which were sent from

accounts outside Britain.

One man appeared in court in north-west England yesterday and admitted a single charge of sending an offensive or abusive message by a public communication network. Scott McCluskey, 43, from Runcorn in Cheshire, singled out Marcus Rashford, Bukayo Saka and Jadon Sancho in an abusive Facebook message after they missed their penalties in a shootout. While at QPR, Ferdinand was at the center of a racism row with Chelsea's John Terry in 2011. Terry was cleared of wrongdoing in court but banned by the Football Association for four matches.

Ferdinand suggested yesterday there should be greater use of technology to block the sending of potentially inappropriate messages, and also to ban anonymous online accounts. There also needed to be a greater understanding of the experience of racism within the higher echelons of social media companies, he added.

He was backed by former England



LONDON: England's midfielder Jesse Lingard (left) and England's midfielder Raheem Sterling attend an England training session at Hotspur Way, the Tottenham Hotspur training ground, in Enfield, north of London on Tuesday. — AFP

women's international Lianne Sanderson, who told lawmakers she had received racist, homophobic and sexist abuse online. Marvin Sordell, a former

England under-21 player, said social media abuse — and weak sanctions — was one of the reasons he left the sport aged just 28. — AFP