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V O L V O



Cabinet tours Zour refinery project, LNG import facilities

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Local

The saga of being stuck abroad



IN MY VIEW

By Chidi Emmanuel

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Like many people, I experienced an unexpected saga related to the coronavirus pandemic. What started as a one-month annual leave ended up being an eight-month vacation. Kuwait, just like other badly-affected countries, imposed restrictions in a bid to contain the rise in the number of COVID-19 cases. But these measures created untold hardships and problems for expatriates. Families were separated amid a burden of accrued debts.

It was an unending story - from a partial lockdown to a total lockdown - then a complete ban on commercial flights. Like other residents, I was stuck abroad while visiting family in Lagos in Nigeria. I was stranded for more than eight months. From month to month, the situation worsened, until August 4, 2021, when the authorities finally opened the airport to expats who are fully inoculated with Kuwait-approved vaccines.

As if the trauma was not enough, I entered into another torturous phase of getting my vaccination certificate approved by the Kuwait health ministry's Immune app. All the documents were uploaded as directed by the ministry, but to no avail. A process that was supposed to take three days (according to the acknowledgment receipt) took more than a month.

My eyes were glued to the Immune app as I waited for the good news - the green status - which indicates MoH's approval. Finally, there came a sign of relief - the green color appeared on the app after weeks. Having taken the approved vaccines and doses (as stated by the MoH) and armed with the green status on the Immune app, I faced another herculean task of getting a ticket to Kuwait. The rush and the restrictions pushed ticket prices to skyrocket exponentially.

After I arrived in Kuwait, I was prompted by the Shlonik app to begin a one-week quarantine. You are required to either send a voice note or a selfie (three times a day) when prompted by the app. Alternatively, one can end their quarantine after three days by uploading a PCR test with a negative result. Amid this hassle, my building's haris presented a litany of bills to pay - with a deadline.

The virus has led to significant knock-on effects on daily life, which are extensive and have far-reaching consequences. The pandemic also resulted in a dramatic loss of life worldwide and poses an unprecedented challenge to public health and economic and social systems globally.

PHOTO OF THE DAY



An aerial photo taken on Sept 7, 2021 shows cars lining up on the road near a drive-thru vaccination center on Jaber Causeway. — Xinhua

The impact of expelling seniors from Kuwait



JUST KIDDIN', SERIOUSLY

By Sahar Moussa

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When a person reaches the age of 60, they are sadly now considered a burden on society. Yes, maybe due to old age, seniors get sick more often and need more care. This is natural, but in return, they have so much to offer to society and the family. Ageing is a natural part of life that no one can stop - unfortunately, some countries consider old people a liability.

Many unconfirmed and controversial reports were carried by local media about the Public Authority for Manpower's rules and procedures for granting work permits, which included a ban on issuing permits to those who reach the age of 60 and do not hold a university degree.

Reports later said work permit fees for this category of residents were reduced by 50 percent, so the maximum annual fee will be KD 1,000 per individual instead of KD 2,000. This will include the state's fee expected to be not more than KD 500, and the same or less for insurance that will cover all medical treatments in the private sector - but until this moment the decision has not been implemented.

There was a kind of mass panic among senior residents towards this decision - as many of them were born here and have lived all their lives in Kuwait. Many senior residents felt backstabbed because they consider Kuwait as their first and last home. They have established businesses and raised families here. They have given everything to this country - from loyalty and devotion to experience - and still have much more to give. The government considers them a burden on

the healthcare system, which maybe in a way they are, but I am sure there are other options and alternatives to resolve this problem without having to terminate their services.

Seniors are a valuable treasure for any society; they are full of knowledge and experience and have a lot to give. In Kuwait, there are highly skilled laborers who are indispensable, and the young generation can learn and benefit a lot from them. We cannot disregard their integration into society - just like any younger person, they shop and use services (which employ people), and they are active.

Another point is that seniors babysit - they look after grandchildren and love to do it. As most younger residents have more than one job, they need a babysitter or other care options to look after their children. Here comes the important role of grandparents - they provide care and safety for grandchildren so their own children can return to the workforce, which is a lifesaving situation that gives peace of mind to the parents and security to children, not to mention saving money.

There is an essential impact of grandparents and seniors in the lives of children and adults. They bring wisdom, calm and dependability. They shape the future of younger generations, filling them with a sense of fun and adventure and give another perspective and point of view. Seniors have lived through situations others cannot even imagine - they are a living example of our treasured history that nowadays is buried by the fast-paced life and technology.

Who can resist listening to elders when they passionately narrate endless stories about their youth, experiences and situations they have faced? Stories can influence children's personalities and give them good values and lessons. I do not know if the government has carried out a study about the impact of kicking seniors out and the consequences that will follow. However, I really wish they will reconsider the decision and study its impact on the society.

Kuwait Times

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ECOSYSTEMS: BIOMES OF LIFE

Exploring **ASCC**

Photos by Shakir Reshamwala

The Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salem Cultural Centre (ASCC) is the largest museum complex in the world. It comprises of

six museums related to natural history, science and technology, Arab and Islamic science and space. The center is home to some 22 world-class galleries, with over 3,000 exhibits.





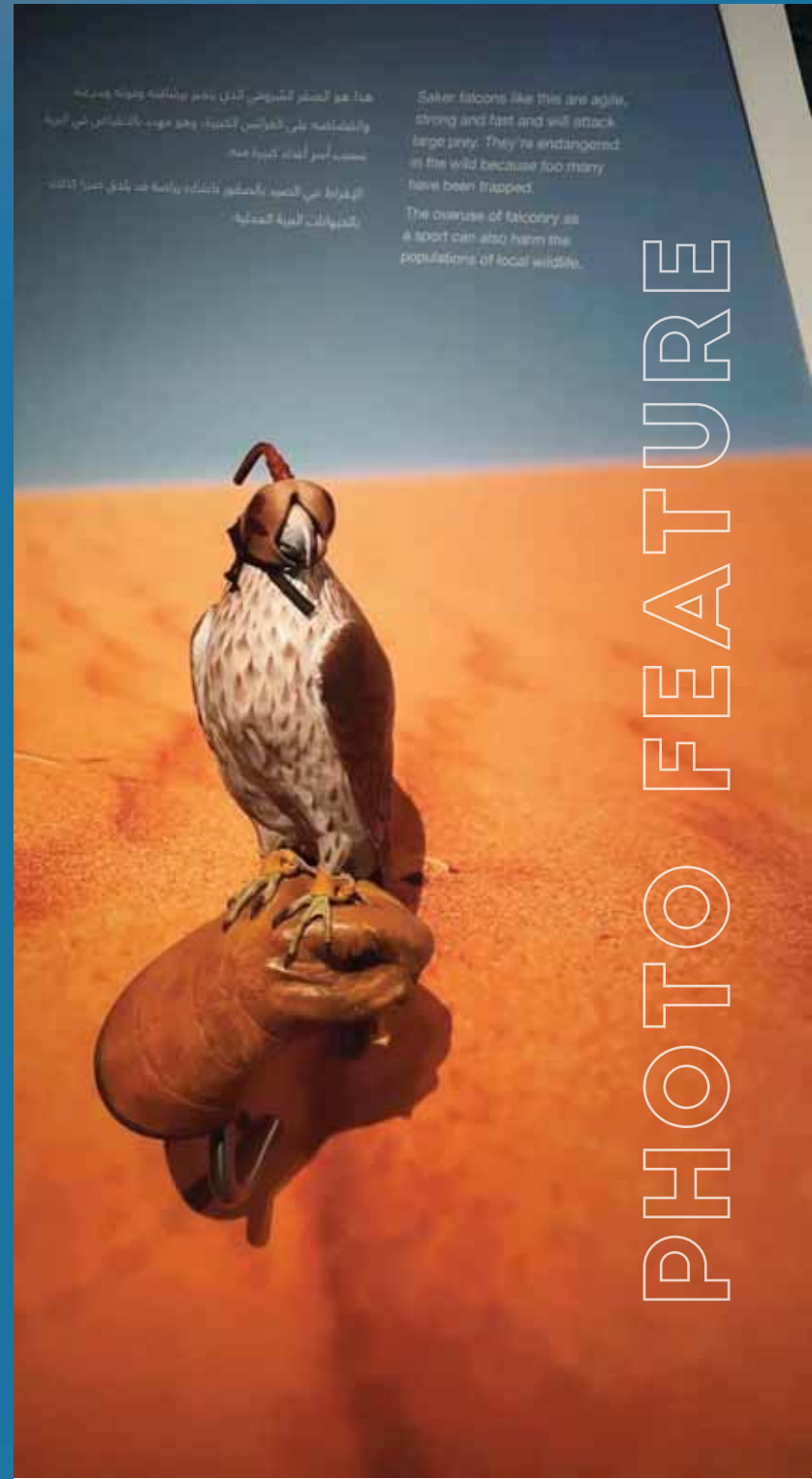
Exploring **ASCC**



We continue our journey of discovery at the Ecosystems museum to understand how different types of biomes influenced the development of the biodiversity of our planet over millions of years. An entire wing of the museum breathtakingly recreates Southeast Asia's rainforests and mangroves and their flora and fauna. The rainforest leads to an underground aquarium with a variety of marine life.

A section on the ecosystem of Kuwait has interactive displays to learn more about our natural habitat and the wildlife that lives in extreme environments. Exhibits with models of microorganisms, plants and animals offer visitors insights into Earth's diverse creatures.





هذا هو الصقر الشيباني الذي يجمع بين القوة والسرعة والقدرة على الطيران لمسافات طويلة وهو مهدد بالانقراض في البرية بسبب أسر أعداد كبيرة منه.

الفرط في الصيد بالصقور يتسبب في انقراض أنواع كثيرة من الطيور المحلية.

Saker falcons like this are agile, strong and fast and will attack large prey. They're endangered in the wild because too many have been trapped.

The overuse of falconry as a sport can also harm the populations of local wildlife.

PHOTO FEATURE



Local

Kuwait FM expresses support for Arab cooperation, resolving major issues

CAIRO: Kuwait will support and push for Arab partnership based on the statute and principles of the Arab League as well as the mutual interests of the countries in the region, Kuwait's Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah said yesterday. Delivering his speech to the 156th regular ministerial session of the Arab League, which Kuwait will preside for six months, Sheikh Ahmad affirmed that his country and the Arab world will always support the central issue of the Palestinian cause based on international resolutions and laws.

He indicated that the Arab world held Israel responsible for all acts of brutality and oppression against the Palestinian people, saying that it was time for the international community to put an end to Israeli unlawful actions. The two-state solution based on the June, 1967 borders and east Jerusalem as a capital for the future Palestinian state was a necessary step to bring peace in the region.

On the coronavirus pandemic, Sheikh Ahmad affirmed it was paramount for Arab countries and the world to cooperate to end the crisis, taking a vital step now to prevent the virus from further spreading. On the Yemeni crisis, the foreign minister expressed continued support to the Saudi initiative for peace in Yemen, the UNSC resolution 2216, and the outcome of the Yemeni national dialogue.

In the same context, Sheikh Ahmad condemned the recent attacks against cities and civilians in Saudi Arabia, affirming unwavering support towards the Saudi people and leadership against the attacks perpetrated by the Houthi militias. Regarding Iraq, the Kuwaiti official expressed support to the recently held Baghdad Cooperation and Partnership Conference, saying that the success of Iraq will reflect on the region. The upcoming parliamentary election on Oct 10 will also push the political scene in Iraq forward, he said, wishing Iraqis the best in their quest for stability, development and welfare.

Touching on the Syrian conflict, he pointed out that a military answer was out of the question, saying that a political settlement was the solution in accordance with international resolutions regarding the crisis. On the occupied Golan Heights, he said that Israel was unlawfully occupying Syrian lands, stressing that the Israeli occupiers must withdraw in accordance with international laws concerning the matter.

Mentioning Libya, the Kuwaiti official called for Libyans to abide by agreements in favor of their people, indicating that the upcoming elections on Dec 24 were of great historical importance. On Egypt's and Sudan's stance regarding the Renaissance Dam, the Kuwaiti foreign minister expressed solidarity with the two Arab nations, saying that this matter touches on Arab



CAIRO: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah chairs an Arab League session yesterday. — KUNA

national security.

He indicated that the Arab world supported all regional and international efforts to resolve the issue of the Renaissance Dam in accordance with the Declaration of Principles on Renaissance Dam signed in 2015 by Ethiopia, Egypt,

and Sudan. Speaking on maritime security, Sheikh Ahmad said that the Arab League stood with UNSC statement on the topic issued on Aug 9, adding that it was important to maintain security in the waters of the Gulf as well as the Gulf of Oman and Red Sea.— KUNA

Education employees to be allowed entry with families

KUWAIT: The Cabinet has approved the education ministry's request to ease the entry of private education employees and their families stranded abroad in preparation for the 2021-2022 academic year. Informed sources told Al-Qabas Arabic daily the education ministry had officially asked for allowing all workers in the private education sector to be issued entry visas (family or tourism) along with their families, while complying with health protocols in effect. Sources said the coronavirus emergency ministerial committee considered the education ministry's request and decided to accept it. The private education sector informed the interior ministry about the approval.

Foreign participation in bids

Meanwhile, participation of foreign companies as investors in public tenders in Kuwait is set to become a reality. The Cabinet had asked the central tenders agency to take the necessary steps to activate item 14 of the tenders law 49/2016 to enable foreign companies to participate in public tenders. The government had announced a roadmap to execute 18 development projects in the short, medium and long terms, while government sources told Al-Qabas the projects will be tendered inside and outside Kuwait.

They said that allowing foreign companies to execute government projects guarantees their completion with the required speed and quality. They said this move gives the government several benefits, including competitive prices and attracting foreign expertise to work in Kuwait, especially since many companies want to work in Kuwait but the local sponsor system is an obstacle. As the general budget is suffering from a large deficit, the government will set priorities for these projects according to their urgency and importance. The start will be with projects that bring revenue to the state while diversifying sources of income.

France issues special stamp on French-Kuwaiti ties

PARIS: The French National Post Office issued yesterday a special postage stamp marking the 60th anniversary of French-Kuwaiti friendship. In a statement to KUNA, Kuwait's Ambassador to France Sami Al-Sulaiman said that French Post Office adopted a design by the Kuwaiti ministry of information marking this occasion and France's recognition of Kuwait's independence on Aug 28, 1961.

The issuance of this stamp embodies



the depth of bilateral relations between the two countries, he added. Sulaiman expressed thanks to the French Post Office and all concerned French authorities for their great efforts, which reflect the bonds of friendship. Paris will host several events for a year on this occasion in coordination with Kuwait's ministry of information and the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL).—KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Force said firefighting teams managed to control a fire that broke out in the fodder market located on Wafra Road yesterday afternoon.

Crimes

Another resident commits suicide

KUWAIT: A second suicide took place in 24 hours, this time in Farwaniya, where a Nepali domestic helper hanged herself to death. A friend of the woman informed police about the incident. Another Asian resident had committed suicide a day earlier in Salimya.

Husband hurt in fight

The husband received a stab wound in his hand after an Egyptian couple had a fight. The wife said an argument turned into a fight, then when her husband pulled out a knife, he got injured by it.

Woman decamps with rent

A Filipina in her 60s was placed on the wanted list for forgery after she put her friend in trouble for nonpayment of rent for two years.

Local

Cabinet tours Zour refinery project, LNG import facilities

KUWAIT: The Cabinet held an extraordinary meeting yesterday at the headquarters of Kuwait Integrated Petroleum Industries Company (KIPIC) in Al-Zour, headed by HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. Considering the interest of the Cabinet in the implementation of development projects, the ministers inspected the Al-Zour refinery project and LNG import facilities.

During the tour, the premier was briefed on the various facilities covered by the two projects, the latest developments regarding the workflow and the stages that have been completed. The Oil Minister Mohammad Abdullatif Al-Fares explained to the Cabinet that the Zour refinery is one of the largest international oil refining projects and includes export facilities and an industrial island. It will meet the needs of power plants in Kuwait of environmentally-friendly fuel with low sulfur content.

The refinery - at 98.67 percent completion - is designed according to the highest environ-

mental standards and will help in creating significant employment opportunities for Kuwaiti youth. It is expected to attract investment to the areas adjacent to the project, establish an industrial zone, contribute positively and effectively to the development plan, activate the role of the private sector by providing support jobs after the operation of the project.

Fares also explained that the LNG import facilities project is in line with the strategic plan adopted by KPC until 2030 and is the first of its kind in Kuwait and the largest in the world. It is designed to the highest environmental standards and will contribute to reducing pollution. The project - at 99.57 percent completion - will meet Kuwait's growing natural gas needs for the supply of electricity and the needs of oil refineries and petrochemical industries.

The Cabinet was then briefed on a video presentation on Kuwait's participation in the Dubai 2020 World Expo. The Cabinet was also briefed on a report on the theme park project to stimulate



KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah chairs an extraordinary meeting of the Cabinet yesterday. — KUNA

local tourism, events and leisure activities. It then heard an explanation by the Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Communications and Information Technology Rana Al-Fares about

the circumstances of the sand collapse that occurred at the site of the new Kuwait International Airport (T2) project under construction, which resulted in the death of two workers. —KUNA

Neymar picks Indian boy based in Kuwait to play with him

KUWAIT/KANNUR: A Kuwait-based Indian boy from Kannur, Kerala, has been hand-picked by Brazilian superstar footballer Neymar Jr to play alongside him in a global five-a-side event to be held in Qatar. Shahzad Mohammed Rafi, 17, a Kuwait resident, has been announced as one of the seven freestyle footballers selected from an online global talent hunt dubbed '2021 Red Bull Neymar Jr's

Five' that had hundreds of entries from the world over.

PSG superstar Neymar was among the seven panelists that scrutinized 60-second clips of footballing skills submitted by Shahzad and other contestants on Instagram. Shahzad is listed as an entry from Kuwait as his family is settled there. "Everyone at home is excited about it," Shahzad told the media in Kannur, where he has been stuck for months since arriving for his sister's wedding.

Shahzad, who is a fan of Manchester United legend Cristiano Ronaldo, is eager to meet and play alongside Neymar, who he says is a huge inspiration. He says futsal and seven-a-side games have always been an attraction, but it was a chance meeting with popular French freestyle footballer Sean Garner a few years ago that became the turning point.



Shahzad Mohammed Rafi

till 11:00 am. No candidate will be permitted to enter the examination center after 11:00 am (Kuwait time). Candidates have to download the admit card from the NTA website <https://neet.nta.nic.in>. They are advised to read the instructions given on the NTA website as well as on the admit card carefully and follow them scrupulously during the conduct of the examination.

Candidates will be offered a fresh N95 mask before entry and will be required to remove the mask worn by them from home and mandatorily wear the mask provided at the center. Candidates may be subjected to frisking with the help of metal detectors and temperature check with thermal devices before entering the examination center.

Candidates are advised to follow the dress code prescribed by the NTA. Shoes/footwear with thick soles and garments with large buttons are not permitted. No candidate shall be permitted to leave the examination room/hall before the end of the examination. No parking facility will be available either inside or outside the diplomatic area. To ensure smooth and timely entry of students, all are advised to arrange drop off and pick up of the candidates at the entry gate of the diplomatic area. Embassy has arranged transport facility for candidates to travel from the diplomatic entrance to the embassy and back.

Guidelines for NEET (UG)-2021 at Indian Embassy

KUWAIT: Embassy of India, Kuwait is the center to conduct the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (UG) - 2021 [NEET (UG) - 2021] in Kuwait. All candidates registered to appear for the entrance test are advised to carefully go through and strictly adhere to the following guidelines. The entrance test will be conducted at the premises of the Embassy of India at the diplomatic enclave in Daiya.

The test will be conducted strictly as per the National Testing Agency (NTA) guidelines on Sunday, Sept 12, 2021, from 11:30 am to 02:30 pm (Kuwait time) in pen and paper mode, to be answered on the OMR sheet using a black ballpoint pen which will be provided by the NTA. The duration of the entrance test will be three hours. As per NTA guidelines, NEET (UG)-2021 outside India will be held only in the English language.

Entry of the candidates to the embassy will be through the main diplomatic gate entrance in staggered timing batches from 8:30 am

IPU to adopt Kuwaiti proposal to prevent social media misuse

VIENNA: President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Duarte Pacheco said yesterday that a Kuwaiti proposal to establish a joint committee that includes representatives of all geopolitical groups to set new regulations preventing the misuse of social media would be adopted during the next meeting of its executive committee.

In a statement to KUNA, Pacheco commended the contribution of Kuwait with its effective role within the IPU. IPU maintains good relations with Kuwait, he added, referring to the results of the visit he made to Kuwait last February, where he agreed with the Kuwaiti side to intensify bilateral cooperation. Pacheco also expressed his satisfaction with the level of coordination that has existed between IPU and Kuwait for a long time.

On Tuesday, Kuwaiti National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem presented a proposal to the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament regarding the formation of an international parliamentary committee to discuss how to ensure that social media platforms are not misused, while preserving the values of freedom.

Ghanem explained in a speech during the third discussion session of the conference that combating misinformation and hate speech on the Internet requires regulations, as the proposal relates to the formation of a committee that includes representatives of all geopolitical groups in order to discuss ideas related to the subject.

Speaker of the Bahraini Parliament Fouzia Zainal earlier yesterday expressed her support to the initiative. In a statement to KUNA, Zainal said: "We share our views with other nations that call for creating legislation to verify information received on social media. Social media platforms have to ensure the authenticity and reliability of sources before publishing information to the public in order to preserve the structure and cohesion of society." — KUNA



UK migrant plan stokes tensions with France

Malaysian mothers hail win for equality in citizenship case

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COLOMBO: Pregnant women wait to get a dose of the Chinese-made Sinopharm COVID-19 vaccine in Colombo. Sri Lankan women were urged to delay getting pregnant after more than 40 expectant mothers died of COVID-19 in four months.—AFP

Women urged to delay pregnancy

Sri Lanka battles spike in COVID infections

COLOMBO: Sri Lankan women were urged to delay getting pregnant after more than 40 expectant mothers died of COVID-19 in four months, the health ministry said yesterday. The island nation, which recorded its first maternal coronavirus death in May, is battling a spike in Delta variant infections after travel restrictions were eased for local new year celebrations in mid-April.

“Usually, we have 90 to 100 maternal deaths a year, but since the start of the third wave we have recorded 41 deaths of pregnant women from COVID alone,” Chitramali de Silva, a director of the government’s Health Promotion Bureau said. Government obstetrician and gynaecologist Harsha Atapattu said he was urging “newlyweds, as well as those who are trying to have a baby, to delay it by at least a year because of the risks of COVID-19”.

De Silva said about 5,500 expectant mothers had been infected. About 70 percent were fully vaccinated, he added. Experts have urged pregnant women to get the jab, with Sri Lankan health officials stating the Delta variant appears to increase their risk of severe symptoms. The nation of 21 million people has been under a lightly imposed lockdown since August that the government expects to lift in mid-September.

But World Health Organization experts in Sri Lanka have called for tougher restrictions until the start of October. Hospitals have been overwhelmed during the surge, despite efforts to speed up the vaccination drive with nearly half of the total population receiving two doses. Sri Lanka has recorded nearly 475,000 infections and more than 10,500 deaths from COVID-19, but doctors say the actual figures could be much higher due to under-reporting. —AFP

France makes birth control free for women under 25

PARIS: The French government said yesterday it would make birth control free for all women under 25, expanding a scheme currently targeting under-18s to ensure young women don’t stop taking contraception because they cannot afford it. Health Minister Olivier Veran said surveys had shown a decline in the use of contraception among “a certain number of young women”.

“Their main reason for going without (birth control) is financial,” he said. The scheme covers the pill, IUDs, contraceptive patches and other methods composed of steroid hormones. Visits to the doctor for contraception will also be free, Veran said. The move is part of a series of measures taken by President Emmanuel Macron’s government to boost women’s rights and alleviate youth poverty.

Last year, the government made free contraception available to girls under 15 for the first time—previously it was only available to girls aged between 15 and 18—as part of a bid to end underage abortions. Several European countries, including Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Norway, make contraception free for teens. Britain makes several forms of contraception free to all. In France, the number of abortions among 15-18 year-olds fell from 9.5 per 1,000 girls between 2012 and 2018 to 6 per 1,000.

But in some developed countries, the free contraception won by women after decades of campaigning is coming under attack again from the religious right. In the US, former president Barack Obama’s signature health reform, known as Obamacare, gave most people with health insurance free access to birth control. But his successor Donald Trump scrapped the measure, allowing employers to opt out of providing contraception coverage on religious grounds—a decision upheld by the Supreme Court in 2020. Poland’s conservative government has also heavily restricted access to emergency contraception as part of its war on birth control.—AFP

International

Desperate Afghans still await flights to flee Taliban regime

‘Nothing is moving ... We feel sold out’

PARIS: When thousands of Afghans hoping to escape the incoming Taliban regime were cut off from Kabul airport last month, many started searching for alternative ways to flee. Hundreds made a daring dash for the airport at Mazar-i-Sharif—a city some 300 kilometers to the north on a route that had become punctuated with Taliban checkpoints. Some managed to board charter planes crowdfunded by individuals and businesses, but many others are still waiting for permission.

“Several hundred more are waiting in Mazar-i-Sharif,” said Nama Vanier, from development and research firm Sayara, who has secured private funding for two Airbus A340 passenger jets for 680 Afghans. “They are people from aid agencies, people who worked for foreign companies and journalists—including a female reporter who suffered an assassination attempt,” she added.

Vanier, who successfully helped 51 Afghans and their families board flights from Kabul, said the holdup often came from Washington. “It is our impression that, if there was strong support from the American authorities, the Taliban would be accommodating,” said Vanier. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the United States was working round the clock to facilitate the flights, but had limited on-ground resources. “We’ve made clear to the Taliban—that these charters need to be able to depart,” he said Wednesday. He said the United States was also pressing the Taliban to reopen Kabul airport for civilian flights

so that those who want to can leave Afghanistan safely.

‘Cheated’

Marina LeGree, from women’s rights group Ascend Athletics, is trying to evacuate a group of young Afghan women and their families. “Nothing is moving,” she said. “We feel sold out.” Eric Montalvo, a former US soldier and lawyer involved in the evacuation attempt from Mazar-i-Sharif, accused the United States of failing to deliver the paperwork needed for the Afghans to leave.

A frenzied two-week international airlift operation out of Kabul saw more than 123,000 foreign nationals and Afghans evacuated, before the last US soldier flew out ahead of an August 31 deadline to end their 20-year war. Farid Ahmadi had been due to fly out on August 26 but hours before his flight, an Islamic State-Khorasan suicide bomber detonated outside the airport, killing scores of people.

In the middle of the night, Ahmadi got a call telling him to go to Mazar-i-Sharif instead. He gathered his colleagues and their families, and together crowded onto a bus for a nine-hour ride. Taliban soldiers stopped the bus several times on its slow journey. “We told them we were going to a wedding,” Ahmadi said. “All the families were afraid. The children weren’t talking, they weren’t playing.” Arriving in Mazar-i-Sharif, they laid low for three days. Then, just hours before the last US soldiers left Afghanistan, Ah-

madi’s group got the green light, and their plane took off.

International effort

Behind the Mazar-i-Sharif flights lay a remarkable effort, sometimes down to the coordination of just a handful of determined individuals. “We had friends, former colleagues, people who were at risk, who asked us for help—but they were not on the lists of embassies,” said Clemence Quint from Magenta, a consultancy company providing governance advice. “So we started working on our own evacuations.” Facebook chartered one to airlift its employees, and others needing help. “In the process of assisting Facebook employees and close partners to leave Afghanistan, we joined an effort to help a group of journalists and their families who were in grave danger,” the social media giant said in a statement.

Mexico said it would welcome 175 Afghans, including more than 100 from the communications group that owns Tolo News, who plan to continue on to the United States. “We spent three days telling each other that the flight was going to leave... then there was a bureaucratic barrier, an administrative barrier, or because someone didn’t pick up their phone,” said Quint. Farid Ahmadi described the relief when the wheels of his plane finally took off from Mazar-i-Sharif. “Everyone was crying,” he said. “No one could believe we had done it.” —AFP

Qatar top diplomat in Iran to discuss Afghanistan

TEHRAN: Qatar’s foreign minister met his Iranian counterpart in Tehran yesterday to discuss developments in Afghanistan, the Qatari diplomat and Iranian media said. Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani held “talks on regional and international issues” with Iran’s Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, reported Iran’s ISNA news agency.

Sheikh Mohammed, who this week met US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Doha, tweeted that he and Iran’s foreign minister met “to discuss the developments in Afghanistan”. “The State of Qatar believes in the effectiveness of having a unified vision to ensure a comprehensive solution for Afghanistan,” he added.

Qatar is close to the US and hosts Washington’s largest military base in the region, but it also enjoys strong ties with Tehran, with which it shares the world’s largest gas field. Iran, worried about the Taliban’s return to power, on Monday “strongly” condemned its assault on Afghanistan’s



TEHRAN: This handout picture shows Iran’s Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian (2nd left) meeting with Qatari Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani (2nd right) in the capital Tehran.—AFP

Panjshir Valley, which had been the last stronghold of resistance. Iran, the region’s dominant Shiite Muslim power, had until now refrained from criticizing the Taliban since the Sunni group seized Kabul on August 15.

Qatar has long acted as a mediator on Afghanistan, hosting the Taliban’s talks with the United States under former president Donald Trump, and then with the now deposed Afghan

government of president Ashraf Ghani. Iran, which shares a 900 kilometer border with Afghanistan, did not recognize the Taliban during their 1996 to 2001 stint in power. Already hosting nearly 3.5 million Afghans, and fearing a new refugee influx, Tehran has however sought to reach a rapprochement with the Taliban since their lightning seizure of Kabul amid the US withdrawal last month.—AFP

Guerrilla hero’s legacy endures in Afghanistan

KABUL: In the streets of Kabul, it is difficult to miss Ahmad Shah Massoud - the revered guerrilla leader’s face adorns billboards, murals and even T-shirts not only in tribute, but also resistance. His legacy as one of Afghanistan’s most towering figures endures two decades after he was assassinated on September 9, 2001, by Al-Qaeda, whose Taliban allies were trying to defeat Massoud’s forces.

He had become the most well-known commander in the country, successfully repelling the Soviet military in the 1980s and then the Taliban from his native Panjshir Valley. “He is the hero of... Afghanistan,” Kabul resident Rashed, who gave one name, told AFP on the eve of Massoud’s death anniversary. “He fought against the Russians and the terrorists and we will fight too. We follow his footsteps,” he added, standing in front of a large billboard bearing an image of Massoud wearing his trademark pakol hat.

Similar billboards and murals abound in Kabul, but less than a month after the Taliban took control of the capital, they are slowly being defaced, painted over, or removed. Still, for sale at one shop in the capital this week were framed portraits of Massoud, as well as T-shirts with his face on them, similar to the ones popular around the world of Latin American revolutionary Che Guevara. For many in Afghanistan, the legacy of Massoud - called the “Lion of Panjshir” by his devotees - is more important now than ever, with his bitter Taliban foes in control of the country once again. As the group’s fighters patrolled Kabul, some residents invoked Massoud’s name as they vowed to stand up against the new regime. “We... will commemorate (the anniversary) in the best way,” said Kabul resident Farid on Wednesday, describing Massoud as “Afghanistan’s national hero”. —AFP

International

Main Paris attacks defendant disrupts trial with new diatribe

'They are in prison but did nothing'

LASSERRE: The main defendant in the trial over the November 2015 attacks in Paris yesterday disrupted proceedings with a new outburst in court, claiming three co-accused knew nothing about the jihadist plot. Salah Abdeslam, the sole survivor of the group of assailants who killed 130 people, went on trial with 19 others Wednesday over the November 13, 2015 suicide bombing and gun assaults on bars, restaurants, the Bataclan concert hall and the national stadium. "They helped me but they knew nothing at all" about the attacks plot, said Abdeslam, 31, of the three fellow accused. "They are in prison but did nothing," he added before his microphone was cut by the presiding judge Jean-Louis Peries who then suspended the hearing. It was the second such intervention by Abdeslam, who on the first day of the landmark trial on Wednesday had launched into a diatribe about how he and his co-accused were being treated "like dogs" in prison.

On this occasion, he had intervened while the court was considering the admissibility of the complaints brought by certain plaintiffs in the case. "The victims from Syria and Iraq—will they be able to speak?" asked Abdeslam, his dark hair combed back, wearing a white sweater with colored stripes. "In principle, we should be presumed innocent before being judged... even if I do not endorse your justice," he said. "Let's leave this discussion, Mr Abdeslam," replied the judge. "Sir—don't be selfish. There are other people who want to hear me," Abdeslam retorted.

Abdeslam's outbursts in court have sharply contrasted with his refusal over the last year to give any statements to investigators, always remaining silent. Peries commented: "You have had five years to comment, you did not wish to make statements—as is your right. I understood now that you wanted to speak, and that's fine—but now is not the time."

'Shocking' for victims

The trial, which is expected to last nine months, is the biggest in France's modern legal history and sees the 20 defendants facing sentences of up to life in prison, including Abdeslam. Six of the suspects are being tried in absentia.

Abdeslam's apparent desire to steal the limelight risks becoming a major headache for the court as it seeks to use the next sessions to set up the marathon process and prepare for the testimony of survivors and relatives of the dead from September 28. "This is offensive to the victims, it is shocking the impact that these remarks have on the victims," said lawyer Samia Maktouf, who represents 40 plaintiffs in the trial. On the first day Abdeslam stated his Islamic faith when asked to identify himself and then replied that he was a "fighter for the Islamic State" when asked for his profession. "Here it is very beautiful, there are flat screens, air conditioning but there (in prison) we are mistreated," he alleged. Abdeslam, a dual French-Moroccan national, was captured in Brussels after allegedly discarding his suicide vest and fleeing the



PARIS: This court-sketch shows Salah Abdeslam, the prime suspect in the November 2015 Paris attacks, standing on the first day of the trial at the Palais de Justice of Paris.—AFP

French capital in the chaotic aftermath of the bloodshed. The horror was unleashed late on Friday, November 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, where 90 people mostly in their 20s and 30s were massacred as they watched a rock concert. 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.—AFP

Somalia's Farmajo and Roble: Leaders at loggerheads

MOGADISHU: When Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed was elected president of Somalia in February 2017, his supporters hoped he could be the answer to corruption and extremism in Africa's most notorious failed state. But the veteran diplomat triggered a political crisis when he extended his mandate and failed to hold elections, and is now locked in a damaging standoff with Mohamed Hussein Roble, the man he appointed premier just a year ago.

The 59-year-old father of four, popularly known as Farmajo (a name derived from the Italian word for cheese), spent several years studying and working in the United States but gave up his American citizenship in 2019. Farmajo was elected president by MPs in a converted aircraft hangar after a six-month voting process marred by widespread allegations of vote-buying and corruption. He inherited a deeply unstable nation where Al-Shabaab jihadists still hold swathes of countryside despite being routed from the capital Mogadishu in 2011. "This is the beginning of unity for the Somali nation, the beginning of the fight against Shabaab and corruption," a triumphant Farmajo said.—AFP

Theranos founder's fraud trial opens in Silicon Valley

SAN JOSE: Fallen biotech star Elizabeth Holmes's fraud trial opened Wednesday in California, with prosecutors claiming she told grandiose lies to cheat investors in her once-billion-dollar company, as her defense said she simply made mistakes. When she launched the diagnostics firm Theranos in 2003 at age 19, the charismatic Holmes promised results that were faster and cheaper than traditional laboratories, running an analytical gamut on just a few drops of blood. Trouble is, prosecutors say, the tests did not do what was promised, and she now faces fraud charges that potentially carry decades in prison.

"This is a case about lying and cheating to get money," federal prosecutor Robert Leach told jurors during his opening arguments in the heart of Silicon Valley, the city of San Jose. "The defendant's fraudulent scheme made her a billionaire," he told a courtroom filled with journalists, Holmes's loved ones and large legal teams. But her high-powered defense argued Holmes devoted her life to Theranos and was not the "villain" prosecutors claimed; instead, she had made mistakes - including the company she kept.

"Theranos failed in part because it made mistakes, but mistakes are not crimes. A failed business does not make a CEO a criminal," attorney Lance Wade told the jury. The defense has also alleged in filings that Holmes was psychologically abused and controlled by her business partner and ex-boyfriend Ramesh "Sunny" Balwani, who is standing trial separately. "You will hear that trusting and relying on Mr Balwani as her primary advisor was one of her mistakes," Wade told jurors.

Holmes was a tech world celebrity whose multi-billion-dollar start-up looked set to revolutionize medical testing before it crashed and burned in a blaze of fraud claims. The 37-year-old faces charges of wire fraud and conspiracy to commit wire fraud. If found guilty, she could be jailed for up to 20 years. She and Balwani, the former Theranos chief operating officer whom she dated for a time, are charged with conspiring to scam Theranos investors and customers.

From 'visionary' to 'villain'

During jury selection last week, Holmes's attorney Kevin Downey asked potential members if they had experience with "abuse by an intimate partner," signaling the defense plans to raise the issue. Prosecutor Jeffrey Schenk of the US Attorney's Office is expected to call on medical professionals to undermine that notion. As the first day of testimony wrapped up, judge Edward Davila warned the jurors to avoid reading news of the case. Proceedings were due to resume on Friday.

Political figures like Henry Kissinger and former defense secretary James Mattis were drawn to the company's board, and media mogul Rupert Murdoch invested cash in what seemed to be a sure-fire winner. Mattis, Murdoch and Kissinger are on a list of potential witnesses filed with the court by prosecutors. Holmes was lauded as a visionary, drawing comparisons with Apple founder Steve Jobs. But years of hype - and billions of dollars - later, those promises unspooled: the miracle machines did not work.

And, say prosecutors, Holmes knew it, yet continued to lie to investors, doctors and patients so she could raise more than \$700 million for the company. At one point, she had a net worth estimated at \$3.6 billion, according to Forbes magazine. At the time, she was the youngest billionaire not to have inherited her fortune. In 2018, the Securities and Exchange Commission presented the Theranos case as a lesson for Silicon Valley, a warning against the "fake it till you make it" culture. The trial was postponed several times - most recently because Holmes had a child in early July.—AFP

International

Two decades after 9/11, Saudi seeks softer image

Women can drive in the 'new' Saudi Arabia

RIYADH: Two decades after Saudi Arabian militants masterminded and carried out the September 11 attacks, the desert kingdom is striving for change in a reform drive aimed at updating its ultra-conservative image. Women can drive and cinemas have reopened in the "new" Saudi Arabia under crown prince and de facto ruler Mohammed bin Salman, among many modernizing reforms that some believe can be linked to the trauma of 9/11. The initiatives are "one of the long-term consequences" of the worst terrorist attack on US soil, Yasmine Farouk of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace said. Fifteen Saudis were among the 19 hijackers in the plane attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, which left nearly 3,000 dead and were plotted by Saudi-born Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.

The kingdom, a long-time American ally, denied any involvement but faced harsh US rhetoric over its social and education systems that critics said promoted extremism. More pressure could follow in the coming months after US President Joe Biden ordered the declassification of secret documents from a US investigation into the attacks. Biden was responding to pressure from families of some of those killed on 9/11 who have long argued that the classified documents may contain evidence that the Saudi government had links to the hijackers.

In a statement issued on Wednesday by its Washington embassy, Saudi Arabia said it "welcomes" Biden's move. It said it "can only reiterate its longstanding support for the full declassification" of any documents with the hope they "will end the baseless allegations against the kingdom once and for all".

Rise of MBS

Saudi Arabia's austere image was rooted in the strict Wahhabi interpretation of Islam, a puritanical doctrine it was accused of exporting around the world. The country, which houses Islam's holiest sites and is the world's biggest oil exporter, at first resisted pressure for reforms.

Triumphant Taliban start putting policies into practice

KABUL: Twenty years since the Taliban's hardline regime was ousted from Kabul, the Islamists are back in power and putting a new political agenda into practice. While promising a more inclusive government, top posts have been handed to veteran leaders who played key roles in their notoriously brutal 1996-2001 rule. Hibatullah Akhundzada, the Taliban's secretive supreme leader, has said the government would "work hard towards upholding Islamic rules and sharia law". While much remains opaque, here is what is known about their policies on key issues so far:

Women's rights

How the all-male leadership treat women is expected to be critical to any resumption of Western economic aid on which the country depends. The Taliban have sought to distance themselves from the harsher policies of old, when half the population was excluded from work and education. Under new rules, women may work "in accordance with the principles of Islam", the Taliban have decreed, without giving further details. Women can also study at university in classrooms that are segregated by sex, but they must wear an abaya robe and niqab covering most of the face. Under the last regime women were forced to wear the all-covering burqa which has only a small mesh window to see from.

But the rise of Prince Mohammed, or "MBS", who was named crown prince in 2017, and the need to diversify as demand cools for oil has brought a string of economic, social and religious changes.

Prince Mohammed has sought to position himself as a champion of "moderate" Islam, even as his international reputation took a hit from the 2018 murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. The kingdom's heavily criticized ban on women driving was lifted in 2018, mixed-gender music concerts are now allowed and businesses can remain open during the five daily prayers. Saudi Arabia has also neutered its once-feared religious police, who would chase people out of malls to go and pray and berated anyone seen mingling with the opposite sex. The Gulf country, a destination for millions of Muslim pilgrims each year, has also flung open its door for non-religious tourism. The kingdom "is a profoundly different and better place", Saudi government adviser Ali Shihabi said. "The (reforms) have dismantled the structures and networks of radical Islam within the country. "Terrorists planning an outrage similar to 9/11 will have to go somewhere other than the kingdom to fish for recruits, since the pool of Saudi youth indoctrinated in reactionary Islam is rapidly shrinking." But some Saudis warn that rapid and sweeping reforms carry the risk of a backlash, with popular sentiment hard to gauge when authorities continue to crack down on any opposition or activists.

'Enormous task'

In 2019, a Yemeni resident went on a stabbing spree during a live musical in Riyadh and, in another incident that year, a Saudi man shot and killed three people at a Florida naval base. Farouk said it was in many ways a "new Saudi Arabia", but warned the reforms are "not sufficient" to eradicate extremism.

"They don't involve a dialogue with the society that would address

Economic crisis

Afghanistan is facing a financial crisis following the takeover, with much of the international aid that had propped up the economy frozen. "The interactions with the international community... are going to continue," chief Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said. "We are going to be working on our natural resources and our resources in order to revitalise our economy."

But it remains unclear how the Taliban will find the funds to pay civil servants' salaries-or to support critical infrastructure to keep the lights on, water running and telecommunications working.

The Taliban's current annual income, much of which is raised from taxation and criminal activities, is estimated to be somewhere between as low as \$300 million and as high as \$1.5 billion. But while those funds bankrolled a successful insurgency, it is nowhere near meeting the needs of running a nation, experts say.

Freedom of speech

The Taliban say that journalists-including women-can continue to work. "We will respect freedom of the press, because media reporting will be useful to society and will be able to help correct the leaders' errors," Mujahid told media watchdog Reporters Without Borders.

Culture and sport

But Afghan journalists paint a different picture, with many having already fled the country, or in hiding fearing attacks. The Taliban have also banned growing protests against their rule, unless permission had been granted by the justice ministry. Mujahid called on the media "not to cover" the demonstrations. On Wednesday, two Afghan journalists were badly



JEDDAH: In this file photo, Hala Hussein Alireza, a newly-licensed Saudi motorist, drives a car in the Red Sea coastal city of Jeddah. — AFP

the extremist arguments," she said. "A dialogue is something very important to reach the objectives and not just imposing changes on people." Reform must focus on the educational system that has long been associated with Wahhabism, said Kristin Diwan of the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington. "Reforming an entire educational system - curriculum, instructors, institutions - is an enormous task akin to remaking society itself," she told AFP. The kingdom is currently reviewing textbooks that refer to non-Muslims as "kuffar" or non-believers, while the education ministry has announced it is working on a new curriculum that promotes "the values of freedom of thought and tolerance". In 2018, Prince Mohammed told CBS television that he aims to remove all "extremist" elements from the education system, in which hard-line Islamists were widely employed. "There is no question that the intent is there, but effective execution will take time," said Diwan. —AFP

beaten covering one in Kabul.

During their first stint in power, the Taliban were infamous for their strict interpretation of sharia law, banning music, photography, television, and even children's games such as kite-flying. This time, the Taliban have yet to issue official decrees regarding entertainment and culture. But spokesman Mujahid told the New York Times last month that they were hopeful that Afghans would follow their rules without compulsion. "Music is forbidden in Islam," Mujahid said, adding that "we're hoping that we can persuade people not to do such things, instead of pressuring them."

Many are also wary about the Taliban's approach to historical artifacts and culture, after their 2001 dynamiting of the 1,500-year-old giant Buddha statues at Bamiyan generated international outrage. Earlier this year, the Taliban promised to protect the country's heritage. As for sports, like in the past, only men can play or attend matches. Ahmadullah Wasiq, deputy head of the Taliban's cultural commission, said women cannot play. "Islam and the Islamic Emirate do not allow women to play cricket or play the kind of sports where they get exposed," he said.

Security and drugs

After crushing the final holdout province of Panjshir last week, the Taliban have warned that "anyone who tries to start an insurgency will be hit hard". They have also said they will battle Islamic State-Khorasan, Afghanistan's branch of the jihadist franchise. As for drugs, the Taliban promise that Afghanistan, the world's leading producer of opium, "will be a narcotics-free country". But many fear that its anti-drug rhetoric-like other pledges to respect fundamental rights-are merely a way to paint a more moderate picture in order to secure international recognition.—AFP

International

Crosses and catechisms: Hungary's push to 'Christianize' education

Decade-old campaign pioneered by firebrand PM

HODMEZOVASARHELY: Hands clasped, children line church pews as nuns lead morning prayer in Hungary. "Jesus loves me... Jesus is happiness," they sing, clapping along to the hymns. It is not a scene from Sunday mass, but from a primary school where students are kicking off the day with prayer as part of the government's efforts to re-Christianise education.

The decade-old campaign has been pioneered by Hungary's nationalist firebrand prime minister as part of his "conservative revolution" in the eastern European nation that Pope Francis will visit on Sunday. The result: More crosses in classrooms and daily schedules punctuated by prayer and catechism.

It has also led to more government funds being funneled into Christian schools - often attended by wealthier students - at the expense of public schools where poorer children are enrolled. For Andrea Magyar, headmistress at Ferenc Liszt, the change has been a welcome one. Her school of 400 in the southeastern town of Hodmezovasarhely has been under the direction of Dominican nuns since September 2020.

She says relations are "less bureaucratic and warmer" with the diocese compared to the centralized education authority, and insists the curriculum itself "has not changed". The religious elements - crosses and catechisms - are not obligatory, she says, and a new crop of young teachers have helped revive the school. So have government subsidies, which have allowed her to freshen the paint work and plan other renovations,

she told AFP in early September, speaking under an old oak tree in the school's sunny courtyard.

'Christian civilization'

The so-called re-Christianisation of Hungary's schools has been spearheaded by controversial leader Viktor Orban, who rose to power on a tide of populist support in 2010. A self-styled defender of "Christian civilisation", he bucked trends secularizing education elsewhere in Europe, vowing to reverse course on a communist-era suppression of religion in Hungary. Instead, his government has overseen an increasing number of educational establishments coming under the authority of the Church. He may be keen to showcase this shift on Sunday when he meets the Pope in Budapest.

His former chief-of-staff Janos Lazar said in 2016 that "education should be the business of Church institutions" in the service of two essential aims: "that children learn to be good Christians and good Hungarians". By 2018, 18 percent of schools in Hungary were Catholic, up from 9.4 percent in 2010 when Orban took office. But the uptick in Church-run schools may not reflect a more pious society, said Kriszta Ercse, a sociologist at the Civil Platform for Public Education.

In the last national census in 2011 only 39 percent of Hungarians identified as Catholics and 11 percent as Protestants. Among adherents, only 15 percent attended religious services. A new census has been delayed by the pandemic but experts estimate these figures haven't



HODMEZOVASARHELY: Dominican nuns hold education lessons and prayer for the school children of Liszt Ferenc primary school of their convent in the St Stephan church of Hodmezovasarhely town. — AFP

changed substantially. Instead, Ercse says parents are attracted to church schools because they outperform public ones - in part due to the more generous state funding they receive, according to Ercse.

That's why Ildiko sends her children aged seven and 14 to Ferenc Liszt primary school in Hodmezovasarhely - for free like public schools in the country. She praises the school's "excellent atmosphere and committed teachers" since it

was taken over by the Church, and says she is "very satisfied" with the changes.

But it's not all positive. Eager to keep up academic performance, some religious schools actively seek out students from wealthy families at the expense of poorer children and those from the Roma minority. Ercse calls this a "drastic form of selection" and warns it could lead to "ghettoisation". "The government is leaving public schools to rot," she says. — AFP

Brexit protocol could collapse govt, N Ireland unionist leader says

LONDON: The leader of Northern Ireland's biggest party yesterday suspended cooperation with Dublin and warned he might collapse the province's devolved government in protest at a UK-EU protocol governing post-Brexit trade. Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) leader Jeffrey Donaldson demanded "significant and substantial changes" to the Northern Ireland Protocol, under which London agreed to checks on goods crossing the Irish Sea as part of its drawn-out divorce from the European Union.

Donaldson took over the faction-ridden DUP in June and is due to meet with EU Commission vice-president Maros Sefcovic, who has insisted the EU will not renegotiate the protocol. But the DUP leader said it was "a matter of political reality, that our political institutions will not survive a failure to resolve the problems that the protocol has created".

"Let me be clear: If the choice is ultimately between remaining in office or implementing the protocol in its present form, then the only option for any unionist minister would be to cease to hold such office," he said, warning the DUP might trigger new elections in Northern Ireland. Donaldson said the DUP was pulling out of a cross-border dialogue

council with the government of EU member Ireland - "Strand Two" of a 1998 peace deal that ended three decades of violence over British rule in Northern Ireland. "In such circumstances unionists cannot be expected to operate Strand Two as though nothing had changed," he said.

'Political limbo'

The Northern Ireland Protocol came into effect on January 1, when the United Kingdom left the European single market and customs union. It involves checks on goods arriving in Northern Ireland from mainland Great Britain - England, Scotland and Wales - to stop items entering the EU by the backdoor via Ireland. It is also designed to avoid customs checks on a hard border with Ireland - another key part of the 1998 peace deal. But pro-British unionists say the port checks have hit business and trade, and altered Northern Ireland's status within the wider UK, putting a border in the Irish Sea.

Earlier this year, opposition erupted into some of the worst unrest in the province in recent years. The UK government in London, which wants to renegotiate the protocol, on Monday said it would extend a grace period indefinitely on implementing checks. Brussels said it would not oppose the move or implement sanctions for breaking the deal while talks were going on to find a solution. Donaldson, however, said that left Northern Ireland in an unsustainable "political limbo" and the protocol should be replaced with "alternative arrangements to provide political stability and economic opportunity". — AFP

Astronauts smell smoke, burning on Russia's ISS module

MOSCOW: A smoke alarm sounded yesterday in Russia's segment of the International Space Station (ISS) and astronauts smelled "burning" on board, Russia's space agency and NASA said. The incident, which the Russian space agency Roscosmos said happened at 01:55 GMT ahead of a scheduled spacewalk, is the latest in a string of problems to spur safety concerns over conditions on the Russian segment. "A smoke detector was triggered in the Zvezda service module of the Russian segment of the International Space Station during automatic battery charging, and an alarm went off," Roscosmos said in a statement.

French astronaut Thomas Pesquet said "the smell of burning plastic or electronic equipment" wafted to the US segment of the station, Russian state news agency RIA Novosti reported, citing a NASA broadcast. The Russian crew turned on a filter and after the air was cleaned up the astronauts went back to sleep, Roscosmos said. The space agency said that a planned spacewalk would go ahead as scheduled. Russia's Oleg Novitsky and Pyotr Dubrov are scheduled to leave the station to continue work on the Nauka science module that docked in July. "All systems are operating normally," Roscosmos said. The Russian segment of the ISS has experienced several problems recently and a space official warned last month that out of date software could lead to "irreparable failures". The Zvezda service module, part of the Russian segment, has experienced several air leaks, including earlier this year and in 2019. — AFP

International

US court grants prisoner stay of execution on religious grounds

A last-minute stay of execution by US Supreme Court

WASHINGTON: A death row prisoner in Texas was granted a last-minute stay of execution by the US Supreme Court Wednesday night after asking that his pastor be allowed to hold him as he is put to death by lethal injection. "The application for stay of execution of sentence of death ... is granted," the Supreme Court's ruling said. It gave no explanation, a practice which is common in emergency rulings. John Ramirez, 37, was scheduled to be executed Wednesday evening for stabbing a convenience store clerk to death during a 2004 robbery.

Seth Kretzer, Ramirez' lawyer, petitioned the Supreme Court to halt the execution because the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) will not allow Ramirez' Baptist pastor, the Reverend Dana Moore, to hold him as he is executed or to pray aloud in the execution chamber. "The first problem is that under the TDCJ's most recent policy, Pastor Moore (may) not lay hands on Ramirez during his death," Kretzer said. The second problem is that Pastor Moore may not pray, speak, read Scripture, move his lips, or do anything at all.

"In other words, Pastor Moore is compelled to stand in his little corner of the room like a potted plant," Ramirez' lawyer said if Moore prays out loud he risks being "ejected from the execution chamber by guards and referred for prose-

cution." "Ramirez will be executed without the spiritual advisor guaranteed to him under the Constitution," he said. The Texas prison authorities allow a spiritual advisor to be in the room during an execution, but they must be quiet and are not allowed to touch a prisoner.

The conservative-leaning Supreme Court rarely intervenes to halt executions, but it has done so in recent cases where prisoners have argued they are being denied access to spiritual advisors. In the Ramirez case it granted the stay without saying why, and said it will study the merits of the case in October or November. The court could take the opportunity of Ramirez' case to clarify its position on the religious rights of those sentenced to death.

In 2018 it rejected the request of a stay of execution for Muslim prisoner who asked for an imam to be by his side during his execution. A few weeks later, following a public outcry, a stay was granted to an inmate who wanted a Buddhist spiritual advisor to accompany him to the execution chamber. And this year the court



LUCASVILLE: This file photo shows the witness room facing the execution chamber of the 'death house' at the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility. A death row prisoner John Ramirez (inset) was granted a last-minute stay of execution by the US Supreme Court Wednesday night after asking that his pastor be allowed to hold him as he is put to death by lethal injection. — AFP

ruled that states could not outlaw spiritual advisors to accompany death row inmates entirely. The Supreme Court said it would revisit

Ramirez' case in October or November. There have been five people executed in the United States this year. — AFP

Biden wants solar to provide 45% of US energy by 2050

NEW YORK: The Biden administration said Wednesday the United States should aim to garner nearly 50 percent of its electric supply from solar energy by mid-century, unveiling the latest component of its climate change strategy. A report released by the Department of Energy (DOE) said solar could account for much as 40 percent of the power supply by 2035 and 45 percent by 2050, up from its current level of just three percent.

However reaching this level would require the United States to quadruple its annual solar capacity additions, the department said in a statement. This future also depends on extensive public investments in a power grid originally built for power from coal and natural gas, as well as policy changes to disincentivize carbon-based energy, the department added. The report comes as President Joe Biden presses for aggressive action on climate change and renewable energy as Congress debates massive proposals to overhaul the country's infrastructure against a backdrop of worsening tropical storms and forest fires in the United States.

It also comes on the heels of a White House announcement last month that set a 2030 target for half of all cars sold in the United States to be zero-emission - another bold goal that will depend on a confluence of public policies, private sector investments and consumer preference to become a reality. As with other ambitious climate targets such as "Net zero" emissions by 2050, Biden's solar goals are "aspirational not practical," said Dan Pickering, founder of Pickering Energy Partners in Houston. "Trillions will be spent trying to get there. Moving that direction

EFFICIENTLY is hugely critical... and hugely valuable."

Congressional debate

The DOE release included some policy objectives, but leaves much of the detail and decisions to Congress. The report foresees some \$562 billion in additional cost in the build-out through 2050, but did not lay out a target for the public share of investment.

The analysis described the investment as cost-effective, saying some \$1.7 trillion would ultimately be saved through "avoided climate damages and improved air quality." The big jump in deployment rests on "continued technological advances" that would limit electricity prices and an increase in storage capacity of solar capacity to build in resilience. "The study illuminates the fact that solar, our cheapest and fastest-growing source of clean energy, could produce enough electricity to power all of the homes in the US by 2035," Secretary of Energy Jennifer Granholm said.

"Achieving this bright future requires a massive and equitable deployment of renewable energy and strong decarbonization policies - exactly what is laid out in the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and President Biden's Build Back Better agenda." A \$1.2 trillion bipartisan infrastructure package focuses primarily on roads and bridges, leaving significant climate-related investments to a \$3.5 trillion plan backed by Biden's Democratic party that faces longer odds.

But congressional Republicans have balked at Biden's strategy, particularly the larger package. Americans for Prosperity, a libertarian advocacy group backed by the Koch Brothers, has dismissed the total \$4.7 trillion in planned legislations as "wasteful, partisan wish lists" and called for Washington to "stop the spending spree." But Biden highlighted the need for action during a visit Tuesday to parts of New York and New Jersey ravaged by Hurricane Ida last week, saying the world faces a "code red" danger on climate. — AFP

Book burning sparks backlash

MONTREAL: Burning Tintin books deemed offensive to indigenous peoples? The 2019 book burning at a group of schools in Canada, only revealed this week, has sparked controversy amid an election campaign. The Conseil scolaire catholique Providence, which manages 30 schools in southwestern Ontario, identified and removed 5,000 children's books it claimed conveyed prejudices about indigenous peoples.

Among the titles were "Tintin in America," "Asterix and the Indians" and three Lucky Luke comic books, as well as novels and encyclopedias. Some were burned during a reconciliation ceremony, Radio-Canada revealed Tuesday. "It was a gesture of reconciliation with the First Nations and a gesture of openness towards other groups represented in the school district and in society," Lyne Cossette told the public broadcaster, citing works that contained "obsolete and inappropriate content."

Faced with a public backlash, the school board said Wednesday it had suspended the removal of books from its libraries. Nearly 200 books are currently under review. "I am never in favor of burning the books," said Prime Minister Justin Trudeau during a campaign stop, while also highlighting the importance of reconciliation with the First Nations. On Twitter, leader Erin O'Toole promised that "a Conservative government would be committed to reconciliation." "But the road to reconciliation does not mean tearing down Canada. I strongly condemn the burning of books," he said. The leader of the New Democratic Party, Jagmeet Singh, meanwhile espoused changes to how children are taught. Canada was shaken by recent discoveries of hundreds of unmarked graves of indigenous children forced to attend residential schools set up by the government to assimilate them into the mainstream from the late 1800s to the 1990s.— AFP

International

Tolls, stickers or free? Spain mulls future of motorways

Transport minister pledges to bring in a new model

MADRID: Who's going to pay for Spain's motorways? Debate is raging over the funding of its 12,000 kilometers of motorways after the government made some roads toll-free after the concessions expired. "Don't stop!" Since September 1, that has been the message plastered across many toll booths in the northeastern Catalonia region, largely along a section of the AP-7 motorway between the French border and Barcelona that is very popular with European tourists.

With the ending of concessions held by subsidiaries of Spanish toll road operator Abertis, control over nearly 500 kilometers of motorways has reverted back to the state and the government of Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez. Halting the tolls there will hand road users "an annual savings of more than 750 million euros (\$890 million)", said Transport Minister Raquel Sanchez.

In a country where almost 85 percent of motorways are toll-free, payments on three stretches ended in 2018 and another two in 2020, meaning that in just three years, 1,029 kilometers of high-

way have passed from private to public hands - saving drivers 1.4 billion euros in tolls. Not renewing the toll road concessions when they came to an end was a pledge made by Pedro Sanchez when he became premier in 2018, with the aim of overhauling Spain's motorway management model, which varies hugely across the country and is a major source of frustration for drivers.

A sensitive issue

But the areas where tolls have been lifted won't stay like that for long. "We're looking to set up a tariff system according to usage," the transport minister said, pledging to bring in a new model that would be "publicly run, fair and homogenous throughout Spain". Over the years, Spain has tried a range of different approaches with some roads under public ownership, others privately-held, some run by the state and others by the region, explained Maria Angeles Baez, an expert in the Spanish road system from Granada University.

"Faced with the need to improve the road net-

work and the scarcity of financial resources, the state opted for the concession system, which was rolled out in two periods: From 1967-1975 and 1996-2006," she told AFP. Although the toll-based motorway system "encouraged economic growth" in certain areas it was not well received by the public, she said. And government plans to set up a new system of charges are creating fresh tensions.

Motorway maintenance is very expensive, costing around 80,000 euros per kilometer every year, a sum which places a huge burden on a country like heavily-indebted Spain. In its economic plan sent to the European Commission to unlock its share of the EU's multi-billion-euro COVID recovery funds, Madrid pledged to review its motorways funding model and set up a payment system that would guarantee "the necessary income" to preserve the state's road network. "It doesn't make much sense for this maintenance to be footed largely out of the state budget which is ultimately paid for by the public, including those

who don't use the motorways," the transport minister said.

Consultation process

So how will the funding work? Many options are on the table, including the idea of an annual motorway charge sticker, along the lines of the Swiss system, which lets drivers onto all motorways in exchange for a fixed fee. Another possibility is payment per kilometer via a system of portals that recognize the passing vehicle and automatically charge the driver's bank account.

The Spanish press has been talking about a relatively modest charge of 0.01 to 0.015 centimes (up to \$0.02) per kilometer for cars and 0.05 centimes for lorries. Whatever model wins out, the solution is likely to mean a charge will be imposed on many roads that until now have been free - and the prospect is angering motorists. Faced with such opposition, the government has committed to a consultation process that should last several months.—AFP

Italian police raid COVID protesters 'planning violence'

ROME: Italian police raided the homes and searched the computers yesterday of eight people suspected of planning violence during protests against the country's coronavirus passport. The suspects are members of a group on messaging app Telegram called "The Warriors", where the use of weapons and DIY explosives at "No Green Pass" demonstrations have been discussed, according to a police statement.

They were said to be planning to attend a protest this weekend in Rome but are also accused of "inciting the other members of the group to carry out violent actions" in their home regions against unspecified "institutional targets" or during visits by government ministers. Some members of the group also planned a meeting where they intended to procure "white weapons" (non-firearms) for use at the Rome protest, the statement said. The searches were carried out in Milan, Rome, Venice, Padua, Bergamo and Reggio Emilia.

The Green Pass shows if someone is vaccinated against COVID-19, has tested negative or recently recovered from the virus, and is required by everyone in Italy who wants to eat inside restaurants, take intercity trains and buses, and for teachers. It is the latest effort to try to control a pandemic that has claimed almost 130,000 lives since sweeping across Italy in February 2020, but has sparked small and occasionally violent protests. More than 39 million people in Italy - almost 73 percent of the population over the age of 12 - have been fully vaccinated.—AFP

14 dead in fire at COVID hospital in North Macedonia

SKOPJE: Fourteen people have died in a fire at a hospital treating coronavirus patients in North Macedonia, authorities said yesterday. The fire broke out late on Wednesday following an explosion in a COVID-19 clinic in Tetovo in the northwest of the Balkan country, said Prime Minister Zoran Zaev, who immediately headed to the town.

"A huge tragedy has occurred in the Tetovo COVID-19 centre," Zaev said on Twitter overnight. "An explosion caused a fire. The fire was extinguished but many lives were lost." At least 14 people died in the disaster, the prosecutor's office later said in a statement, raising the toll from the 10 deaths confirmed overnight. "Prosecutors have ordered autopsies to identify the bodies of the 14 people who died in the fire and we are looking into whether there are others dead," the statement said.

Health Minister Venko Filipce had earlier expressed "profound condolences" to the victims' families on Twitter. The fire broke out as the former Yugoslav republic celebrated the 30th anniversary of its independence, with festivities in the capital Skopje, including a military parade. The blaze destroyed part of the modular units recently built in front of the hospital to accommodate COVID patients. Several hours after the disaster, people walked past charred containers while stretcher bearers went back and forth to rescue vehicles.

'Fight for life'

Investigators have gone to the site to try to determine the cause of the disaster. Fire services were alerted to the blaze at around 1900 GMT, and it took about 45 minutes to extinguish. Construction work on the modular COVID unit only began in December at the hospital in Tetovo, a town of around 50,000 people.



TETOVO: Forensic scientists and firefighters work at the site of a fire at a COVID-19 clinic in Tetovo yesterday. —AFP

"The fire was huge because the hospital is modular, there was plastic," Tetovo deputy fire chief Saso Trajcevski told local television. "We took out victims while we put out the flames." Several injured people were transported to hospitals in the capital. "The fight for life is still going on and all services are doing everything they can to save people," Zaev said earlier, expressing "deep condolences to the families and of the deceased". "I wish the injured a quick recovery."

North Macedonia, with a population of around two million, is a poor country with a rundown healthcare system. Hospitals are overwhelmed in some areas, particularly where vaccination rates are low. The country has reported a rise in coronavirus infections recently, with the daily death toll reaching around 30. It has recorded more than 6,100 fatalities in total since the start of the pandemic. COVID-19 hospitals in other countries have been hit by explosions followed by fires. In Iraq, dozens of people were killed in fires that occurred after oxygen cylinders exploded in April and July.—AFP

International

Friday, September 10, 2021

UK migrant plan stokes tensions with France

Plans to turn back migrant boats spark anger

LONDON: Britain and France locked horns yesterday over reported plans by London to turn back boats carrying migrants across the Channel, triggering alarm and anger in Paris. At least 14,100 people have now crossed the Channel to the UK on small boats this year, according to Britain's domestic Press Association news agency - some 6,000 more than for the whole of 2020.

A record 828 people crossed over from France on a single day in late August, as traffickers took advantage of favorable late-summer weather. The growing number of boats is proving increasingly embarrassing for Home Secretary Priti Patel, who has carved out a reputation for being tough on immigration and law and order.

"Taking back control" of Britain's border was a key part of the campaign to take the country out of the European Union in the divisive 2016 Brexit referendum. But several newspapers said she has now secured legal advice and sanctioned the use of "pushback" tactics to turn back the small boats before they reach Britain's south coast. Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Downing Street office said yesterday that "it's right that our Border Force has the right range of tactics to address this problem".

Patel has also reportedly threatened to withhold £54 million (63 million euros, \$75 million) in funding pledged to Paris to help tackle the issue. However, French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said yesterday that France would not accept Britain violating international maritime law. "France will not accept any practice that breaks maritime law, nor any financial blackmail," Darmanin wrote on Twitter, a day after meeting Patel.

France has a policy of not intercepting or turning back migrant boats unless they ask for help, and instead escorts them to British waters. That has stoked anger in Brexit-supporting sections of the British media and the government in London, who accuse France of shirking its responsibilities. France for its part has said it would not make payment "conditional on numerical targets", warning that to do so would damage relations. "Such an approach would reflect a serious loss of confidence in our cooperation," a French interior ministry source said.

No 'silver bullet'

Downing Street insisted that Britain "won't break maritime law" with the new plans. It also dismissed the claims of blackmail, saying "we've provided our French counterparts significant sums of money and we've agreed another bilateral agreement backed by millions of pounds." Britain's reported new strategy has been trialed for months, overseen by the Royal Marines, the Daily Telegraph said.

However, Border Force officials have told ministers the tactic could only be used in certain circumstances and was not a "silver bullet", it added. Johnson on Wednesday told parliament that Britain must use every possible tactic to halt the "vile trade" of traffickers bringing record numbers of migrants across the Channel. Johnson praised Patel for dealing with the problem "in the best possible way, which is to make sure that they don't leave those French shores".

In cooperation with Britain, France has doubled police numbers on its beaches, preventing more than 10,000 crossing attempts. But Johnson added that "clearly as time



KENT: Migrants carry children as they are escorted to be processed after being picked up by an RNLI (Royal National Lifeboat Institution) lifeboat while crossing the English channel at a beach in Dungeness, southeast England. —AFP

goes on and this problem continues, we are going to have to make sure that we use every possible tactic at our disposal to stop what I think is a vile trade". MPs are scrutinizing proposed government legislation that would make it harder for those who enter the UK to stay by claiming asylum. Controversially, it would make it a criminal offence to knowingly arrive in the UK without permission, angering organizations working with asylum seekers. —AFP

Storm-hit Philippines braces for typhoon

MANILA: At least one person died and 17 were missing after a storm dumped heavy rain and caused flooding in the Philippines, authorities said yesterday, as a powerful typhoon barreled towards the country. Tropical Storm Conson hit the central province of Eastern Samar as a typhoon on Monday before weakening as it passed over the archipelago, forcing around 10,000 people to flee their homes, according to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council.

One person drowned on the island province of Marinduque, said Mark Timbal, spokesman for the disaster agency. Another two deaths reported in Masbate province were yet to be confirmed by the authorities. At least seventeen people, mostly fishermen, have been confirmed missing. Floods were recorded in the provinces surrounding the national capital region along

with communities in central regions, according to the disaster agency.

The heavy rain and flooding came as Typhoon Chanthu - packing maximum sustained wind speeds of 195 kilometers per hour - swept across the Philippine Sea towards the country's northeastern tip. Chanthu is expected to graze Cagayan province today, dumping intense and "at times torrential" rain over the region, before continuing north towards Taiwan, the state weather agency said. In the most vulnerable areas, "pre-emptive evacuation is advised... to all those who have weak or... shanty houses," Darwin Sacramento of the provincial disaster agency told AFP in a text message. The Philippines is hit by an average of 20 storms and typhoons every year, a dangerous and disruptive part of life in most of the country. As the surface layer of oceans warms due to climate change, cyclones are becoming more powerful and carry more water, posing an increasing threat to the world's coastal communities, scientists say. The deadliest cyclone on record in the Philippines was Super Typhoon Haiyan, which left more than 7,300 people dead or missing in 2013. —AFP

Thai device tests for coronavirus in armpit sweat

BANGKOK: For Bangkok market sellers, the armpit sweat soaking their T-shirts during the humid monsoon season may contain subtle signs of coronavirus infection, local scientists have said. Thai researchers are developing a sweat-based mobile virus detector, and road-tested it on shopkeepers at a Bangkok food market this week.

"From the samples, we found that people infected with COVID-19 secrete very distinct chemicals," said Chadin Kulsing from Bangkok's Chulalongkorn University. "We used this finding to develop a device to detect the specific odors produced by certain bacteria in the sweat of COVID-19 patients. Chadin - who said the test was 95 percent accurate - hopes it might be rolled out as an affordable alternative to more expensive swab tests that require lab processing.

It is however still in the development stage, and the research behind it is yet to be published or peer-reviewed. The scientists adapted a device usually used to detect toxic chemicals in the environment. Subjects place a cotton swab under their arms for 15 minutes, before the swab is put in a glass vial and sterilized with UV rays. "The technician then draws an appropriate amount of the sample using a suction hose, and pressurizes it into the analyser to check the results," Chadin said.

Sample collection takes 15 minutes and the results are ready in 30 seconds. The sweat tests received the thumbs-up from Bangkok market vendors, who said it was much more pleasant than nostril swab tests. "This sweat test is more convenient because I get to work while waiting for the results," a 43-year-old watermelon seller said. "With the PCR test, I'd have to be at a testing centre, sit and wait for the result and it just wastes my time." Thailand, battling its third and worst COVID wave, reported 16,000 new cases yesterday, taking the total since the start of the pandemic to nearly 1.34 million. —AFP

International

French jail term confirmed for Syria's president uncle

Paris appeals court backs 'Butcher of Hama' guilty verdict

PARIS: The Paris appeals court yesterday backed a guilty verdict against Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad's uncle for misappropriating public funds in Syria, laundering the spoils and building a vast property portfolio in France with ill-gotten gains. The court confirmed last year's four-year prison sentence against 84-year-old Rifaat Al-Assad, which he may not have to serve given his advanced age. But the confiscation of his French real estate assets, worth an estimated 90 million euros (\$106 million), ordered at his initial trial, will now go ahead.

Dubbed the "Butcher of Hama" for allegedly commanding troops who put down an uprising in central Syria in 1982, Assad has been under investigation in France since 2014. The younger

brother of the late Syrian president Hafez al-Assad - father of the incumbent president - was tried for crimes allegedly committed between 1984 and 2016, including aggravated tax fraud and misappropriation of Syrian funds.

A Paris court last June dismissed charges against Assad for the period 1984 to 1996, but found him guilty of organized laundering of funds embezzled from the Syrian public purse between 1996 and 2016. He was also convicted of tax fraud. Formerly Syria's vice president, Assad left his home country in 1984 after mounting a failed coup against his brother Hafez who led Syria from 1971 to 2000. After he arrived in Europe, Rifaat al-Assad's lavish lifestyle, four wives and 16 children soon raised eyebrows. His French for-

tune includes two townhouses in chic Parisian neighborhoods, a stud farm, about 40 apartments, and a chateau.

Assad and his family also built up a huge portfolio of properties in Spain, valued at around 695 million euros, which were all seized by the authorities in 2017. Lawyers for Assad, who was awarded France's Legion of Honor in 1986 for "services rendered", have insisted all his money had a lawful origin. The French case against Assad began with a suit filed in 2013 by anti-corruption campaign group Sherpa. Calling yesterday's verdict "encouraging", Sherpa said in a statement that it hoped the courts would now intensify the fight against illicit funds stashed away in France.— AFP

Police raid shuttered Tiananmen museum

HONG KONG: Hong Kong police yesterday raided a museum that houses exhibits commemorating Beijing's deadly crackdown on Tiananmen Square in 1989, a day after they arrested four members of the group that ran the venue. Officers from the newly created national security unit were seen carting away documents and exhibits from the now-shuttered June 4 museum which is run by the Hong Kong Alliance.

The items included a giant logo of the museum, a paper model of the Goddess of Democracy - a symbol of the 1989 pro-democracy student movement in Beijing - photos of the huge annual candlelight vigils Hong Kongers hosted for Tiananmen's victims as well as dozens of boxes of materials. The alliance, officially named the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China, is the latest target of a sweeping national security law that Beijing imposed on the city last year to quash dissent after huge and often violent democracy protests. The museum raid came a day after security police arrested Chow Hang-tung, vice-chairwoman of the alliance, and three other leaders for refusing to cooperate with their investigation.

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. But alliance members have refused, calling the request illegal and arbi-



HONG KONG: Police officers (center) from the National Security Department take away items after raiding the June 4 museum dedicated to the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown in Hong Kong yesterday.— AFP

trary. Many members of the alliance are already in jail on national security charges or other protest-related offences.

Yesterday's raid came on the same day 12 democracy activists, including the alliance's jailed vice-chairman Albert Ho, pleaded guilty to unauthorized assembly charges over the Tiananmen vigil in 2020, which was the first one banned by authorities since 1990. In his mitigation speech, Ho said he rejected the accusation that they are foreign agents, saying the alliance was formed by local democratic groups supporting democracy protesters in Beijing.

"We were driven by our consciences and moral commitment to make our best endeavours to maintain this historic tradition of commemorating June 4th, remembering the lesson of history and speaking truth to power," he said, explaining why it was important for Hong Kongers to con-

tinue remembering Tiananmen. The vigils were once one of the most visible symbols of Hong Kong's political plurality but they have been banned over the last two years. China is rapidly remoulding Hong Kong in its own authoritarian image following huge and often violent democracy protests that broke out two years ago.

Dozens of democracy figures have been arrested on national security charges and an official campaign has been launched to purge the city of anyone deemed "unpatriotic". Yeung Sum, a former lawmaker and one of the 12 democracy activists who pleaded guilty yesterday, said Hong Kong will continue to fight for democracy. "The June 4 candlelight vigil may be banned forever... but the flowers of liberty will blossom regardless of the storm. Hong Kong people will continue to seek our way to democracy and freedom." — AFP

Malaysian mothers hail win for equality in citizenship case

KUALA LUMPUR: A group of Malaysian mothers won a landmark legal challenge yesterday, overturning what they described as discriminatory citizenship rules affecting women who gave birth overseas. The rules had meant a woman with a foreign spouse who had a child abroad was barred from automatically passing on her Malaysian nationality. Similar restrictions did not apply to men from the Southeast Asian country, who enjoy a straight path to citizenship for their offspring.

Socially conservative Malaysia was among only a handful of countries worldwide with such rules, with campaigners long complaining they were discriminatory. But yesterday, the High Court in Kuala Lumpur ruled in favor of a challenge brought by six Malaysian mothers, who argued the regulations breached the constitution. "This judgment recognizes Malaysian women's equality, and marks one step forward to a more egalitarian and just Malaysia," said Suri Kempe, president of NGO Family Frontiers, which helped bring the case to court.

The judgment applies to all Malaysian mothers, not just the plaintiffs in the case, she said. The lawyer for the mothers, Gurdial Singh Nijar, hailed a "momentous decision", saying the rules had "disrupted family structures". There was no immediate reaction from the government, and it was not clear whether they would appeal the ruling. Campaigners said the law had sometimes left women trapped in abusive relationships.

If they brought their children back to Malaysia, the youngsters faced obstacles in accessing public services like free education and healthcare. Women could apply for their overseas-born children to be granted citizenship but authorities rarely agreed. According to Family Frontiers, the home ministry received over 4,000 applications between 2013 and 2018, but only approved 142. The government had sought to get the mothers' challenge dismissed, insisting the rules were in line with the constitution. But campaigners said they breached constitutional guarantees to equality before the law, and the court allowed the case to proceed. — AFP

LIFESTYLE

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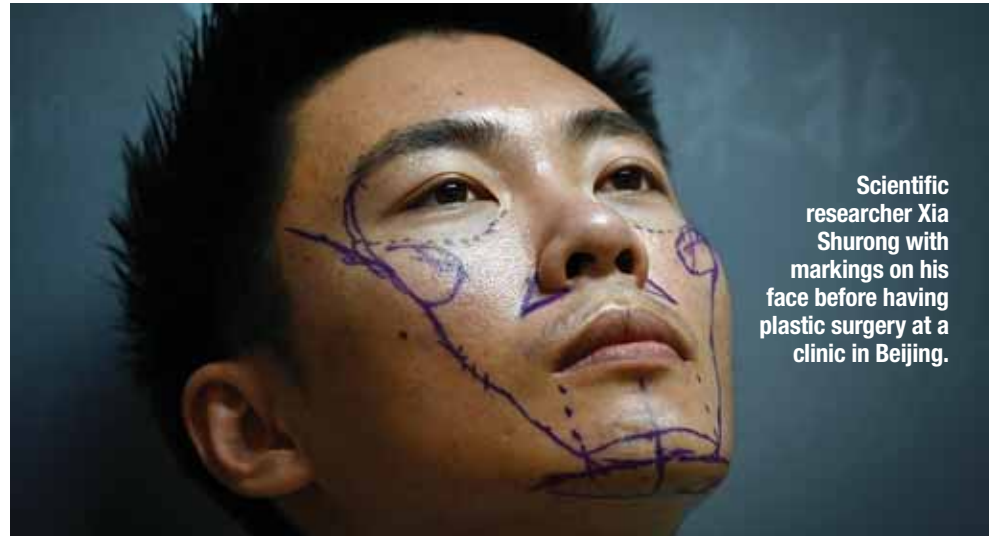
**New York exhibition
celebrates Dior's
American influence**

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A model displays a creation from
the Jinshangyuyi collection by
designer Wang Cong during China
Fashion Week in Beijing.—AFP
.....



This picture shows a doctor marking scientific researcher Xia Shurong's face before getting plastic surgery at a clinic in Beijing. — AFP photos



Scientific researcher Xia Shurong with markings on his face before having plastic surgery at a clinic in Beijing.

Men in China go under the knife to boost life chances

Worried his appearance would detract from opportunities in China's competitive society, Xia Shurong decided to go under the surgeon's knife to reshape his nose—one of millions of young men in the country turning to cosmetic surgery. The 27-year-old researcher wanted medical procedures to transform his look from "engineering geek" to something he thinks will boost his life chances. Beauty standards in China can be exacting, from pressure over skin tone, eye and nose shape to the controversial "little fresh meat" look—a buzzword used to describe handsome young men with delicate features. "I feel I should be 'fresh meat' at my age, but I already look like a middle-aged uncle," explained Xia.

AFP met Xia in Beijing as he was preparing for surgery to plump out his features. He had already spent 40,000 yuan (\$6192) on a face-filler procedure earlier this year. "I grew up in the countryside—my face was dark, my skin was bad, I thought my appearance was not good in general," he said, adding that he had long planned to rework his face. "I always felt a sense of inferiority," he added. The intense popularity of Chinese social media—rife with trends in cosmetic procedures, beauty "tutorials" and advice on how to become "beautiful", has added to the pressure for many. Growing numbers of educated men in China are opting for aesthetic and surgical procedures to give them the edge. According to iResearch, around 17 percent of male white collar workers in China have had cosmetic treatments and the vast majority of men had their first procedure before the age of 30.

'Changed my fate'

Xia Zhengyi, the doctor carrying out Xia's procedure, says he has seen an increase in

young men coming to him for procedures. "Surgery can change the facial expression and give people a feeling of intimacy, which is good for your relationships with people," he said. Rose Han, from the BeauCare Clinics investment group, said male civil servants opt for procedures because they worry looking tired or old may mean missing out on promotions. Men in their twenties were most keen on eye and nose reconstruction surgery, according to surgery app So Young, which cited a survey of their 8.9 million active monthly users.

"It's not like buying a Gucci handbag—it is giving yourself an opportunity. Confidence will bring changes to my work and life," said Xia. China's average national disposable income has more than doubled since 2010 according to government data, and

increased wealth among China's middle classes has also fuelled interest. Zhang Xiaoma left his job at an IT company to become a full-time social media influencer after sharing his own experience of cosmetic surgery. "You can do more on-camera jobs if you become more attractive," Zhang said.

His procedures include "elf ears"—a procedure that fills ears with hyaluronic acid to make them look more prominent while the face appears smaller. This became popular after a social media star documented the procedure and it went viral. Model Nai Wen has had more than 60 procedures on his face, including laser treatments, and believes cosmetic surgery "changed his fate". "It is as convenient as a face mask—it's really amazing that you can increase your age but not grow old," he told AFP during a shoot.

Stigma and complaints

China's cosmetic surgery industry is now worth 197 billion yuan (\$30 billion) — up from 64.8 billion yuan in 2015, according to iResearch. But the rapid growth in demand comes at a time when authorities are concerned the nation is facing "masculinity crisis". Beijing has criticized the "little fresh meat" look, and has proposed an increase in physical education classes for boys to encourage a more "traditional" form of masculinity in society.

Earlier this month, the broadcast regular ordered TV channels to resist showing "abnormal aesthetics" such as "sissy" men on screen. There are also safety and quality concerns—the National Consumer Association logged more than 7,200 complaints relating to the cosmetic industry. Xiaoran, a 33-year-old online influencer, died of a serious infection after undergoing liposuction, state media reported in July. The clinic where she had her surgery has since been closed, reported the state-run Global Times.

And pictures shared by actor Gao Liu this year went viral on Chinese media, showing dead, blackened flesh on her nose after surgery went wrong. Critics believe there needs to be better regulation. Model Nai admits there is a risk that cosmetic surgery becomes "addictive." "You can't accept an ugly self," he added. After his hour-long surgery in Beijing, Xia examines his face in a hand-held mirror, turning from side to side. "It feels a little bit different, but it isn't quite as I expected," he admitted. "I think achieving the perfect look may take some time." — AFP



Scientific researcher Xia Shurong (right) receiving treatment after having plastic surgery.

With the nimbleness of a younger man, John Ngaii Moses skillfully knotted a tiny fishing fly onto his line, and hopping over mossy rocks, cast off into the surging river flowing through Kenyan tea country. “I can tie a fly at night, without a light,” the 60-year-old fisherman said with a grin, flicking his line with a graceful arc into the pristine waters. Moses is something of a rarity in Kenya, where fishing for recreation is neither popular nor widely understood, and even viewed warily as a vestige of colonial times. But the country occupies a special place in the world of fly fishing, and enthusiasts believe demystifying the sport could create jobs and encourage future generations to protect rivers.

Kenya boasts one of Africa's oldest fishing clubs, and a fly tying industry that for decades has supplied fishermen from Norway to New Zealand with hand-crafted lures. Visitors come from all over the world to fish in its highland rivers and alpine lakes, where the British introduced trout in the early 1900s. Fish don't draw tourists like the big cats on Kenya's savannas-but what's on offer for the intrepid fisherman is no less remarkable. Just two hours drive from Nairobi, where the Mathioya River crashes beneath the Aberdare Range, prime fishing country meets wilderness inhabited by black rhinos and elephants.

“Imagine spending the morning... fishing and the afternoon out taking pictures of wild animals. Where else can you have this?” said Zac Gichane, owner of the Aberdare Cottages and Fishing Lodge, a resort overlooking the Mathioya. He said fly fishing was a multi-billion dollar global industry ripe for expansion in Kenya. “It is God's country. Two hours from Nairobi and you find crystal-clear rivers, a peaceful village, greenery.... The opportunities here are limitless.”

Big business

Gichane sources his fishing flies from Kenyan craftsmen whose delicate and elaborate creations have become a mainstay for anglers across the globe. These artificial lures-some so small they perch on a fingertip-are designed to imitate the particular insects that trout, salmon and other species feast on. Moses prefers the “royal coachman”-traditionally dressed with feathers and



60-year-old fishing guide John Ngaii Moses pulls a rainbow trout out of the water while fly-fishing in the Githugi river in Mathioya Constituency, Muranga County, Kenya. — AFP photos

a tail-because it resembles a butterfly native to the Mathioya that brings trout to the surface. Reliable data is scant, but some estimates suggest one in three flies used in Europe originated in Kenya, while millions more are shipped to the United States, Canada and other key fishing markets.

“It is a big business in Kenya. It employs a lot of people,” said John Nyapola, who runs Ojoo Fishing Flies Designers. In his small workshop outside Nairobi, flamingo feathers, rabbit pelt and all manner of furs and fabrics litter an assembly table where custom orders from Canada, Australia and Japan are individually hand-tied. “We have made them all,” says Jane Auma, a veteran fly tyer with 32 years of experience, pointing to a well-worn catalogue detailing 1,000 individual lure designs. Their names-such as “Woolly Bugger”, “Copper John” and “Irresistible Adams”-are as baffling to most tyers as the

sport itself. “We do fish, but we don't use flies. We use nets, and we try and catch everything,” Auma said, laughing.

‘Our legacy’

Fly fishermen, by contrast, mostly return whatever they catch to the river, to prevent overfishing. Gichane said the catch-and-release ethos was considered “madness” by Kenyans who fish for food. Some also dismiss the sport as a strange import. Decades ago, the Mathioya valley was a hotbed of anti-colonial resistance, and suffered British reprisals. Gichane said before independence in 1963 — and even a time after-many Kenyans wouldn't dare pick up a rod.

“They think sport fishing is for mzungus (white people), not for Africans,” said Moses, who himself was born in a British internment camp, and is today a fishing guide. The Kenya Fly Fishers' Club, a private 102-year-

old establishment on the Mathioya, has sought to broaden the sport's appeal. The club has welcomed more Kenyan members as interest has grown, and elected its first black chairman in 2018. “Times are changing-same as fly fishing. Right now we have a lot of local, indigenous Kenyans who are fishing. I am one of them,” said Musa Ibrahim, a trustee and 20-year member of the club.

It has also reached out to local schools, to introduce children to fly fishing and its conservation aspects such as replenishing the Mathioya with trout. Kenya at its prime was criss-crossed by 2,000 kilometers (1,200 miles) of unspoiled trout-fishing rivers, but rapid land conversion reduced that 10-fold Ibrahim said. “It's up to us to make sure that we leave the legacy for the next generation,” he said. — AFP

**‘IT IS GOD'S COUNTRY':
KENYA'S FLY FISHING
FANS CHASE
BIGGER CATCH**



60-year-old fishing guide John Ngaii Moses picks a fishing fly from his kit.



John Nyapola shows a catalogue design used to make fishing fly at his workshop in Kinoo.



Owner of Ojoo fishing flies designers John Nyapola (left) flanked by Eduard Adom (middle) and Peter Obara, making fishing flies at their workshop in Kinoo.

Lifestyle | Feature



Executive producer and director John Murdy gives a tour of "The Bride of Frankenstein" maze he is setting up for Halloween Horror Nights at Universal Studios Hollywood in Universal City, California. — AFP photos

Horror offers 'escape' from pandemic year at Universal theme park

Universal Studios Hollywood is notorious for its spooky annual Halloween transformation, when a series of ghoulish interactive "mazes" inspired by classic horror films pop up around the California theme park. While last year's "Halloween Horror Nights" were canceled due to the real-life terror of COVID-19, organizers are betting that customers in 2021 will be more in the mood for an evening of frights than ever before. "Horror always does extremely well in the most challenging of times," creative director John Murdy told AFP on a recent behind-the-scenes tour.

"The 'Universal Monsters' movies... when were they made? 'Frankenstein' 1931. 'Dracula' 1931. 'The Mummy' 1932. 'Bride of Frankenstein' 1935." That remarkable string of seminal spine-chillers is often credited with saving the Universal Pictures studio from bankruptcy during the Great Depression—the

worst economic collapse in US history. "These were huge hit movies in their day," said Murdy. "Horror always speaks to the present fears of society, and it becomes an escape." Visitors-seeking goosebumps and gore, or otherwise-have already been welcomed by theme parks around Los Angeles, which mostly reopened in April after a year in which COVID-19 ravaged the second-largest city in the United States.

California Governor Gavin Newsom chose Universal Studios Hollywood as the site for his June "reopening day" event, which celebrated the ending of nearly all COVID-19 restrictions, although some measures such as mask-wearing have since been restored. Masks are not a problem inside this year's Halloween mazes, where most performers are already clad in elaborate face coverings as they transform into zombies, vampires and Frankenstein's monsters.

Ladies' fright night

One of this year's mazes, called "The Bride of Frankenstein Lives," is a brand-new sequel to the 1935 movie. It imagines that the monster's undead mate survives the film and works to bring him back to life again in a makeshift lab—donning a handy surgical mask as she carries out her experiments. "It's an extra creative challenge," said Murdy, of the COVID-19 measures. Along with the usual gallons of fake blood, rumbling sound effects and special smoke and light effects, the maze contains real movie props from a more recent Universal horror — 2004's "Van Helsing" starring Hugh Jackman as the monster hunter.

Murdy was inspired to give the Bride of Frankenstein her own maze because she only appears for "about five minutes" in the 1935 film. In a departure from the usual canon of horror movies, "Bride of Frankenstein" is part of a bid to highlight the

genre's often overlooked female characters, featuring terrifying hordes of Dracula's daughters. The maze exits into a "scare zone" in which the She-Wolf of London can be found roaming. Other female-centered installments this year include an "Exorcist" attraction, and a new "Haunting of Hill House" experience based on the Netflix TV series. "I have a six-year-old daughter, and I wanted to create those female characters for my kids," said Murdy, who had the help of fellow horror fan Slash from Guns N' Roses for the maze's soundtrack. "Horror teaches us how to deal with our own fears in our everyday lives," Murdy added. — AFP



Halloween's Jamie Lee Curtis: 'I hate horror movies'

She has been starring in the "Halloween" movies for 43 years, but Jamie Lee Curtis said Wednesday that the secret to her success is that she despises horror films. "I scare easily," Curtis said at the Venice Film Festival, where the latest installment, "Halloween Kills", premiered. "I am an untrained actor. I've never been to acting class," she told the press conference. "But I hate these movies. I loathe them. I do not like to be frightened. So it's a natural talent—that genuine emotional connection to being afraid. You're watching that happen on screen."

Curtis, 62, — daughter of Hollywood legends Tony Curtis and Janet Leigh — was also receiving a life-time achievement award in Venice for her long career, which includes hits "A Fish Called Wanda" and "True Lies". She said the role of Laurie Strode, which she has portrayed since the first "Halloween" film by cult director John Carpenter in 1978, was crucial to her career but initially put her in the firing line with feminists who took issue with the story for allowing only the virgin to survive. "I was in horror films for a long time, it gave me a foothold in the business, but the women's movement hated me," Curtis said.



US actress Jamie Lee Curtis acknowledges receiving a Golden Lion for lifetime achievement during the 78th Venice Film Festival at Venice Lido. — AFP

"Then I was in 'Trading Places' and took off my shirt, and all of a sudden, I was what they call legitimate, an A-lister. "Now, today, the women's movement would love Laurie Strode... her strength, her ability to fight back against adversity, and yet somehow it was anti-feminist then." The "Halloween" series was relaunched to massive box office success in 2018 with indie director David Gordon Green at the helm. The new installment is the second part of a trilogy by Green, with the third part due to start filming soon.

"I read the third one on the plane over here, and I did not sleep. It's an extraordinary way to finish this trilogy," said Curtis. She said Green's success with the new trilogy lay in its reflection of real-life issues, particularly women challenging the patriarchy and protests against injustice. "I'd like to take him to Vegas because my guess is we'd win a load of money because he's so far-thinking," Curtis said. — AFP



ly-is "not less important than the war itself that's going on". Using bleak, single-frame tableaux reminiscent of chiaroscuro paintings, Vasyanovych lays bare the torture inflicted on captured Ukrainian soldiers, and one former prisoner's journey towards healing and salvation.

After surgeon Serhiy (Roman Lutskyi) enlists in the war, he is soon taken prisoner. After first subjecting him to torture, his captors rely on him to tell them whether other mutilated and barely recognizable victims of their torture are dead, or still alive. In one powerful scene, Ukrainian soldiers who have been tortured to death are burned in a mobile incinerator inside a truck labeled "Humanitarian Aid from the Russian Federation."

Spies and saboteurs

In Bureau's documentary shot mostly in black and white, front-line soldiers spend much of their time digging with pickaxes, carrying sandbags, waiting and worrying—all between moments of fire from enemy trenches within

eyesight. The trenches' lone female soldier-nicknamed Persephone, for the queen of the underworld—says her fellow soldiers, the same age as her children, "look like grown-ups, but some of them are just kids.

"They simply don't understand that it's no picnic," she says. "They're on a frontline, there are bombardments, people die and others are seriously injured." Man's brutality is also a theme of the powerful period drama "Captain Volkonogov Escaped", by Russian directors Natasha Merkulova and Aleksey Chupov.

Like "Reflection", it is competing for the festival's top prize, the Golden Lion. A captain, played by Yuriy Borisov, escapes from the state security services in 1938 Leningrad where he and his colleagues have been charged with killing "terrorists, spies and saboteurs". "You know the times we're living in," the captain's superior tells him, to justify the gruesome torture used to exact confessions. "Yes, they're innocent now—but they'll be guilty later on." — AFP



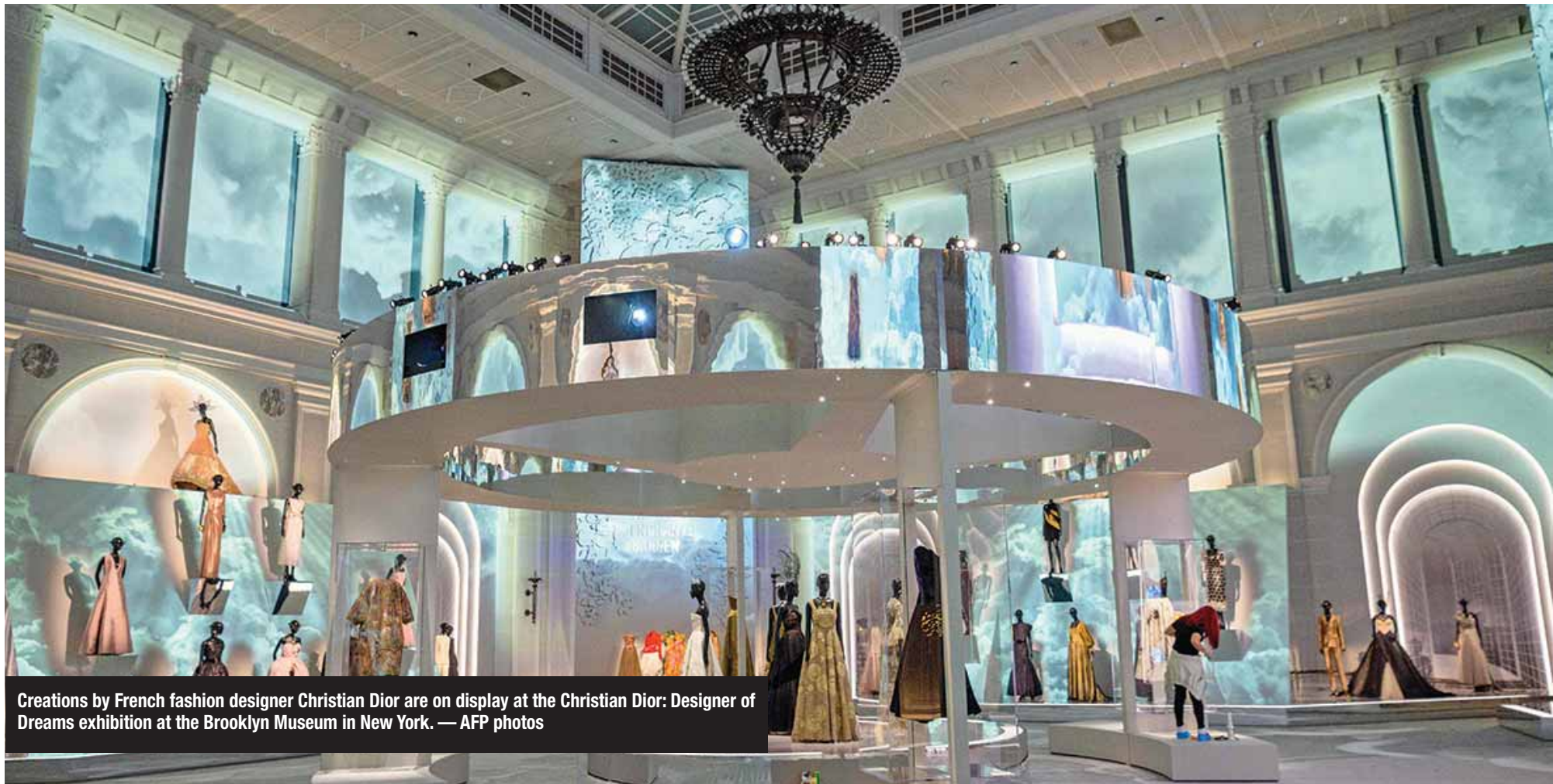
(From left) Ukrainian actor Andriy Rymaruk, Ukrainian director Valentyn Vasyanovych and Ukrainian actor Roman Lutskyi arrive for the screening of the film 'Vidblysk' (Reflection) presented in competition during the 78th Venice Film Festival at Venice Lido. — AFP

Venice films expose horrific Ukraine war, man's brutality

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine's east is the subject of two films at the Venice Film Festival this year, underscoring the horror and futility of the simmering—and largely forgotten—war. The festival also premieres Oleh Sentsov's "Rhino" about corruption in 1990s Ukraine, two years after the Ukrainian director was released from a Russian prison after being arrested for protesting the annexation of Crimea in 2014.

"Reflection", from Ukrainian director Valentyn Vasyanovych, portrays the gruesome torture inflicted in secret detention centers by pro-Russian separatists in occupied Ukraine. A documentary by France's Loup Bureau, "Trenches", follows Ukrainian soldiers inside their tunneled defenses as they deal with anxiety, monotony, and unpredictable artillery attacks. Since 2014, Ukraine's army has been locked in a protracted battle in the east with pro-Russian breakaway fighters, a conflict that has killed more than 13,000 people.

"I was deeply affected by the fact that in modern Europe nowadays these cruel, totally inhumane things can happen," Vasyanovych told AFP Wednesday. The torture—which the United Nations said in July was occurring dai-



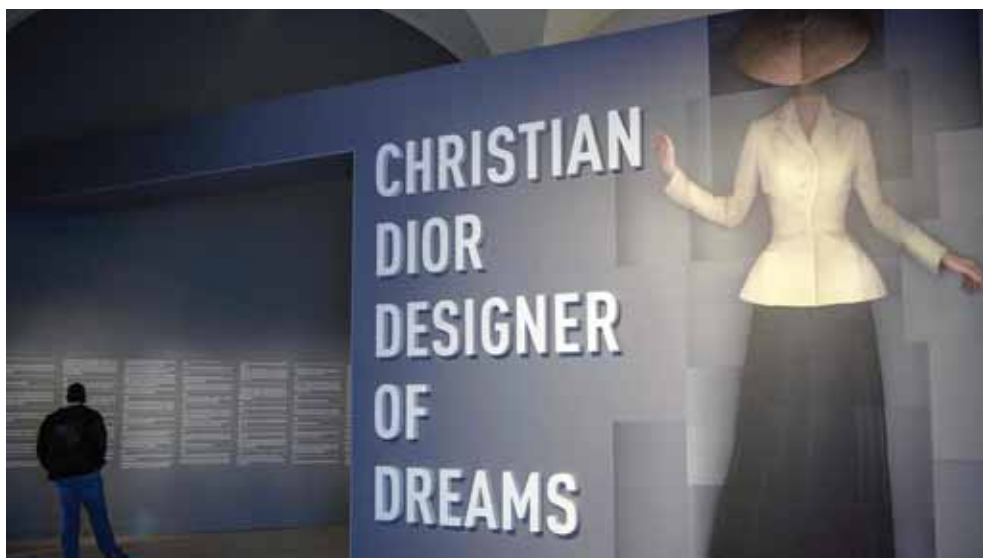
Creations by French fashion designer Christian Dior are on display at the Christian Dior: Designer of Dreams exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum in New York. — AFP photos

NEW YORK EXHIBITION CELEBRATES DIOR'S AMERICAN INFLUENCE

Christian Dior's hit exhibition tracing the history of the legendary French fashion house opens in New York this week with an American twist after record-breaking attendances in Paris and London. "Christian Dior: Designer of Dreams" premieres at the Brooklyn Museum on Friday and fea-

tures more than 300 haute couture dresses as well as photos, videos and sketches from the museum's collection. The exhibition, which runs until February 20, charts Dior's 75-year-history, starting with the French couturier's dazzling success in Paris in 1947 with his very first Corolle collection. It was quickly

renamed "New Look" by American magazine Harper's Bazaar and would revolutionize the fashion of the time with a redesigned silhouette of fitted waist and rounded skirt.



A sign is on display at the Christian Dior: Designer of Dreams exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum.



Creations by French fashion designer Christian Dior are on display at the Christian Dior: Designer of Dreams exhibition.

Lifestyle | Fashion



Creations by French fashion designer Christian Dior are on display.



Lifestyle | Fashion



“In his shop on 5th Avenue, he had workshops, salons, which were somewhat similar to those in Paris. But here, he didn’t do haute couture, he did luxury ready-to-wear. “The collections were presented to the press and to the buyers, and then were sold in department stores or luxury boutiques. So it’s a slightly different vision of his style, adapted to American customers,” she said. Among the highlights on show is a small and delicate porcelain doll wearing a black dress that Dior designed himself and which the institution acquired in 1949. Also included are dresses worn by Grace Kelly and Jennifer Lawrence.

The exhibition tracks the development of the house after the untimely death of Dior himself in 1957 aged just 52, from successor Yves Saint Laurent to current creative director Maria Grazia Chiuri, the first woman to hold the role. “Christian Dior had this will to make women beautiful in order to make them happy. And I think that’s a universal message and that’s why this name has become synonymous with elegance, luxury, beauty, and fashion all over the world,” said Muller. — AFP



Lifestyle | Fashion



A visitor looks at the Seletti stand, at the “Super Salone” one of the special event of the 2021 Salone del Mobile Milano, an International Furnishing and Design Fair, taking place at the Fiera Milano venue, in Rho on the outskirts of Milan, northern Italy, during the Milan Design Week 2021. — AFP photos



A visitor looks at lamps displayed at the stand of India World, at the “Super Salone”.

‘More joy’: Milan designers visualize the post-pandemic home

A pool table that changes into a dining table, a bookshelf that transforms into a filing cabinet and noise-cancelling panels to facilitate home-working: adapting to life after coronavirus was on the minds of many exhibitors at Milan Furniture Fair this week. After months cooped up at home, many people’s houses and apartments have been transformed into offices, schools, gyms and playgrounds, blurring the lines between public and private spaces.

“The home has become a refuge for its inhabitants, a welcoming place that reflects the personality of each of them and offers both comfort and a certain flexibility,” Maria Porro, head of the Salone del Mobile fair, told AFP. “Hence the search for materials that feel nice to touch, and multifunctional pieces that allow spaces to be modulated and personalized.”

Modular billiards

A pool table in canaletto walnut laid with plates and candles draws the eye of visitors, who stop to feel its smooth surface and take photos. “Demand has increased with the pandemic because people have rediscovered their home and want a games area that transforms easily into a dining table or desk,” said Guido Rossi of the manufacturer MBM Biliardi. Nearby, Ferrimobili offers tailor-made products including a shelf that houses an extendable desk, adapted for the needs of people working from home.

“It’s the ideal solution for small spaces. With the pandemic, clients want a home that is more functional but also still elegant,” said Domenico Tescione from the Rimini-based firm that saw its revenues increase by 20 percent last year. The wider Italian furniture industry had a difficult 2020, when the country endured

months of coronavirus lockdowns, with turnover falling 8.9 percent to 21.2 billion euros (\$25 billion). In the first half of 2021, however, sales soared and even overtook pre-pandemic levels, at 14.3 percent higher than the same period in 2019.

Bright colors

Comfort has become increasingly important. “Working for hours on an old table and repurposed chair is unacceptable,” said Andrea Bottoli of office furniture firm Martex. Home-workers who spend much of their day in videoconferences are also focusing more and more on their image. “They put the company logo as a backdrop, they try to find the most attractive part of their house and adapt the light so they don’t look too tired,” Bottoli said.

Before the pandemic, “clients looked for office furniture that made it feel more like

home—and now it’s the reverse. They want an office at home, without it looking like a workplace”, added designer India Mahdavi. Another trend during lockdowns was that “people wanted their house to be a happy place, so with more colour and greenery”, she told AFP.

The trend of searching out durable, solid and sustainable material was highlighted by the fair’s “urban forest”, 100 maples, oaks, lime, apple and plum trees that welcomed visitors and will later be replanted around Milan. “The pandemic has revealed a huge appetite in people for creating, for renovating their homes, because they are staying at home, they don’t travel so much,” said French designer Pierre Yovanovitch. He believes “people want comfort, sensuality”, not cold, white interiors: “They are searching for more playfulness, more color, more joy.”— AFP



A visitor walks past chairs displayed at the stand of Novita Home, at the “Super Salone”.



Visitors look at the Connubia stand, at the “Super Salone”.



A woman with a bag reading “I am Where Design Is” arrives at the Fiera Milano venue, in Rho on the outskirts of Milan, northern Italy, to visit the “Super Salone”.

Kids Page

Word Search

Zoo Animals



DIRECTIONS: Circle the names of the different animals from the word list in the letter grid below. To find them all you will have to look in every direction, including backwards and diagonally. Good luck!

ALLIGATOR	L K R O T A G I L L A S A L A O K
CAMEL	Y Z U G E U Z R P E J P B K V F L
ELEPHANT	K F G H C C G N C V Y W A G O K U
FLAMINGO	S M O P X P E E O A I N M N O G H
GIRAFFE	I B R O D K L T E I G M A F D P C
GORILLA	P C I G I C N V N A L K E F S A M
HIPPO	O B L H R A V Z R Y K I R O V O O
KANGAROO	L G L I H A Y O J U T C O P N U G
KOALA	A O A P I T O U C A N R E K F H N
LION	R A E P N I Z E B R A L E N H M I
	B L M O O G J S C G I Y R I I H M
	E U A N Y E M A I C P P D U X K A
	A C I Y Q R M R A J I W D G L Y L
	R A X A D E A N Y F H G T N D P F
	F S F Y L F J P L L T M F E X A U
	R V W M F J H Z U W F P P P H Q
	R K A E J O S B N S Y U W S E A L

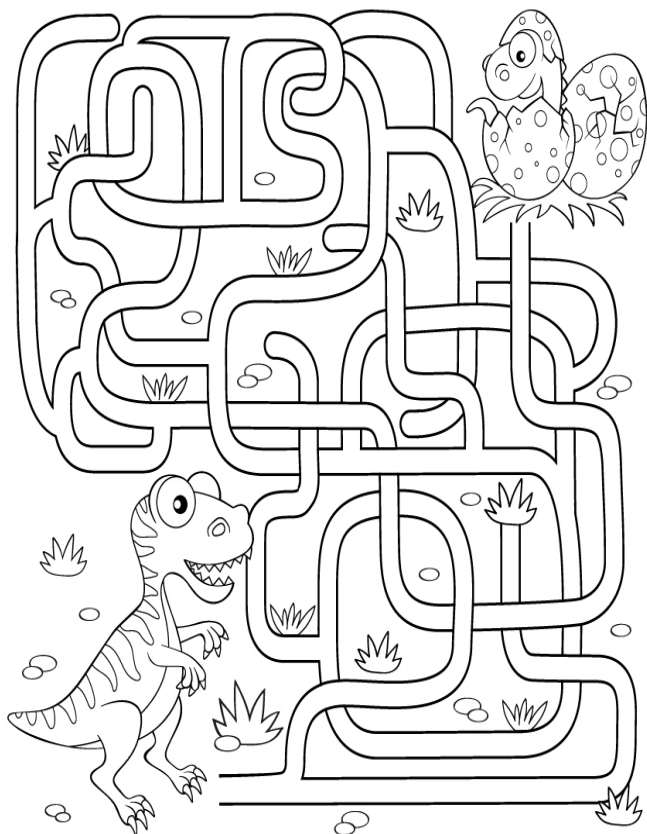


- MONKEY
- PANDA
- PELICAN
- PENGUIN
- POLAR BEAR
- RHINO
- SEAL
- TIGER
- TOUCAN
- ZEBRA

Color It



Kids Mazes



Find the objects



FIND 10 OBJECTS IN THE PICTURE



Word Scramble

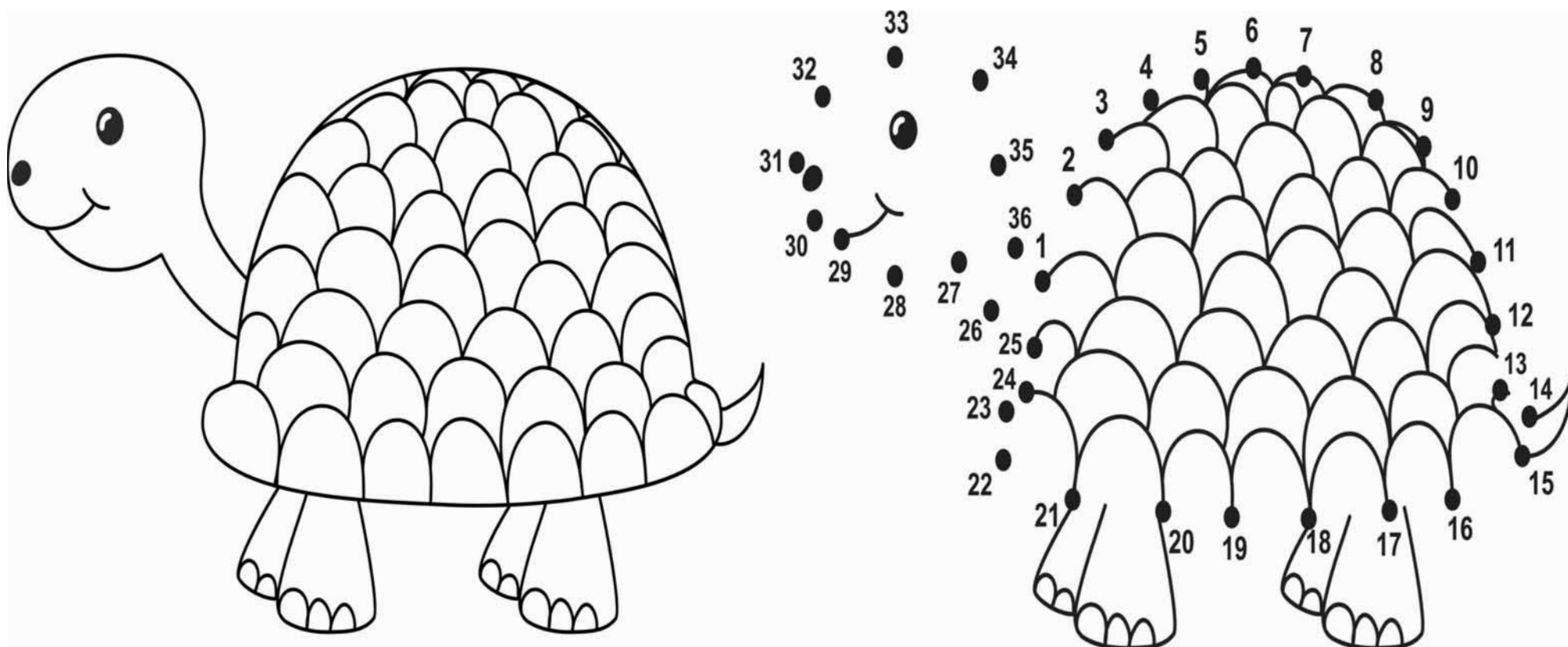
Earth Day - April 22nd

WORD SCRAMBLE AND CROSS: Unscramble each of the words on the left and write them in the grid. When the puzzle is complete the shaded letters going down will spell out another name for your home.

ERTWA	→	□	□	□	□	□
RSHTA	→	□	□	□	□	□
AOCEN	→	□	□	□	□	□
BLOGAL	→	□	□	□	□	□
NLLTOIUOP	→	□	□	□	□	□
AETUNR	→	□	□	□	□	□
REEDCU	→	□	□	□	□	□
OCSTPMO	→	□	□	□	□	□
YLCCER	→	□	□	□	□	□
TWSAE	→	□	□	□	□	□
NYGER	→	□	□	□	□	□
EREUS	→	□	□	□	□	□
TEILTR	→	□	□	□	□	□



Join the dots



Business

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2021

32 Asian markets hit by recovery worries as tech hammers HK**35** US economic growth 'downshifted slightly'**35** Mix of curiosity, concern, as El Salvador adopts bitcoin

KABUL: Taliban fighters shop at Bush market in Kabul yesterday. —AFP

Afghans fear for jobs and money

'I have left my job because there is no salary'

KABUL: As a nurse at one of Kabul's main hospitals, Latifa Alizada was the breadwinner for her family, providing for her three young boys and unemployed husband. Now-since the Taliban rolled into Afghanistan's capital-she too is jobless, and worried about the future. The 27-year-old left her role at Jamhuriat Hospital because the hardline Islamist group said salaries would not be paid, and imposed rules that would force her to wear a face veil and be segregated from male colleagues.

"I have left my job because there is no salary. There is no salary at all," she said, holding the hands of two of her boys who chewed on sweetcorn cobs. "If I go there, they say 'do not work with this style of dress. Do not work with men. Work with women'. This is impossible," she told AFP at a street market in Kabul. "For us, there is no difference between men and women, because we are medical workers." Afghans like Alizada worry about what lies ahead under the Taliban.

Food prices have gone up at markets, the cost of fuel has risen and there are fewer opportunities to

make money. The United Nations this week warned prices for essential goods were soaring in Afghanistan, adding: "There are fears of food shortages, higher inflation, and a slump in the currency all resulting in an intensification of the humanitarian emergency across the country." Many government services are no longer functioning, while the international community—which has long propped up the aid-dependent economy—hesitates over funding Afghanistan.

Cash in short supply

In some sectors that are operating, the Taliban have offered wildly different salaries. A former customs official, who did not want to be named for security reasons, told AFP he had worked at the Spin Boldak border crossing with Pakistan for more than seven years. Under the previous government he earned about \$240 per month, but the Taliban said they would pay him just \$110. "It is up to you if you want to continue your job, or quit," the Taliban told him.

The official said he resigned after weighing up his

salary against the cost of the long commute to work. The sight of big crowds queuing to get into banks to access cash is now commonplace across Afghanistan. The country's central bank only has access to a fraction of its usual financing, cut off from the international banking system and access to the country's foreign currency reserves. It means cash is in short supply and the Taliban are enforcing a withdrawal limit of \$200 per person each week.

Worried about the future

In the capital on Wednesday about 150 men jostled in the midday sun outside a branch of Kabul Bank, where government employees under the last administration held accounts. An armed security guard clutched an electric cable to use as a whip in case the crowd grew too boisterous as they queued for one of the two ATMs. Abdullah told AFP he travelled overnight from the northeastern province of Takhar, which borders Tajikistan, to get to the branch at the crack of dawn—and he was still at the back of the queue at noon.

"The problem is that after the collapse of the government, all the banks were closed," the 31-year-old former army commando said. He told AFP that some soldiers like him could not access their salaries in the months leading up to the Taliban takeover in mid-August. "I was at my post for three or four months. My salary was in the bank and I couldn't get it," he said. Other members of the security forces complained of not getting paid at all in the months leading up to the Taliban takeover.

A kitchenware shopkeeper in the capital, who did not want to give his name for security reasons, told AFP had no customers. "Since the changes, all business has stopped," he said, sitting on a stool in front of his empty store. "We are facing lots of problems. People are staying in their homes because there are no jobs. There is no-one to buy from us." With high rents and next-to-no income, he worried about looking after his family of five. "We cannot find the money to feed ourselves. People are concerned about how to find their meals, morning and night. Everyone is worried about their future."—AFP

PREMIER MARKET WEEKLY TECHNICAL BULLETIN

WEEK ENDED ON
9 SEPTEMBER 2021

#	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance										Valuation Multiples *				
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	940	938	940	933	7	16,325,094	-2	-0.21%	11.67%	935	940	22.8	2.02	2.0%	1.27
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	239	238	241	237	4	25,027,020	-2	-0.83%	8.68%	237	242	21.6	1.13	2.0%	1.13
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	226	224	228	223	5	9,764,385	-3	-1.32%	7.69%	224	230	NM	0.98	0.0%	1.01
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	232	232	234	230	4	4,069,582	-1	-0.43%	8.92%	225	233	18.3	0.94	2.0%	1.06
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	825	825	825	819	6	14,821,158	1	0.12%	21.86%	819	830	36.0	3.72	1.1%	1.41
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	787	781	790	780	10	2,725,637	-10	-1.26%	37.50%	780	793	64.1	4.58	0.0%	1.05
204	National Investments	Financial Services	199	187	199	193	6	3,895,318	0	0.00%	38.52%	195	199	7.1	0.91	5.1%	1.24
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	154	156	156	153	3	6,111,221	2	1.30%	-1.89%	153	159	NM	1.51	3.2%	0.59
252	Al Imtiaz Investment	Financial Services	124	127	128	123	5	22,467,943	3	2.42%	13.39%	123	128	NM	0.78	0.0%	0.98
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	144	146	146	141	5	34,903,467	2	1.39%	33.94%	140	147	28.3	1.07	0.0%	0.97
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	772	785	786	772	14	1,082,082	-1	-0.13%	19.48%	772	785	19.8	1.84	0.7%	1.11
501	National Industries	Financial Services	232	235	236	231	5	31,374,517	3	1.29%	33.52%	228	235	6.0	0.88	0.0%	1.44
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	812	816	821	808	13	921,191	-2	-0.24%	8.08%	806	818	30.6	0.92	6.1%	0.93
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	874	877	880	866	14	1,086,459	3	0.34%	37.03%	856	883	24.9	2.06	6.1%	0.72
526	Al Qurain	Basic Materials	379	374	383	372	11	1,465,060	-4	-1.06%	10.65%	373	387	30.0	0.98	4.0%	0.75
603	Agility	Industrials	1,003	992	1,003	989	14	8,978,163	-11	-1.10%	46.75%	981	1020	28.9	1.89	0.9%	1.49
605	Zain	Telecommunications	602	598	606	596	10	10,655,865	-4	-0.66%	-1.32%	597	607	13.8	2.24	5.5%	1.36
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,391	3,350	3,440	3,335	105	1,135,646	-43	-1.27%	-11.82%	3350	3440	6.1	3.86	11.9%	0.49
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	225	236	238	224	14	12,130,018	11	4.89%	9.26%	224	237	NM	0.75	0.0%	0.86
818	Ahli United Bank	Banking	270	270	270	266	4	23,817,011	-1	-0.37%	18.94%	265	277	20.0	2.17	1.3%	1.13
821	Warba Bank	Banking	264	261	264	257	7	17,418,469	-2	-0.76%	10.59%	257	262	15.5	2.07	0.0%	0.99
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	617	602	620	602	18	1,912,577	-15	-2.43%	-0.99%	601	618	19.0	1.72	2.9%	0.44
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	372	376	385	369	16	7,599,111	4	1.08%	2.73%	371	375	NM	1.57	0.0%	0.48
826	Shamal Az-Zour	Utilities	236	238	241	235	6	5,474,131	1	0.42%	-14.08%	233	243	20.6	4.98	5.0%	0.68
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	1,686	1,815	1,840	1,680	160	1,710,333	125	7.40%	65.00%	1770	1840	13.0	6.93	2.2%	0.75

* As of end of week closing

Business

Asian markets hit by recovery worries as tech hammers HK

Wall Street's 3 main indexes finish well in the red

HONG KONG: Asian equities retreated yesterday on growing concerns about the impact of the Delta coronavirus variant, while tech giants drove a sharp sell-off in Hong Kong (HK) after China further tightened its grip on the gaming sector. After enjoying a broadly healthy run-up at the start of September, markets were again on the back foot as traders reassess their growth outlook for this year in light of the fast-spreading Delta variant.

Wall Street's three main indexes finished well in the red after the Federal Reserve's closely watched Beige Book on the state of the US economy pointed to a slowdown caused by COVID-19 as well as problems with supply and a lack of workers. It said growth had "downshifted" in July and August, which was "largely attributable to a pullback in dining out, travel, and tourism in most districts, reflecting safety concerns due to the rise of the Delta variant". "Looking ahead, businesses in most districts remained optimistic about near-term prospects, though there continued to be widespread concern about ongoing supply disruptions and resource shortages," it added.

Analysts pointed out that while COVID remained a major headwind, the issue of supplies and cost pressures was noticeably prominent in the report. "Momentum definitely seems to be slowing as far as the recovery is concerned," said Fiona Cincotta, at City Index. "Before we'd been hearing that the Fed would tighten monetary pol-

icy and that's what was unnerving the market. Now, it's actually slightly softer data and also rising COVID cases."

Tokyo ended down with profit-taking playing a part after the Nikkei rose around five percent over the previous four days, while Sydney, Seoul, Wellington, Mumbai, Bangkok and Manila also fell. Shanghai, Singapore, Jakarta and Taipei edged up. But the standout was Hong Kong, which sank more than two percent, dragged by tech giants after Beijing again cracked the whip. Chinese authorities summoned gaming companies to demand they not focus on profits and "resist unfair competition to prevent excessive market concentration or even monopolies in the industry".

US debt ceiling

The state-run Xinhua agency reported that officials also called for the companies - which included Tencent and NetEase - to remove "obscene and violent content" and avoid "unhealthy tendencies, such as money-worship and effeminacy". The move comes after authorities last week unveiled rules limiting the amount of time children could spend playing video games. The latest announcement hammered industry giants, with NetEase collapsing 11 percent and Tencent losing 8.5 percent, while Alibaba and JD.com also suffered painful losses.

Investors had been cautiously edging back into the industry in recent sessions on hopes that the



YAAN, China: A customer buys vegetables at a market in Yaan in China's southwestern Sichuan province yesterday. —AFP

crackdown by China on a range of private enterprises may be easing off. "This demonstrates the risk for those attempting to call the bottom with so much uncertainty still hanging," Bloomberg Intelligence analyst Matthew Kanterman said. "I don't think the overnight news is a big departure from that which we already knew, but the reaction clearly signifies the skittishness of investors around any regulatory news."

There was little major reaction to news that China's producer price index, a gauge of the cost of goods at the factory gate, rose to a 13-year high, while consumer prices came in below forecasts. London, Paris and Frankfurt were well down in the morning as investors awaited the conclusion of the European Central Bank's latest policy meeting later in the day, hoping for an idea about its plans for monetary policy. —AFP

Bill Gates-linked fund buys control of Four Seasons hotels

NEW YORK: Microsoft founder Bill Gates' investment fund reached a deal to acquire a controlling stake in the luxury hotel chain Four Seasons for \$2.2 billion, the companies announced Wednesday. Under the deal, Cascade Investments, a private investment firm holding Gates' assets, will increase its holding in Four Seasons Hotel and Resorts to 71.25 percent from 47.5 percent by purchasing half of the stake belonging to Kingdom Holding Company of Saudi Arabia.

The transaction means the Canadian company overall has an enterprise value of \$10 billion, Four Seasons said in the news release. Founded in 1960 by Isadore Sharp, Four Seasons now has 121 hotels and resorts, and 46 residential properties in 47 countries. The company entered public markets in 1997 but undertook a transaction to go private in 2007 under an agreement between Cascade, KHC and Sharp, who now holds five percent of the company. Gates has been in the spotlight after he and Melinda French Gates announced in May they were divorcing after 27 years. He has been under scrutiny over his association with disgraced financier Jeffrey Epstein, who killed himself while awaiting trial on charges of sex trafficking minors. —AFP

Safir to manage operations of hotel rooms and suites within El Centro

CAIRO: Safir Hotels & Resorts (SHR) signed a memorandum of agreement with Empire State Developments to manage and operate hotel rooms and suites within the El Centro Business Complex project in Cairo's New Administrative Capital. The contract was signed by Mahmoud ElSarrag, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Empire State Developments, and Fawzi Khalifa Al-Musallam, CEO of Safir Hotels & Resorts, at the headquarters of Empire State Company, in the presence of Mostafa Mohsen and Amr Abadi, members of the Board of Directors of Empire State Company, and Hussein Shoukry, Area General Manager of SHR's Egypt operations, Mohamed Sharaki, SHR's Corporate Director of Engineering, and Ahmed Seleit, SHR's Corporate Director of Business Development.

This contract is the first step of cooperation between the two companies, beginning with Safir's management of the "El Centro Business Complex" project. The "El Centro" project adds to the record of the two entities' achievements. It is located on an area of 24 thousand square meters and consists of 15 floors. The multi-use complex will house a commercial mall, medical clinics, administrative floors, and hotel rooms and suites.

The project will be designed and built according to the latest international standards and technologies, with a capacity of 100 rooms and suites with spacious areas and designs in the Andalusian architectural style. It will be brought to life for its guests through the warm Arabian hospitality that distinguishes Safir Hotels & Resorts. The hotel also includes a group of distinguished international restaurants, meeting and banquet halls, and entertainment areas, and it is scheduled to open during 2024. The new hotel



Mahmoud Al-Sarrag, Fawzi Khalifa Al-Musallam, Mustafa Mohsen, Amr Abadi, Hussein Shukry, Muhammad Sharaki, and Ahmed Salit pose for a group photo.

is considered the first investment that will bear the "Safir" brand in Cairo's New Administrative Capital.

Mahmoud ElSarrag said, "The new project is the first tourism project launched by the Empire State Developments in the Administrative Capital and has strong competitive elements. This new contract reflects our confidence in Safir Hotels & Resorts and its ability to achieve the highest investment returns and provide a distinguished hotel experience to its customers through its expertise in the field of hotel and resort management in the Middle East and the Arab Republic of Egypt in particular." Fawzi Khalifa Al-Musallam, Safir's CEO, stated that this project is a new addition to the company in accordance with its strategy aimed at expanding in the Arab Republic of Egypt.

Eng. Fawzi said, "This new hotel addition will be designed and equipped with great care that takes into account all the details in line with our vision towards excellence in all our services provided to our customers." He also stressed that the next phase will witness, God willing, more new projects.

Business

EasyJet rejects takeover bid, plots \$2.0 bn lifeline

Battered aviation sector looks to recover

LONDON: British airline EasyJet yesterday announced it had rejected a takeover approach, reportedly from rival Wizz Air, and revealed a \$2.0-billion lifeline as the battered aviation sector looks to recover. No-frills carrier EasyJet said in a statement that the bid had undervalued the group, adding that the suitor was no longer considering an offer and that the airline would now sell new shares to raise about £1.2 billion (\$1.6 billion, 1.4 billion euros). Bloomberg reported that the bidder had been Hungarian budget airline Wizz Air. EasyJet meanwhile added that it had secured a new credit facility totalling \$400 million.

The coronavirus crisis and travel restrictions have rocked airlines worldwide. Also yesterday, Japan Airlines said it plans to raise about \$2.7 billion as it weathers the continuing impact of the pandemic on its finances. In London, EasyJet noted that its “board recently received an unsolicited preliminary takeover approach. “This was carefully evaluated and then unanimously rejected. The potential bidder has since confirmed that it is no longer considering an offer for the company.”

EasyJet said the “highly conditional all-share” proposal “fundamentally undervalued the company”. The rights issues would “facilitate and accelerate the group’s recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic”, it added. Chief executive Johan Lundgren said the financing boost would also position EasyJet for

growth, allowing it to take advantage of investment opportunities “as the European aviation industry emerges from the pandemic”.

Shares dive

Traders rushed to offload EasyJet shares yesterday’s announcements. “EasyJet shares tumbled 10 percent after announcing a £1.2-billion rights issue and disclosing that it had turned down an unsolicited takeover offer,” noted Neil Wilson, chief market analyst at Markets.com. The airline’s need for fresh capital is “a sign of the ongoing trouble in the sector”, he added. In the group’s final fiscal quarter, or three months to the end of September, EasyJet expects to fly just over half of the capacity seen two years earlier before the pandemic erupted.

Mirroring rivals, the carrier last year slashed costs and flights as the deadly pandemic ravaged global aviation industry. The coronavirus outbreak grounded planes worldwide, resulting in massive losses across the aviation sector. The industry has since been boosted by partial lifting of international travel restrictions - with full reopenings held back by the emergence of the fast-spreading Delta variant. Japan’s borders for example remain closed to tourists and domestic travel has been stifled by successive waves of infections and resulting virus states of emergency. — AFP



SCHONEFELD: In this file photo, EasyJet airplanes are parked on the tarmac during the official opening of Berlin’s airport ‘Berlin Brandenburg Airport Willy Brandt’, in Schoenefeld, southeast of Berlin. — AFP

Inflation, fleeting nuisance or real danger?

PARIS: Tame for years, inflation abruptly returned in 2021 as the world recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, complicating the work of central bankers steering their countries out of the economic crisis. The question for policymakers is whether higher inflation is here to stay or not. If they believe it is, the traditional playbook calls for interest rate hikes that would slow if not halt the recovery.

The data

Inflation has been increasing for months. In the OECD, which groups together most industrialized nations, 12-month inflation hit 4.2 percent in July. Excluding volatile items like food and energy, it still stood at 3.1 percent. In the United States, inflation hit a near 40-year high in the second quarter. In the euro-zone, it is running at a 10-year high. In both it is running higher than the roughly two percent rate that the US Federal Reserve or European Central Bank would normally tolerate. Elsewhere, inflation is running at 4.6 percent in July, 5.6 percent in India and just shy of 9.0 percent in Brazil.

Why are prices rising?

Economies tumbled in 2020 due to

COVID-19 restrictions, but now are rebounding, with demand by consumers and businesses outstripping supplies. That prompted an increase in prices for raw materials, including oil, wood and copper. Shortages have also hit the high-tech sector, with the semiconductors that power devices from smartphones to cars being in short supply, leading prices to rise on many of these products as well. Cargo shipping has become congested and containers are in short supply, leading to higher prices to get goods to market. The Freightos Baltic Index, which measures maritime shipping costs between China and the US West coast, has more than quintupled. The UN Food and Agricultural Organization’s Food Price Index, which monitors food prices globally, has neared its record set in 2011.

Transitory?

“Transitory” is the favorite word on the tongues of central bankers who have been arguing that the surge in prices is only a temporary phenomenon due to short-lived economic conditions arising from the pandemic. “People will start to think it isn’t transitory if clear second-round effects appear, such as a durable acceleration in wage increases and a generalization of price increases,” said Gille Moec, chief economist of insurer Axa in London. He said US inflation excluding energy and food costs is essentially due to the shortage of semiconductors which is hitting automobile and home electronics sectors, as well as the travel sector. “I don’t

think that price rebounds in travel categories or temporary supply shortages or supply chain disruptions tell us a huge amount beyond this year,” said strategist David Mericle at Goldman Sachs Research.

Furthermore, part of inflation in 2021 is just an automatic consequence of the price falls experienced last year, either directly from a drop in demand during the pandemic or the temporary cuts in VAT or sales taxes adopted in many countries such as Germany to support economic activity. Nevertheless, there is some uncertainty. “The supply shortages turned out to be more long-lasting than most central bankers wanted to make us believe,” said Markus Brunnermeier, professor of economics at Princeton University.

Why so important?

The surge in inflation is important for central bankers as most are mandated to keep it low to protect their economies from galloping prices which erode purchasing power. If it is no longer seen as temporary, central bankers will likely withdraw economic stimulus and raise interest rates. Some countries such as Mexico, Brazil and Russia have already begun to raise rates to try to get a handle on inflation. But a quick withdrawal of stimulus support and interest rate hikes from the US Fed is the biggest threat, as even its prospect could roil the markets as it did in 2013 and raise borrowing costs for many developing countries. Such moves could snuff out the global economic recovery. — AFP

JAL to raise \$2.7 billion to boost finances

TOKYO: Japan Airlines said yesterday it plans to raise some 300 billion yen (\$2.7 billion) in funds as it works to weather the continuing impact of the pandemic on its finances. The funds will be raised through financing measures, including subordinated loans and bonds, the company said in a statement, adding more details would be announced on Friday. “It’s not an urgent or imminent measure,” a company spokesman said. “It’s a pre-emptive measure to solidify our financial base,” he said.

The move comes after the airline company raised some 180 billion yen in a new share sale late last year. Japan Airlines logged a net loss of 286.7 billion yen for the year through March—its first full-year result in the red since it relisted on the Tokyo Stock Exchange in 2012. But JAL trimmed losses by nearly half in the April-June period thanks to cost-cutting efforts. JAL has concluded that it needs an additional cash buffer as the pandemic has lasted longer than expected, the Nikkei daily said.

Airline industries have been among the sectors hit hardest by the pandemic with demand stagnant at home and overseas. Japan’s borders are currently closed to tourists and domestic travel has been stifled by successive waves of infections and resulting virus states of emergency. Later, the government is set to extend the virus state of emergency for Tokyo and other areas until September 30. JAL shares closed down 1.61 percent to 2,432 yen following the company’s statement.—AFP

Business

Huawei nova 8 is more than just a stunning camera phone

Solid and cool super device features

KUWAIT: You have probably heard about Huawei's latest mid-range camera phone, the Huawei nova 8. Yes, the buzz about it is surreal and much deserved. This most stunning camera phone comes with a 64MP AI Quad camera, 66W Huawei Super Charge, a 90Hz curved OLED display and Super Device and EMUI 12 cool and futuristic features. So whether you like recording videos, snapping photos, watching your favorite show or playing your favorite game the Huawei nova 8 is the right phone for this back to school season and here is exactly why.

Huawei nova 8

First of all, the Huawei nova 8 is a jaw-dropper! This smartphone comes in a stunning Blush Gold color that is sure to capture all attention. In addition, you will need a good-looking phone to match your mood this back to school season, isn't that right? This smartphone blends technology with stunning aesthetics. At both the front and back, the Huawei nova 8 uses a curved glass design, while retaining the physical buttons on the side for functionality and aesthetics.

Moreover, the curved edges from the front and back fit perfectly into the metal mid-frame, making it feel smooth and sleek on your palm. To meet the more diverse needs for photography and videography, the Huawei nova 8 is equipped with 64MP AI Quad Camera system. This includes a 64MP main camera, 8MP ultra-wide camera, 2MP macro camera and a 2MP Bokeh camera.

These cameras work together to deliver stunning images and videos in all scenarios, no matter how bright or how dark the environment may be. The Main Camera and Ultra Wide Angle Camera on the back of the Huawei nova 8 work together to enable Dual-View Video. One is in charge of capturing the whole picture, and the other is used for close-up shots, adding a playful touch to your videos. When it comes to capturing your own personal moments, selfies with your friends are bound to play a part in it. The Huawei nova 8 32MP High-res Front Camera makes you and your friends look stunning in every selfie. It also supports the Super Night Selfie Mode that automatically enhances facial conditions and improve background details. In addition, the powerful built-in AI algorithm intelligently removes flares from glasses, making you look fabulous even at night.

Additionally, if you happen to have forgotten to charge your phone before you head out to school, needless to worry because Huawei nova 8 supports 66W Huawei SuperCharge, which saves you the trouble of charging your phone every now and then and in between classes. It can be charged up to 60% in just 15 minutes



and 100% in a staggering 35 minutes. In the time it takes you to have breakfast and get dressed before heading out to school, you will have the phone fully charged and ready to go.

Be it for gaming, watching videos, browsing the Internet, or viewing pictures in the gallery, all you need is a high-quality display to bring out the best. The Huawei nova 8 features a 6.57-inch curved OLED screen, together with the AI-supported Mistouch prevention and TUV Rheinland certified Eye Comfort features, delivering a vivid and buttery-smooth viewing experience in every way.

Additionally, with a refresh rate of 90Hz, the display updates 90 frames per second and responds swiftly when scrolling. You can smoothly scroll through pages to read any type of content, as well as catch up with followers' comments faster. Besides enabling great fluidity, a refresh rate of 90Hz gives you lower touch control latency, making every touch more responsive and accurate, giving you a competitive edge in gaming.

This phone also comes loaded with cool and futuristic Super Device and EMUI 12 features that you will sure love when going back to school this season. Huawei's innovative All-scenario AI Life technology provides you with enhanced connectivity options and more ways to stay connected with the world. It will also help you enjoy a more convenient, efficient and secure experience. This way, not only will you have more time to spend with friends and family,

you will be able to accomplish more of your goals.

Under Multi-screen Collaboration, the Huawei nova 8 can be connected with a PC to form a powerful Super Device. Once connected, you get the chance to open up to 3 windows on your PC and you can also access files on your mobile using your PC, while the smartphone can function as your PC's thumb device, making cross-device file management and sharing breezy.

There is also Floating Windows. With this simple trick, you can now multi-task even more efficiently. For example, when reading news, emails or watching videos, you can reply to direct messages via the Floating Window without having to exit your current app. Simply click on the banner notification and reply to the message instantly in the Floating Window that pops up. You can also open a second Floating Window or stack tasks in a Quick Balls in the sidebar to bring them back up at any time.

Moreover, if you are craving something to satisfy your hunger in between your classes or if you need to book a ride back home there is a fun way of doing both. Launched together at the same time with the Huawei nova 8 are Huawei Watch 3 Pro. You can enjoy the Super Device functions of both devices; you can use your Huawei nova 8 as the starting point to order food or book a ride (compatible with certain apps only) and you will get automatic status order updates directly from your Huawei Watch 3 Pro without the need to constantly juggle both devices.

NBK-Bahrain provides exclusive benefits

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait - Bahrain (NBK-Bahrain) is keen on rewarding its customers and providing them with top-notch banking services for a richer banking experience. In this regard, the bank is providing exclusive offers for NBK Visa Platinum and Visa Signature Credit Cards. NBK Credit Cards give customers the opportunity to explore various styles of a world full of luxury and exceptional benefits including NBK Reward Points whereby they can get more benefits and rewards for every trip, hotel stay and purchase and cashback.

NBK Rewards Program, which is one of the largest loyalty programs in Bahrain, enables customers to earn NBK Points for every BHD 1 spent using the card, inside or outside Bahrain. NBK

Credit Card customers are also given complimentary access to more than 1000 airport lounges worldwide, concierge services, free travel insurance, as well as NBK Traveler with dnata Travel whereby they get free airport Drop or Pickup with their booking for flights, hotels and car rental.

Furthermore, customers can avail a wide range of offers in Bahrain including: Free valet parking with Park-Pass across strategic locations in Bahrain such as Bahrain International Airport and leading shopping malls, Buy 1 Get 1 free cinema tickets when using NBK Credit Card in booking through VOX Cinemas website or box office, as well as Buy 1 Get 1 free offers at Dose Cafe and all Baskin Robbins branches in Bahrain.



Ali Fardan

Offers also include up to 15% discount across Alshaya Group, and Aramex Shop and Ship special membership fee of BHD 5 and 10% discount on shipment fees. Speaking on these offers, Ali Fardan, General Manager of NBK - Bahrain, said: "We always strive to reward our customers and offer them a unique lifestyle through NBK Credit Cards by providing exclusive offers and benefits that meet all their needs."

"We are always in touch with our customers to ensure delivering top-notch banking products and services as usual from NBK. We also promise them to continue improving our services and adding various benefits to meet their interests and expectations," he added. Fardan noted that NBK Credit Cards offer unmatched benefits and provide customers with utmost luxury, as the bank always strives to provide customers with the best and most secure banking experience. For more details about NBK Credit Cards, you can visit nbk.com/Bahrain or contact the Call Center on 17155555.

Business

US economic growth 'downshifted' amid labor and supply shortages

Sales of autos, homes depressed by low inventory

WASHINGTON: US economic growth "downshifted slightly" in July and August amid shortages of workers and materials, as well as concerns about the rise of the highly transmissible Delta variant of the virus that causes COVID-19, the Federal Reserve said Wednesday. And while those shortages also caused rising wages and prices in some areas, the report of a slower recovery could add weight to the argument that the central bank should hold off on plans to withdraw stimulus to the world's largest economy.

The nationwide surge in coronavirus infections has led to the reimposition of some restrictions and mask-wearing rules, and delayed the return to the office for some businesses. In its "beige book" report on the economy, the Fed said the recent growth slowdown was largely due to "a pullback in dining out, travel and tourism in most districts, reflecting safety concerns due to the rise of the Delta variant."

But activity declined in some areas of the country due to labor issues and "pervasive resource shortages" that also were driving up prices, the report said. With inflation picking up and progress made on restoring jobs lost during the pandemic, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell has signaled the central bank expects to begin to pull back on its massive bond-buying program by the end of the year. However, he acknowledged that the Delta variant

has introduced uncertainty about the course of the recovery.

Price pressures

In a speech Wednesday, the president of the Fed's New York branch, John Williams, cautioned that "a full recovery from the pandemic will take quite some time to complete." He also echoed Powell's position that the recent spike in inflation is mostly due to temporary issues and the rate should drop back to around two percent next year from double that currently.

However, "there is still a great deal of uncertainty about the inflation outlook," Williams said. A sustained rise in inflation is a concern for the White House, which on Wednesday announced an initiative to contain rising meat prices. Linking consolidation in the meat industry to food price increases that have contributed to overall inflation, the White House said it would invest \$1.4 billion into the food supply chain aimed at small businesses, as well as crack down on price fixing and antitrust violations in meat processing.

'Extensive' labor shortages

The Fed report noted that sales of autos and homes in the United States were depressed by low inventory, while retail

sales growth slowed, but construction rose modestly. The analysis, prepared in advance of the Fed's next policy meeting on September 21-22, said contacts in most districts "remained optimistic about near-term prospects, though there continued to be widespread concern about ongoing supply disruptions and resource shortages."

The rapid reopening of businesses following the pandemic shutdowns has posed a challenge for global shipping and production of raw materials, including a worldwide semiconductor crunch that has hit the auto sector. Likewise, strong demand for workers has kept employment rising overall, but the pace has been slowed in all districts by "extensive labor shortages that were constraining employment and, in many cases, impeding business activity."

The Fed cited "early retirements (especially in health care), child care needs... and enhanced unemployment benefits" as factors contributing to the difficulty in filling open positions, as well as rising wages in some regions. The government employment report Friday showed a disappointing 235,000 jobs were added in August, even as the jobless rate fell to a pandemic low of 5.2 percent. "I cannot stress enough that we still have a long way to go to get back to our maximum employment goal," Williams said. — AFP

Mix of curiosity, concern, as El Salvador adopts bitcoin

SAN SALVADOR: Salvadorans queued Wednesday at some of the dozens of bitcoin teller machines erected around the country that has made history by adopting a cryptocurrency as legal tender. Some were driven by curiosity, others were hopeful the new "Chivo" digital wallet will make it easier-and cheaper-to receive remittances from abroad.

Some were drawn by the \$30 sign-up bonus. Many did not know what a cyber currency even is. "I wanted to see how it is, what it is... They said there will be an account, a wallet," said Alvaro Garcia, 47, who works as a goods loader at a market. "Thank God they are giving us these \$30... I hope this will be a good thing and that we will benefit," he said of the government's controversial experiment.

On Tuesday, the country of 6.6 million people became the first to adopt bitcoin as legal tender alongside the US dollar, which has been the official currency for two decades. The rollout met with difficulties on day one, as the Chivo application crashed and bitcoin lost some 17 percent of its value at one point. Garcia was one of dozens to queue at a Chivo ATM in the historical center of San Salvador, where an official helped him download the app onto his cellphone. The machines will allow users to deposit or withdraw cash, in dollars, and make bitcoin transfers. In the Salvadoran dialect, Chivo means "cool."

'Financial inclusion'

The digital wallet will only be available to people with a Salvadoran ID document-whether at home or abroad. The government says the project will give many Salvadorans access to bank services for the first time, and hopes it will shave millions off commissions on remittances, which account for more than a fifth of the country's GDP.

According to Economy Minister Maria Luisa Hayem, making payments or transfers with the Chivo wallet will incur no fees. "This is important for financial inclusion," she said. Marni Munoz has a sister in Houston-one of an estimated three million Salva-



EL ZONTE: A woman buys in a store that accepts bitcoins in El Zonte, La Libertad, El Salvador. — AFP

rans abroad, mainly in the United States. "She sends me \$300, we pay R30" in agency fees, she said. "We hope that with bitcoin, we will not have to pay all that."

On top of the \$30 bonus she received from the government, Munoz deposited another \$20 worth of bitcoin into her brand new cyber wallet, and said she plans to keep a close eye on the currency's value fluctuations. "At least I want to learn, I don't want to be left behind," added 64-year-old retiree Miguel Angel Vasquez. "There are very negative people and they don't want to accept new technologies. This country is small but this (initiative) is global," he told AFP in the capital.

'I want a dollar'

Some, like 33-year-old Franklin Saravia, are already depositing their earnings in the new Chivo wallet. He has an online business, selling tech equipment. "I've just deposited \$100 to stand a chance at making a profit on bitcoin," he said. "I'm betting \$100 on this new option... that plus the \$30 from the government." Experts and regulators have highlighted concerns about the cryptocurrency's notorious volatility, its potential impact on price inflation in a country with high poverty and unemployment, and the lack of protection for users. —AFP

Bitcoin: How will it work in El Salvador?

SAN SALVADOR: El Salvador on Tuesday became the first country to use bitcoin as legal tender, alongside the US dollar. But how will it work? A few pointers to President Nayib Bukele's currency experiment:

What is cryptocurrency?

Cryptocurrencies are digital currencies that can be used to pay for goods and services. The first was bitcoin, created in 2009, which uses so-called blockchain technology to secure and record each transaction. Cryptocurrencies, of which there are thousands currently, are not regulated by any central bank, and the price - often volatile - is determined by market factors. Bitcoin started off valued at cents to the dollar, and is now trading at around \$46,000 - down from an all-time high of more than \$63,000 in April.

'Chivo' digital wallet work?

Bitcoins are loaded onto digital wallets and accessed via a mobile app. In El Salvador, the wallet is called "Chivo," which translates as "cool" in the local dialect. To download the Chivo wallet, one needs a Salvadoran ID document. Users can configure Chivo to make payments either in bitcoin or their dollar equivalent. To draw or deposit cash (in dollars), the government has erected 200 Chivo automatic teller machines countrywide. To pay for goods and services, both the buyer and seller must have the electronic app.

Is it obligatory to use bitcoin?

Under a law pushed by Bukele and passed within 24 hours by his parliamentary majority in June, "any economic agent must accept bitcoin as a form of payment when it is offered by the person who acquires a good or service." But if a vendor prefers to receive dollars as online payment, the Chivo user can make an on-the-spot conversion when paying via the app. Consumers will not be under any obligation to switch to bitcoin, although those who do will receive a one-off incentive equivalent to \$30 in their wallet from the government. —AFP

Sports

India eye historic series win as England try to regroup

MANCHESTER: India head into the fifth Test in Manchester starting Friday just one match away from the superb achievement of winning Test series in both Australia and England in the same year. Their 157-run win at the Oval completed Monday, that put them 2-1 up with one to play, came after England's innings and 76-run victory at Headingley, where India were dismissed for just 78 in the first innings.

But it was a different story in south London. Rohit Sharma scored his first Test hundred outside of India, all-rounder Shardul Thakur hit fifties in both innings and took valuable wickets and Ravindra Jadeja bowled some probing spin. Jasprit Bumrah's devastating spell of reverse swing - 6-3-6-2 — was then instrumental in England losing their last eight wickets for 69 runs as India bounced back in style.

India's win was made all the more remarkable by the omission of Ravichandran Ashwin, yet to feature in this series, despite the off-spinner's haul of 413 Test wickets. In Australia, India recovered from being 36 all out in the series opener to win 2-1 and they now lead England by the same scoreline after bouncing back from another batting collapse.

'Love being written off'

"It was unbelievable," said India captain Virat Kohli after the victory. "We love being written off and I think a lot of people after Leeds really stood up and said, 'Will India be able to come back?' But we've shown time and time again that we are a top side and we have been at the top for a while now, and that's because of the belief and the pas-

sion that we have in this group," he added.

Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) President Sourav Ganguly, himself a former India captain, wrote on Twitter: "The skill is the difference but the biggest difference is the absorbing power of pressure. Indian cricket is far ahead than the rest." But no one is now writing off India, who have been in England since losing the inaugural World Test Championship final to New Zealand in June.

In Manchester, however, India must cope with the pressure of being favourites to win, or at least avoid defeat, if they are to enjoy just a fourth series victory in England following their 1971, 1986 and 2007 triumphs. India may be able to summon some of the 'backs to the wall' spirit Kohli thrives upon from knowing they will be without head coach Ravi Shastri, bowling coach Bharat Arun and fielding coach Ramakrishnan Sridhar, who will miss the match after testing positive for COVID-19.

Anderson concerns

Meanwhile, England are on the brink of losing two Test series in a home season for the first time since 1986. Veteran seamer James Anderson and Ollie Robinson have both bowled more than 163 overs each so far this series, the pair combining for 36 wickets in the absence of the injured Stuart Broad and Jofra Archer, with all-rounder Ben Stokes missing the series due to mental health issues. "You want to make sure you do the best thing for the player but you also don't want to go into a Test match and someone go down injured and you've got one less bowler at your disposal,"



MANCHESTER: India's Ravichandran Ashwin (left) talks with India's captain Virat Kohli during a team practice session ahead of the fifth cricket Test match between England and India at Old Trafford on Wednesday. — AFP

said England captain Joe Root. Root said Jos Buttler, who missed the fourth Test for the birth of his second child, would return as England's vice-captain and wicketkeeper.

It means Jonny Bairstow, who kept wicket at the Oval, is in line to miss out given batsman Ollie Pope made 81 on his England return in that match. England could play two spinners at Old Trafford after Somerset left-armer Jack Leach was recalled in addition to Moeen Ali. Root said not managing

key pressure points had "really cost us". So too has a lack of runs from anyone other than the England skipper, the world's top-ranked Test batsman. Root has scored 564 runs at an average of 94, including three hundreds, this series with England's next-best contribution Bairstow's 184 runs at 26.28. Root, in a plea to his team, asked: "Can you be the one to go and make that big score and to really put us in a position of strength, be part of a really big partnership?" — AFP

Worth the wait: Jeter ushered into baseball Hall of Fame

NEW YORK: New York Yankees icon Derek Jeter was finally ushered into baseball's Hall of Fame on Wednesday after a year-long wait to enter the sport's pantheon of greats following the COVID-19 pandemic. Jeter and fellow inductees Larry Walker, Ted Simmons and the late Marvin Miller were saluted at an outdoor ceremony for the Class of 2020 held near the hall in Cooperstown, New York.

Basketball greats Michael Jordan and Patrick Ewing were in attendance along with a crowd of Yankees fans chanting Jeter's name as they saluted the man known as "Captain Clutch". "I forgot how good that feels," Jeter told the cheering crowd before reading a prepared speech at a ceremony which had been postponed for more than year due to the coronavirus.

Jeter was chosen for the hall after coming within one vote of being a unanimous pick during voting by the Baseball Writers Association of America last year, garnering 396 out of 397 ballots. "Thank you to the baseball writers - all but one of you - who voted for me," Jeter quipped on Wednesday. Jeter used his speech to recall how he had been inspired by meeting Rachel Robinson, the widow of the late Jackie Robinson, at a dinner in 1996 as well an encounter with Hank Aaron in 1999 at the All-Star Game.

"These two moments in particular are when I realized it's more than just a game. During my career, I wanted to make Mrs Robin-



COOPERSTOWN, New York: Derek Jeter, Larry Walker and Ted Simmons pose with their plaques during the Baseball Hall of Fame induction ceremony at Clark Sports Center on Wednesday. — AFP

son proud, I wanted to make Hank Aaron proud, I wanted to make all you behind me proud," Jeter said. "Not the statistics. Proud of how I played the game, how I carried myself and how I respected the game for those before and after me."

Former Montreal Expos, Colorado Rockies and St Louis Cardinals star Walker, only the second Canadian-born Hall of Famer, meanwhile, was greeted by fans waving Canadian flags. "I share this honor with every Canadian," said Walker, National League Most Valuable Player in 1997 and a five-time All-Star. "I hope for all you Canadian kids out there that have dreams of playing in the big leagues that seeing me here today gives you another reason to go after those dreams." — AFP

IOC boss: Afghan Olympic athletes 'out of' country

LAUSANNE: All Afghan athletes who competed in the recent Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics, as well as two hoping to qualify for the 2022 Beijing Winter Games, are "outside the country", International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Thomas Bach said Wednesday. The new Taliban interim government began work in Afghanistan on Wednesday, after the militant group ousted the US-backed administration on August 15.

Bach said the Afghanistan National Olympic Committee had already expressed concerns for its athletes on August 8, the day of the Tokyo Olympics closing ceremony. "All athletes who participated at the Olympic and Paralympic Games at Tokyo 2020 are outside the country," he told reporters. "Two winter sport athletes are also outside the country and continue training, hoping to qualify for Beijing." "It goes without saying, given the circumstances, that there was a special focus on women and girls in the Olympic community," Bach added. He also said a "significant number of other members of the Olympic community in Afghanistan have received humanitarian visas and could leave the country". Notorious for their brutal and oppressive rule from 1996 to 2001, the Taliban had promised a more inclusive government this time. However, all the top positions in the interim government were handed to key leaders from the movement and the Haqqani network - the most violent faction of the Taliban known for devastating attacks. — AFP

Niyonsaba and Crouser shine in opening Diamond League finals

ZURICH: Francine Niyonsaba again trumped Hellen Obiri in the women's 5000m while two-time Olympic champion Ryan Crouser won the men's shot put on the first of two days of Diamond League finals in Zurich on Wednesday. In hot, sunny conditions at the Sechselaeutenplatz square on the shores of Lake Zurich, Niyonsaba best negotiated an unorthodox 560-metre track to win in 14:28.98, 0.70sec ahead of two-time world champion and Olympic silver medalist Obiri.

Niyonsaba's victory saw her bag \$30,000 in prize money to cap a tremendous season in which she switched to the 5,000m after being barred from running her favored 800m. The former Olympic and world 800m silver medalist, like South African Caster Semenya, has fallen foul of World Athletics regulations that prohibit athletes who have unusually high levels of testosterone from competing in races between 400m and a mile unless they undergo treatment to reduce the levels.

"I love challenges. I have a lot of resilience and determination," said the 28-year-old. "I stayed behind most of the race, this was my tactic. I am still learning after switching from 800m to longer distances. I did what I had to do. We love to see the people around here, cheering for us. This race was amazing."

The Burundi runner left it late, taking the lead at the bell for the last lap ahead of her Kenyan rival and comfortably keeping her nerve through to the line. "This race was like a championship," said Obiri. "It was a new experience, we did not know where we can start to kick and to accelerate. The race was hard for me, I tried to kick and did my best, but Francine is a

former 800m runner. She had a stronger kick."

Cowboy Crouser

Crouser was introduced to the crowd of 2,500 basking in the early evening sunshine in his customary cowboy hat, but quickly shelved that to take an early lead. The 28-year-old, who set a world record of 23.37m in the pre-Tokyo US Olympic trials in June, managed a best of 22.67m on his third attempt. Tokyo silver medalist Joe Kovacs finished second with 22.29m, with Serbia's Armin Sinancevic claiming third spot (21.86).

Crouser also beat by 7cm the meet record set in 2018 by Tokyo bronze medallist Tom Walsh, the New Zealander - who sports "Space for rent" on the front of his all-black vest after losing sponsorship-finishing fourth (21.61). "This meeting record is a big one for me," said Crouser. "This is my first Diamond League victory. I am honoured to be here and come out with a victory. I love great events like this, you can see and feel the energy of the crowd. This is a perfect evening."

Crouser was joined on the winners' podium by teammate Maggie Ewen, who won the women's shot with a best of 19.41m, having failed to even make the Olympics. Olympic champion Mariya Latsitskene of Russia won the women's high jump in a meet record of 2.05m. "The venue here is difficult and fantastic at the same time - difficult because of the track and fantastic because of the spectators," said the three-time world gold medalist.

There was no such luck, however, for Germany's Malaika Mihambo, another Tokyo champion, who could only finish fifth in the



ZURICH: Burundi's Francine Niyonsaba celebrates winning the women's 5000m at The Diamond League athletics meeting on Wednesday. —AFP

women's long jump, which was won by Serbia's Ivana Spanovic in 6.96m. Sweden's Tobias Montler won the men's long jump with a last-gasp 8.17m, while Ethiopian Berihu Aregawi topped the podium in the men's 5,000m in 12:58.65. All 25 other Diamond League finals were scheduled yesterday at the iconic Letzigrund Stadium, where more than 20,000 spectators traditionally create a raucous atmosphere. —AFP

Hamilton faces age gap challenge in new Russell era

MONZA, Italy: Like any ageing champion, Lewis Hamilton faces a most demanding and potentially unsettling season when fellow-Briton George Russell replaces Valtteri Bottas as his Mercedes team-mate next year. As if battling a 13-year age gap against Red Bull's Max Verstappen was not enough, the 36-year-old seven-time champion will have to contend with an even younger racing partner in a 'new age' formula following a radical regulations overhaul to create closer racing.

Not since Nico Rosberg beat Hamilton to the title and retired in 2016 has the sport's greatest driver been given such a clear reminder of his racing mortality - and at a time when Formula One is undergoing a widespread move to youth. Hamilton, mindful of his comforts, often made clear his respect for, and trust in, Bottas as a team-mate, but it was not enough to save the Finn from being dropped.

Hamilton, who has signed a new contract keeping him with Mercedes until 2023, recently admitted he did not plan to go on 'too much longer'. As a 'millennial' he knows that Generation Z has arrived. This year is his 15th as an F1 driver, a spell that has transformed his life and made him one of the world's most recognizable, wealthy and successful sports stars.

Asked by Dutch broadcaster Ziggo how long he wished to continue racing, Hamilton said he did not know. "I can't imagine too much longer, but it could change." He admitted he hated losing, a trait he may revisit if Russell rises to the challenge as he did as substitute for a COVID-stricken Hamilton at the 2020 Sakhir Grand Prix where he would have won, but for a bungled pit-stop.

Russell had only two days' notice of his promotion from Williams, he was slightly too big for the cockpit and had to wear



Lewis Hamilton

small racing boots and struggled with the controls tailored for Hamilton. But he almost out-qualified Bottas, made a faster start than him and looked set to triumph.

'A star is born'

"I would say a new star is born," admitted Mercedes team chief Toto Wolff. That qualifying defeat to Bottas, by 0.026 seconds, is his only one by any team-mate in three seasons with Williams during which, on average, he out-paces his partner by six-tenths of a second. 'Mr Saturday' has proved his successive titles in GP3 and GP2 were no fluke. Having pushed for the unthreatening Bottas to stay for a sixth harmonious year, Hamilton admitted at the Dutch Grand Prix that Russell was an 'incredible talent'.

Russell's potential was confirmed again when he gained his first podium finish, by virtue of a brilliant qualifying, at the rain-aborted Belgian Grand Prix. He impressed his rivals too. "For sure, he will make it very difficult for Lewis next year," said Verstappen while Alonso, now 40, wryly observed "with George, we will see a better competition inside the team." —AFP

Schauffele, Spieth head Stricker picks as Reed left out

LOS ANGELES: Olympic champion Xander Schauffele and three-time major winner Jordan Spieth were named to the US Ryder Cup team but there was no place for Patrick Reed as captain Steve Stricker completed his line-up on Wednesday. Schauffele and Spieth were joined by Daniel Berger, Harris English, Tony Finau and Scottie Scheffler as Stricker confirmed his final selections for the September 24-26 clash with Europe at Whistling Straits in Wisconsin.

Schauffele, 27, will be the first Olympic gold medallist to represent America in the Ryder Cup. It follows an impressive showing in the 2019 Presidents Cup, when he helped the US clinch a comeback victory over Australia. Reed lost only one of nine matches across his first two Ryder Cups, winning seven points and earning the nickname 'Captain America'.

But he struggled in the US defeat in Paris in 2018, mustering just one point, and has only recently recovered from bilateral pneumonia, saying he was "battling for his life". Stricker said Wednesday Reed's recent health problems and lack of play had factored in the decision to take what he described as a "very, very difficult call." "Kind of lost sleep over that one," Stricker said. "He's a tremendous competitor. He brings a lot to match-play golf. His record here at The Ryder Cup is pretty darned good. It was a very difficult call. It wasn't an easy one. It was just the uncertainty of his health and really the lack of play that led to our decision down the stretch." —AFP

Sports

Italy thrash Lithuania, England held by Poland in qualifiers

PARIS: Moise Kean grabbed his first international goals since March 2019 as Italy thrashed Lithuania 5-0 in World Cup qualifying on Wednesday, as Damian Szymanski's late header forced England to settle for a draw in Poland. Italy had drawn their previous two qualifiers to slip into a battle with Switzerland for automatic qualification from Group C.

But the European champions, who set a new world record of 36 internationals unbeaten with the goalless draw against the Swiss at the weekend, produced a dominant display against Lithuania in Reggio Emilia. Young striker Kean, who rejoined Juventus from Everton in the close-season after a successful loan spell at Paris Saint-Germain, scored twice in the first half.

Edgaras Utkus put through his own net and Giacomo Raspadori also scored as Italy moved four ahead at the break. Giovanni Di Lorenzo made it five in the second period as Roberto Mancini's side stretched their lead over Switzerland at the top of the table to six points. "It was important to have won this game with young players, who played very well, especially in the first half," Mancini told RAI. "They (Kean and Raspadori) have a great future, everything will depend on them."

The Azzurri are hoping to banish the memories of their shock failure to qualify for the 2018 World Cup in Russia. The Swiss do have two games in hand, but they were held to a 0-0 draw by Northern Ireland in Belfast, with Haris Seferovic having a penalty saved by Bailey Peacock-Farrell.

England held by Poles

England, who were beaten by Italy on penalties in the Euro 2020 final at Wembley, lost their 100 percent record in qualifying with a 1-1 draw against Poland in Warsaw. The hosts were second in Group I, five points behind England, before kick-off and frus-

trated their opponents for long periods. England captain Harry Kane appeared to have settled a tempestuous affair with 18 minutes remaining, slamming a swerving long-range shot into the bottom corner to score his 41st international goal.

But Szymanski headed home at the back post from Robert Lewandowski's cross in injury time. "A tough one to take right at the end," Kane told ITV. "Sometimes the pressure comes away from home but we are top with four games to go." Gareth Southgate's men are still four points clear of second-placed Albania, who thumped San Marino 5-0 in Tirana.

Spain's qualification hopes were under threat heading into their game at Kosovo, but a 2-0 win, coupled with Sweden's surprise loss to Greece, gave Luis Enrique's side a much-needed boost. West Ham United midfielder Pablo Fornal's 32nd-minute strike and Ferran Torres' late goal gave the 2010 world champions all three points in Pristina. Sweden, albeit having played two matches fewer than Spain, slipped four points adrift of their Group B rivals after a 2-1 defeat by the Greeks.

Flick's Germany impress again

Germany entered the current international break with a new coach, Hansi Flick, and looking to hit back following their European Championship last-16 exit at the hands of England, just months after a shock World Cup qualifying home loss to North Macedonia. But an impressive 4-0 victory in Iceland made it three wins from three for the former Bayern Munich boss.

There had been serious questions raised about the form of forwards Timo Werner, Serge Gnabry and Leroy Sane, but all three netted in Reykjavik. Werner and Gnabry have both scored three times in these three games, with Sane on the score-sheet twice. Chelsea center-back Antonio Ruediger was the



WARSAW: England's forward Raheem Sterling (left) and Poland's defender Tymoteusz Puchacz vie for the ball during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 qualification Group I football match between Poland and England on Wednesday. —AFP

other scorer as Germany stretched four points clear of Armenia in Group J.

The Armenians were held to a disappointing 1-1 home draw by Liechtenstein. In Group E, Belgium continued their cruise towards qualification as Dennis Praet's first-half effort saw Roberto Martinez's side edge out Belarus 1-0 in Kazan. Wales are now nine points behind the Red Devils after a goalless stalemate with Estonia in Cardiff. —AFP

Boateng in court to face assault charges

MUNICH: German 2014 World Cup winner Jerome Boateng appeared in court in Munich yesterday to answer allegations he assaulted the mother of his twin daughters during an argument in 2018. Wearing a dark suit and white shirt, the 33-year-old walked into Munich regional court just before 1000 local time (0800GMT).



Jerome Boateng

Boateng denies claims he injured his ex-girlfriend, named as Sherin S, during a heated argument while the pair were on holiday with their daughters in July 2018. The incident happened in the weeks after the World Cup in Russia, when Boateng was in the Germany squad which was knocked out early after the group stages. Anne Leiding, a spokeswoman for the prosecution in Munich, said the footballer is accused of throwing a lamp at his former partner, missing her, before insulting her.

He allegedly then flung a small filled isotherm bag, which is said to have struck her, injuring her right upper arm, before he "insulted her once more, hit her and pulled her hair". Several witnesses are due to give evidence and a verdict is expected to be returned later today. If found guilty, Boateng could be fined or jailed for up to five years. —AFP

Pepi leads fightback as US off the mark

SAN PEDRO SULA, Honduras: Teenage striker Ricardo Pepi inspired a second-half fightback as the United States came from behind to defeat Honduras 4-1 in a hard-fought CONCACAF World Cup qualifier on Wednesday. FC Dallas 18-year-old Pepi scored a crucial header to fire the US into a 2-1 lead and had a hand in three more goals to give the Americans their first victory of CONCACAF's final round of qualifiers after two opening draws.

US coach Gregg Berhalter's team had been outplayed in a lackluster opening 45 minutes that saw Honduras take the lead through a Brayan Moya header on 27 minutes. But Berhalter rang the changes at half-time, bringing on Antonee Robinson, Brenden Aaronson, and Sebastian Lletget and switching to a more adventurous 4-3-3 formation after starting the game with an unfamiliar 5-2-3 line-up.

The switch paid immediate dividends, with Robinson equalising in the 48th minute with a cushioned finish after Pepi's decoy run to the near post distracted the Honduras defense. Former Mexico youth

international Pepi then headed the US into the lead on 75 minutes after DeAndre Yedlin's superb cross from the right flank to make it 2-1. Pepi then set up an 86th minute goal for Aaronson, squaring to the Red Bull Salzburg forward who finished with aplomb to make the game safe.

There was still time for Pepi to be involved in the fourth US goal, his low shot parried by Honduras goalkeeper Luis Lopez into the path of Lletget, who tucked away at the far post. The second half display delivered a badly needed three points to Berhalter, who had gambled with an untested starting line-up in a game that had acquired must-win status after opening draws against El Salvador and Canada.

For long periods of the first half, it looked as if Berhalter's tactical experiment was about to end in disaster, with Honduras over-running the US midfield and taking a deserved lead midway through the half with the American defense rocking. But Berhalter's raft of changes at half-time turned the tide back in favor of the US, who had started the game without injured Borussia Dortmund star Gio Reyna and the suspended Juventus Weston McKennie, sent home after breaching COVID-19 protocols.

The only blemish on a superb second-half display was an injury to Chelsea star Christian Pulisic, the US skipper hobbling off early in the 62nd minute. The win leaves



SAN PEDRO SULA: Honduras' Maynor Figueroa (right) and US' Ricardo Pepi vie for the ball during their Qatar 2022 FIFA World Cup CONCACAF qualifier match at the Olimpico Metropolitano stadium on Wednesday. —AFP

the United States third in the eight-team CONCACAF qualifying standings after three games with five points. Mexico, held to a 1-1 draw by Panama earlier Wednesday, lead the standings with seven points from three games. Canada are second with five points from three games after a thumping 3-0 win over El Salvador in Toronto. In other games Wednesday, Costa Rica drew 1-1 with Jamaica in San Jose. —AFP

Djokovic moves two shy of Slam with Zverev next at US Open

NEW YORK: Novak Djokovic moved within two matches of completing the first men's calendar-year singles Grand Slam in 52 years on Wednesday, rallying to defeat Italian Matteo Berrettini in a US Open quarter-final. Top-ranked Djokovic stretched his Grand Slam win streak to 26 matches by eliminating sixth seed Berrettini 5-7, 6-2, 6-2, 6-3 at Arthur Ashe Stadium in a rematch of July's Wimbledon final.

"I think it was a great performance overall," Djokovic said, calling his last three sets "the best three sets I've played in the tournament". The world number one booked a semi-final date Friday against Olympic champion Alexander Zverev, who beat Djokovic in the semi-finals in Tokyo. "He's in tremendous form. He has been winning a lot," Djokovic said. "He's one of the best players in the world right now and I'm pumped. The bigger the challenge, the more glory in overcoming it."

Djokovic is trying to become the first man to win all four major titles in the same year since Rod Laver in 1969, but he wasn't ready to ponder the glory of that challenge just yet. "Only focusing on the next match. Don't ask me about history," Djokovic said. "I'm thinking only about the next match. Step by step." The 34-year-old Serbian also seeks his fourth US Open title and men's record 21st career Slam trophy, which would lift him one above the mark he shares with Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal, both absent with injuries.

German fourth seed Zverev, last year's US Open runner-up, reached his fourth career Slam semi-final by eliminating South Africa's 46th-ranked Lloyd Harris 7-6 (8/6), 6-3, 6-4. Zverev denied Djokovic's bid for a "Golden Slam" sweep of all four major titles plus Olympic gold, but Djokovic leads their all-time rivalry 6-3. "He's the best player in the world. He's very difficult

to beat," Zverev said. "I was the first player to beat him in a very big match this year. That does give you something."

Zverev is on a 16-match win streak that includes a title last month at Cincinnati. Djokovic didn't play between the Olympics and the Open. Djokovic improved to 4-0 in his rivalry with Berrettini, who was chasing his third Slam semi-final after the 2019 US Open and his career-best Wimbledon runner-up effort. Berrettini secured the first break with a forehand cross-court winner to seize a 6-5 lead, then squandered three set points before Djokovic sent a forehand wide to surrender a tension-packed first set after 77 minutes.

After dropping the opening set for a third consecutive match, Djokovic broke for a 3-1 lead in the second when Berrettini sent a backhand long, his power struggling to cope with the all-around finesse of Djokovic's game. Berrettini netted a backhand to surrender a break and the second set and Djokovic broke again in game two of the third and again in the last to claim the set.

A passing forehand winner to break gave Djokovic a 2-0 lead in the fourth set and he held out from there to win in three hours and 27 minutes. "It was a great match, a lot of energy on the court," Djokovic said. "When I lost the first set, I managed to forget about it, move on, be in the moment. I was dialed in, locked in from the beginning of the second set and was able to raise my level."

Zverev was down set point in his opening tie-breaker before Harris sent two forehands long and Zverev blasted a service winner to take the first set. "He was serving incredible, in the first set especially," Zverev said. "Somehow was able to win that tie-breaker and that loosened me up. I'm really happy to get through in three." Zverev broke Harris for a 2-0 lead in the sec-



NEW YORK: Serbia's Novak Djokovic hits a return to Italy's Matteo Berrettini during their 2021 US Open Tennis tournament men's quarter-finals match at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center on Wednesday. — AFP

ond set and held serve from there. In the third, Zverev broke Harris in the first and third games and won after two hours and six minutes with his 21st ace of the match.

"The level wasn't quite where it needed to be," Harris said. "A little disappointing in that regard. Nonetheless, still a lot of positives to take from the week." The best prior Slam run for Harris was to the third round of this year's Australian Open. — AFP

Raducanu to face Sakkari in US Open semis

NEW YORK: British 18-year-old sensation Emma Raducanu became the first qualifier to reach the US Open semi-finals by defeating Tokyo Olympic champion Belinda Bencic 6-3, 6-4 on Wednesday. Raducanu, only the fourth qualifier to reach a Grand Slam semi-final, made the Swiss 11th seed the highest-rated victim of her young career in making history on the New York hardcourts. "It was a really tough match," Raducanu said. "I'm really glad to have come through."

World number 150 Raducanu, who hasn't dropped a set at the Open, had no clue she would become the new British number one or about the historic impact of her display on the New York hardcourts. "I've actually got no idea about any of the records at all," Raducanu said. "It's the first time I heard I was the first qualifier to make the semis. I had no idea before that. I'm not here to chase any records right now. I'm just taking care of what I can do on the moment and on the match ahead."

Next for Raducanu is a first-ever matchup against Greek 17th seed Maria Sakkari, who ousted Czech fourth seed Karolina Pliskova 6-4, 6-4. Sakkari, whose first Slam semi-final came in June at the French Open, also eliminated 2019 US Open winner Bianca Andreescu, the sixth



NEW YORK: Britain's Emma Raducanu celebrates her win over Switzerland's Belinda Bencic during their 2021 US Open Tennis tournament women's quarter-finals match at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center on Wednesday. — AFP

seed from Canada, and Czech 10th seed Petra Kvitova, a two-time Wimbledon champion, in matching her best Slam run.

Asked about the challenge of Raducanu, Sakkari said, "It's great for our sport. We have many young girls playing really well right now. I trust myself. I trust my game." Raducanu, who would be the first qualifier to ever reach a Grand Slam final, made her Slam debut this year at Wimbledon and reached the fourth round. She is trying to become the first British woman to win a Grand Slam title since Virginia Wade at Wimbledon in 1977 and the first British woman to win the US Open since Wade in 1968. — AFP

Trump to provide commentary for Holyfield-Belfort fight

MIAMI: Former US president Donald Trump will provide commentary for the upcoming fight between former world heavyweight champion Evander Holyfield and Brazilian mixed martial arts star Vitor Belfort, the digital channel that will stream the bout announced on Wednesday. "I love great fighters and great fights. I look forward to seeing both this Saturday night and sharing my thoughts ringside," Trump said in a statement released by FITE TV. "You won't want to miss this special event."

The main commentary for the bout will be on the HBO channel, but viewers who pay \$49.99 can opt to listen on FITE to Trump, who will be joined by his son Don Jr. The 58-year-old Holyfield will fight Belfort at the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino in Hollywood, Florida on Saturday, after former boxing great Oscar De La Hoya was forced to step aside after testing positive for COVID-19. The bout, which is being held on the 20th anniversary of the Al-Qaeda attacks on New York and Washington, was originally scheduled to take place at the Staples Center in Los Angeles.

It was moved to Florida after California boxing authorities refused to sanction the fight between Belfort and Holyfield - who will



Donald Trump

be a month shy of his 59th birthday on fight night. Holyfield hasn't fought since 2011, but he had signed to fight Kevin McBride earlier this year - with a possible future fight against his old nemesis Mike Tyson on the horizon.

After the proposed McBride fight failed to materialize, Holyfield posted on Instagram in August that he'd been "training hard for months". "I promise my fans I will step back in the ring at least one more time before I lay my gloves to rest for good," he said. Trump is no stranger to boxing, having hosted a number of fights at his former Atlantic City casinos. — AFP



Djokovic moves two shy of Slam with Zverev next

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