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US honors 9/11 victims on 20th anniversary of attacks

Biden urges unity • Bush denounces disunity • Trump slams 'incompetence'



NEW YORK: (From left) Former US President Bill Clinton, former First Lady Hillary Clinton, former President Barack Obama, former First Lady Michelle Obama, President Joe Biden and First Lady Jill Biden attend the annual 9/11 commemoration ceremony at the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum yesterday. — AFP

NEW YORK: America marked the 20th anniversary of 9/11 yesterday with pleas for unity at solemn ceremonies given added resonance by the messy withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan and return to power of the Taliban. At the 9/11 memorial in New York, relatives wiped away tears, their voices breaking as they read out the names of the almost 3,000 people killed in the Al-Qaeda attacks.

"We love you and we miss you," many of them said as somber violin music played at the official ceremony, attended by dignitaries including President Joe Biden and former presidents Barack Obama and Bill Clinton. The service at the Ground Zero site where 2,753 people died - some of whom jumped to their deaths from the collapsing towers - started shortly after 8:30 am (1230 GMT) under tight security, with Lower Manhattan effectively locked down.

The first of six moments of silence were marked at 8:46 am, with a bell ringing to symbolize the time the first hijacked plane crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center. At 9:03 am, attendees stood still again to mark the moment the South Tower was struck. At 9:37 am, it was the

Pentagon, where the hijacked airliner killed 184 people in the plane and on the ground.

At 9:59, the moment the South Tower fell. At 10:03 am, they remembered the fourth plane to crash in a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, after passengers fought the hijackers. And at 10:28 am, the North Tower falling. Mourners clutched photos of their loved ones, their pain still raw despite a whole generation having grown up since the morning of September 11.

"It feels like it was yesterday. Every year (that) we get further away it becomes more important to remember" Joanne Pocher-Dzama, whose brother died at the World Trade Center, told AFP. Bruce Springsteen sang 'I'll See You in My Dreams' and across New York smaller ceremonies took place at fire stations in remembrance of the 343 firefighters who lost their lives saving others. After nightfall, twin light beams were to be projected into the sky.

Heart-wrenching commemorations also took place at the Pentagon and Shanksville, where former president George W Bush said the unity America showed following the attacks "seems distant" from today.

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Singh named OCA chief after Sheikh Ahmad convicted

NEW DELHI: Veteran Indian sports administrator Raja Randhir Singh yesterday took over as head of the Olympic Council of Asia after its former Kuwaiti leader was sentenced to jail in a forgery case. Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad Al-Sabah, a member of Kuwait's ruling family, stepped aside as Asia's top sports official after the Geneva court found him guilty on Friday over a plot against political rivals in the state.

Singh, 74, said in a statement he was taking over as interim president as the longest serving member of the OCA executive. "I have every confidence that Sheikh Ahmad will be successful in his appeal," Singh said, adding that he would seek "to ensure the continued smooth running of the organization in the critical period ahead."

Asia will host the 2022 Winter Olympics in China in February and has just started the one-year countdown to the Asian Games in the Chinese city of Hangzhou. Singh, a former Olympic shooter, was a member of the International Olympic Committee executive until 2015 and helped bring events such as the 2010 Commonwealth Games to India.

Sheikh Ahmad had been one of the most powerful sports bosses in the world until his court troubles erupted. He was handed a 30-month prison sentence for the alleged plot, half of which was suspended. Five defendants, including Sheikh Ahmad, were found guilty over a forgery scheme linked to efforts to show that Kuwait's former prime minister and parliament speaker were guilty of coup-plotting and corruption.

Sheikh Ahmad denied any wrongdoing and said after the sentence was delivered that he would appeal. His office said he would "temporarily step aside" from his OCA role "until he



Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad

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Taliban firmly in charge on 9/11 'versary

KABUL: Afghanistan marked the 20th anniversary of 9/11 in muted fashion yesterday with the Taliban firmly in charge, two decades after being ousted for hosting the architects of the US attacks. The hardline Islamists retook power on Aug 15, after a lightning offensive that capitalized on the chaotic last weeks of the 20-year US-led occupation that followed the 2001 attacks.

In a sign that things were returning to normal, Pakistan International

Airlines (PIA) said it would resume flights to Kabul from tomorrow, the first foreign commercial service since the Taliban seized power last month. And in a carefully orchestrated publicity stunt, hundreds of fully veiled women staged a rally at a Kabul university to profess support for the Taliban, just days after public protests against their rule were banned.

Unconfirmed reports had circulated all week that the Taliban may use the Sept 11 anniversary to swear in their new government, but the day unfolded without formal recognition. "This is a day for America, not for Afghanistan," said Muhammad Alzoad, a bank clerk. "This was nothing to do with Afghanistan, but it made us suffer."

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New Lebanon cabinet faces daunting task

BEIRUT: Lebanese commentators voiced skepticism yesterday over the bankrupt state's ability to win back the support of foreign donors after political factions finally agreed a new government following 13 months of horse-trading. Billionaire Najib Mikati, who has served as prime minister twice before, on Friday unveiled his team of newcomers, some technocrats but all endorsed by at least one of the political parties dominant

since the 1975-1990 civil war.

The 24-member cabinet, which includes a single woman, faces the daunting task of carrying out reforms demanded by the international community to unlock desperately needed financial aid. But many Lebanese questioned whether the new team was up to the task, or would be able to bring forward the demands of a 2019 protest movement for an end to alleged mismanagement and corruption.

"There is no confidence in Najib Mikati's government, which represents the interests of a system that engineered the country's collapse," wrote the Al-Akbar newspaper, which is close to powerful Shiite movement Hezbollah.

Continued on Page 2

4 Palestinian jailbreakers recaptured

JERUSALEM: The Zionist entity has recaptured four of the six Palestinian militants who escaped from a high-security prison last week in one of the most spectacular breakouts in the country's history, police said yesterday. Since Monday's breakout, the army

has poured troops into the occupied West Bank for a massive manhunt.

But the two latest fugitives to be recaptured, who include a prominent former militant leader, were found hiding in a lorry park just outside Nazareth, police said. Zakaria Zubeidi, 45, is a former militant leader of the Fatah movement of Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas in the West Bank town of Jenin. Mohammad Ardah, 39, was sentenced to life in prison in 2002 for his role in Islamic Jihad's armed wing.

"Two more prisoners who escaped were captured a short time ago... while they were hiding in a parking lot for trucks," the police said. "The hunt for the other

two fugitives continues." On Friday evening, police recaptured Yaqoub Qadri, 48, and Mahmud Abdullah Ardah, 45, both members of Islamic Jihad. Ardah was the alleged mastermind of the escape. "Police located (the two fugitives) and chased them in a helicopter," the police statement said. "They offered no resistance when they were arrested in the south of Nazareth."

Zionist media said police were alerted by residents who reported seeing two men searching litter bins for food. Shortly after their capture was announced Friday, the army said that a rocket had been fired at the Zionist entity from the Gaza Strip, but was intercepted by air defenses. — AFP



KABUL: Taliban fighters patrol in a vehicle along the tarmac at the airport yesterday. — AFP



BEIRUT: Prime Minister-designate Najib Mikati signs a decree for the formation of a new Lebanese government after a meeting with the president at the presidential palace in Baabda on Friday. — AFP

Local

Kuwait's policy proceeds with unifying Gulf, Arab ranks: FM

Arab states keen to further joint action: Sheikh Dr Ahmad

CAIRO: Kuwait's Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah said that Kuwait's policy, in line with the directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, is proceeding with unifying the Gulf and Arab body. Sheikh Ahmad Nasser made the statement to the press at the end of the 156th regular session of the Arab League Foreign Ministers that was chaired by Kuwait on Thursday.

The Al-Ula Summit created a new consensus spirit amongst the region's countries, he said. He stressed the importance of building on the summit's results and boosting commonalities, affirming that Kuwait is moving forward in this way. Kuwait was honored to chair the Council of the League of Arab

“No immunized country if all not immunized”

States for six months ending in March 2022, he said. He noted that the meeting was “fruitful” and full of deep discussions as it discussed all challenges and issues facing the Arab world, mainly the coronavirus and its repercussions on the Arabs.

There is a unified vision on enhancing solidarity amongst the Arab health institutions, he affirmed. The Kuwaiti minister went on to say that there is a full understanding that “there is no immunized country if all of us are not immunized”. The gathering witnessed a frank discussion amongst all Arab brothers on challenges facing the Arab region, topped with the Palestinian cause, he pointed out. He emphasized full interaction from all countries to refer the cause to the next UN General Assembly meeting planned at the end of this month. In addition, he elaborated, the conferees discussed the crises in Yemen, Syria and Iraq, and the recent developments in Libya. He finally referred that they focused on the distinguished bonds and ties between the Arab League and the African Union.

Joint action

Sheikh Dr Ahmad had earlier underlined the keenness of Arab states, including Kuwait, to boost joint action. Speaking to a press conference after chairing the ministerial talks, the minister said, when asked about Kuwaiti efforts to mend the rift between Algeria and Morocco, that his country has “great confidence in all the Arab leaderships, and their ongoing endeavor to boost joint Arab action.”

“Kuwait and other Arab countries will play their role in this field to strengthen Arab reconciliation,



CAIRO: Kuwait's Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah speaks during the 156th regular session of the Arab League Foreign Ministers that was chaired by Kuwait on Thursday. — KUNA

solidarity and cohesion,” he explained. The minister recalled the Al-Ula summit in Saudi Arabia, which closed the chapter on a feud between Gulf states that lasted over three years, mentioning the emergence of a “new Arab spirit in dialogue and reconciliation, which aims to find common denominators to build upon.” The ministerial discussions were characterized by “brotherhood and admiration,” he said, but conceded that “it is not healthy for 21 countries to come together and agree on everything.”

On the top of these discussions was the “primary Arab issue,” the Palestinian issue, namely the Zionist entity's continuing breaches on the rights of Palestinians in occupied territories, he said, stressing the need to continue shedding light on these violations. The minister made significant reference to the events in late May, “whether the events of Sheikh Jarrah or what happened in the occupied territories or Gaza, and the Zionist violations for more than 73 years.” Regarding the matter, Arab states agreed for there to be “significant participation” at upcoming United Nations General Assembly meetings, he revealed.

Similarly, he underlined the importance of ensuring sustainable support for the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in its bid to provide humanitarian support to Palestinian refugees, unaffected by political agenda. Alongside this, ministers discussed the developments in Lebanon, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Sudan, Somalia and the Comoros, alongside Iran's occupation of the three Emirati islands, Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa. Other matters included the security of navigation and the transport of energy supplies in Arab Gulf waters, Iran and Turkey's interventions in the internal affairs of Arab states and establishing a nuclear weapon-free zone in the Middle East. The minister also said that the matter of Arab-African cooperation took a “large space” of the discussions throughout several Arab meetings, positively reflecting on the two regions' close proximity in terms of “geography, human-to-human communication, customs, tradition, faith and mannerisms.”

Arab-UN meeting

At the same press conference, Arab League

Secretary General Ahmad Abul-Gheit said an Arab Troika would convene with members of the United Nations Security Council on September 22 to mull the situation in the region, particularly the occupied Palestinian territories. The Arab Summit Troika — the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and Algeria — and the UNSC members will hold their meeting in New York on the sidelines of the coming UN General Assembly meeting, the Arab League chief said. Abul-Gheit thanked Tunisia, the Arab member at the UNSC, for arranging the meeting.

On the coming Arab summit, he pointed out that it would be held next March in Algeria. He noted that the UN Palestinian refugee agency (UNRWA) is struggling with acute financial crisis, with a budget shortfall estimated at approximately \$100 million. Arab countries with a financial ability like Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Algeria and Egypt are remarkably contributing to the UNRWA budget, he argued. The Arab League chief criticized the Zionist entity's Prime Minister Naftali Bennet for opposing any attempts to resume negotiations for a political settlement with Palestinians. — KUNA

US honors 9/11 victims on 20th...

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“So much of our politics has become a naked appeal to anger, fear, and resentment. That leaves us worried about our nation and our future together,” he told mourners.

In a video posted on the eve of the anniversary, Biden urged Americans to come together. “To me, that's the central lesson of September 11th. It's that at our most vulnerable, in the push and pull of all that makes us human, in the battle for the soul of America, unity is our greatest strength,” Biden said in a six-minute message from the White House.

But former president Donald Trump shattered that unity, releasing a video message slamming the “inept administration” of Biden for its “incompetence” over the Afghan withdrawal. The memorials come less than two weeks since the last soldiers left Kabul airport, ending the so-called “forever war”.

But national discord over the chaotic exit,

including the deaths of 13 US troops in a suicide bomb and the return to power of Al-Qaeda founder Osama bin Laden's protectors the Taleban, has overshadowed what was supposed to be a pivotal day in Biden's nearly eight-month-old presidency. “The leader of our country was made to look like a fool and that can never be allowed to happen,” Trump said. He blamed “bad planning, incredible weakness and leaders who truly didn't understand what was happening”.

In the last 20 years, bin Laden has been hunted down and killed and towering new skyscraper has risen over Manhattan, replacing the Twin Towers, dubbed the “Freedom Tower”. But the effects of 9/11 rumble on. In Guantanamo Bay, accused 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and four other men continue to await trial, nine years after charges were filed.

And only last week did Biden order the release of classified documents from the FBI investigation over the next six months. World leaders sent messages of solidarity to the United States, saying the attackers had failed to destroy Western values. “They failed to drive our nations apart, or cause us to abandon our values, or to live in permanent fear,” said British leader Boris Johnson. — AFP

tested. According to Friday's ruling, Sheikh Ahmad's lawyers then engineered a complex set-up, in which he ceded the broadcast rights of the videos to Delaware firm Trekell. Trekell - a shell company controlled by the defendants, according to the court - then filed a lawsuit claiming the videos were fake.

This enabled a fictitious arbitration to be set up, the court ruled. In the arbitration case, one of the Geneva-based lawyers took on the role of arbitrator and signed a ruling stating that the videos were authentic, and received a 10,000-Swiss-franc payment in return. Sheikh Ahmad then attempted to use the Swiss court ruling as evidence that the voices heard in the recordings were those of the two former officials.

Geneva prosecutors began investigating the case back in 2015 after a criminal complaint was filed there on behalf of Sheikh Nasser and Khorafi, who died in May that year. The Khorafi family's lawyer, Catherine Hohl-Chirazi, told AFP the case had poisoned the final months of former parliament speaker's life, adding: “All this was Machiavellian”. — AFP

New Lebanon cabinet faces...

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The new government comes as Lebanon is mired in what the World Bank has described as one of the world's worst economic crises since the 1850s. The overwhelming majority of Lebanese struggle to survive amid soaring inflation, fuel and medicine shortages and almost round-the-clock power cuts. A huge swathe of the population has sunk into poverty, while thousands of the better off have left the country for new lives abroad. French-language newspaper L'Orient - Le Jour questioned the naming of “an old-school cabinet to tackle a herculean task”.

Mikati was the third person asked to try to form a new government after the previous one resigned following a massive explosion of ammonium nitrate fertilizer at Beirut port last summer that killed at least 214 people. It emerged afterwards that officials had known the highly explosive material had been

lingering unsafely on the dockside for years, but had done nothing about it.

Activists on social media slammed the new cabinet as representing the same people they hold responsible for the blast. One user described it as yet another product of “the nitrate regime, political sterility and corruption”. Lebanese political analyst Sami Nader said he doubted the new ministers' ability to lead the country forward as they had been approved by the “same cooks”. He said he feared a continuation of the same “quota politics and bickering over every reform” that had dogged the previous cabinet.

In an emotional speech on Friday, Mikati vowed to leave no stone unturned in his quest to save the Mediterranean country. But many see the business tycoon, who is reputed to be Lebanon's wealthiest man, as a product of a corrupt oligarchy. He was accused by a state prosecutor in 2019 of illicit enrichment, a charge he denies.

The new government includes some fresh faces. Among them is new health minister Firass Abiad, the head of Lebanon's largest public hospital, who rose to prominence for his role in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic. — AFP

Singh named OCA chief after Sheikh...

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has successfully appealed today's verdict”. He stepped down from the IOC in 2018 when the charges were laid.

Sheikh Ahmad, who remains the head of the Asian Handball Federation, was accused of orchestrating a fake arbitration case to legitimize suspicious video recordings he presented as evidence of corrupt practices by ex-premier HH Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and former National Assembly Speaker Jassem Al-Khorafi.

In 2013 he provided these recordings to Kuwaiti authorities that he said showed the pair plotting a coup, and conducting corrupt transactions to pocket tens of billions of dollars of public funds. The authenticity of the video recordings was con-

Taleban firmly in charge on...

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Taleban fighters have violently put down protests that broke out against their rule in Kabul and elsewhere in recent days, shooting two people dead. They also detained and brutally beat some journalists who covered the protests, before outlawing demonstrations unless permitted by the justice department. Yesterday, however, dozens of women dressed head-to-toe in black abayas and face-covering niqabs were allowed to rally in support of the Taleban. Around 300 similarly dressed women first met at a lecture hall of a Kabul university to hear speakers extol the virtues of Taleban policies.

Also yesterday, PIA said it was resuming flights to and from Kabul, but added the schedule would depend on demand. “We have got all technical clearances for flight operations,” PIA spokesman

Abdullah Hafeez Khan told AFP. “Our first commercial plane... is scheduled to fly from Islamabad to Kabul on September 13. We will make the decision about the regular commercial operations in due course after assessing the situation.”

Kabul airport was severely damaged during the evacuation of over 120,000 people, which ended with the withdrawal of US forces on Aug 30. The Taleban have been scrambling to get it operating again with Qatari technical assistance. In the last two days, Qatar Airways has operated two charter flights out of Kabul, carrying mostly foreigners and Afghans who missed being taken out during the evacuation.

Two planes from the United Arab Emirates landed yesterday carrying aid supplies including meat, powdered milk, cooking oil and other items - part of what an official described as a “humanitarian air-bridge”. An operations manager with the UAE-based GAAC - a company that has provided ground and security services for the airport since Nov 2020 — told AFP that efforts to make the facility fully functional were under way. “We have activated and resumed our operations,” said Ibrahim Moarafi. — AFP

Local

Anxiety and acclimation main attributes of post-COVID world

Return to normal with precautions eased fears, says psychologist

KUWAIT: Since around December 2019, the world has been experiencing a health crisis like no other due to COVID-19, where there was significant increase in mortality and morbidity. The pandemic has had a major effect on our lives that can be stressful and overwhelming, triggering potent, sometimes unexplainable emotions in adults and children alike. Public health measures, such as social distancing, are necessary to reduce the spread of the virus, but it also makes people feel isolated, lonely and anxious.

In this regard, Assistant Professor in Psychology Dr Wasmia Al-Abbad said that the way people adapt to these situations "reflects their ability to overcome these unusual circumstances by means that restore psychological balance." She added that with the authorities broadcasting health instructions and information about the virus, people were able to acknowledge and return to their normal lives with precautionary measures, which eased their anxiety and fear.

The impact of social distancing and other preventive steps on the lives of individuals can lead to obsessive behavior due to fear of infection, which became the drive for Badriyah Al-Hassan and Fahad Shehab to get vaccinated as soon as the shots arrived. Badriyah pointed out that during the pandemic, she relied on social media to contact and keep

in touch with her family, especially the elders, which contributed to relieving her anxiety. Most people, including Shehab, felt positive and energetic when they began to cope with the virus and return to their usual normal activities such as going back to work, shopping and family visits.

Uncertainty and acclimation

Professor of Psychology at Kuwait University Dr Hessa Al-Nasser said that mask-wearing, sanitizing, and social distancing became daily habits. However, uncertainty and acclimation became of people's daily routines, "even the way we greet each other," she noted. As His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah stated, "the world won't be the same as it was before the pandemic." In this vein, Social Planning Professor Seham Al-Qabandi advised people not to surrender to negative feelings and always find a way to live with changes happening in a positive manner.

She noted that epidemics existed a long time ago, but people have been able to live with them, regardless of individual, social and psychological consequences. COVID was, and still is, a "scary" and somehow "weird" outbreak to adapt to, as it does not only disrupt a person's physical health, but also their wellbeing as a social and interactive crea-



KUWAIT: A sign encouraging social distancing hangs from the ceiling in the corridor of a building in Kuwait. —KUNA

Find a way to live positively with changes

ture, Qabandi pointed out. Nevertheless, people managed to face this "scarecrow" of a pandemic by returning to their respective lives, one way or the other, she indicated. —KUNA

Kuwait Airways resumes flights to New York



KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways has resumed its commercial flights to and from New York starting yesterday, the airline announced, noting that flights will be operated once a week to this destination. In a press statement, Kuwait

Airways Director of the Public Relations Fayeze Al-Enezi said that this destination is in high demand from clients, especially business travelers, tourists and students. Kuwait Airways seeks to give its clients wider options to

meet their travel needs and provide them with a better service by launching new and diverse destinations, he added. Kuwait Airways has re-operated several destinations since mid-June, which are London, Sarajevo, Paris,

Geneva, Munich, Frankfurt, Trabzon, Bodrum, Thilisi, Malacca, Cairo, Amsterdam, Mumbai, Delhi, Kochi, Madras, Trivandrum, Bangalore, Ahmedabad, Islamabad, Lahore, Colombo and Dhaka. —KUNA

Man hurt in Khaitan fire; woman in Salmiya blaze

KUWAIT: Two people were hurt in fires reported in Kuwait over the weekend. In one incident, a man was wounded in a fire that took place in Khaitan yesterday. The man was left with various burn injuries across his body in the fire that started in the kitchen of a basement apartment in the six-storey building, Kuwait Fire Force said, adding that he was rushed to hospital for treatment. Firemen evacuated the building before extinguishing the flames, it said, noting that a case was filed for investigations.

Meanwhile, a woman suffered from smoke inhalation in a fire reported in a Salmiya building Friday evening. Firemen evacuated the nine-storey building before battling the flames, which had spread to two apartments. An investigation was opened to reveal the cause of the fire. Separately, firemen saved a man after his 21-foot-long boat capsized near Failaka on Friday, Kuwait Fire Force said. Firemen rushed to the scene shortly after receiving a mayday call, and they were able to pull the victim to safety in good condition, KFF noted, adding that the boat was pulled to the shore.

Kuwait executes project to help women in Gaza

GAZA: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) has funded an economic project aimed at helping

women who suffered from the Zionist aggression on the Gaza Strip. KRCS has executed a three-year project to help women who suffered economic loss due to the Zionist aggression on Palestine, Heba Adwan, chairwoman of the disabled families care society in Gaza Strip, said in a statement yesterday. She said KRCS would finance a sewing project to alleviate humanitarian and economic hardships of women. She noted the Zionist aggression destroyed thousands of houses and economic facilities in

Gaza. Adwan said the women would be trained on the use of the sewing machines and managing their project for three months, then they would be trained to manage small businesses in general. The disabled families care society was established in 2001 with the objective of contributing to finding proper education and working opportunities for this segment. The society has executed many Kuwaiti-funded projects benefiting hundreds of families in Gaza. —KUNA



Local

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News in brief

Floating restaurants approved in Kuwait

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has authorized licensing floating and marine restaurants among several new commercial activities it has recently approved. Al-Qabas Arabic daily reported yesterday. This comes in parallel with recent government moves to prepare Jaber Causeway islands for investment, it added. The new licenses would be issued through the Interior Ministry (Coastguard Department) and the Ministry of Finance, the report noted.

Request made to reopen Kuwait Zoo

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources has submitted a request to the Ministry of Health in order to reopen Kuwait Zoo, which has been closed since March 2020, and receive visitors under health precautions, Al-Anbaa Arabic daily reported yesterday.

ACK renews MoU with Aalborg University

KUWAIT: The Australian College of Kuwait (ACK) has renewed its memorandum of understanding (MoU) with its International Partner Aalborg University in order to further the cooperation between the two universities and grow the spirit of mutual understanding between them.

Representing ACK, the MoU was signed by Sager Al-Sharhan, Assistant to the President for Support Services, and Prof Isam Zabalawi, President of ACK, and on Aalborg University's behalf, Prof Anette Kolmos and Prof Henrik Peterson, Dean of Technical Faculty of IT and Design.

The MoU aims to achieve the further development of the PBL (Project Based Learning) center at ACK, the further development of the Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship at ACK, and for both universities to collaborate in the development of joint academic programs that are of mutual interest.



Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: This picture taken last week shows a traffic jam on a main road between Kaifan and Shamiya. —Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh (To have your picture featured in the Kuwait Times' 'Photo of the Day' section, please send your high resolution, unedited photos to local@kuwaittimes.com, along with the full name and Instagram account, in addition to a description showing the picture's location and date taken)

Minister hails Kuwaiti Paralympic athletes' achievements



KUWAIT: Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi is seen in a group picture with Kuwait's Paralympic athletes. —KUNA photos



Kuwaiti Paralympic athlete Ahmad Naqa



Kuwaiti Paralympic athlete Faisal Sorour



Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi speaks to reporters.

KUWAIT: Minister of Information and Culture, and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi has expressed pride for the accomplishments made by Kuwait's athletes at Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games. Speaking to reporters Thursday night after receiving the Kuwaiti delegation to the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games, the minister said that Ahmad Naqa's winning of the silver medal in 100-m race and Faisal Sorour grabbing of the bronze medal in the shot-put contest at this big global

event mirrored the brilliance of Kuwait's Paralympic athletes.

This progress was the fruit of the continued support provided by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to Kuwait's sports, he said. He noted that the government is keen on translating this backing by providing all facilitations to Kuwait's athletes, in cooperation with their federations and clubs, to help them contin-

ue excellence and creativity in all sports.

He congratulated the players and those responsible for the Kuwaiti Paralympic sports on this good achievement that made Kuwaiti people happy. Meanwhile, Naqa said he dedicated his medal to Kuwaitis, promising them to do his best to win the gold at Paris 2024 Paralympics. Sorour shared Naqa's view regarding the next preparations for the Paris games, saying he won the bronze despite bad weather conditions at that time. —KUNA



DOHA: Kuwait has participated in this year's edition of Katara International Hunting and Falcons Exhibition, held in Doha, Qatar. —KUNA photos





Afghanistan's Hazaras fear uncertain future

Unaccompanied children evacuated from Afghanistan in Qatar limbo

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SAO PAULO: Photo shows pilots in the cockpit of a Boeing 737 MAX aircraft operated by low-cost airline Gol before take off at Guarulhos International Airport. The security measures put in place in airports and airplanes after the September 11 attacks have drastically limited the risk of a terrorist breaking into the cockpit. — AFP photos

Cybersecurity: Rising risk for airlines

Computers and electronic equipment targeted

NEW YORK: After remaking their security procedures following the 9/11 attacks to stop airline hijackings, carriers are now faced with rising threats targeting computers and electronic equipment critical to their operations and safety. Since the tragedy 20 years ago on Saturday, airlines and airports have fortified cockpits, barred sharp objects in carry-on luggage and improved technology to detect explosives. "We are more secure," said Willie Walsh, director general of the International Air Transport Association.

Many of today's security risks are now viewed as targeting the networks and hardware planes and airlines rely on. From the gradual shift to electronic tickets to the management of jet fuel, even more aspects of aviation go through digital channels now than they did two decades ago. "We must stay ahead of emerging security threats," Walsh said. "To do this effectively, we need to take a more integrated approach on things like cyber risks, drones, and insider threats."

New entry points

Beyond new airline security rules mandated by governments worldwide, security experts say potential hijackers face an additional challenge: other passengers. "Because of 9/11, if you're sitting in the airplane, and someone jumps up and tries to enter the cockpit, the passengers themselves are going to fight back and prevent that from happening," said Dan Cutrer, an expert in aviation safety at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University.

However the embrace of digital technology has created new opportunities for trouble, with hackers able to penetrate systems through suppliers' software, online services or WiFi offered to passengers. Experts consider the potential for a hacker to take control of the plane itself as unlikely, since flight controls are separate from systems used by customers.

Even if plane systems "may exhibit cybersecurity weaknesses, they're not an attractive target for most actors because of the required access and expertise, plus the risk of loss of life," said Katelyn Bailey of cybersecurity company FireEye. A realm of potential vulnerability is the communication system between pilots and air traffic controllers, said Pablo Hernandez, a researcher at Innaxis Research Institute. The conversations "are open and they're not encrypted or confidential," he said. "Anyone



Airlines boost security after 9/11

with the right radio can join into this conversation."

However, key flight systems needed to run the plane and air traffic have been well secured, Hernandez said. There have been some notable hacks of ground or ancillary systems, including a 2020 data breach at British airline EasyJet that exposed the personal data of some nine million customers. There were 1,260 incidents last year against airlines and other aviation bodies, such as airports, according to Eurocontrol, an intergovernmental organization that supports European aviation.

"Every week, an aviation actor suffers a ransomware attack somewhere in the world, with big impacts on productivity and business continuity," Eurocontrol said in a note published in July. Airports use "best practices" to try to mitigate this risk. This

three of them died together. Berry has come to the Guantanamo military court regularly. The hearings are still stuck in the pretrial phase. "I want to see resolution. This event happened 20 years ago. And it had a profound effect on me, on my family and on the families of over 3,000 people," Berry said. A clinical psychologist, she likes to help other victims' relatives process the trial and the interminable delays.

"On the 20th anniversary, this was where I wanted to be because we were going back into pretrial, because I felt a sense of optimism and hope that this will actually move this thing forward." "I get frustrated," Berry said, especially because relatives of victims are dying without ever seeing a resolution to the case. "As you know, the world has moved on. And a lot of people in the United States today, especially young people, were not even born on 9/11. So it's not something that you hear a lot about in the media anymore."

Berry said she had confidence in the prosecution and a new judge in the case to get it moving forward to trial, which attorneys say could take as long as another year. Defense attorneys are trying to overturn the prosecution's case by arguing that their evidence is tainted by the extensive torture all the defendants underwent while in the custody of the CIA between 2002 and 2006. Asked about the torture issue, Berry deferred to her husband Paul Berry, a recently retired attorney. The torture issue is "only a small part" of the bigger picture, he said.



LOS ANGELES: An American Airlines Boeing 737 NG / Max takes off from the Los Angeles International Airport.

includes sending employees fictitious emails with links such as the ones devised by hackers; workers who click on them then receive additional training, said Christopher Bidwell, senior vice president at the Airports Council International, North America.

Money and espionage

The implications of cyberattacks are significant for airlines. "In the aviation industry, you can't have downtime," said Deneen DeFiore, chief information security officer at United Airlines. "Any system outage or disruption would be detrimental to any company." Most hackers are motivated by money. They

use or sell stolen credit card data or financial information and sometimes demand ransom from companies to recover their systems.

However Bailey of FireEye said that because they often target the data of passengers, some hackers may be connected to states and engaged in espionage. The airline industry benefited from the 2014 creation of an information sharing body, Aviation ISAC, focused on cybersecurity, said United's DeFiore. She considers cyberattacks an emerging risk throughout aviation that needs to be taken seriously by everyone from air safety directors to maintenance teams. — AFP

Victim's sister marks 9/11 at stalled trial in Guantanamo

GUANTANAMO BAY: A woman whose fireman brother died in the 9/11 attacks expressed frustration at the lack of a resolution in the nine-year-old trial of the perpetrators, but said she was hopeful for eventual justice. Elizabeth Berry was spending the 20th anniversary of the attacks at the US naval base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where the US military is still in the pretrial phase of prosecution of 9/11 architect Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and five others.

The hearings just resumed Tuesday after an 18 month delay due to the coronavirus. Berry told journalists Friday that she could not think of a better place to honor her brother, fire Captain Billy Burke, on the anniversary, which falls Saturday. On September 11, 2001 Burke was called to the New York World Trade Center from his side job as a lifeguard. He and his company had ascended to the 27th floor of the north tower when they heard the south tower collapse.

Burke ordered the company to evacuate. But he himself stayed behind to help a paraplegic man, and the man's friend, try to get out. The



GUANTANAMO BAY: Doctor Elizabeth Berry, and her husband Paul Berry sit during an interview with AFP in the US naval base at Guantanamo Bay. — AFP

He added that the court has given the defendants more rights and due process than any other criminal case he had seen. "The actions of this country, in how they seek information to stop further actions, is always something that's going to be debated whether it's right or wrong," Paul Berry

said, referring to the torture issue. "But we're here to have a trial of the terrorists and the terrorist act," he said. "What these terrorists did to murder our family members has to come out, and the world has to see that the government has presented it in enormous detail." — AFP

International

Third jab debate rages; Delta variant spreads

Useful protection or not warranted?

PARIS: Should a third dose of COVID vaccine be recommended for the general population? Some say it's vital to boosting immunity as the Delta variant spreads, while others say precious vaccines should go to countries—mostly in the Global South—where most people haven't even had their first jab. France was among the first countries to start distributing third jabs to the elderly and people with compromised immune systems, among others. Those eligible can get the shot six months after their second dose.

Countries who are offering the shots say the additional dose is justified because vaccines have reduced efficacy against the Delta variant that diminishes over time. Other governments have gone even further or have plans to: children in Israel who are 12 and older can get a third dose five months after full vaccination. The US plans to launch a booster shot distribution campaign for all Americans with Pfizer and Moderna shots. But the World Health Organization (WHO) has more than once expressed its opposition to such measures.

"We do not want to see widespread use of boosters for healthy people who

are fully vaccinated," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told journalists Wednesday. Speaking from WHO's headquarters in Geneva, he called on countries to avoid giving out extra COVID jabs until the end of the year, pointing to the millions worldwide who have yet to receive a single dose. "I will not stay silent when the companies and countries that control the global supply



US plans to launch a booster shot

of vaccines think the world's poor should be satisfied with leftovers," he said.

What are the benefits?

There is scientific consensus that the third dose is recommended for immunocompromised patients, including people fighting cancer or those who have

received an organ transplant. Studies show that these patients' immune systems do not produce a significant amount of antibodies when they receive the standard vaccine dosage. While there is less data to back it up, the same principle applies to the elderly whose immune systems have been rendered less efficient by ageing.

What scientists are less convinced about is the usefulness of a booster shot for young people and people in good health. The data is just not there, say some. "We aren't sure the benefits are significant," cardiologist Florian Zores said. "We could do studies or think about target populations instead of offering the third dose to everyone," he said, adding that tests could determine who might-or might not-need a booster. "That might be a bit smarter in terms of science," added the doctor, who is a member of French scientific integrity watchdog, On the Side of Science.

'Boomerang effect'

The question of unequal vaccine access raised by the WHO is not only an ethical issue but a practical one, say experts. "I am not at all convinced that



SYDNEY: A member of the local Sikh community gets his first dose of Pfizer vaccine inside a Glenwood Sikh Temple in Sydney. — AFP

rich countries ought to be giving a third dose before a large proportion of people on the planet get their first two," epidemiologist Antoine Flahault said. By allowing the virus to spread throughout a large part of the world, rich countries

expose themselves to a "particularly severe boomerang effect". "Foreign epidemics could generate new variants that could be even more contagious, virulent, and resistant to current vaccines," he said. — AFP

Compulsory jabs: Pressure mounts on anti-vaxxers

PARIS: As the United States requires companies to ensure their workers are vaccinated or tested, we look at the growing number of countries coming up with measures to pressure people into getting jabbed against COVID-19.

Compulsory

Ex-Soviet Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, along with the Vatican - the world's smallest state - are among the rare countries that have made vaccinations mandatory for all adults. The South Pacific French territory of New Caledonia has also said it will make vaccination compulsory for all its inhabitants and visitors.

United States

President Joe Biden announced strict new rules Thursday that will directly affect an estimated 80 million people. The most broad-reaching requires companies with more than 100 workers to ensure they all or vaccinated or take weekly tests. Among the US states and cities to issue their own regulations, California and New York City are demanding the same from public sector workers. San Francisco has said it will require all municipal employees to be vaccinated or they could face penalties up to and including dismissal. And children aged 12 or over who attend public schools in Los Angeles must be fully vaccinated by the start of 2022.

France

French healthcare staff, retirement home workers and others working with vulnerable people have until Wednesday to get vaccinated. The country's health pass, restricting access to places like cinemas, museums, restaurants and long distance travel to the vaccinated or those with a negative test, also piles on the pressure to be jabbed.

Greece

Health workers in both the public and private sectors have been required to be vaccinated since September 1.

Italy

Italian doctors and health workers must get vaccinated or face being banned from working directly with patients. Vaccinations will be compulsory for retirement home workers from October 10. Unvaccinated teachers, school and university staff and students must show proof of a negative test every two days.

Britain

From November 11 anyone working or volunteering in a care home will need to be fully vaccinated.

Canada

Justin Trudeau's government said in mid-August that it would require all federal workers to be vaccinated by the end of September and most commercial rail, air and ship passengers to also have shots.

Russia

Moscow has ordered mandatory jabs for anyone working in the service industry, with other cities including Saint Petersburg following suit.

Hungary

Prime Minister Viktor Orban has said vaccination will become compulsory for caregivers. — AFP

Timeline: The agonies of crisis-hit Lebanon

BEIRUT: Mired in what the World Bank calls one of the worst economic crises since the mid-19th century, Lebanon finally got a new government Friday after 13 months of deadlock. Here is a recap of the country's escalating crisis:

Dollar shortages

Protesters take to the streets of central Beirut against economic hardship on September 29, 2019. Among the worst hit are petrol station owners who need dollars to pay their suppliers. But media reports say banks and exchange offices are limiting dollar sales for fear of running out of the US currency on which the country relies.

Last straw

Mass protests follow a government announcement on October 17 of a planned tax on voice calls made over messaging services such as WhatsApp. Many see the tax as the last straw, with some demanding "the fall of the regime". The government of prime minister Saad Hariri scraps the tax the



BEIRUT: Prime Minister-designate Najib Mikati attends prayers at the Al-Omari mosque in the Lebanese capital Beirut, ahead of meeting with the Lebanese President. — AFP

same day. But protests continue over the ensuing weeks, culminating in huge demonstrations calling for the overhaul of a ruling class in place for decades and accused of systematic corruption. Hariri's government resigns in late October.

Eurobond default

Lebanon, with a \$92 billion debt burden equivalent to nearly 170 percent of its gross domestic product, announces in March 2020 that it will

default on a payment for the first time in its history. In April, after three nights of violent clashes, then-prime minister Hassan Diab says Lebanon will seek International Monetary Fund help after the government approves an economic rescue plan. But talks with the IMF quickly go off the rails.

Catastrophic explosion

A massive explosion on August 4 at Beirut port devastates entire neighborhoods of the capital, kills more than 200 people, injures at least 6,500 and leaves hundreds of thousands homeless. The government says the blast appears to have been caused by a fire that ignited tons of ammonium nitrate left unsecured in a warehouse for six years. Popular anger-kept on hold by the COVID pandemic-erupts. Top officials are investigated over the explosion, but no politicians are arrested.

Political impasse

Diab's government resigns in August after just over seven months in office. Diplomat Mustapha Adib is named new premier but bows out after less than a month, and Hariri, already prime minister three times, is named in October. Authorities announce in February 2021 that bread prices will rise by around a fifth. In June, the World Bank says Lebanon's economic collapse is likely to rank among the world's worst financial crises since the mid-19th century. — AFP

'Worried and anxious': Conflict hit Ethiopia confronts new year

ADDIS ABABA: Tesfaye Hagos usually rings in the Ethiopian New Year by buying embroidered cotton dresses for his wife and young daughters, slaughtering a goat and inviting friends around for a feast. But not this time. With war raging in the country's north and ethnic Tigrayans like himself fearing arbitrary arrest, Tesfaye plans to keep his head down during the holiday.

"The new year is coming, but it's far from my mind," he told AFP. "I'm just going to stay at home and pray for peace." Africa's second most populous country adheres to a unique 13-month calendar that begins in September and runs seven to eight years behind the Gregorian version. Saturday marked the first day of 2014 for Ethiopians.

The celebrations are usually merry, with families singing and dancing as small children gather bouquets of the bright yellow daisies that bloom every year. But this year's festivities have been dampened by the conflict - particularly

for ethnic Tigrayans - and related economic woes, notably inflation that exceeded 30 percent last month for food. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed is trying to rally the country, with a five-day social media campaign in the run-up to the holiday highlighting such themes as heroism and victory.

"Those who challenge Ethiopia are those who don't know Ethiopia," he said Friday in his New Year message, adding that the country "has never been defeated". US President Joe Biden voiced hope Friday that Ethiopians can negotiate a ceasefire to end the growing bloodshed. "We believe Ethiopia, a great and diverse nation, can overcome its current divisions and resolve the ongoing conflict, beginning with a negotiated ceasefire," Biden said in a statement.

But for Tigrayans like Tesfaye, the life they knew was upended in November, when the acrimonious relationship between Abiy and the Tigray People's Liberation Front, the regional rulers of Tigray, erupted into



ADDIS ABABA: A man holds a live chicken in the Shola district during the preparations for the Ethiopian New Year in Addis Ababa. — AFP

violence. Many thousands have lost their lives in a conflict marked by brutal massacres and mass rapes, and some 400,000 people face famine-like conditions, with a "de-facto aid blockade" choking humanitarian access, according to the UN.

In the capital Addis Ababa, meanwhile, Tesfaye has been fired from his job at a government office after more

than a decade of service, with a dismissal letter accusing him of giving money to the TPLF. He now says he avoids speaking in the Tigrinya language and has deleted Tigrinya songs from his phone in a bid to evade a campaign of mass arrests that rights groups say has swept up hundreds of Tigrayans - and possibly many more - in recent weeks. — AFP

4 separatists sentenced to die in troubled Cameroon

YAOUNDE: Four suspected separatists in Cameroon's troubled anglophone region have been sentenced to death over the killing of seven schoolchildren, the defense ministry announced on Friday. A military court on Tuesday sentenced the four to "execution in public by firing squad," it said in a statement to AFP. The seven children, aged between nine and 12, were killed in October last year when armed men opened fire on their school in Kumba in the Southwest Region—one of two western regions gripped by a long-running breakaway campaign.

The four defendants were sentenced by a military tribunal in the regional capital of Buea for "acts of terrorism, hostility towards the motherland, insurrection and murder," the ministry said. "This

judgment isn't just," said Daniel Ikose Etongwe, a lawyer for the accused who said they would appeal. "There was not enough evidence to render such a verdict and the rules of criminal procedure were violated," the lawyer added.

Western Cameroon is in the grip of a four-year old conflict triggered by militants demanding independence for two predominantly English-speaking regions in the francophone-majority state. More than 3,500 people have been killed and over 700,000 have fled their homes. Rights groups say abuses have been committed by both separatists and the armed forces. Several death sentences have been issued against separatists in past years, although no execution has been carried out in Cameroon for more than two decades. The defendants have 10 days in which to appeal, the ministry said. Their lawyers could not be immediately reached by AFP.

WWI legacy

The presence of the anglophone regions in Cameroon derives from the colonial era. The former

German possession of Cameroon was partitioned after World War I between Britain and France. In 1961, part of the British territory, the Southern Cameroons, joined Cameroon after it gained independence from France.

Anglophones have repeatedly complained about perceived discrimination at the hands of the francophone majority, especially in education and law. Demands for reform and local autonomy were rejected by Cameroon's veteran president, Paul Biya, culminating in the separatists' declaration of independence on October 1 2017.

Their self-declared entity, Ambazonia, is not recognized internationally. In addition to attacking troops and police, separatists in the two English-speaking regions have targeted buildings deemed to be a symbol of the francophone state. These include schools, and some of the fatalities have been teachers, although the attack in Kumbamarked the first time that students had died. The assault targeted a dual-language school, the Mother Francisca International Bilingual Academy. — AFP

International

Veiled protest: Afghan women rally in support of the Taliban

Women express support for Islamists' policies

KABUL: Afghan women wearing full face veils sat in rows at a Kabul university lecture theatre yesterday, pledging commitment to the Taliban's hardline policies on gender segregation. About 300 women - covered head-to-toe in accordance with strict new dress policies for education - waved Taliban flags as speakers railed against the West and expressed support for the Islamists' policies.

A handful wore blue burqas, which have only a small mesh window to see from, but most wore black niqabs covering most of the face apart from the eyes. Many also wore black gloves. Women's rights in Afghanistan were sharply curtailed under the Taliban's 1996-2001 rule, but since returning to power last month they have claimed they will implement a less extreme rule. This time, women will be allowed to attend university as long as classes are segregated by sex or at least divided by a curtain, the Taliban's education authority has said. They must also wear an abaya robe and niqab.



at the education ministry, said the protest was organized by the women, who had asked and been granted permission to demonstrate.

'Not freedom'

"We are against those women who are protesting on the streets, claiming they are representative of women," said the first speaker, covered head to toe. "Is it freedom to like the last government? No, it is not freedom. The last government were misusing women. They were recruiting women just by their beauty," she claimed. Some in the audience held babies, who occasionally cried during the speeches, while others were young girls clearly too young for university. A student named Shabana Omari told the crowd she agreed with the Taliban's policy that women should cover their heads.

"Those not wearing the hijab are harming all of us," she said, referring to the headscarves worn by many Muslim women. "The hijab is not an individual thing." Omari concluded her speech by leading a chorus of "Allahu Akbar", or "God is greatest". Another speaker, Somaiya, said history had changed since the Taliban came back. "After this we will not see 'bihijabi' (people not wearing headscarves)," she said. "Women will be safe after this. We are supporting our government with all our strength."

After the speeches in the meeting hall, the women walked in organized lines a short distance on the street outside, holding printed banners and flanked by Taliban soldiers carrying rifles and



KABUL: Veiled students hold Taliban flags as they listen to a speaker before a pro-Taliban rally at the Shaheed Rabbani Education University in Kabul yesterday. —AFP

Protesters defend new government

Permitted Pro-Taliban protest

The women, who organizers said were students, listened to a series of speeches at Shaheed Rabbani Education University in the capital, Kabul. Large Taliban flags flanked the podium, as the female speakers criticized women who have protested across Afghanistan in recent days. They also defended the new government of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, which has banned demonstrations unless permission is granted by the justice ministry. Daud Haqqani, director of foreign relations

machine guns. The public demonstration was in stark contrast with scenes in Kabul and elsewhere earlier in the week, when Taliban fighters fired into the air to disperse a number of protests against their rule, shooting two people dead.

"Women who left Afghanistan cannot represent us," one pro-Taliban banner on Saturday read. "We are satisfied with attitude and behaviour of

Mujahideens (Taliban)" read another. The Taliban say they want 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, but few details have yet been given as to what that exactly might mean.—AFP

Afghanistan's Hazaras fear uncertain future

KABUL: Hundreds of Hazara worshippers overflowed from a mosque on the outskirts of the Afghan capital on Friday, touching their foreheads to the ground as they took part in the most important prayer of the week. Long persecuted by both the Taliban and Islamic State for their Shiite faith, members of the ethnic minority group say they feel less threatened since the Taliban seized power on August 15. "Previously, during Friday prayers we'd be afraid of attacks from terrorist groups, especially IS," Mahdi Hassanzadah said. "For now the threat is reduced."

But after holding top positions in previous US-backed governments, they fear the future consequences of being shut out of the Taliban's new acting administration - made up of hardline militants of the group's old guard. "It is largely made up of a single ethnicity," Hassanzadah said, referring to the Pashtuns who dominate the Taliban and are Afghanistan's biggest group. "We don't see any participation of the Hazaras, which is a huge concern," he said.

Morocco's king names Akhannouch to head government

RABAT: Morocco's King Mohammed VI on Friday named businessman Aziz Akhannouch to lead a new government after his National Rally of Independents (RNI) thrashed the long-ruling Islamists in parliamentary elections. The king appointed Akhannouch "head of the government and tasked him with forming a new government", following Wednesday's polls, a statement from the palace said.

The RNI won 102 of parliament's 395 seats, trouncing the moderate Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD), which had headed the

Unaccompanied Afghan refugee kids in limbo

DOHA: The daily life of unaccompanied Afghan refugee children in Qatar is punctuated by recurring questions, "where are we going?" and "can I have some chips". About 200 uprooted young Afghans arrived in Doha aboard flights from Kabul in recent weeks and are being hosted at a reception centre, where they grapple with the trauma of their ordeal.

They are now being cared for by Qatar Charity, a humanitarian organization that has sought to protect and keep them out of the reach of people traffickers. Officials are picking a path for the future of the children who have adopted new routines, playing football, exercising and enjoying arts and crafts. "It's very hard to imagine the trauma that they've been through," said an aid worker based in the Middle East who declined to be named. "All of them are in a state of shock and trauma, similar to what we've seen in places like Iraq or Syria with kids who have lived in (Islamic State group) areas."

The Taliban's shock takeover rekindled fears among Afghanistan's people of a return to the hardline rule

'Anxiety and worry'

The Hazara make up the bulk of the country's Shiite minority, and it is feared the Taliban - hardliners from the Sunni branch of Islam - may again turn on them, just as they did during their last regime in the late 1990s. They have suffered some of Afghanistan's most violent assaults, with rallies bombed, hospitals targeted and commuters ambushed. In May, Islamic State suicide bombers targeted a school just 1.6 kilometers away from the mosque, killing more than 80 girl students.

In the Hazara neighborhood, there were visibly fewer Taliban fighters on the streets and manning checkpoints, AFP journalists saw. But like many others in the capital, taking home a salary was their most pressing concern, as food prices soar. "The people who used to work for the government have all become unemployed. There's a lot of anxiety and worry," worshipper Suleiman told AFP outside the mosque. "It's not like the Taliban are killing us, but it is better to die than to live suffocated like this."

Many government services are no longer functioning, while the international community, which has long propped up the aid-dependent economy, hesitates over funding Afghanistan. "We haven't seen anything bad from the Taliban but there is no work for people, what are we supposed to do about our hunger?" Suleiman said. Comprising between 10 and 20 percent of the country's 38 million people, Hazaras have been marginalized for

governing coalition for a decade but took just 13 seats, according to results released by the interior ministry. Akhannouch hailed the results as "a victory for democracy". The billionaire businessman - worth \$2 billion according to Forbes - has led the RNI since 2016.

His party is considered close to the palace and has been part of all coalition governments for the past 23 years, except during a brief period between 2012 and 2013. Following his win, Akhannouch pledged to improve conditions for citizens of Morocco, where entrenched social inequalities have been exacerbated by the pandemic. "The main commitment of the party is to work seriously as long as we enjoy the confidence of citizens, to improve their daily lives, to achieve their aspirations and regain confidence in their representatives," he said.

The economy shrank by 7.1 percent in 2020 and the poverty rate shot up to 11.7 percent dur-

ing the lockdown, the Moroccan statistics institute said in April. A recent overhaul of the elections laws meant it was the first time Morocco's 18 million voters cast ballots in both parliamentary and local elections on the same day, an effort to boost turnout. Around 50.35 percent of eligible voters participated, according to the interior minister, higher than the 43 percent in the 2016 legislative polls. Akhannouch's party also came first in the local elections, winning 9,995 of the 31,503 seats, and the regional poll with 196 of the 678 positions. Akhannouch said he was ready to begin negotiations to form his coalition government. "The most important thing is to have a coherent and united majority," he said in a televised address Friday evening. Under Morocco's constitutional monarchy, the new administration must be submitted for approval by the king, who reserves veto rights.—AFP

between 1996 and 2001 which was marked by public executions, floggings and amputations for misdemeanours. Many fled, including the youngsters, some of whom cannot recall the circumstances of their abrupt departure from their homeland, while others give contradictory accounts of how they came to be in Qatar. According to the UN children's agency UNICEF, around 300 unaccompanied children were evacuated from Afghanistan to Qatar, Germany and other countries after August 14.

Questions are swirling about how they came to be at Kabul's airport and then embark on planes bound for Qatar, and drastically different lives, but answers are in short supply. The US Embassy in Doha did not comment on the specifics of the children's case. A French police officer who was present at the Kabul airport gates described seeing a woman "desperately throw her baby into the barbed wire towards the French special forces who recovered and handed the child to American medics".

"The baby was treated and evacuated to Doha. He was really tiny. His mother just disappeared into the crowd," he added. The officer witnessed other dramatic scenes. "One man arrived at the gate with three young children who he passed off as his own. They were orphans, he probably used them to get the gate open, but they were also evacuated. "Stories like that highlight the chaos. They'll be part



KABUL: Members of the Hazara community offer prayer outside a mosque on the outskirts of Kabul. —AFP

their faith in a country riven by deep divisions.

By some estimates, nearly half of their population was massacred in the late 19th century, with many later enslaved during the conquest of their traditional homeland by Pashtuns. After leading the prayers, Imam Abdul Qadir Alemi told AFP inside the mosque he still hoped the Taliban's acting government would later become representative of the people in the country. "There is no doubt that the people of Afghanistan want an inclusive government in which all ethnicities, followers of all faiths and different segments of society are represented."—AFP

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DOHA: An undated handout picture shows an unaccompanied Afghan boy evacuated from Kabul playing football in Doha, Qatar. —AFP

of the history of this fiasco."

Qatar Charity and other agencies are now taking care of the group who are mostly aged between eight and 17 years old, with the youngest housed at a separate facility. In Doha, children were settled at accommodations, to which AFP was not granted access, and grouped by age or family group if they arrived together. As far as possible they were also grouped according to the friendships and bonds forged during their respective journeys.—AFP

News in brief

Togo shuts churches, mosques

LOME: Togo's government has ordered all places of worship to shut down for one month starting on Friday, following a "worrying upsurge" in coronavirus cases in recent weeks. The West African nation of about eight million people has recorded just over 23,000 cases and 203 deaths but the true tally could be higher given low testing rates. "The number of deaths keeps increasing," Didier Koumavi Ekouevi, president of the country's scientific council said on Wednesday. "In June, we had four deaths, in July 22 and in August 33. We are recording four times more patients." From Friday, weddings and funerals are banned, as well as cultural, sporting and political events, the government said. Outside the Sacred Heart Cathedral in the capital Lome, Delphine Oudjor said she was against the closure of churches. —AFP

Yacht seized off UK coast

LONDON: UK authorities have seized over 2 tons of cocaine in a raid on a luxury yacht off the coast of southern England, the National Crime Agency said yesterday. British authorities said they arrested six people on Thursday evening after discovering the drugs with an estimated street value of £160 million (\$221 million) on a Jamaican-flagged yacht sailing from the Caribbean. One British man was arrested on suspicion of drug trafficking along with five Nicaraguans. The NCA released photographs of the drugs stored in black waterproof bags in the lounge of the docked Kabu yacht. "There's no doubt these drugs would have been sold on into communities across the UK," said NCA deputy director Matt Horne. The seizure "will smash a hole in the OCG's (organized criminal gang's) plans and ability to operate," he said.—AFP

5 die as army copter crash

ABIDJAN: Five people died when an army helicopter crashed in northern Ivory Coast, officials said on Friday. The crash, which took place overnight Thursday to Friday, involved a Mi-24 helicopter, the army said. The helicopter had been on a "reconnaissance mission on the northern border" with Burkina Faso, near Togolokaye, a statement said, adding that all five on board had died. The cause of the accident was not yet known and an investigation was launched. The army in northern Ivory Coast has faced several attacks by suspected jihadists, especially on the border with Burkina Faso. Last June, two soldiers and a gendarme died in the Togolokaye region, after having run over an explosive device. Fourteen soldiers were killed in June 2020 in an attack at Kafolo and in the same locality, three other soldiers were killed last March.—AFP

Tornado kills two in Sicily

ROME: A tornado hit the Sicilian island of Pantelleria on Friday, killing two people and seriously injuring four others, the civil protection agency said. The whirlwind "hit and overturned six cars", the agency said in a post on Facebook, with photographs showing one vehicle thrown against a house and another lying battered in a field. It said an off-duty fireman was among the dead on the tiny volcanic outcrop, a tourist hotspot which lies closer to North Africa than Italy. The wind ripped down a coastal road in seconds, according to media reports. "It was an apocalyptic sight," an unnamed paramedic at the scene told ANSA news agency. A hospital helicopter from nearby Lampedusa island was ready to provide assistance once the weather improved, it said.—AFP

Business

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2021

Apple takes app payment hit in Epic court fight

SAN FRANCISCO: A US judge on Friday ordered Apple to loosen control over its App Store payment system, a blow to the global tech giant sparked by its anti-trust battle with Fortnite maker Epic Games.

In a ruling with significant potential to alter the digital economy, Apple will no longer be allowed to force developers to use its tightly-controlled sales tool. It's a change loudly demanded by app producers because of the up to 30 percent commission on purchases, however the judge also ruled that Epic had not proved its claim of illegal monopoly—which prompted a sigh of relief from Apple.

Lawsuits, rules and probes have piled up for the iPhone maker, but it was noncommittal about challenging the ruling and instead lauded the anti-trust portion by saying: "We consider this a huge win for Apple." Epic for its part branded the judgment as essentially a loss for app developers who rely on the App Store in the multi-billion-dollar mobile gaming industry, and for consumers.

"We will fight on," Epic CEO Tim Sweeney tweeted, and a company spokesperson later confirmed they would appeal. Friday's order says Apple is permanently barred from prohibiting developers from

including in their apps "external links or other calls to action that direct customers to purchasing mechanisms." "Apple enjoys considerable market share of over 55 percent and extraordinarily high profit margins... (but) Success is not illegal," California federal Judge Yvonne Gonzalez Rogers wrote.

"Epic Games failed in its burden to demonstrate Apple is an illegal monopolist," she added. The decision noted that Apple violated California's laws against unfair competition, however.

The two firms clashed in a lawsuit over whether Apple has the right to set ground rules, control payment systems and kick out apps from its marketplace that fail to comply. Also at stake was Apple's slice of revenue from iPhone apps of as much as 30 percent. Apple booted Fortnite from its online mobile marketplace after Epic released an update that dodged revenue sharing with the iPhone maker.

A win for Apple?

However, even before Friday's decision Apple started to cede ground on its App Store dominance, including in an agreement with Japanese regulators. It also faces the legislation adopted by South

Korean lawmakers, which banned Apple and Google from forcing app developers to use the tech giants' payment systems.

Analyst Carolina Milanesi noted the anti-trust aspect of the case was what really had Apple's attention, with a ruling against it potentially opening the doors for challenges from lawmakers and prosecutors. "For me, it is a win for Apple in that the judge clearly said they are not engaging in monopolistic behavior," she told AFP. "I don't think it is a problem for Apple from a revenue perspective."

Some US lawmakers also noted the anti-trust aspect of the case could not be ignored, noting courts have not tackled the issue. "Congress must enact rules of the road to ensure free and fair competition online," said the joint statement from representatives Jerrold Nadler and David Cicilline.

"It is clear that courts continue to narrowly interpret the antitrust laws in favor of monopolies and against consumers, workers, and small businesses," they added. Apple opened its App Store in July 2008, a year after the release of the first iPhone. The shop, stocked with mobile apps tailored for devices powered by iOS mobile software, was



This file illustration photo shows the Apple app store logo reflected from an iPhone onto the back of an iMac in Los Angeles. —AFP

quickly imitated by rival smartphone makers.

It ignited an entire economy where developers big or small could make money with "an app for that," from games or social networking to summoning car rides or ordering food.

The App Store—the lone gateway onto the more than one billion iPhones in use around the world—has grown to include more than 1.8 million apps. —AFP

Cash is king in Venezuela real estate market

CARACAS: Gustavo Martinez has a stable job as an engineer at an oil company in Caracas, but he can only dream of buying an apartment because Venezuela's inflation, the highest in the world, has crippled real estate financing. With banks not offering loans, would-be homeowners are expected to pay for property in a single or handful of installments, using wire transfers, checks and even briefcases full of US dollars.

The national currency, the bolivar, has lost 73 percent of its value to the dollar so far this year, and a single US dollar now costs 4 million bolivars. The greenback, though not official currency, is widely used to pay for goods and services across Venezuela and it is the only accepted means of payment in real estate transactions.

But in a country with a minimum public service wage of just \$2 per month, Venezuelans often cannot afford even to rent and many young adults, including couples, end up living with their parents much longer than they had planned. Venezuela's eye-watering inflation, hovering around 3,000 percent, means that banks are loath to risk giving out loans in bolivars. In the rare event they do, the repayment period is generally under six months.

There are no credit cards either. And in January, the government said banks could give out loans in dollars only with the permission of the Central Bank, making it a near-impossibility.

'No job pays you that'

As a result, Venezuelan banks have given out only \$140 million in loans to a population of some 30 million, compared to \$14 billion in loans in neighboring Colombia, which has some 50 million people.

Of the total loan amount, only \$840,000 or 0.6 percent, were mortgage loans, based on official figures released in March. Economist Cesar Aristimuno told AFP this was a sharp drop from 7.2 percent in 2014, before a global crash in oil prices tanked Venezuela's economy, heavily dependent on crude exports. Martinez, the oil company engineer in Caracas, is luckier than most. After moving to the capital in January, he lived with his grandmother for a while but is now renting an apartment with his girlfriend. Martinez, 30, did not want to reveal how much he earns, but he said it is more than the average Venezuelan salary of \$50 a month. Apartment rents in a modest suburb of the capital start from \$150, according to realtor Carolina Quintero.

"An apartment costs about \$50,000 dollars. No job pays you that," Martinez told AFP. "Much less will you be able to pay it in a single instalment." The figure he mentioned can buy a flat of about 800 square feet (74 square meters) in a middle-income neighborhood in



CARACAS: Apartment buildings are reflected in the windows of another one in the middle class neighborhood of Los Palos Grandes in Caracas. —AFP

Caracas. There are no public figures on how many Venezuelans live at home into their 30s or 40s, but it is a widely-observed phenomenon.

'Something of my own'

While buying a home remains a distant dream for most Venezuelans, the country's eager, though informal, adoption of the dollar as a shield against inflation has given the real estate sector at least a bit of a boost over the past two years. "In 2019 we grew five percent and we hope to close with more than 20 percent in 2021," says Francisco Lopez, president of the Real Estate Chamber of Venezuela.

Most transactions, explained Quintero, are conducted via transfers from foreign banks, though buyers may be required to provide a

deposit of up to 20 percent in cash. A growing number of properties are being bought and sold on social media by agents who provide their own down payment options, such as requiring an initial investment of a third of the purchase price, with 11 months to pay the rest.

And of course there are the loan sharks, charging 15 percent per month in interest and demanding guarantees that can triple the amount of the loan to be paid back.

Martinez still hopes to buy "something of my own" one day, and he told AFP he was dabbling in small-scale investments as a way of saving some money. "It would have been great if there was a system of loans in dollars so that people who can afford the down payments can get credit," he said. —AFP

Russia says divisive Nord Stream 2 pipeline complete

MOSCOW: Russia announced Friday the completion of the controversial Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline to Germany, a project that has raised US concerns, divided Europe and angered EU ally Ukraine.

Nord Stream 2 is expected to double natural gas supplies from Russia to Germany, but it has raised tensions between the European Union and Washington. Critics say the pipeline will increase Europe's dependence on Russian gas and bypass Ukraine. The head of the Gazprom energy giant, Alexei Miller, announced Friday that construction was "fully completed." A key controversy is that the pipeline diverts supplies from an existing route through Ukraine and is expected to deprive the EU's partner of crucial transit fees from Russia.

Ukraine-in conflict with Russia since Moscow's 2014 annexation of Crimea—has warned Europe that the pipeline could be used by Moscow as "a dangerous geopolitical weapon." "Ukraine will fight this political project, before and after its completion and even after the gas is turned on," Sergiy Nykyforov, the spokesman of Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky, told AFP. A US State Department spokeswoman, Jalina Porter, said Washington would "continue to oppose this pipeline as a Russian geopolitical project that's a bad deal for Europe."

But Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said critics should end efforts to block the project and instead agree "mutually beneficial terms" for its operation.

"It is clear to everyone, including critics of Nord Stream 2 and those who desperately opposed its construction, that it cannot be stopped," she said. Kremlin

spokesman Dmitry Peskov called for the project to be launched "as soon as possible" and said that "everyone" would benefit from it.

German government spokesman Steffen Seibert said that Nord Stream 2 had submitted a relevant application to the Federal Network Agency in order to begin operations.

Running from Russia's Baltic coast to northeastern Germany, the underwater, 1,200-kilometre (745-mile) pipeline follows the same route as Nord Stream 1, which was completed over a decade ago.

Like its predecessor, Nord Stream 2 will be able to pipe 55 billion cubic metres of gas per year to Europe, increasing the continent's access to relatively cheap natural gas at a time of falling domestic production.

'Victory for Russia'

"It's a victory for Russia, especially taking into account the huge opposition the project has faced, from the US but also from European countries," Dmitry Marinchenko, a Fitch analyst, told AFP. Besides Ukraine, countries such as Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland risk losing transit fees because of the pipeline, he added.

Gazprom has a majority stake in the 10-billion-euro (\$12-billion) project. Germany's Uniper and Wintershall, France's Engie, the Anglo-Dutch firm Shell and Austria's OMV are also involved.

Former German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder serves as chairman of the Nord Stream's shareholders committee. Russia and Germany insist Nord Stream 2 is a commercial project, but analysts disagree about its economic benefits.

A 2018 report by German think-tank DIW said it was unnecessary and undertaken based on forecasts that "significantly overestimate" demand in Germany and Europe.

Germany, Europe's top economy, imports around 40 percent of its gas from Russia, and Berlin believes the pipeline has a role to play in the country's transition away from coal and nuclear energy.



This undated handout picture taken in September 2021 and provided by Nord Stream 2 AG, shows specialists on the lay-barge Fortuna performing an above water tie-in during the final stage of Nord Stream 2 pipeline construction in the Baltic Sea. —AFP

US olive branch

US sanctions on Russian vessels laying the pipeline succeeded in delaying Nord Stream 2, angering Germany. But President Joe Biden, eager to rebuild transatlantic ties that were badly strained by his predecessor Donald Trump, waived sanctions in May on the Russian-controlled company behind the project. Analysts saw the move as an olive branch to Berlin, whose support Washington is counting on in the face of other challenges, including a rising China. Zelensky has said the sanctions waiver is a win for Russian President Vladimir Putin. Reaffirming support for Ukraine, Biden hosted Zelensky at the White House in September.

After the meeting, Zelensky said Biden had assured him Washington would impose sanctions on the pipeline if there were "violations" from Russia that would create problems for Ukraine's energy security. Critics of Washington's opposition to the pipeline point out that the US also wants to boost sales of liquefied natural gas (LNG) to Europe. —AFP

What's the impact of Apple app store court ruling?

SAN FRANCISCO: Apple was forced to loosen the grip it holds on its App Store payment system, after US judge ruled Friday in a closely watched battle with Fortnite maker Epic Games.

Though app makers will be able to take steps to skirt the up to 30 percent commission Apple takes on sales, the tech giant avoided being branded an illegal monopoly in the case.

Here are some key questions on the App Store and the impact of the ruling:

How does the App Store work?

The App Store acts as the lone gateway for mobile applications of any kind onto iPhones or other Apple devices. Apple requires developers to adhere to its rules for what apps can or can't do, and makes them use the App Store payment system for all transactions there.

Apple takes a commission of up to 30 percent of app purchases or transactions, contending it is a fair fee for providing a safe, global platform for developers to hawk their creations. Apple maintains that 85 percent of the approximately 1.8 million apps at the digital shop pay nothing to the Silicon Valley based tech giant.

What was the ruling?

The ruling by US District Court Judge Yvonne Gonzalez-Rogers said that Apple's control of the App Store did not amount to a monopoly, but that it must let developers include links to other online venues for buying content or services. App makers will be able to provide links that users can click on to take them to another website to buy content or otherwise interact.

Apple can still require its payment system be used for in-app purchases, meaning it should still get its share of transactions such as buying virtual gear in a game or a subscription.

Gonzalez Rogers wrote that Apple violated California's laws against unfair competition but that it was not "an anti-trust monopolist... for mobile gaming transactions."

Big change?

The biggest change lovers of Apple mobile gadgets might notice is that apps should start showcasing links enticing them to leave the App Store to spend money. Apple representatives called the ruling a validation of the App Store business model. The judge did not order Apple to let Fortnite back in the App Store, and studio's CEO Tim Sweeney tweeted the game would only return "when and where Epic can offer in-app payment in fair competition with Apple."

Bite out of Apple's revenue?

It will be difficult to estimate what sort of bite the ruling will take from the company's income. Most of the offerings at the App Store are created by small developers who haven't built their own payment systems the way Epic Games runs its own online shop, noted analyst Carolina Milanesi.

Small developers likely see benefits to using Apple's payment system and provided perks, such as promoting apps or handling refunds, the analyst reasoned. App users might also feel more comfortable trusting transactions on Apple's platform rather than entering credit card or other information in on third-party websites. "How many developers can do something else when it comes to payment systems and how many customers are interested in using something else?" Milanesi asked.

"I don't think this ruling is a problem for Apple from a revenue perspective."

And, Apple may be planning to more than offset any lost revenue with its own advertising business, according to the analyst. —AFP

Business

Kuwait's economic recovery may falter if it continues to rely heavily on oil: Report

COVID-19 negatively impacted country's GDP growth and oil prices

KUWAIT: The COVID-19 pandemic has had major economic impacts on the Middle East region and demonstrated the growing need to diversify the region's oil-based economies. International Monetary Fund GDP data illustrates the severity of the situation within the region, as major oil-exporting countries have experienced severe declines in GDP.

The intertwined effects of falling oil demand and falling prices with rising oil inventories have caused a disaster for countries that depend on selling oil to finance the majority of government expenditures. The coronavirus pandemic led to a significant decrease in Brent crude prices, reaching the lowest level of \$23 in April

experienced a decline in GDP. Compared to its Gulf neighbors, the forecast for GDP growth places Kuwait as the fifth worst drop for 2020.

Financial deficit

The rapid drop in oil prices have put Kuwait and its Gulf partners in precarious fiscal positions. Last fall, Moody's downgraded Kuwait's bond rating to A1 from Aa2, and more recent changes have caused Standard & Poor's (S&P) to cut Kuwait's credit rating from AA- to A+, saying that the government "has yet to put in place a comprehensive funding strategy for these deficits." The crisis continued until Kuwait's government deficit reached nearly a third of



GT Georgia Institute of Technology

than \$70 as of June 2021. As the economic effects of the Corona epidemic recede over time, the countries of the Middle East will remain at risk, and their economic problems will not subside in the short-term without

Al-Anjeri raises questions about future of Kuwait

Abdulaziz Al-Anjeri, Founder and CEO of Reconnaissance Research, said that during the discussion of the axes of this brief study with the specialized research team, several questions about the future of Kuwait surfaced, which he thought to share with the readers, namely:

1. How will structural and economic stability be ensured?
2. What is the probability that Kuwait will lose the wealth of future generations?
3. Is Kuwait immune to the possibility of a major political conflict resulting from financial mismanagement?
4. How will Kuwait act if the Kuwaiti bonds rating continues to decline, and what is the impact of this on its ability to borrow and finance its debts?
5. If renewable energy is the future, what is the way forward for a country like Kuwait?

"I do not think that there are those who disagree that the above questions are logical and need clear and honest answers," he said. He continued, "The research team was shocked when they were unable to obtain official Kuwaiti governmental public sources that addressed those matters in either an interview, an article or a general meeting for these important questions!"

"In light of the available facts and figures within local and international special analyzes on the reality of Kuwait's economic future, I do not hide my deep concern about the continued absence of transparency among government leaders, their lack of clarity of vision, and the apparent lack of coordination between them due to the many conflicting statements published in the press releases to the public. Their vocal presence to the people is overcome by emotional reassurances and recycling plans and promises without implementation and follow-up. As if the goal is only to seek to buy more time."

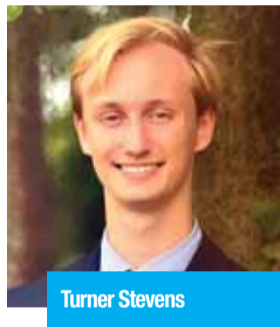
Note: Reconnaissance Research prepared this brief report on the impact of the Corona epidemic on the economies of the Middle East region in general, and Kuwait in particular. This report was prepared by Dr. Matthew Oliver, a professor at the Georgia Institute of Technology, and Turner Stevens, an economics student and non-resident researcher at Reconnaissance Research.



Dr. Matthew Oliver



Abdulaziz Al-Anjeri



Turner Stevens

2020 according to the IMF Primary Commodity Price System. After a brief price war between Saudi Arabia and Russia and subsequent negotiations in April 2020, OPEC+ agreed to production cuts of approximately 23 percent of total production levels.

While the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) has been relatively successful in minimizing some of the financial effects on the region by reducing production in recent negotiations, many Middle Eastern economies have had to expand spending to bridge the deficit and deplete reserves to maintain stability.

Impact of the coronavirus in Kuwait

Kuwait's short-term economic outlook prior to the coronavirus pandemic had already been lackluster, with economic growth gradually declining since 2014. Economic growth in Kuwait reached only 0.4 percent in 2019, and the political conditions following the passing of HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in 2020 brought on more pressure to address steep government deficits.

Interestingly, the negative economic impact of Kuwait was very similar to other (non-oil-exporting) countries, which expe-

rienced a decline in GDP. Compared to its Gulf neighbors, the forecast for GDP growth places Kuwait as the fifth worst drop for 2020. In addition, Standard & Poor's expects Kuwait's deficit to average 17 percent of GDP during 2021. For Kuwait to meet budget expectations, prices must rise Brent crude to at least \$90 a barrel. Oil prices are expected to remain below \$50 a barrel through 2022, and mounting liquidity problems have put stress on the funds many of these countries rely on to mitigate fiscal shocks.

The need for diversification

The Oxford Economics Middle East Report estimates that Kuwait's 2021 GDP growth is 2.5 percent, driven by expansion in the non-oil sector. However, the Kuwaiti economy's heavy dependence on the oil sector means that the economic recovery will falter until the OPEC+ production cuts end later in 2022 and Brent crude prices rise to pre-pandemic levels.

The shock of falling oil prices and the closure of economic activities have weakened the diversification efforts that Kuwait and many other oil-based economies are trying to achieve. In addition, the slow deployment of vaccines in Kuwait compared to its neighbors continues to hinder the reopening of its economy.

Many of the problems with Kuwait and

its GCC neighbors' efforts to expand into non-oil sector expansion stem from the reliance of private sector activity on government contracts and subsidies from the oil and gas sector. The private sector does not depend at all on exports, and the government has not succeeded in attracting foreign capital to bring it attractive revenues.

For economic diversification programs to succeed, oil-exporting countries such as Kuwait must focus on producing goods and services that do not depend on the sale of oil and petroleum derivatives. Unfortunately for Kuwait, this challenge was a nearly impossible task even before the pandemic, and it is now more difficult than it used to be, with hydrocarbon production accounting for 90 percent of total exports in Kuwait and Qatar, more than 80 percent of total exports in Saudi Arabia and the Sultanate of Oman, and more than 50 percent of total exports in the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, according to the United Nations Merchandise Trade Statistics database.

OPEC+ negotiations

Prior to the pandemic, global oil demand had fallen from 100 million barrels per day in the fourth quarter of 2019 to 83 million barrels per day in the second quarter of 2020. Combined with the failed OPEC+ negotiations in March 2020 between Russia and Saudi Arabia, the decline in travel and movement due to the epidemic, and a large glut in global oil supplies, the price of Brent crude dropped to less than \$30 a barrel.

After global shutdowns in March and April 2020, West Texas Intermediate (the US crude oil benchmark) turned negative for the first time in history as suppliers reached maximum storage capacity in the absence of demand. After OPEC production cuts were later agreed to by about 10 million barrels per day, oil prices remained nearly 30 percent below pre-pandemic levels.

With the global economy gradually reopening, oil prices returned faster than expected, with Brent crude reaching more

proper fiscal and monetary measures. The way they conduct their fiscal and monetary policy operations will be critical as the global economy reopens.

During the pandemic, countries in the Middle East underwent major changes in fiscal and monetary policy to adapt to the decline in economic output. Several GCC countries have provided liquidity support to maintain credit flows, and central banks in these countries have cut interest rates by an average of nearly 140 basis points.

Despite the positive reaction from global financial markets to these expansionary policies, financial risks such as the budget crisis in Kuwait present a real challenge. High debt and low reserves will constrain the policy options available to these countries in the event of future shocks. A key indicator of success will be their ability to diversify their economies.



NAIROBI: People shop in Nairobi. Kenya's economy shrank for the first time in three decades last year as the country was battered by the coronavirus pandemic.

Kenya suffers huge job losses as COVID pummels economy

NAIROBI: Kenya's economy shrank for the first time in three decades last year as the country was battered by the coronavirus pandemic, and almost 740,000 people were thrown out of work, a new government survey said. Gross domestic product in the East African powerhouse dropped by 0.3 percent—the first contraction since 1992 — after expanding five percent in 2019, according to the report issued Thursday.

However, Treasury Secretary Ukur Yatani said that the economy was set for a "significant rebound" in 2021, with forecast growth of around six percent. Overall GDP fell to 10.75 trillion Kenyan shillings (\$98 billion/83 billion euros) last year.

A total of 738,000 jobs were shed, with informal workers such as small traders and artisans bearing the brunt, bringing the total number of people employed to 17.4 million.

"Disruption in labor supply brought about by restriction of movement and social distancing meant to contain the spread of COVID-19 reduced demand for goods and services," the report said.

The key tourism sector—usually the biggest foreign exchange earner—was the hardest-hit as revenue dropped almost 44 percent. Visitor numbers plunged more than 70 percent to just over half a million as international coronavirus travel curbs took their toll.

Construction was one of the few bright spots, surging more than 11 percent on the back of an increase in government spending on infrastructure projects, including a major China-funded highway being built in the capital Nairobi. Agriculture, long the backbone of the economy, also bucked the trend. The sector grew 4.8 percent as generally favorable weather conditions boosted crop production, particularly of tea which jumped 24 percent. Ken Gichinga, chief economist at Mentor Economics in Gichinga, described the government's growth predictions for this year as "slightly ambitious".

"Even as we speak, the economy is only partially open. Large swathes of the Kenyan economy remain closed because of the curfew restrictions (so whether we can hit that target remains quite debatable.)"

Kenya remains under a nationwide nighttime curfew and other curbs as coronavirus cases continue to rise although the country has been trying to ramp up its vaccination drive with the delivery of jabs from abroad. According to the latest statistics, only three percent of Kenyan adults have been fully vaccinated, while the country has reported a total of 242,284 COVID-19 cases with 4,864 deaths. — AFP

Russia ups key rate to battle inflation ahead of polls

MOSCOW: Russia's central bank on Friday raised its interest rate for the fifth time in a row in an effort to curb soaring food prices with parliamentary elections coming up later this month. Authorities are under pressure to rein in inflation following a leap in prices for staple goods ahead of the September 17-19 polls where the increasingly unpopular ruling United Russia party might struggle.

At a meeting on Friday, the Bank of Russia increased its key rate by 0.25 percentage points to 6.75 percent, saying inflation is still running above its

target. "The Bank of Russia's monetary policy stance is aimed to limit this risk and return inflation to 4 percent," the bank said, adding that more hikes could be in the pipeline. The central bank said that as of September 6, inflation stood at 6.74 percent and was expected to return to 4-4.5 percent in 2022.

In August, 12-month inflation reached 6.7 percent, the highest level in five years.

The same month President Vladimir Putin announced cash handouts to pensioners and servicemen in an apparent bid to drum up support for United Russia. After months of historically low inflation, consumer prices began to climb in March 2020, driven by a drop in the ruble's value in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic. The central bank started raising its historically low rate the same month.

The central bank's next rate review meeting is scheduled for October 22. In July, the central bank raised its interest rate by 1.0 percentage points to 6.5 percent—its biggest increase since 2014. — AFP

Stocks stumble on inflation, growth worries

NEW YORK: US stocks dropped for the fourth straight day on Friday and European stocks mostly fell amid renewed fears about inflation and ebbing growth. Investor sentiment took a hit from news the UK economic recovery slowed sharply in July, growing by just 0.1 percent as rising COVID cases and supply shortages offset the end of lockdown curbs.

In the United States, government data showed producer price inflation (PPI) over the latest 12 months hit a record 8.3 percent in August. That unnerved markets, and all three major Wall Street indexes closed lower for the week. "This is part of a recent trend downward in the market, probably fueled by the Delta variant and the potential for slowing," said Jack Ablin of Cresset Capital. Ablin said the PPI spike "shows a fair amount

of pricing pressure. And I think that caused some concern among investors," as it could push the Federal Reserve to tighten monetary policy sooner.

US consumer price index (CPI) data is due out next week, and Michael Hewson, chief market analyst at CMC Markets UK said, "It would be rather odd if some of these price rises didn't start to trickle down into the headline CPI rate." London ended the day with a small gain of less than 0.1 percent, while Paris stocks shed 0.3 percent and Frankfurt gave up less than 0.1 percent.

News that leaders of the world's two biggest economies, US President Joe Biden and China's Xi Jinping, talked for the first time in seven months sent Asian stocks fizzing higher.

Oil prices also got a boost from the Biden-Xi talks, shooting up two percent. However, that optimism may be premature: according to news reports, the White House is considering launching a trade investigation over Chinese industrial subsidies, which could lead to a new round of punitive tariffs. The Wall Street Journal reported that the administration "wants it to be a full-court press," although no decisions have been made, citing a person familiar with the discussions. — AFP



Business

KFH raises awareness on loan encashment risks

Banks provide financial advice to customers on their credit needs and obligations

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House continues its efforts to provide banking awareness to customers and the public within its banking awareness campaign "Let's be aware" which was launched under the supervision of the Central Bank of Kuwait in cooperation with Kuwait Banking Union.



Within the campaign 'Let's Be Aware'

The Executive Manager - Branches at KFH, Amina Al-Hamli said that KFH continuously alerts customers and the public on the risks of "loan encashment" through awareness messages on social media, webpage, and various communication means. The bank highlights the risks of this phenomenon and the need to encounter and report such suspicious transactions. These suspi-

cious transactions contain high risks i.e., submission of forged documents by the customer and customer signing documents in favor of the mediator which may render him liable for imprisonment.

Al-Hamli added in a press release that "loan encashment" is considered as one of the most dangerous, suspicious, and legally incriminated transactions. The customer resorts to this finance method to escape from his debts without knowing the implications and violations which may result from these transactions. Although this transaction may seem to be a method to settle their outstanding debts and gain more finance, yet this transaction may expose the customer to new debts exceeding his maximum financial limits.

Al-Hamli said that "loan encashment" transactions are executed through mediators who provide the customer with short term cash amounts against high profit so that the customer would settle his liabilities to the bank and then attempt to get a new loan from the bank. In this case the customer will be required to settle his obligations to the mediators and the instalments of the new loan at the same time, thus exposing himself to multiple interconnected liabilities and obligation beyond his capacity and expose himself to continuous financial pressures. In this case the customer will continue to take



Amina Al-Hamli

companies aiming to achieve fast and remarkable profit by taking advantage of the customer's needs and difficult financial situations based on unfair terms and conditions.

Al-Hamli indicated that the "Loan Encashment" idea is based on some fraudulent groups attempting to circumvent the law by announcing their wish to help people to obtain new finance from the banks and settle their current liabilities. These groups use twisted methods that would render the debtor bearing more interest by signing promissory notes exceeding the amount settled to the bank and obtaining double interest from the debtor.

Al-Hamli said that these twisted illegal finance methods place the debtor in a very high risk according to the law. Credit and finance transactions are governed by certain regulatory rules, regulations, and instructions that would enable the customer to benefit from the facilities and advantages provided by these transactions without exposing the customer to the risks of default or shouldering unbearable financial liabilities.

Al-Hamli emphasized that the Central Bank of Kuwait has taken into consideration, in its instructions to banks, the customers rights and transparency requirements. CBK instructions demand that the financing party shall provide advice to customers, examine the nature of their monthly obligations and liabilities, advise them on their needs and liabilities and explain the results of increasing such liabilities in case their financial conditions change because of changing their work or retirement.

The activities of the banking awareness campaign "Let's be aware" have started last January to spread financial knowledge and culture among society members, increase awareness of their rights and duties, highlight banking sector's role and the method to benefit from the services provided by banks in the best possible manner.



France pleads EU to see nuclear as Green

PARIS: French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire on Friday firmly defended nuclear power as a suitable energy to meet Europe's net-zero emissions climate goal despite strong feeling in Germany that it is too dangerous. France derives the vast share of its electric power from nuclear plants and sees atomic energy as key to transitioning away from fossil fuels.

But Germany, after the Fukushima nuclear disaster, has turned its back on nuclear energy and is the continent's strongest promoter of natural gas as the right alternative to coal and other fossil fuels.

"Either we fight climate change with an ideological approach and we will fail, or we fight climate change with a scientific approach and then we will succeed. But this means recognising the added value of nuclear energy," said Le Maire at a press conference in Slovenia. Le Maire was speaking on the sidelines of an EU finance ministers meeting at Brdo Castle in Slovenia, which holds the rotating presidency of the European Union. At issue is the so-called "green tax-

onomy" classification system that will define what constitutes sustainable investment as the EU moves towards carbon neutrality by 2050.

Due by the end of the year, this classification will open up access to green finance and give a competitive advantage to recognized sectors. The subject divides the member states: while France, Poland and the Czech Republic defend the atom, countries such as Germany and Austria are fiercely opposed to it, as are many NGOs which see it as a risky technology.

"I just want to remind the other member states and European citizens that two expert reports have come to the same conclusion, namely that nuclear energy is necessary to fight climate change," Le Maire said. In June 2019, a group of experts on sustainable finance concluded that nuclear energy, which emits virtually no CO₂, could "help mitigate climate change" - but without concluding on its potential environmental damage.

Then in a report issued at the end of March, the European Commission's scientific service found that "no analysis provides scientific evidence that nuclear energy harms human health or the environment more than other energies" that could be included in the taxonomy. "This means that nuclear energy should be included in the European taxonomy. There is no reason why nuclear energy should not be included in the European taxonomy by the end of the year," Le Maire insisted. —AFP

AVEVA, Aramco to partner to realize sustainability goals

RIYADH: Aramco, one of the world's largest integrated energy and chemicals companies, and AVEVA, a global leader in industrial software, driving digital transformation and sustainability, have announced their intention to form a strategic alliance. Focused on driving sustainability in the region through digital transformation, the partnership will help enable AVEVA to establish their largest digital hub, with an R&D capability, in the Middle East, headquartered in Saudi Arabia. This partnership will represent a significant investment for AVEVA which is also looking to create up to 300 high skill new jobs in the Kingdom by 2030.

This transformative and groundbreaking partnership is designed to foster a working relationship between the two companies in the deployment of various digital technologies including Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML), and Data Management. AVEVA and Aramco aim to work together to unlock the benefits of these technologies in line with the Kingdom's move towards industrial sustainability. One of the key focus areas of the partnership would be to utilize digital technologies to support the development and implementation of blue hydrogen and decarbonization facilities in Saudi Arabia in line with the Kingdom's energy transition strategy. Another area in which the companies intend to work together is in the implementation of cutting-edge predictive analytics technology across Aramco's operating facilities. This would be one of the largest deployments of such technology in the region and the main goal is to further improve the reliability, performance, and safety of Aramco's operation.

A key offering for customers in the region through this new hub is intended to be AVEVA's trademark Digital Twin technology which combines asset design and predictive analytics in order to create a fully integrated, real-time data visualization center that reveals functional insights, unlocks efficiencies, and identifies

new pathways to optimize performance. The new hub, through its R&D capability, would contribute to enriching Saudi Arabia's knowledge economy incorporating world-class research at prominent universities across the Kingdom. Commenting on the initiative, Ahmad Al-Sa'adi, Senior Vice President of Technical Services, Aramco, said "One of the key pillars for realizing the Kingdom's Vision 2030 is Digital Transformation. Digital technologies have the potential to accelerate the transformation of the industrial sector and drive it towards more efficient and sustainable operations. Establishing partnerships with leaders in industrial digital software, such as AVEVA, is one of the main elements in our digital transformation strategy and we believe will help us realize our mission of leveraging digital solutions to deliver tomorrow's energy more sustainably, efficiently, and safely. The regional hub that would be established by AVEVA would contribute to Aramco's 'In Kingdom Total Value Add' (IKTVA) program goals and will facilitate Saudi Arabia's path to realizing the benefits of a digital economy."

AVEVA's CEO Peter Herweck also commented, "AVEVA is proud to be working with Aramco towards an agreement to facilitate its digital transformation journey. Through this partnership the vision of our companies is to play a fundamental role in industrial sector decarbonization within Saudi Arabia and the delivery of its sustainable goals, bringing capabilities to optimize every aspect of the value chain with sophisticated imaging, data analytics and deep-learning technologies that this initiative would bring. Through this initiative AVEVA aims to contribute to creating job opportunities in the Kingdom and throughout the Middle East region."



Ahmad Al-Saadi



Peter Herweck

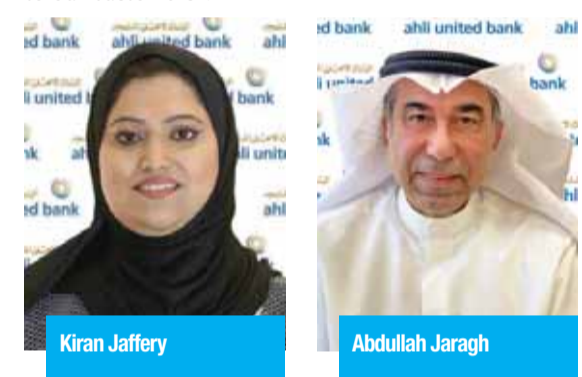
AUB launches SWIFT 'Payment Controls' service

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank (AUB) has successfully launched SWIFT "Payment Controls" service that helps in mitigating fraudulent attacks and improving customer experience. SWIFT Payment Controls provides safer transfers by detecting and directly preventing high-risk payments. SWIFT Payment Controls service also enables bank users to real-time monitor, track, alert and block sent payments with daily powerful and but simple to use pre-built reports, which is positively reflected in improving processing time and enhancing transparency and reliability.

Global Payments Innovation service (GPI) is a service from Swift that improves customer experience in cross-border payments by increasing the speed, transparency, and end-to-end tracking of cross-border payments. On this occasion, Kiran Jaffery, AGM of Central Operations at AUB, said that SWIFT Payment Controls is a real-time solution that screens payment messages safely from within SWIFT's secure network to detect, prevent and validate the Bank's payment messaging activity, and provides an additional control to existing fraud prevention solutions.

Jaffery added "SWIFT GPI service enables the tracking or location of a payment at any point in real time provides a unique end to end transaction reference which can be used to check the location of a payment and obtain confirmation of credit to the beneficiary account. There is no doubt that the shift towards real-time payments is an added value that helps

change the form of payment systems and reduces the time needed to complete payments in a framework of transparency and rapidity. We are pleased to work with SWIFT, which will constitute more added value to our customers".



Kiran Jaffery

Abdullah Jaragh

For his part, Abdullah Jaragh, GM of Information Technology at AUB said: this new service is an addition to AUB's successive efforts to enhance data security and security strategy in its tireless follow-up to confront fraudulent operations. The success in implementing the best information security initiatives and the best fraud management is recognized due to the bank's advanced programs, professional team and the Bank's success in tangibly benefiting from its digital initiative: supporting the mechanisms required to implement multi-level responsibility, encrypting and classifying data according to the value and volume of transactions. The bank constantly reviews and assess security risk and updates its policies and procedures to confront novel online threats, while ensuring to send periodic alerts to customers and bank staff to check and follow the latest security recommendations to protect their computers.

AUB congratulates winners of Al-Hassad weekly draw

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank (AUB) held the weekly draw of 08 September 2021 of Al-Hassad Islamic account Al-Hassad Islamic account, the first Islamic prizes account in Kuwait which offers over 750 prizes over a 12 month period and provides numerous features. Such features include the simplest and easiest savings program, highest number of winners, largest prize value, loyalty multipliers, and unique account opening feature online with all ease with instant deposit option.

The draw announced 20 winners of KD 1,000 as follows: Tariq Fouad Al-Ali, Waleed Mohammad Renno, Mohammad Hossein Khosrou Zadeh, Mohamad Ibrahim Khalil, Al-Haitham Mahmoud Mohammad, Sultan Asad Sultan, Jaman Mahdi Al-Azemi, Saritha Monteiro, Samreen Aashif Shaikh, Musaed Faleh Al-Azmi, Shaikhah Fawaz Al-Harbi, Alaa Aabalkader, Saoud Abdulaziz Buabbas, Suhailah Abdulrazzaq Abdullah, Manal Abdulrahman Al-Rashed, Athari Mohammad Aldharman, Faisal Dawod Al-Busairi, Abdallah Ali Hasan, Abdulrahman Nayef Al-Harbi and Ahlam Ibrahim Al-Jassim.

The draws of Al-Hassad include several cash prizes, such as KD 100,000 each Eid and the grand quarterly draw of KD 250,000 prize which continues to be a key aspiration for customers who are wishing to fulfill their dreams. Al-Hassad offers 20 weekly prizes of KD 1,000 for each winner. Furthermore, for the first time in Kuwait, the AUB Al-Hassad presents the "Privilege Draw", which is a quarterly draw of KD 25,000 exclusively for Al-Hassad customers who maintained their balances for more than one year and have not won a prize in the past five years. For all draws, the clients are eligible for one draw chance for each KD 50 deposited in their Al-Hassad account.

In addition to this attractive package of rewards, Al-Hassad Islamic account incorporates a Wakala contract for projected annual profits, making this account unique and attractive to all society segments that are aspiring to build their short and long-term savings through a unique savings account with many advantages.



Private equity giant Blackstone had hoped to expand its presence in the country through acquisition of Soho China, which holds prime real estate in cities like Beijing. — AFP

Blackstone scraps \$3bn takeover of giant Soho China

BEIJING: A US private equity firm has abandoned a planned \$3 billion purchase of Chinese property developer Soho China, with antitrust authorities yet to approve the deal. Blackstone had hoped to expand its presence in the country through acquisition of Soho China, which holds prime real estate in cities like Beijing. But its offer had been conditional upon clearance from China's competition authorities, and the parties concluded that the pre-conditions would not be satisfied within a designated time frame, according to a filing to the Hong Kong exchange dated Friday. Both sides have now "agreed that the offer should not be made," the filing added.

Blackstone's offer in June, at HK\$5 per share, was over 30 percent above Soho China's closing price at the time — and valued the property group at HK\$26 billion (\$3.3 billion). A June filing said Blackstone owned "approximately 6 million square meters of properties in China". The latest joint statement did not elaborate further on why the deal fell through.

But it comes as Beijing steps up a broad crackdown on monopolistic behaviour and deals that has spooked China's once unassailable tech giants, with regulators taking aim at industries from e-commerce to education. The real estate sector has also been hit in recent weeks, with a crackdown making it harder to raise cash and embattled firms like real estate giant Evergrande struggling to service debts. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features

ABBA scores first UK top 10 single in nearly 40 years

ABBA on Friday scored their first top 10 single in the UK for almost 40 years after thrilling fans with the announcement of a new album and a virtual concert. One of two new songs released by the legendary Swedish pop band this month, "Don't Shut Me Down", reached number nine in the Official Singles Chart, which is based on sales and streaming.

ABBA last appeared in the British singles charts

with a song called "One Of Us" in January 1982, according to the chart company. Now in their 70s, the quartet have just released their first new music since 1982, ahead of an album release in November. The group's second single, "I Still Have Faith In You," entered the British charts at number 14.

The comeback also sparked a return to the album charts for their greatest hits compilation from 1992, "ABBA Gold", which appeared at num-

ber five. The group has premiered new material while publicizing a virtual show called "ABBA Voyage", which aims to recreate a concert by the band in their heyday in 1979. The show, to be staged at a purpose-built theatre in London from next May, will see the group perform as digital avatars alongside live performers, using sophisticated hologram technology. — AFP



French actor Alain Delon arrives for the funeral ceremony for late French actor Jean-Paul Belmondo at the Saint-Germain-des-Pres church in Paris on Friday. — AFP

Alain Delon leads France's final farewell for Belmondo

An adoring French public gave actor Jean-Paul Belmondo a final farewell on Friday, with fellow film icon Alain Delon the most prominent of the celebrity funeral guests. Belmondo's burial in the Saint-Germain-des-Pres church in Paris's Latin Quarter came a day after thousands turned out to honour the actor who died this week aged 88 at an official ceremony led by President Emmanuel Macron.

Friday's funeral was a more intimate affair, bringing together Belmondo's family, friends and film celebrities. Among them was 85-year-old Delon, who like his friend Belmondo was the face of French New Wave cinema in the 1960s and 70s. Delon, who had been absent from the week's official ceremonies, arrived at the church smiling and holding a single crutch, as a crowd of onlookers applauded him and chanted his first name.

Many other cinema heavyweights were among the mourners, including director Claude Lelouch and actor Pierre Richard, famous for roles in 1970s comedies, on crutches. Jean Dujardin, best-known for "The Artist", was also there, as was Cannes film festival boss Thierry Fremaux. "This is the last time we're with him, but he'll be always be with us, always," Fremaux told AFP.

Many of the fans present were much younger than Belmondo, such as star DJ Bob Sinclair. Hundreds of onlookers tried to get a glimpse of the arriving celebrities, pushing against police barriers or watching from nearby cafes. Among them was Californian Cynthia Levine who told AFP that she had seen Belmondo a few times lunching at the Brasserie Lipp, a Parisian restaurant, over the years. "He was magnificent, very kind, very handsome," she said. "His charm was so French," added another onlooker, 56-year-old Gerald Schmitte.

Belmondo first came to fame as part of the New Wave cinema movement with films like "Breathless" and "Pierrot Le Fou" by Jean-Luc Godard that helped define French cool in the international imagination. He went on to become a household name, acting in 80 films covering a multitude of genres, including comedies and thrillers. Belmondo was also often called "Le Magnifique" (The Magnificent), after a 1970s secret agent satire in which he starred. — AFP

Italy seizes 500 fake Francis Bacon works

Italian authorities on Friday said they had seized 500 works of art suspected of being Francis Bacon counterfeits, along with cash and other valuables worth around three million euros. Five people have been charged with criminal conspiracy to "authenticate and circulate fake works of art" and "fraud and money laundering", according to an official statement. The main suspect is a collector from Bologna, according to media reports. He had been the subject of two different investigations since 2018, the statement said.

Police launched the first after discovering "numerous works of contemporary art... including two drawings (purporting to be) signed by Francis Bacon, one of the most famous artists of the 20th century" at the man's home. The second investigation was opened by the tax authorities, which found "financial flows with foreign countries... incompatible with his legal sources of income", the statement said. Francis Bacon (1909-1992) is famous for his triptychs, one of which, "Three Studies of Lucian Freud", sold for \$142.4 million (€120 million at today's exchange rate) in 2013 at Christie's in New York, making it one of the 10 most expensive paintings ever sold at auction. — AFP

Disney to debut rest of 2021 films in cinemas first

Disney announced Friday that all of its films slated for release by the end of the year will be exclusively screened in cinemas first, bringing relief to theaters anxious to reconnect with audiences after the coronavirus pandemic devastated their industry. The animated film "Encanto" will be released on the big screen on November 24 and will not appear on Disney's on-demand video platform until December 24, the company said in a statement.

Other planned projects, including "The Last Duel" by Ridley Scott, "Eternals" by Marvel Studios and "West Side Story" by Steven Spielberg, will be screened in theaters for at least 45 days before they are released elsewhere. The decision was eagerly awaited by traditional cinemas after the entertainment giant recently chose to release a series of big productions such as "Black Widow", "Jungle Cruise" and "Cruella" on its Disney+ platform, diverting part of their revenue.

"Black Widow" actor Scarlett Johansson has sued Disney, accusing the company of breach of



contract and costing her millions of dollars in box office revenue after it released the film on its video platform. Two years ago, Disney was producing content for both theaters and television channels, but it now has direct access to its audience via streaming, a trend accelerated by the pandemic.

In mid-August, Disney boss Bob Chapek said he favored "flexibility" and the ability to "follow the consumer wherever he goes". During a presentation of the company's financial results, he said "when theaters reopened, there was immense reluctance from the public to return". Warner Bros. studios has also been heavily criticized for its decision to release all of its new movies for the rest of the year on its HBO Max platform. — AFP

Prehistoric winged lizard unearthed in Chile

Chilean scientists have announced the discovery of the first-ever southern hemisphere remains of a type of Jurassic-era "winged lizard" known as a pterosaur. Fossils of the dinosaur which lived some 160 million years ago in what is today the Atacama desert, were unearthed in 2009.

They have now been confirmed to be of a rhamphorhynchine pterosaur—the first such creature to be found in Gondwana, the prehistoric supercontinent that later formed the southern hemisphere landmasses. Researcher Jhonatan Alarcon of the University of Chile said the creatures had a wingspan of up to two meters, a long tail, and pointed snout.

"We show that the distribution of animals in this group was wider than known to date," he added. The discovery was also "the oldest known pterosaur found in Chile," the scientists reported in the scientific journal Acta Paleontologica Polonica. — AFP



Handout picture released by the Universidad de Chile showing a fossil of a pterosaur found by a group of scientists in the Atacama Desert in northern Chile on May 11, 2015. — AFP

Facebook and Ray-Ban debut 'smart' shades

Facebook and iconic eyewear brand Ray-Ban on Thursday launched their new smart glasses, the latest effort in a tricky, niche market but which the social media giant sees as a step toward its future. The "Ray-Ban Stories" shades can take pictures and video upon the wearer's voice commands, and the frames can connect wirelessly to Facebook's platform through an app.

"We took our Wayfarer (frames), born in 1952, and we reinvented the design squeezing in some cool technology," said Fabio Borsoi, global research and design director at the EssilorLuxottica group, Ray-Ban's maker. Facebook is wading into a market that has already seen 2013's Google Glass, which sparked a privacy backlash over built-in cameras and prompted the tech titan to pivot its focus for the device away from the general public.

Messaging app SnapChat has also released its camera-equipped Spectacles, but they are pricey and have struggled to catch on broadly with tech lovers. Notably, the Ray-Ban Stories glasses will not have augmented reality features - technology that can mesh online computing with visual cues such as mapping or face recognition.

Instead, the shades are an early step toward efforts to create futuristic eyewear that adds to real-world views with data or graphics from the internet, Facebook chief executive Mark Zuckerberg has said previously. The company had said in July it was combining specialists from across its hardware, gaming and virtual reality units to build an immersive digital world known as the "metaverse."

Privacy features

Priced starting at \$299, the Ray-Ban Stories will roll out in Australia, Britain, Canada, Ireland, Italy and the United States. Cameras are built into the front of the frames, while the arms are designed to

act as directional speakers for listening to calls or streamed audio. A white light in the front of the frame goes on when the cameras are being used, which is intended as a privacy feature to alert people they could be filmed.

Users can take a picture or a video clip of up to 30 seconds by pressing a button at the temple or using a voice command, both of which can be cues that a camera is on. "We need the user to feel completely in control of their capture experience," said Facebook Reality Labs product manager Hind Hobeika. "And, similarly, we need people around them to feel comfortable that these smart glasses exist and always be in the know when a capture is happening," Hobeika added, referring to filming.

The glasses also have a physical switch for turning them off. Users log into the glasses' Facebook View app using their accounts at the social network. Ray-Ban Stories frames sync wirelessly to a smartphone app designed specifically for handling images or video captured by the glasses. Users can decide using the app whether they want to share pictures or video they have just captured, such as posting to Facebook or attaching them to an email. Only data needed to run the app is gathered, and no information is used for targeting ads, said Hobeika. — AFP



This undated image received on Sept 8, 2021 shows a model wearing smart glasses by Facebook and Ray Ban. —AFP

Sotheby's to sell \$600m of art from Macklowe divorce

Sotheby's has won the rights to sell the highly sought-after Macklowe art collection, valued at more than \$600 million, the auction house announced Thursday. The trove - which includes works by Pablo Picasso, Andy Warhol and Mark Rothko - was the subject of a bitter legal dispute following the high-profile divorce of New York real estate developer Harry Macklowe and his ex-wife Linda.

Auction houses had been competing to sell the 65 works which Sotheby's described as the "most significant collection of modern and contemporary art to ever appear on the market". Sotheby's said it would put the pieces under the hammer in two separate auctions in November this year and May 2022. It said the \$600 million tag was the highest estimate ever placed on any collection to come to auction.

The top lots are Alberto Giacometti's "Le Nez" sculpture, completed in 1964, and Rothko's 1951 abstract "No. 7", both of which are tipped to sell for upwards of \$70 million each. Other highlights include Warhol's 1962 "Nine Marilyns", estimated to sell for between \$40 million and \$60 million and Cy Twombly's "Untitled" from 2007, which has the same price estimate.

Gerhard Richter's 1975 work "Seestück" has been priced between \$25 million and \$35 million while Picasso's "Figure (Project for a monument to Guillaume Apollinaire)" is estimated at up to \$20 million. Two Willem de Koonings will also be sold: "Untitled XXXIII" from 1977 and "Untitled IV" from 1983, which are expected to fetch up to \$18 million and \$15 million respectively.

"The Macklowe Collection stands in a league of its own as the greatest collection of Modern and Contemporary Art ever to come to the market," said Sotheby's CEO Charles Stewart. "It will undoubtedly captivate top collectors from



This undated image courtesy of Sotheby's shows Pablo Picasso's "Figure (Project for a monument to Guillaume Apollinaire)" part of the Macklowe Collection and estimated at up to \$20 million. — AFP

around the world, and the sale will make history as one of the landmark events defining the art market and the history of Sotheby's over the past 277 years," he added.

During divorce proceedings, the Macklowes had been unable to agree on how much the vast collection was worth. A New York judge ruled in 2018 that they should sell the 65 works and split the works. A receiver was appointed to broker the sale, which was delayed by the coronavirus pandemic. — AFP



A picture taken on Sept 2, 2021 shows a work of Brazilian artist Jaider Esbell during the press day ahead of the opening of the 34th Biennale of Sao Paulo at Ibirapuera park in Sao Paulo. — AFP photos



Work of Brazilian artist Daiera Tukano.



Works of US photographer Mathew B Brady.

Sao Paulo art fest gives voice to resistance in times of darkness

A meteorite salvaged from a 2018 fire at Rio de Janeiro's National Museum symbolizes resistance to the destruction of culture in times of darkness - a spirit at the heart of this year's Sao Paulo Biennial of Contemporary Art. Marking its 70th anniversary the exhibition, one of the most important of its kind in the world, reflects a reaction to the extreme right embodied in Brazil by President Jair Bolsonaro, as well as to the environmental crisis and the pandemic.

"Faz escuro mas eu canto" ("It's dark but I sing"); the curators salvaged this verse by Thiago de Mello, a message of hope written during Brazil's military dictatorship from 1964 to 1985, to summarize this Biennial of more than a thousand works by 91 Brazilian and foreign artists, including indigenous creators. The darkness has become more tangible with "new fires, hate speech (...), acts of explicit racism, signs of institutional fragility and finally the pandemic," said Paulo Miyada, one of the curators, at the launch. "The voices of artists become more important in states of emergency like the one we are living in," he added.

After coming to power in 2019,

Bolsonaro eliminated the Ministry of Culture and reduced it to a secretariat within the tourism portfolio, with a slashed budget and complaints about alleged censorship. Since then, the art world has resisted. "The way to respond ... to dark political times of far-right movements was with a political approach," Italian guest curator Francesco Stocchi told AFP.

Past and present

So the Biennial proposed a concept of a circular history that goes back to the country's colonization and addresses the present from a historical perspective, establishing certain parallels. There is "a clear awareness of the seriousness of some current situations," said curator general Jacopo Crivelli Visconti. By way of example, he cited the work of Brazilian Regina Silveira, who depicts disproportionate shadows as symbols of the dictatorship, such as an army tank similar to those recently used in Brasilia in an unprecedented military parade in which Bolsonaro, a former army captain, participated.

Her compatriot Carmela Gross exhibits a large silhouette covered with a canvas,



Works of Brazilian photographer Mauro Restiffe.

a sculpture she already exhibited at the 1969 Biennial during the military junta, a context that the organizers say "permeates her with a sense of threat and danger." That perception was bolstered by marches last Tuesday in which many "Bolsonaristas" called for a military intervention to stop the judiciary from investigating Bolsonaro for, among other things, spreading fake news. A phrase by the

philosopher Antonio Gramsci, embodied in another of the exhibited works, invites the visitor to reflect: "The old world dies. The new takes time to appear. And in that chiaroscuro the monsters arise".

Ecological emergency

Outside, two inflatable snake-shaped sculptures on a lake in Ibirapuera Park grab the attention of visitors. But Jaider

Esbell, an indigenous Makuxi and author of the work called "Entities", says that his participation in the Biennial goes beyond that and other of his exhibited works. "My best work is politics, not those colorful drawings, or the cobra in the lake; those are elements to grab attention and spark discussion on issues such as global warming and ecological urgency," Esbell told AFP.

"It is a key moment because everyone is fighting, but nobody is fighting for the ecological emergency," said the artist from the Raposa Serra do Sol indigenous reserve in the northern state of Roraima, a land marked by territorial conflicts and threatened by illegal mining. Under the Bolsonaro administration, deforestation and forest fires have set records in the Amazon, a vital component for stabilizing the global climate, and home to many indigenous peoples. The exhibition, which opened on Sept 4, will continue until Dec 5 and aims to attract, as in previous years, around one million visitors. — AFP



Work of Brazilian artist Juraci Dorea.



Work of Peruvian artist Ximena Garrido-Lecca.



Work of Brazilian artist Lygia Pape.



Work of Angolan artist Paulo Kapela.

Dueling knights, a mullet and MeToo in new Damon, Affleck film

Whether a noblewoman lied about being raped is the catalyst for a bloody duel to the death between medieval noblemen in Ridley Scott's new film starring Matt Damon and Ben Affleck. "The Last Duel", which is loosely based on true events, is both an action film and commentary on sexual politics, as it searches for vestiges of contemporary MeToo sensibility in 14th-century France, where a woman accused her husband's friend and fellow courtier of rape.

The high-profile cast and writing team of Damon, Affleck and Nicole Holofcener did not spare the film some early negative reviews, however. "An all-star cast and some showstoppingly horrible hair can't save Ridley Scott's medieval epic," wrote The Guardian, with Variety calling the film a "medieval soap opera". Speaking to reporters ahead of the film's premiere Friday at the Venice Film Festival, Affleck said he found the story of a young wife who speaks out about the rape "important and powerful".

"I do consider myself a feminist and I think this movie principally was really exciting to me because of the character of

Marguerite, her extraordinary strength and bravery," Affleck said. "To have somebody who has been done a great injustice and goes to great lengths to seek justice at great risk to themselves."

Damon, sporting a mullet and looking in need of a good scrub, plays Jean de Carrouges, a knight who defends the word of his wife - and his own honor - through a bloody duel. If he has not lied about the allegations levelled against his friend, God will protect him, says the king.

Rattling armor

"I will provide for you," De Carrouges utters early in the film as he gallops away on his horse to war, one of the many bits of stock dialogue that hammer home with little nuance the evils of the patriarchy. The film, wrote The Hollywood Reporter, includes "a lot of pandering to contemporary sensibilities, often skirting close to didacticism as the script hits bullet points about patriarchal privilege and victim-blaming."

Key scenes, most importantly the rape, are shown three times, representing the three diverging perspectives of De Carrouges, his nemesis Jacques LeGris (Adam Driver) and Marguerite (Jodie Comer), and shedding light on the inability of the male characters to see their actions clearly. Affleck said he wanted to write a movie that pointed to dominant Western culture that "didn't view women for many centuries as human beings". "And of course many vestigial aspects of that perspective remain." —AFP



(From left) US actor Matt Damon, US actor Ben Affleck, British actress Jodie Comer and US director Ridley Scott arrive for the screening of the film "The Last Duel" presented out of competition on Friday during the 78th Venice Film Festival at Venice Lido. — AFP

Cumberbatch swaps Marvel cloak for cowboy horse in 'Power of the Dog'

He's best known to superhero fans around the world as "Doctor Strange", a leading star of the multi-billion grossing Marvel films. But Benedict Cumberbatch relished stepping into the arthouse world of "The Power of the Dog" - complete with a painstakingly recreated 1920s Montana cowboy ranch - for his latest Oscar-tipped film, he told the Toronto film festival Friday. "To play something as diverse as those two characters are, apart from each other, is fantastic," said Cumberbatch. "I loved swapping the cloak for a horse," he added.

Doctor Strange's trademark cloak will be next seen in the Spider-Man movie "No Way Home" in December, while Cumberbatch is also starring in "Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness" in March. But far away from the world of blockbuster franchises, "The Power of the Dog" - out in theaters in November, and on Netflix from Dec 1 - is already seen as an early frontrunner for next year's Academy Awards.

Based on a novel about a closeted cowboy, it earned rave reviews at the Venice and Telluride festivals before moving onto Toronto. Its selection in multiple major festival lineups is itself an indicator of likely success - last year's best picture "Nomadland" toured the major fall events that went ahead. So is the presence of director Jane Campion. The New Zealander was only the second woman ever nominated for the best directing Oscar with 1993's "The Piano," and "The Power of the Dog" is her first feature in more than a decade.

"It's quite far away from my normal wheelhouse and I was just thrilled that someone as mad as Jane wanted me to do it!" said former "Sherlock" star Cumberbatch, who learnt to ride horses and rope steers, play the banjo and blow a piercing cowboy whistle for the part. He paid tribute to Campion as "this amazingly strong woman, in a very male-dominat-



(From left) Roger Frappier, Kodi Smit-McPhee and Benedict Cumberbatch attend "The Power Of The Dog" Premiere during the 2021 Toronto International Film Festival at Princess of Wales Theatre on Friday. — AFP

ed world - this person who has this incredible weight of work."

'Intolerance'

The film is Campion's first to feature a male protagonist, something the director has said she felt freed up to do after the #MeToo movement paved the way for more female-centered movies elsewhere in Hollywood. Toxic masculinity, as well as sexual repression, is a key theme of the film with Cumberbatch's sadistic, sinister ranch owner Phil Burbank disguising his own sexuality behind a constant barrage of homophobic taunts and insults toward others.

Burbank also terrorizes and pours malicious scorn on the widow (Kirsten Dunst) who has married his more congenial brother (Jesse Plemons) - driving her to alcoholism - and her effeminate son (Kodi Smit-McPhee.) "Phil's tragedy is he can't be his authentic self, in the time he's in but also the culture he's in," said Cumberbatch. "It is a tragedy of intolerance in many ways."

The second day of the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) also saw the North American premiere of time-hopping psychological horror "Last Night in Soho," from British director Edgar Wright. After the successes of films like "Baby Driver," Wright has continued to pursue original projects including an acclaimed recent documentary on eccentric musical duo Sparks. He co-wrote "Last Night in Soho," and has so far shown little interest in following the likes of Cumberbatch into the superhero universe.

"I wouldn't be so silly as to say I would never do that," he told AFP. "But right now I feel very proud that, given the opportunity, I did another original movie after 'Baby Driver'." "I think when you have the opportunity to do that, you should take it." TIFF, North America's biggest film festival, runs until Sept 18. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features

UK'S LAST CASSETTE SHOP REELS IN NOSTALGIC MUSIC LOVERS

Tucked away in a corner of the top floor of an indoor market in Manchester, northwest England, is the last shop in Britain dedicated to selling cassettes. Mars Tapes crams around 1,000 cassettes, a Coca-Cola radio, boom boxes, vintage editions of the Walkman cassette player and other tape-related accessories in a compact retail unit smaller than one of the city's tram carriages.

Hits by stars including Elvis Presley, Florence and the Machine, and Lewis Capaldi line its shelves, as classic tracks provide a musical backdrop, taking customers back in time. The shop was set up in 2019 by an eclectic group of people united by a love of music, explained co-founder Giorgio Carbone.

Spanish sound engineer Borja Regueira, 28, and his girlfriend Moira Lorenzo, 27, initially proposed starting a cassette-only shop. Italian Carbone, 30, and 28-year-old journalist and musician Alex Tadros supported the idea and merged the store into the group's record label.



Giorgio Carbone, co-founder of Mars Tapes poses in his shop in Manchester on Sept 4, 2021. — AFP photos

ing lockdowns. Sales of vinyl - the pocket-sized plastic cassettes' predecessor in music distribution - jumped to their highest level since the 1990s in Britain last year.

Modern artists such as Lady Gaga, Dua Lipa and Selena Gomez have released tapes recently, pushing cassette sales in Britain up to around 157,000 in 2020 - the highest figure since 2003. Mass production of cassettes began in the 1960s, with 2.4 million tape players produced and sold worldwide by 86 differ-

ent manufacturers by 1968.

But their UK heyday ended with the explosion of CD sales in the 1980s and 1990s, leaving some music fans pining for a bygone era. Warehouse manager Mark Williams, 38, browsed Mars Tapes' collection with an analogue camera hanging from his neck and said his interest originated in "nostalgia more than anything". "I'm a child of the 80s and 90s - I grew up with cassettes. It's tangible, something you physically own, not just downloaded data," he told AFP.

Social conscience

But the boom in cassette consumption is not confined to an older generation seeking to revive their youth. Younger listeners also increasingly prefer to savor music rather than mindlessly skipping through online playlists and endlessly scrolling through social media. "People like the idea of having something physical. Lately especially, with coronavirus and lockdown, it's a way of appreciating the music more," said Carbone. "There's a lot of work behind a cassette. It's something we lost with time, to appreciate what we have and listen to something more than once and not just skip it."

Care assistant Jane Fielding, 22, occasionally listens to cassettes on her Walkman. "I like the simplicity - there's no distractions, no notifications on my



phone," she said. Most tapes cost no more than £10 (\$14), with prices rising to £50 for limited-edition products. Cassettes are cheaper and easier to produce than vinyl and Mars Tapes limits its runs depending on the genre and band to keep costs down, Carbone explained.

The store acquires stock from websites like eBay, individual donations and record labels including Universal, while Carbone, Tadros and Regueira's record label supports local indie bands by purchasing their tapes. "In Italy, there's not that music culture. It's good to be here because there's a lot of people passionate about cassettes," said Carbone. "We thought cassettes was the most affordable way of making records and helping bands."

'Another level'

And socially-conscious listeners want independent artists to earn a good living from their work instead of filling the coffers

of streaming giants like Spotify and Apple Music. Streaming services accounted for 80 percent of UK music consumption in 2020 but have been criticized for short-changing musicians. "You own the music and support the artist, big and small," Carbone added.

Carbone acknowledged it seemed "crazy" to occupy a bigger unit after the UK's 2021 winter lockdown and the economic damage it wrought. But grants from Manchester's council and rent holidays helped Mars Tapes survive. He thinks cassettes will remain a "niche" interest but reckons demand will remain steady. "There's something about the sounds of cassettes that's just different," he said. Prospective customer John Yates, a 45-year-old shop manager, agreed. "It sounds better on cassettes, a lot different than listening on the radio - it's another level," he said. — AFP

Nostalgia

The shop is tapping into a nostalgic trend in cultural consumption accentuated by the coronavirus pandemic. People have turned to reading books and watching classic films and television series to stave off boredom and find escapism dur-



Afghan pop star Aryana Sayeed poses during an interview in Istanbul on Sept 8, 2021. — AFP

'Just shoot me': Afghan star recalls surreal Kabul escape

Afghan pop star Aryana Sayeed recalls asking her fiancé one thing as they snuck into Kabul's chaotic airport after the Taliban moved in: "Don't let them take me away alive". Aryana, who brags of 1.4 million Instagram followers and is often likened to US megastar Kim Kardashian, had drawn the religious conservatives' ire for her women's rights activism and figure-hugging clothes.

A singer and former judge of a popular Afghan music talent show, the 36-year-old could not walk down the streets of Kabul without attracting a gawking crowd of selfie-snapping fans. This made her escape from the city she loved that much more surreal. Her first attempt on Aug 15 - the day the Islamists entered Kabul while US forces scrambled to evacuate foreigners and some Afghans after 20 years of war - failed because the plane never took off.



The stakes could hardly be higher when she made her second attempt the following day, with Kalashnikov-toting fighters surrounding the airport and allied forces trying to control the desperate crowds at its gates. Her fiancé and manager, Hasib Sayed, was communicating with her by walkie-talkie in a second car. "I said to him, you know Hasib... if I am about to be taken away alive, just shoot me. Just shoot me in the head," she told AFP at her swank Istanbul apartment. "That was the only thing I was scared of. I wasn't scared of dying or anything."

'Women were fainting'

Aryana knew she was taking a risk when she launched her own fashion brand in Kabul just as US forces were speeding up their withdrawal and the

Taliban were retaking huge swathes of the country in July. "I always wanted to give hope to the future, so I decided to invest," she recalled. Those dreams were a distant memory when she found herself with a little boy she did not even know sitting on her lap, her face veiled, trying to pass off as a normal family as they passed Taliban checkpoints en route to the airport.

"We made up a story as well. I remember we told this little kid if we get stopped, you have to tell them I am your mum and my name is not Aryana. It's Freshta," she said. Her fiancé reached the gate first, pushing through the crowds. "People were pushing each other, there were children, little babies, the women were fainting because of a lack of oxygen and space," she said. US soldiers initially refused to let them through, giving priority to American citizens, but a translator recognized Hasib and told the soldiers that he was the fiancé of a big star whose life was in jeopardy.

'Not the new Taliban'

The couple made their way to Doha, Kuwait and the US, eventually returning to the flat they had in Istanbul. The woman she has left behind, Aryana says with bittersweet pride, are more educated and self-aware than those the Taliban forced out of school and work when they last ruled Afghanistan in 1996-2001. "The women of Afghanistan are not the same women they were 20 years ago," she said. "They are definitely not going to accept this," she said of fundamentalism.

Just as important now, Aryana said, was for governments to understand that the Taliban today were the same as those who ruled before the Sept 11, 2001 terror attacks led to the US-led invasion. "I hope the world realizes this is not the changed or the new Taliban," she said.

'Thirsty for my blood'

Aryana has dedicated more than half her music to Afghan women. But the risk to her own life was simply too great to stay behind. Even before Kabul fell, she said she felt "like a prisoner" because fundamentalists viewed her as a threat. "If the Taliban are around, there is definitely no space for me because the Taliban are thirsty for my blood," she said.

But while inspired by global pop icons such as Jennifer Lopez and Beyonce, Aryana draws a line at direct comparisons. "Imagine being a judge on a musical show and you have to wear an armored jacket not to be killed. I don't think any of them has lived that," she said. "I think I have had a very different life from them," she mused. "I wish I could have a life like them, but how can you blame your fortune for being born in a war-torn country like Afghanistan?" — AFP

As Broadway returns, one play channels the emotions of 9/11

Broadway is back after an 18-month coronavirus shutdown, and for the actors of "Come from Away" there is added resonance: the show about 9/11 returns as New York marks 20 years since the attacks. "I think it's sort of the perfect show for this moment because it emphasizes our shared humanity," Paul Whitty, one of the musical's actors, told AFP during a recent rehearsal.

"Come from Away" first came to Broadway in 2017 - but its last performance was in March 2020, when COVID-19 brought New York City to an abrupt halt. Some actors found themselves having to find other sources of income and a way to stay in shape and keep their passion for performing intact, all while locked down at home.

But Broadway, which generated around \$33 million in sales per week before the pandemic across 31 shows, is gradually reopening throughout September. Tuesday heralds a landmark moment when "Hamilton", "The Lion King", "Chicago" and "Wicked" all return on the same day. "Come from Away", written by Canadians Irene Sankoff and David Hein, returns to the stage on Sept 21. A film version was released on Apple TV on Friday.

The show tells the true story of how residents of Gander in Newfoundland, Canada welcomed 7,000 stranded passengers whose planes landed there after US airspace was closed on 9/11. "(It) is a really good reminder of kindness and compassion and grace, even in this time when it's very difficult," said James Seol, a newcomer to the troupe.

At a studio in Lower Manhattan, rehearsals are drawing to a close. Fifteen actors dance, sing and stamp their feet. Their reflexes have returned but above all is an impatience for the appreciation of an adoring crowd. "I missed the audience. I miss connecting with them, sharing this story with them," said Q Smith. "In my dressing room, we can hear the rumblings of the audience filtering into their seats and sometimes the band warming up. I missed that a lot. It's my favorite thing," she added.

New York's performance venues began reopening in the spring but various restrictions meant it wasn't worthwhile for most Broadway League-affiliated theaters to return, until now. With capacity limits gone, several Broadway and off-Broadway shows are opening their doors again, a defining moment in New York's post-pandemic recovery. For the actors, the unprecedented shutdown was a leap into the unknown. "It was really tricky," said Smith, whose savings started to dry up towards the end.

Few foreign tourists

But the extended break also reinforced her appreciation for her work. "I will never (again) complain about being tired after eight shows a week. I just have a renewed joy for performing now. I'm so excited to get back on stage. I cannot wait," she told AFP. Seol, 43, turned to giving private lessons during the shutdown, but he never thought of stopping his artistic career entirely. Whitty wondered if theaters would ever reopen.

"I was trying to figure out other ways to be creative and to feel like I had some purpose," Whitty recalled. "I immersed myself in a lot of music. I really was practicing piano a lot during the pandemic. Just little ways to stay sort of artistically active



Actors from the Broadway musical 'Come From Away' perform a free concert in front of the Lincoln Memorial on Friday in Washington, DC. — AFP photos

instead of just streaming Netflix all day at home," he said.

The first show of "Come from Away" is sold out. Producer Sue Frost is optimistic about the rest of the run even if international tourists still cannot visit New York because travel to America remains closed for many countries. "We were very encouraged when we looked at the zip codes of

people who are purchasing tickets. It's people from up and down the east coast," she said. "I think there's going to be domestic tourism. It's going to come back much stronger than anybody anticipated. I believe we're strong enough to weather this storm." — AFP

WIM WENDERS OPENS 9/11 PHOTO EXHIBITION IN LONDON

Legendary German film-maker Wim Wenders on Friday opened an exhibition in London of his photographs capturing the devastation wrought by the 9/11 attacks, which he hopes also convey "surreal beauty". The showcase - "Wim Wenders: Photographing Ground Zero", at the Imperial War Museum - presents large-scale images of the apocalyptic scenes shot by the veteran director less than two months after the attacks.

The haunting photos show the still-smoking ruins of the collapsed World Trade Center towers, as workers cleared the site in Nov 2001. "I had wanted the place to somehow tell me something, to give me a message," Wenders said at the launch of the exhibition in the British capital. He recalled rays of sunshine fil-

tering through the gigantic skeletons of the towers, amid the smoldering ruins and thick layers of ash carpeting the ground.

"A surreal beauty appeared and I took it as a great sign of hope that there was something beautiful emerging," Wenders explained. The acclaimed director - best known for arthouse hits like "Buena Vista Social Club", "Wings of Desire", "Pina" and "Paris, Texas" - said he hoped Ground Zero could be "forever a symbol of peace and healing". He noted recent events in Afghanistan, with the total withdrawal of US and NATO military forces and return of the Taliban, may add "particular resonance" to his images for some visitors.

Wenders, who has established himself as a giant of European cinema while cultivating a decades-long love affair with the United States, has also photographed extensively during his career. That passion has been increasingly represented in his film-making this century, especially in the visually arresting 2005 family drama "Don't Come Knocking". Meanwhile his photos have been published and exhibited around the world. The exhibition, at the south London museum, runs until Jan 9. — AFP



German filmmaker Wim Wenders poses during a photocall for 'Wim Wenders: Photographing Ground Zero' exhibition at the Imperial War Museums (IWM) in London on Friday. — AFP

Sports

Djokovic to play for Grand Slam against Medvedev in US Open final

Star chases first calendar-year Slam in 52 years, 21st overall

NEW YORK: Novak Djokovic will play Daniil Medvedev to try and complete the first men's singles calendar-year Grand Slam since 1969 after defeating Tokyo Olympic champion Alexander Zverev in Friday's US Open semi-finals.

Top-ranked Djokovic outlasted the German fourth seed 4-6, 6-2, 6-4, 4-6, 6-2 to reach today's championship match at Arthur Ashe Stadium against Russian second seed Medvedev. "I'm going to treat the next match like it's the last match of my career," Djokovic said.

One more victory will give the 34-year-old Serbian star the first calendar-year Slam since Rod Laver accomplished it 52 years ago. "There is only one more match left. All in. Let's do it," Djokovic said. "I'm going to put my heart and my soul and my body and my head into that one."

Djokovic seeks his fourth career US Open title and his 21st overall Slam crown, which would lift him one above the all-time record he shares with Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer, both absent with injuries. "These are the moments we live for," Djokovic said. "These are the kind of unique opportunities we dream of when we are looking for motivation."

Australian legend Laver, 83, was in the stands to watch as Djokovic took a measure of revenge for Zverev, 24, beating him in an Olympic semi-final, denying Djokovic's bid for a "Golden Slam" with a Tokyo gold medal. "I knew coming onto the court it was going to be a great battle," Djokovic said. "Alexander is a big champion. He's someone I admire on and off the court."

Medvedev, the 2019 US Open runner-up, defeated Canadian 12th seed Felix Auger-Aliassime

6-4, 7-5, 6-2 to reach his third career Slam final. "I don't think I played my best today but I'm really happy to be in the final," Medvedev said.

Djokovic is the oldest US Open finalist since Andre Agassi at 35 in 2005 and could be the oldest US Open champion since Ken Rosewall at 35 in 1970. By beating Zverev, Djokovic matched Federer's all-time record of 31 men's Slam final appearances. Djokovic is 20-10 in major finals. The final is a rematch of February's Australian Open final won by Djokovic in straight sets. Medvedev trails Djokovic 5-3 in their all-time rivalry.

"If I can make this, I'll probably be in the history books a little bit somewhere like not letting him do

this," Medvedev said. "But I don't really care about it. I think it's more about him, that it affects him. I'm just going to throw it everything and I'm definitely not going to be thinking about Grand Slam or whatever."

Djokovic has won 27 consecutive Slam matches, three shy of his all-time record streak from

2015 and 2016 when he won all four major titles in a row. Zverev, last year's US Open runner-up, saw his 16-match win streak end.

In the fifth set, Djokovic broke after an extended rally with a forehand passing winner to 2-0 and Zverev swatted back-to-back forehands long to go down 4-0. Djokovic broke again in the eighth to book his date with history after three hours and 34 minutes.

Djokovic double-faulted away a break in the ninth game and Zverev held to claim the first set in 36 minutes. Having dropped the first set for the fourth consecutive match, Djokovic dominated the second, never facing a break point.



NEW YORK: Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates after winning his 2021 US Open Tennis tournament men's semifinal match against Germany's Alexander Zverev at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in New York, on Friday. —AFP

A 10th-game groundstrokes battle in the third set saw a 53-shot rally ended by a Zverev forehand winner to save set point and draw a roar from the crowd, but Djokovic hit an overhead smash on the next point for the break to capture the set. In the fourth, Zverev broke to 2-1 with a forehand winner and held from there.

Breaking mentally

Auger-Aliassime lost two set points and was broken in the ninth game of the second set and

Medvedev broke again at love on the way to taking the set to seize command of the match. "I knew I had to do everything at my best because at that point in the match I knew I could break him mentally and that's what happened," Medvedev said.

In all Medvedev took 11 of the final 13 games, ending matters with an overhead smash after two hours and four minutes. "I had to play my best level and even better if I wanted to get a chance to win," Auger-Aliassime said. "I didn't do it long enough. Overall Daniil was the better player." —AFP

News in brief

Pele feeling 'a little better'

SAO PAULO: Brazilian football legend Pele remains in intensive care but is making a satisfactory recovery after undergoing surgery for a suspected colon tumor, his doctors said Friday. Pele's medical team at the Albert Einstein Hospital in Sao Paulo said in a statement that he was "actively conversing and displaying vital signs within normal range." Pele, 80, took to Instagram to reassure his fans. "My friends, with each passing day I feel a little better. I'm looking forward to playing again, but I'm still going to recover for a few more days," he said. "While I'm here, I take the opportunity to talk a lot with my family and to rest. Thanks again for all the loving messages. We'll be together again soon!" The suspected tumor was detected during routine tests, according to the hospital, where Pele has been undergoing treatment since August 31. —AFP

Alves, Sao Paulo split

SAO PAULO: Brazilian side Sao Paulo have parted company with Dani Alves after the veteran defender skipped training on Friday in protest over unpaid wages. "We have made the decision and we have informed (manager) Hernan Crespo, that Daniel Alves will no longer be part of the team," the side's sporting director Carlos Belmonte announced on Twitter. "Sao Paulo is bigger than one man," he insisted. The former Barcelona, Juventus and Paris Saint-Germain player's advisers told the club his training boycott would continue until his outstanding salary was paid, Belmonte revealed. According to reports in the local press Alves, 38, is owed 11 million reais (almost 1.8 million euros). Sao Paulo recognizes the debt and last week tabled an offer which was rejected, Belmonte added. Relations between the side and Alves soured when he left for the Olympic Games where he captained Brazil to the gold medal for his 43rd title. The most decorated player in history joined Sao Paulo in 2019 on a three-year contract. —AFP

Collins suspended for five games

LOS ANGELES: Dallas Cowboys right tackle La'el Collins has been suspended for five games after violating the NFL's substance abuse rules, the league said Friday. The 28-year-old offensive lineman, who played in the Cowboys' season-opening 31-29 loss to Tampa Bay on Thursday, will be eligible to return on October 18. US media reports said Collins' suspension came after missing multiple drug tests. Collins' ban is a blow to the Cowboys who were already missing guard Zack Martin due to COVID-19. Collins missed the entirety of the 2020 season after undergoing surgery on a hip injury. —AFP

Nats' Nolin suspended

NEW YORK: Major League Baseball has suspended Washington Nationals pitcher Sean Nolin five games for intentionally hitting Atlanta Braves first baseman Freddie Freeman. MLB meted out the punishment — which included a fine — on Friday, two days after Nolin plunked Freddie Freeman in the bottom of the first inning in Atlanta. Nolin opted to appeal the suspension, and can play until the appeal is resolved. In addition, Nationals manager Dave Martinez has received a one-game suspension and an undisclosed fine as a result of Nolin's actions. —AFP

Superstitions keep Fernandez's dad from US Open

NEW YORK: Jorge Fernandez did not attend his daughter Leylah's all-teen US Open final showdown yesterday with Britain's Emma Raducanu over fears about messing with routines that are working. Fernandez, a former footballer from Ecuador who became a tennis coach for his daughter, watched from home in Florida as he has for two weeks when 19-year-old Fernandez met 18-year-old qualifier Raducanu for the title.

"No, I'm not going to be there," Fernandez told US Open reporters on a conference call before the match. "I'm extremely superstitious. My daughter is as well. 'I've been using the same shampoo on game day, kind of using the same jeans on game day, I think the same socks and underwear — it's taken to a completely different level. It's nothing new. You do your shoelaces a certain way. Leylah and I have always when we figured out what's working, we don't mess with it.

It's working, so let's not ruin it."

Raducanu is the first qualifier to ever reach a Grand Slam final while Fernandez ousted three of the world's top five to reach the final. "You're playing another warrior in front of you. I don't think the age, who it is or the ranking should even matter," Fernandez said. "It's a finals. Let's leave it all on the table. Let's sweat it all out. Let's make sure that no matter how it finishes, there are no regrets."

He painfully recalls the last time he watched Leylah in a final. "It was Acapulco when she made it to the finals and she lost it," Jorge Fernandez said. "I was hating myself for a good two months afterwards. I didn't really want to talk about it. They say, 'C'mon, it's just a game, she made it to the finals.' But inside me it's like, 'No, I shouldn't have shown up. I shouldn't have been there.' It's really about superstition. She knows I'm supporting her from afar. I'm in her heart and she's in mine. Everybody who has seen it from the stadium, fantastic. But I'm going to look at her right across the kitchen table when we're going to have dinner and we're going to be OK."

They're also in touch often, with Leylah getting calls on a schedule, the

Toyota makes history with 24 Hours of Le Mans victory

LE MANS: Toyota celebrated another spectacular result recently with a one-two victory in the iconic 24 Hours of Le Mans. Mike Conway, Kamui Kobayashi and Jose Maria Lopez finally won at Le Mans for the first time in the No. 7 GAZOO Hybrid Electric Vehicle (HEV). The World Champions started from pole position and led for the majority of the race, completing 371 laps and securing GAZOO Racing's fourth consecutive victory at the legendary Circuit de la Sarthe.

Last year's winners Sebastien Buemi, Kazuki Nakajima and Brendon Hartley completed a perfect result for the team by finishing second in the No 8 GRO10 HEV. GAZOO Racing (GR) has now won all four races of the 2021 FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC) so far during the new GRO10 HEV's debut season.

An incident-packed 24 hours began on a wet track with Conway leading the field in the No 7 GRO10 HEV. Rain in the sixth hour caused several

incidents, including a 20-minute safety car, but Lopez maintained the lead while Hartley followed in second in the No 8 GRO10 HEV. The two vehicles continued to lead the race, with slow zones and safety cars contributing to a fluctuating gap as the GR team held a clear lead over the chasing pack.

As the race entered its final 12 hours, Kobayashi had stretched the No 7 GRO10 HEV's lead to just over half a minute, with Hartley chasing in the No 8 GRO10 HEV. Despite some technical challenges, close communication between the drivers and race engineers on both vehicles ensured the team maintained their lead, with Kobayashi and Nakajima crossing the line together to make Hypercar history at Le Mans.

"To Kamui, Mike, and Jose, congratulations! The #7 crew finally got to the end of 24 hours and took the checkered flag on the highest step of the podium. I was so happy and relieved that I could nearly cry. Huge congratulations! Thank you so much," said Akio Toyoda, President, Toyota Motor Corporate. "I heard it was announced that 100 percent renewable fuel would be introduced in the WEC next season. We are moving towards carbon neutrality through motorsport and we can make an effort to expand the options. We believe that we can speed up technological development through motorsport, because it is a place for serious competition, and will continue our efforts. To the fans, thank you for your support this



NEW YORK: Canada's Leylah Fernandez hits a return to Belarus's Aryna Sabalenka during their 2021 US Open Tennis tournament women's semifinal match at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in New York, on Thursday. —AFP

night before a match for plans, the next morning for workout needs and for the pre-match pep talk. "It's more based on sentiments and emotions," he said. "It's almost like a virtual hug and a kiss. 'Good luck, you know what to do.' It's more of a motivating conversation. What I say is what I'm feeling

in the moment, what I'm feeling from her."

It's a final boost for the mental fortitude Fernandez shows on court. "She's just unbelievable with her mindset right now. She shows so much fight," he said. "But she is human, and she does feel those emotions." —AFP



time as well and I would be grateful if you could continue to support us in the future."

Jose Maria Lopez, Driver of the No 7 GRO10 HEV, said: "To finally win this race is a dream come true. It is simply amazing. We came so far for so many years but, up to now, we couldn't win Le Mans. All those experiences make the victory even more special. Mike and Kamui are like brothers to me, and I have seen them doing things in the car which are just amazing. Of course, there is a strong team behind us in Japan and Cologne. We take the glory, but we couldn't do this without this team. Thanks to all of you."

Afghan cricket board signals women could still play: Report

SYDNEY: Women could still be allowed to play cricket, the chairman of Afghanistan's Cricket Board has claimed to an Australian broadcaster in an apparent backflip on the Taliban's headline stance. Azizullah Fazli said the governing body would outline how this would happen "very soon", adding that all 25 of the women's team remained in Afghanistan

and had chosen not to leave on evacuation flights.

"We will give you our clear position on how we will allow women to play cricket," he told SBS Radio Pashto late Friday, the broadcaster reported on its English-language website. "Very soon, we will give you good news on how we will proceed."

His comments appear to contradict the deputy head of the Taliban's cultural commission Ahmadullah Wasiq, who told the same broadcaster on Wednesday that it was "not necessary" for women to play sport. Those remarks saw Australia threaten to cancel a historic maiden men's Test between the two countries, set to take place in Hobart in November.

Australian Test captain Tim Paine turned up the heat on Friday, saying he believed teams could pull out of next month's Twenty20 World Cup in protest, or boycott playing Afghanistan. In an overnight statement, the Afghanistan Cricket Board urged Australia not to punish its men's team over the Taliban's apparent ban, saying it was "powerless to change the culture and religious environment of Afghanistan".

"Do not isolate us and avoid penalizing us," it added. Cricket Australia said in brief comments yesterday that it remained in regular dialogue with the Afghanistan Cricket Board and that "we made our position very clear in the statement". —AFP

Sports

Biennial World Cup proposal divides football world

More profits to help federations in Africa, Asia and South America

LAUSANNE: FIFA risks plunging the world of football into a new conflict with its proposal to hold the World Cup every two years instead of four, raising the possibility of a divorce with leading clubs and the powerful European leagues. The proposal, first floated in the 1990s, was revived in March by former Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger, now head of football development at FIFA.

In May, FIFA President Gianni Infantino agreed, at the request of the Saudi football federation, to launch a "feasibility study" into the proposal, making it clear that he is open to reforming the international calendar. With Wenger saying he hopes the consultation process will be completed by the end of the year, the powerful European leagues have stepped up their opposition.

A final phase every summer

FIFA's central argument is that a biennial World Cup would create more profits that could be distributed to federations in Africa, Asia and South America, who have a greater reliance on FIFA funds than the wealthy European leagues.

Wenger says the idea would be to have a final phase every summer from 2025-2026, alternating World Cups and continental tournaments like the European Championships and Copa America. Qualifying matches would be grouped together in October, or in October and March. He refutes the argument that the players would face increased strain, arguing that they would have to make fewer long journeys and would have a minimum of 25 days rest after playing in summer tournaments for their countries. "Today's calendar is outdated," Wenger said. "We want to organize it in a more efficient way."

Hostility in Europe

UEFA President Aleksander Ceferin is fiercely opposed to the proposal and threatened that European nations and South American powerhouses like Brazil and Argentina would boycott a biennial World Cup.

"We can decide not to play in it. As far as I know, the South Americans are on the same page. So good luck with a World Cup like that," he told *The Times* newspaper. "I think it will never happen as it is so much against the basic principles of football."

South American federation CONMEBOL followed that up with a strongly worded statement on Friday, saying the proposal would "distort the most



DOHA: Qatar's assistant Foreign Minister Lolwah Al-Khater and FIFA President Gianni Infantino visit the Park View Villas, a Qatar's 2022 FIFA World Cup residence in Doha housing Afghan refugees, on September 4, 2021. — AFP

important football competition on the planet". "There is no sporting justification for shortening the period between World Cups," CONMEBOL said.

Major European clubs have opposed it as well. "I'm not a fan of it," said Bayern Munich coach Julian Nagelsmann, arguing that "if you want more value, make yourself rare." Liverpool manager

“ Today's calendar is outdated ”

Jürgen Klopp claimed Friday that FIFA's proposal was "all about money".

The European Club Association, which represents the continent's biggest clubs, said it believed there was no space in the current calendar for the proposals and complained that FIFA had not contacted it to discuss the matter. The World Leagues Forum, which speaks for 42 leagues around the globe, said the two-year proposal was detrimental

to the economic interests of football and the players' health.

Silent majority?

Perhaps sensing it was losing the battle of public opinion, FIFA gathered together a group of illustrious former players and coaches in Doha this week to defend the idea of a biennial World Cup. One of those present, former Manchester United goalkeeper Peter Schmeichel, said "we all were in agreement". Brazilian World Cup winner Ronaldo insisted that if you asked the world's two best current players, Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo, "I'm sure they will all say yes." FIFA holds the key. Any final decision on the proposal would have to be made by a FIFA Congress, which usually takes place in May.

Boycott threat

Even if FIFA decides to go ahead, it seems unlikely that European clubs — where the best players are mostly concentrated — would be prepared to part with their expensive assets for a month at a time, with the increased risk of injury that would bring. A foretaste of what could happen came this week when some English clubs refused to release their players for matches in countries with an increased risk of COVID-19. FIFA could also face legal challenges from clubs. — AFP

US Soccer chief vows to 'equalize' World Cup payments

LOS ANGELES: United States Soccer Federation president Cindy Parlow Cone said Friday the body hopes to "equalize" World Cup prize money for its men's and women's national teams as part of efforts to settle ongoing litigation with its women footballers.

In an open letter addressed to US fans, Parlow Cone said the gulf in prize money paid out by FIFA in the men's and women's tournaments was "by far the most challenging issue" facing US Soccer in pay negotiations with men's and women's teams.

The question of World Cup prize money formed a prominent part of a lawsuit filed by the US women's soccer team in 2019, which accused the USSF of "stubbornly refusing" to pay its men and women's players equally.

A federal judge later rejected the claim of pay discrimination, but the US women have appealed. The 2019 lawsuit cited the discrepancy in World Cup prize money payments paid to the two teams in 2014 and 2015. The US men received \$5.375 million for reaching the round of 16 at the 2014 World Cup, while the women received \$1.725 million for winning the 2015 tournament.

The USSF has argued that its hands are tied because the prize money is set by FIFA, which awarded \$38 million to France for winning the 2018 men's World Cup in Russia, but only \$4 million to the American women for winning the 2019 Women's World Cup. "FIFA alone control those funds," Parlow Cone said in her letter on Friday. "And US Soccer is legally obligated to distribute those funds based on our current negotiated collective bargaining agreements with the men's and women's teams." However Parlow Cone said US Soccer wants to bring the men's and women's national teams together to "rethink how we've done things in the past."

"To that end, we have invited the players and both Players Associations to join US Soccer in negotiating a solution together that equalizes World Cup prize money between the USMNT and USWNT," she wrote. "Finding a framework that works for everyone will require open and thoughtful conversations and sincere commitment from USMNT and USWNT players to come together. Until FIFA equalizes the prize money that it awards to the Men's and Women's World Cup participants, it is incumbent upon us to collectively find a solution. US Soccer is ready and willing to meet with both groups of players as soon as possible and as often as needed to determine that innovative solution. We hope our men's and women's national teams share our sense of urgency when it comes to doing whatever we can to resolve the prize money gap."

Parlow Cone said the USSF had wanted to negotiate a single collective bargaining agreement covering men's and women's team, but had met resistance. Accordingly, the USSF is negotiating separate agreements. US Soccer said the body "will be offering the USMNT and the USWNT the exact same contract, just as we have in past negotiations. That means offering CBAs that include equalized FIFA prize money, identical game bonuses and identical commercial and revenue sharing agreements."

A spokeswoman for the US women's team said Parlow Cone's letter showed that the USSF "finally acknowledged that they pay women less than men and must correct this ongoing disparity by reaching an equal pay collective bargaining agreement and resolving the ongoing lawsuit. "Letters to fans are not a substitute." — AFP

South American players cleared to play for English clubs

PARIS: England-based South American players will be able to line up for their clubs in the weekend after their countries dropped complaints about their failure to report for international duty, FIFA said yesterday.

Reigning Premier League champions Manchester City as well as Liverpool, Manchester United, Chelsea and Leeds refused to release players for World Cup qualifiers over the past week due to the coronavirus isolation period required on their return to Britain.

All of the South American qualifiers were played in countries on the British government's red COVID-19 travel list, meaning travelers returning from those countries have to quarantine for 10 days. Brazil, Chile, Mexico and Paraguay had invoked a FIFA rule which would have barred the players for five days, but football's world governing body said it recognized "that players have no control over the extreme situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic".

"As a sign of good faith, goodwill and cooperation, the member asso-

ciations of Brazil, Chile, Mexico and Paraguay, in close consultation with FIFA, have taken the decision to withdraw their complaints in relation to the England-based players," FIFA said in a statement.

FIFA added it had been liaising with the Premier League, Football Association and the British government to avoid a repetition of the scenario in the next international window which comes in October.

Liverpool manager Jürgen Klopp had said Friday he was still unsure whether he could select Brazilian goalkeeper Alisson Becker or midfielder Fabinho to play against Leeds today. Klopp, a vocal opponent of the congested global football calendar, criticized South American football authorities for failing to show foresight in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We all know we are in the middle of a pandemic, which is difficult for all parts of life and for football it was difficult as well — we have a few more games to play than we have to play usually internationally,"



BUENOS AIRES: Argentina's Lionel Messi (center) and Bolivia's Jairo Quinteros (right) vie for the ball during their South American qualification football match for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 at the Monumental Stadium in Buenos Aires on Thursday. — AFP

Klopp said. "We had a summer break where all of a sudden somebody organized again a Copa America, where they could have played the games, for example, without playing a Copa America, which they had a year before."

Newcastle manager said Friday, after confirming that his Paraguay midfielder Miguel Almiron had been

cleared to play this weekend that "common sense prevailed". The coronavirus pandemic led to Brazil's clash against fierce rivals Argentina in Sao Paulo last Sunday being halted and then abandoned after Brazilian officials sprinted onto the pitch to remove Argentine players they accused of breaching Brazil's COVID-19 quarantine protocols. — AFP

Classifieds

Hospitals & Clinics

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adalya	22517144

Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsia	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401

CHANGE OF NAME

I, formally known as AKALEZI JOHN KELECHI, holder of Nigerian Passport Number A08103014, hereby declare that I have changed my name to AKALEZI STEPHEN. All former documents remain valid. The general public, banks and concerned authorities should please take note.

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

I, GAFFAR SYED HUSSAIN SHANAWAS, Tindivanam V.R.P. Dist, Tamil Nadu, hereby declare that I have changed my name as SYED SHANAWAS S/o SYED HUSSAIN, Tindivanam V.R.P. Dist, Tamil Nadu. (C 0642) 8-9-2021

VILLA FOR RENT

AL-ADAN
2 floors and quarter + garden
Rent: KD 1850

VILLA FOR RENT

MISHREF
2 floors - 5 rooms
Rent: KD 1500

Cont: 99928013

EMERGENCY



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Ronaldo enjoys a sensational return

Ronaldo's double sinks Newcastle 4-1; Arsenal ease Arteta pressure



MANCHESTER: Manchester United's Portuguese striker Cristiano Ronaldo (center) celebrates after scoring their second goal during the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and Newcastle yesterday. — AFP

LONDON: Cristiano Ronaldo enjoyed a sensational return to Manchester United as his debut double inspired a 4-1 win against Newcastle, while Arsenal eased the pressure on Mikel Arteta with a 1-0 victory over Norwich yesterday. Ronaldo's second debut for United was the headline act as the Premier League resumed after the international break and the Portugal superstar did not disappoint his adoring fans at Old Trafford.

The 36-year-old insists he did not make his £19.8 million (\$27 million) move from Juventus last month for a "vacation". Ronaldo lived up to that boast, showing he remains as sharp as ever with a clinical brace either side of Javier Manquillo's equalizer for Newcastle. Ronaldo's compatriot Bruno Fernandes netted with a long-range rocket 10 minutes from full-time before Jesse Lingard bagged the fourth.

A winner of three Premier League titles and one Champions League crown in six years with United before moving to Real Madrid, Ronaldo was making his first appearance for the club since 2009. United hope the five-time Ballon d'Or winner can help end arch rivals Manchester City's reign as champions and there was an electric air of anticipation around Old Trafford ahead of his return.

Thousands of fans gathered outside hours before kick-off to catch a glimpse of Ronaldo when he stepped off the

United team bus. Chants of "Viva Ronaldo" echoed around Old Trafford as supporters paraded in their idol's famous number seven shirt. Former United boss Alex Ferguson, whose phone call to Ronaldo played a key role in the Portugal striker choosing United over City, was watching from the stands.

There was also a rare visit from the club's United States-based co-chairman Avram Glazer. Ronaldo's name was cheered to the rafters before kick-off and inevitably he was destined to break Newcastle's resistance two minutes into first half stoppage-time. Mason Greenwood's shot was spilled by Newcastle keeper Freddie Woodman and Ronaldo reacted quickest to finish from virtually on the goal-line.

Running to the corner to perform his trademark 'Sii' celebration, Ronaldo soaked up the acclaim from 76,000 ecstatic fans. Not everyone was happy with Ronaldo's return as a feminist group flew a banner over the stadium in support of a woman who accused the striker of rape in Las Vegas. In 2019, US prosecutors said Ronaldo, who denied the claims, would not face charges because they could not "be proven beyond reasonable doubt".

Ronaldo raises the roof
Newcastle threatened to spoil Ronaldo's day when Manquillo equalized

in the 56th minute with a fine finish from Allan Saint-Maximin's pass. But Ronaldo had other ideas and he restored United's lead in the 62nd minute. Luke Shaw's through-ball sent Ronaldo racing clear on goal and he drilled a low shot under Woodman to raise the roof again.

Surfing the feel-good factor generated by Ronaldo, unbeaten United sit top of the table after a third win from their first four matches. At the Emirates Stadium, Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang gave under-fire Arsenal manager Arteta some much-needed breathing space. Gabon forward Aubameyang tapped home in the 66th minute, with a VAR check going in the Gunners' favor as Norwich appealed in vain for offside.

After three successive defeats in the top-flight, Arsenal's first league goal this season was enough to lift them off the bottom of the table and out of the relegation zone. Despite Ronaldo's snub, Bernardo Silva showed Manchester City can cope just fine with their array of talent as he fired the champions to a 1-0 win at Leicester. Portugal playmaker Silva struck in the 62nd minute with a close-range finish after Caglar Soyuncu blocked Joao Cancelo's drive.

Second placed City have now won their last three games. Crystal Palace ended 10-man Tottenham's perfect start to the Premier League season as Wilfried Zaha's penalty and a late double



LONDON: Arsenal's Spanish manager Mikel Arteta reacts at the final whistle during the English Premier League football match between Arsenal and Norwich City at the Emirates Stadium yesterday. — AFP

from Odsonne Edouard sealed a 3-0 win. Nuno Espirito Santo's side had Japhet Tanganga sent off for two bookings in quick succession in the second half at Selhurst Park. Zaha netted from the spot after Ben Davies's handball and former Celtic striker Edouard's debut brace made it a first win for Palace boss Patrick Vieira.

South Korea forward Hwang Hee-chan scored his first Premier League

goal for Wolves in their 2-0 win at Watford. Wolves' first league goal this season - an own goal by Watford's Francisco Sierralta - was followed by Hwang's 83rd minute tap-in in his debut appearance after joining from Leipzig last month. Brighton won 1-0 at Brentford thanks to Leandro Trossard's 90th minute strike, while West Ham striker Michail Antonio was sent off in their 0-0 draw at Southampton. — AFP

England and India consider next moves after cancelled Test

MANCHESTER: What happens now? That was the question cricket fans around the world were asking after the dramatic last-minute cancellation of the deciding fifth Test between England and India in Manchester. Following all-night talks, it was not until shortly before 9:00 am local time Friday, just over two hours before the scheduled start and minutes before the gates at Old Trafford were due to open to a sell-out crowd of 22,000, that the match was called off due to COVID-19 fears within the India camp—a decision that leave English cricket facing a financial 'black hole' estimated at £40 million (\$55 million).

Reports a physiotherapist in close contact with the players had tested positive for COVID appeared to be the final straw in persuading an India side already

missing head coach Ravi Shastri, bowling coach Bharat Arun and fielding coach Ramakrishnan Sridhar due to positive COVID tests, with senior physiotherapist Nitin Patel self-isolating, not to take the field. England had been in a similar situation in December when their one-day series in South Africa was postponed amid fears COVID had infiltrated the team, even if two positive tests were later found to be negative.

'India flexed their muscles'
"I felt at the time England let South Africa down," former England captain Michael Vaughan told the BBC. "England flexed their muscles back then and I believe India have flexed their muscles. "I honestly feel Indian cricket has let the English game down." Unlike last year, where teams were kept in bio-secure bubbles, the 2021 international season in England has seen restrictions loosened as officials felt it was unsustainable to expect sides to keep playing under such strict regulations. But whether Shastri's presence at a well-attended London launch of his new book two days before the fourth Test at the Oval, which India won by 157 runs, was acceptable under

current guidelines remains a debatable point. So too does England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) chief executive Tom Harrison's contention that fear of COVID, rather than COVID itself, was the reason behind the cancellation—a difference which could impact on the hosts ability to make an insurance claim. "It doesn't make a difference in respect of a ticket buyers; they will be paid back in full," said Harrison. "It makes a difference in terms of the ECB balance sheet."

COVID is an acceptable reason for cancelling a match under the regulations for the World Test Championship if it has a significant impact on a side fielding a team. The International Cricket Council are now set to decide the result of the match and series-which India led 2-1 to leave them on the brink of a notable double after their series win in Australia earlier this year-although a quick verdict is unlikely. "I think we have to just take a breath and do some work with the ICC, to formally ask them to adjudicate on the result of this," added Harrison.

Meanwhile, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) said it had offered to reschedule the game after

a cancellation "jointly decided" by both boards. However, with the lucrative Indian Premier League, itself disrupted by COVID, resuming in the United Arab Emirates on September 19, the Test will not happen anytime soon. But with India meant to tour England next year for a white-ball series, it could yet be slotted in at Old Trafford. Harrison insisted the IPL was not to blame for the cancellation, saying: "This Indian cricket team are as passionate about Test cricket as fans in our country are." "Could have cancelled yesterday."

And what of those fans?
George Twigg, a geography student, was among a group of four friends who had made a journey of 81 miles from Derby to Manchester for their annual pilgrimage to a Test. "We set off at 7:30 am. We were halfway to Manchester when we heard about the cancellation," he said. "They could have done it (cancelled the match) yesterday (Thursday). We could have saved on the travel, could have cancelled the hotel. "But instead they've had to wait until this morning and we've had to be disappointed as we got here." — AFP