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Busing a major concern for parents of school-age kids

Scramble for ridesharing options amid lack of clarity



KUWAIT: Students alight from a school bus in this pre-pandemic file photo. Photo used for illustrative purposes only.

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Children across Kuwait will start returning to school from Sept 26, and the education ministry as well as public and private schools are busy making preparations. One issue, however, remains undecided, and has left parents worried about the return to on-campus learning. School buses may or may not be allowed by the ministry to operate, and so far there is no clarity on the issue. "To this date, we have no clear guidance on the matter of transportation services for our students," the registrar of a private Arabic school told Kuwait Times. "We are waiting for a memorandum from the ministry of education. Normally, we charge fees for transportation services along with the tuition fees, but currently we are deferring receiving payment for transportation services from our students," she said.

"Earlier, it was announced no school buses will be allowed. But we do not know whether that previous announcement is still in force for the current school year. We informed parents that they will have to send their kids to school by private vehicles or taxis and pick them up on time after school. Until the ministry comes up with a new announcement, we cannot do anything. Parents must bring their kids on time and be able to take them back after classes," she said.

The lack of a clarity on the matter of busing is a major concern for parents who work or don't have private transportation. Rasha, a Syrian working mother, said this has been a hot subject on online parent groups. "The school said we have to wait for the announcement from the government whether they will allow school buses or not. I am sure if there are no buses, it will be very hard for

me since I am a working mom," she said.

"I can take my children to school, but how to get them home afterwards? I cannot run from Shuwaikh to the school just to pick them up. Besides, my office timings are from 9 am to 5 pm. If I go out earlier, maybe my boss will cut my salary. I hope busing will be allowed," she said. "Plus, imagine the traffic jam in October if there are no school buses!"

The logistics for on-campus learning are expected to create headaches for everyone - administrators, teachers, parents and students. Education Minister Ali Al Mudhaf had announced that public schools will resume face-to-face-classes on Oct 3 (most private schools have already started the new school year online). But students will be divided into two groups. Group A will attend on-campus classes, while group B will learn from home.

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News in brief

Morocco dismantles IS cell

RABAT: Moroccan authorities have dismantled a cell of Islamic State group-affiliated militants and arrested three suspects accused of plotting the assassination of a public servant, security services said yesterday. The suspects were detained in the southern city of Errachidia. — AFP

Putin, Assad hold talks

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin condemned the presence of foreign troops in Syria without the approval of its leader Bashar Al-Assad, during their unannounced meeting in Moscow, the Kremlin said yesterday. Putin hailed Russia and Syria's "joint efforts" in the conflict, saying their militaries had returned the vast majority of Syrian territory to government control. — AFP

Facebook shields VIPs from rules

SAN FRANCISCO: Facebook exempts certain celebrities, politicians and other high-profile users from some of its own rules for posts as part of a program launched as a quality-control mechanism, the Wall Street Journal reported on Monday. Facebook spokesman Andy Stone defended the "XCheck" program, but noted the social media giant is aware its enforcement of rules is "not perfect". — AFP (See Page 6)

Global oil demand to rebound

PARIS: Global oil demand has dropped for three straight months as COVID cases have risen in Asia but it is expected to bounce back next month, the International Energy Agency said yesterday. Global oil demand is expected to rise by 5.2 mbd this year, slightly lower than previously forecast, but 2022 growth will be slightly higher at 3.2 mbd. — AFP (See Page 8)

No 'responsibility' for Kabul airport

DOHA: Qatar warned yesterday it would not take responsibility for Kabul airport without "clear" agreements with all involved, including the Taliban, about its operations. "There is a possibility for collaboration with other countries if needed, but until now the discussion is only among us and Turkey and the Taliban," Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani said. — AFP

Palestinians hail jailbreak despite arrests

JENIN: Four of the six Palestinians who staged a Hollywood-style escape from a Zionist prison may be back behind bars, but in their hometown they are being celebrated as heroes. When cellphones buzzed last week in Jenin with news of the spectacular jailbreak from a high-security prison, Abu Antoine dreamt his nephew Zakaria Zubeidi might never be caught. "In the hour after the announcement, we were filled with hope," Abu Antoine told AFP. "We said to ourselves: 'If he hasn't been arrested yet, maybe he'll be free forever.'"

Zubeidi, 46, was the most prominent of the six who had dug a tunnel underneath a sink and made their way to freedom, embarrassing their captors and sparking a massive manhunt. Jenin in the occupied West Bank is a historic flashpoint in the

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ARABAH: Fathiya Al-Ardah, mother of escaped Palestinian prisoner Mahmud Al-Ardah, speaks at their home in this village near Jenin on Sept 12, 2021 after her son's arrest by Zionist authorities. — AFP

Apple users urged to download Pegasus spyware flaw fix

SAN FRANCISCO: Apple users were urged yesterday to update their devices after the tech giant announced a fix for a major software flaw that allows the Pegasus spyware to be installed on phones without so much as a click. Cybersecurity

experts at the Citizen Lab, a research center at the University of Toronto, uncovered the flaw while analyzing the phone of a Saudi activist.

That person is among tens of thousands believed to have been targeted with the Zionist-made Pegasus software, which according to media reports has been used worldwide to intercept the communications of activists, journalists and even heads of state. Apple said Monday that it had "rapidly" developed a software update after Citizen Lab alerted it to the hole in its iMessage software on Sept 7.

"Attacks like the ones described are highly sophisticated, cost millions of dollars to develop,

often have a short shelf life, and are used to target specific individuals," the company said. Citizen Lab said it was urging people "to immediately update all Apple devices".

Explosive revelations that governments have spied on people using the hugely invasive software - which was developed by the NSO Group, a secretive Zionist firm - have ricocheted around the world since July. Once Pegasus is installed on a phone, it can be used to read a target's messages, look at their photos, track their movements and even switch on their camera - all without the person knowing.

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Bahrain Jews worship in public again

MANAMA: For the first time in decades, Ebrahim Nonoo is leading prayer services in Manama's renovated synagogue, bringing Jewish traditions into plain view after decades of worship in private. Bahrain's tiny Jewish community, about 50 people, have practiced their faith behind closed doors since 1947, when the Gulf country's only synagogue was

destroyed in disturbances at the start of the Arab-Zionist conflict.

But when Bahrain normalized ties with the Zionist entity one year ago as part of US-brokered agreements with Arab countries known as the Abraham Accords, it "opened everything" up, Nonoo said. "We're very happy to be out in the open," the 61-year-old told AFP. The small, white-painted synagogue with wood-framed windows is in the heart of the capital Manama. It was recently renovated at a cost of 60,000 Bahraini dinars (\$159,000).

Inside are wooden benches with navy blue cushions, a big screen to broadcast prayers, and a wooden podium, or bimah, holding religious

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MANAMA: Ebrahim Nonoo, the head of the Jewish community in Bahrain, speaks to a reporter at the House of Ten Commandments on Sept 4, 2021. — AFP

Local

Kuwait Amir congratulated by Moroccan King on 1st anniversary of power assumption

Amir, Crown Prince receive Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah. — Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday received a cable from King of Morocco Mohammad VI, congratulating him on the first anniversary of accession to the throne. King Mohammad VI stressed the importance of

boosting the distinguished ties between both nations, wishing His Highness the Amir everlasting health and wellness, and further progress and prosperity to his country.

His Highness the Amir replied with a cable in which he thanked King Mohammad VI for his sin-



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah.

cere feelings, praising the deep-rooted ties between both countries and wishing King Mohammad VI everlasting health and wellness, and further progress and prosperity to his country.

In other news, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at

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

KFH inaugurates 7th edition of 'Forsah' program

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House "KFH" has inaugurated the 7th edition of 'Forsah' program which was designed by the bank to include the most distinguished Kuwaiti graduates in IT fields at local and international universities.

The program shall continue till Jan. 2022. It includes highly condensed and comprehensive training programs in the field of information technology and its applications in the banking field. The program contributes to the development of the trainees' self-abilities to serve KFH and its customers.

In his opening speech during the inauguration of the program, KFH Group Chief HR Officer - Zeyad Al-Omar emphasized the significance of making difference at work. He noted that KFH is keen on supporting all employees' innovative initiatives.

He added that the competitive environment in the banking industry requires employees to create competitive advantages that would render KFH as the



Zeyad Al-Omar



Jamal Al-Munaikh

customers' bank of choice and enhance its leading position in the Sharia compliant innovative financial services. He emphasized that KFH is continuing its endeavor to provide all the required means to translate employees' innovative ideas to a reality by designing certain services and products that would add value to the customer's experience and facilitate all fast, easy, and secured digital procedures and services at the highest levels of quality.

Omar indicated that KFH has ensured that 'Forsah' program is fully diversified and rich with academic lectures, workshops, and practical and technical projects. In this program trainees are introduced to digitalization methods applied at global organizations.

Omar expressed his pride in stating that KFH sup-

ports and provides all means to enhance education and an inspiring and innovative work environment, thus assuring the significance of flexible performance within the change and innovation culture.

Digitalization

Executive Manager IT, Jamal Al-Munaikh emphasized the significance of digitalization in the banking operations and the need to facilitate and enhance banking services round the clock. Digitalization has also played a significant role in mitigating operational expenditures and the errors in manually executed operations.

Munaikh said in a speech addressed to the 'Forsah' program trainees during the inauguration ceremony: "KFH was keen on recruiting you in the 'Forsah' program considering your distinguished results in your universities. KFH aims to acquire your contributions, especially that the bank has come a long way in digitalization including artificial intelligence, Blockchain, cyber security, iCloud, Fintech and others". He indicated that this stage requires talents and elites with an innovative mentality to continue development and moving to new levels of distinction in offering services and facilitating work procedures in a way that would reflect positively on the customer's experience and enhance satisfaction levels.

The 'Forsah' program, launched by KFH periodi-

cally, comprises advanced training courses with different learning methods, delegation journeys to Silicon Valley, workshops, and field visits to the biggest global IT organizations e.g., Microsoft, Google, Apple, Repel and other IT giants.

Also, it includes visits to the laboratories of the biggest and highly advanced American universities in the field of digitalization e.g., Berkely university in California, field visits to the innovation center at Silicon Valley and several global IT organizations and FinTech companies. The program also includes field visits to KFH Turkey digitally advanced laboratories to acquaint trainees with the research and innovation centers as part of a team comprising hundreds of engineers.

The trainees exhibited great passion and enthusiasm for 'Forsah' program and the rich content thereof. This would surely add an academic and professional value to their experience and reflect on their performance at the bank by executing ideas that would achieve customers' aspirations.

The inauguration of the program took place at KFH head office in presence of the Group Chief HR - Zeyad Al-Omar, Executive Manager IT - Jamal Al-Munaikh, Executive Manager - Talent Acquisition - Yousef Al-Fadhli, Senior Manager - Talent Development - Mohammed Assadih and the 'Forsah' program trainees.

Busing a major concern for...

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The two groups will alternate, with one group going to school for three days in the first week and then two days in the second week, so that both groups can attend school for five days over the course of two weeks.

The fate of on-campus classes for private schools will depend on their readiness and how they prepare for this hybrid model. Each school will enforce its own plan. In the case of on-campus classes, schools are advised to reduce the number of students per class. Authorities have also mandated school administrations to implement a one-meter

distance between students.

Unvaccinated students and teachers will have to present a negative PCR test every Sunday. School canteens will remain closed, although the education ministry has created a list of food items students can bring with them in school. All the restrictions, however, pale in comparison to the problems with online learning. Most parents can't wait for their children to return to school in person, even if it means no canteen and no busing.

Many parents are now scrambling to find ridesharing options. Sujith, an Indian who has three children returning to campus this October, said he has spoken to a friend who also has two children in the same school. "We agreed to share transportation. I will take all the kids in the morning, and in the afternoon my friend will pick them up from school. In this way, we can resolve our biggest problem of transportation," he said.

of the intifada.

But on Friday night, two of the six escapees were re-arrested by Zionist security forces, in the majority Arab city of Nazareth. The next morning, Zubeidi and another fugitive were also picked up, at a lorry park outside Nazareth. Two members of the group remain at large. All six of the escapees have been implicated in planning or perpetrating attacks on Zionists, and news of the re-arrests was welcomed across the Zionist entity.

Abu Antoine said the "escape remains a victory for Palestinians" but conceded the re-captures had made that victory "incomplete". He recalled that Zubeidi's grandfather had escaped in the summer of 1958 from the Zionist entity's since-closed Shata prison. Palestinian newspaper clippings from the time, shared this week on messaging apps, noted the "glory" the escape had brought to the family.

A fresh Palestinian effort was underway to bolster the heroic status of the latest jailbreakers. Shortly after the Zionist entity released photos of Zubeidi following his rearrest, handcuffed and appearing forlorn, a doctored image began circulating on Palestinian social media accounts showing him smiling. Falestine al-Youm (Palestine Today), the television voice of Islamic Jihad, has broadcast tributes to its escapees, highlighting its member Mahmud Abdullah Al-Ardah, 45, who spent 25 years in prison and is considered the mastermind of the jailbreak. — AFP

Bahrain Jews worship in...

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books in Arabic, English and Hebrew. "We can develop Jewish life in Bahrain because we have a fully functioning synagogue," Nonoo said. "We have the ability to bring the Jews to the synagogue, and we want them to come on a regular basis."

On Sept 15, 2020, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates broke with accepted Arab policy that there should be no ties with the Zionist entity until it makes peace with the Palestinians, and Sudan and Morocco followed suit. The move was condemned as a "betrayal" by Palestinian critics, but it was a boon for Bahrain's Jews. Last month, they held their first Shabbat services at the synagogue in 74 years, accompanied by expatriate Jews and diplomats.

At the services, worshippers eat bread and drink

grape juice after reciting short prayers from a book from the synagogue library, with a silver menorah, or ceremonial lampstand, in the center. Rabbi Elie Abadie, head of the association of Gulf Jewish communities, said the return of public prayer was "renewing our history in the region." "Jewish public prayers were heard in this region for over 2,000 years and unfortunately were stopped in 1947," he said. "Resuming them is like coming back home."

Even when the synagogue was out of action, Jews in Bahrain were still prominent in business and public life. One example is Nancy Khedouri, a Bahraini Jewish parliamentarian, who hopes that the opening-up of Jewish culture will attract visitors from abroad. "Many more people from the Jewish faith are interested to travel to the region, dreaming up new opportunities, enthusiastic to learn from those already living in the Gulf region," she told AFP. "Those visiting will definitely contribute to tourism and economic growth."

Many Bahraini Jews left the country during the Arab-Zionist conflict over fears they would be targeted, while others stayed behind but kept a low profile, Nonoo said. — AFP

Palestinians hail jailbreak...

Continued from Page 1

Zionist-Palestinian conflict, and Zubeidi is one of the city's most famous sons. During the second intifada, or uprising, of 2000-2005 he was the local leader of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade, the armed wing of Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas's Fatah faction.

He has since run afoul of both Zionist and Palestinian authorities and, after agreeing to lay down his arms more than a decade ago, also dabbled in theatre. He was arrested by the Zionist entity in 2019 and was serving time in Gilboa prison, along with the other five escapees, all members of the group Islamic Jihad. The jailbreak marked a high-profile embarrassment for the Zionist entity's vaunted security establishment.

In Palestinian areas, it sparked joy, with supporters handing out sweets in celebration. There was feverish speculation the six may have escaped to neighboring Jordan or Syria. Jenin's resistance iconography was also freshened up, with new posters of the fugitives plastered on concrete walls beside the torn and fading images of the "martyrs"

Apple users urged to download...

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The flaw fixed by Apple on Monday is a so-called "zero-click exploit", meaning that it can be installed on a device without the owner needing to do so much as click a button. Less sophisticated spyware tools have generally required the target to click on a booby-trapped link or file in order to start tapping the person's communications.

Citizen Lab said it believed the flaw, which it named FORCECENTRY, had been used to install Pegasus on devices since Feb 2021 or possibly earlier. It is a variant of a weak spot in Apple's messaging software that Citizen Lab previously detected on the iPhones of nine Bahraini activists, who were hacked with Pegasus between June 2020 and February this year.

"Popular chat apps are the soft underbelly of device security. They are on every device," tweeted John Scott-Railton, a senior researcher at Citizen Lab who helped uncover the flaw. The messaging service WhatsApp was previously also allegedly used to infiltrate phones using

Pegasus, and its owner Facebook is suing the NSO Group. The security of messaging apps "needs to be a top priority", Scott-Railton added, urging his followers: "UPDATE YOUR APPLE DEVICES NOW."

NSO, the company at the heart of the scandal, has denied any wrongdoing and insisted its software is intended for use by authorities only in fighting terrorism and other crimes. But the company, which says it has clients in 45 countries, did not dispute that Pegasus had prompted Apple's urgent software upgrade. It said in a statement that it would "continue to provide intelligence and law enforcement agencies around the world with lifesaving technologies to fight terror and crime".

Citizen Lab, which first uncovered Pegasus alongside cybersecurity firm Lookout five years ago, accuses NSO of selling the software to authoritarian governments that use it for repressive purposes. Emerging economies such as India, Mexico and Azerbaijan dominated the list of countries where large numbers of phone numbers were allegedly identified as possible targets by NSO's clients.

Since July, the scandal has prompted calls from rights groups for an international moratorium on the sale of surveillance technology until regulations are put in place to prevent abuses. That call was backed by United Nations human rights experts last month. — AFP

Local

Kuwait's COVID-19 infections at lowest level, recovery at 99.09%

Cabinet examines efforts to reduce Kuwait's carbon emissions

KUWAIT: Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Humoud Al-Sabah briefed Cabinet ministers on the latest health situation in Kuwait in terms of statistics of the coronavirus pandemic, and the decline in COVID-19 infections to "the lowest level" reaching 0.03 percent. He said that the recovery rate rose to 99.09 percent, thanks to Allah Almighty and the high rate of vaccination given to the public.

Furthermore, the Cabinet examined a recommendation regarding a report that the Environment Public Authority submitted on Kuwait's commitment to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. It was notified, through a visual presentation made by the National Committee for Ozone Affairs and Climate Change, about the general framework of Kuwait's low-carbon strategy 2050, and the document of national contributions 2025-2035.

The Cabinet assigned the Ministry of Electricity and Water, the Ministry of Public Works, the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources, the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation and its subsidiaries to provide the EPA with a report on the measures that each of these parties will take to reduce carbon emissions, in a manner that ensures Kuwait's commitment to international agreements and obligations.

Letter to Amir

At the onset of its weekly meeting held at Seif Palace on Monday under the chairmanship of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, the Cabinet was briefed on the letter His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received from Lebanese President Michel Aoun, who thanked Kuwait for its

permanent support to Lebanon mainly amid current conditions. The Lebanese President affirmed deep-rooted relations between the two countries, Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah said after the meeting.

The Cabinet was also informed about the message received by His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah from Egypt's President Abdulfattah Al-Sisi on fraternal ties and an invitation to His Highness the Crown Prince to visit Egypt. In addition, Deputy Prime



High rate of vaccination contributed to decline

Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah briefed the Cabinet on results of the visit of US Secretary of Defense Lloyd James Austin last week and their talks on cooperation between the two countries. The talks covered several fields, especially the military, in addition to latest developments in the region and issues of common concern. The US defense secretary expressed his country's appreciation for Kuwait's great efforts and unlimited support during the evacuation operations carried out by the US forces from Kabul.

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister told the Cabinet



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

about the results of his recent visit to Egypt and his meeting with President Sisi who was handed a written message from His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah that dealt with deep-rooted brotherly relations between the two countries and their peoples, as well as means of backing them in all fields, in addition to latest regional and international developments. The minister briefed the Cabinet on results of his participation in the Arab League Foreign Ministers' regular meeting held last Thursday under Kuwait's presidency.

Int'l developments

The ministers also discussed political affairs in light of the latest developments on the political arena at international and Arab levels. The Cabinet

lauded the interception of explosive-laden drones fired by the Houthi militias towards the Saudi City of Khams Mushait. It expressed Kuwait's strong condemnation of continued attempts of terrorist Houthis aiming to threaten Saudi Arabia's security that constitute a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law. The Cabinet renewed Kuwait's full solidarity with Saudi Arabia in all measures it takes to maintain its security, stability and sovereignty. It called on the international community to take all decisive and serious measures, and immediate actions to stop these terrorist and hostile practices against Saudi Arabia. Finally, the Cabinet congratulated Lebanon on the announcement of formation of the new government led by Najib Mikati, wishing all his cabinet members success to meet aspirations of the Lebanese people. — KUNA

Kuwait stresses support for relief in Afghanistan

GENEVA: Kuwait affirmed that it has spared no efforts to enhance rapid response to face humanitarian challenges in Afghanistan. This came in Kuwait's speech before the High-level Ministerial Meeting on the Humanitarian Situation in Afghanistan that Kuwaiti Permanent Representative to the UN and Other International Organizations in Geneva Ambassador Jamal Al-Ghunaim delivered on Monday.

This stance comes in harmony with Kuwait's firm faith in humanitarian action based on transparency towards building peace and security in Afghanistan, he said. Kuwait has facilitated the passing of more than 15,000 Afghans and other several nationalities, who were evacuated from Afghanistan, he pointed out. Kuwait has partnerships with Afghanistan since 1963 through the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, the ambassador told the conference.

History showed that there is no alternative to dialogue and international cooperation that necessitate doubling diplomatic efforts and building peace to reach the aspired goals of the UN Charter, Ghunaim noted. Kuwait reaffirmed the contents of the UN Security Council Resolution 2593 to achieve a comprehensive and lasting peace



KABUL: Young students walk along a roadside as they return to their home in Kabul yesterday. —AFP

in Afghanistan, as Ghunaim reiterated Kuwait's firm position that rejects all forms of violence and terrorism. Kuwait urged the international community to redouble its efforts to fully eliminate terrorism and ensure that Afghanistan is not used again as a haven for terrorism and extremism.

The ambassador said UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres' initiative to hold this key international conference aims to help Afghanistan avert a looming humanitarian catastrophe, and express solidarity of the international community with that country. UN figures show how this humanitarian crisis affects more than 18 million people in Afghanistan, a half of the country's total population. He emphasized that Kuwait shares the call previously made by Guterres for all parties in Afghanistan to allow humanitarian workers

unhindered access. He also pointed out that the various humanitarian crises and the repercussions of COVID-19 have exhausted the international community.

This requires the need to put an end to armed conflicts and enhancing respect of international humanitarian law to redirect and transform "our international efforts" from the relief phase to the development phase, he said. The ambassador indicated, at the same time, that the Afghans have been suffering the repercussions of the conflict for more than 40 years. The recent incidents in Afghanistan constitute a key turning point that requires joint action to back a permanent peace to achieve security and stability in Afghanistan, boost rebuilding efforts, push ahead with developments and meet the aspirations of Afghan people, he made clear. — KUNA

Police arrest 96 in Bneid Al-Gar crackdown

KUWAIT: Police arrested 96 people during a security crackdown in Bneid Al-Gar yesterday, the Interior Ministry announced. The detainees include 37 people who had expired visas, 55 in violation of residency laws, three wanted on absconding cases and one person who failed to produce an ID, the ministry explained. The detainees were sent to concerned authorities to face legal action, it added.

Meanwhile, the interior ministry also announced yesterday that police

arrested a pharmacist for allegedly selling prescription medication illegally. The arrest came following investigation after police were tipped off regarding a pharmacist who was selling prescription drugs without medical prescriptions, the ministry explained.

After acquiring evidence confirming the claims, an informant under cover was sent to the pharmacy to purchase 100 packs of prescription drugs illegally, and the pharmacist agreed to sell them for KD 4,000. The pharmacist was arrested, and police seized 300,000 psychotropic pills on the spot. Once interrogated, the suspect admitted to the crime and was referred to legal authorities who will take legal action against him, the ministry concluded.



KUWAIT: This handout photo released by the Interior Ministry yesterday shows policemen during a crackdown in Bneid Al-Gar.



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Army Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Khaled Saleh Al-Sabah presents a memento to Maj Gen Shakil Ahmad from the visiting Bangladeshi military delegation. — Defense Ministry photo

Kuwait, Bangladesh discuss military ties

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Army Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Khaled Saleh Al-Sabah yesterday tackled issues of mutual interest with a visiting Bangladeshi military delegation led by Maj Gen Shakil Ahmad. During the meeting, the Kuwaiti army chief lauded the deep relations between both friendly countries, Kuwait's Army staff said in a press release. Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Army Lt Gen Fahad Al-Nasser, and Assistant Chief of Staff for the Management and Manpower Authority Lt Gen Dr Khaled Al-Kandari attended the meeting.

The Kuwaiti Army Chief of Staff had also met on Monday with the visiting Canadian Joint Operations Commander Vice-Admiral John Robert Auchterlonie and his accompanying delegation. The chief of staff stated that during the meeting, they discussed issues of common interest, especially military affairs and the deep ties between the two countries. Lt Gen Nasser and several other senior officers attended the meeting. — KUNA



This handout photo released by the Interior Ministry yesterday shows a pharmacist arrested for allegedly selling prescription medication illegally.

Sports fans return to Kuwait's stadiums

KUWAIT: After a break of about twenty months due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and following a noticeable decrease of infections in Kuwait, sports fans returned to stadiums at the start of the 2021-22 season to support their football teams. The return was on a decision issued by Kuwait's Cabinet, in coordination with the health authorities. Matches were limited to only the presence of teams; however, fans and the press are currently allowed to attend again, provided that they follow health guidelines. — KUNA



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Top rating for BSK in quality of education

KUWAIT: The British School of Kuwait (BSK) has achieved top ratings in an international survey of parents whose children attend private schools. In a survey conducted by Nord Anglia Education involving more than 20,000 parents of students attending over 70 world-class international schools across the globe, BSK ranked number one globally in several key categories.

In terms of the overall quality of education provided, BSK received the highest rating of any of the schools in the survey, with 94 percent of parents expressing their satisfaction with the overall provision for their children. BSK also placed top when it came to the quality of the provision for online learning, with 90 percent of parents speaking highly of the virtual school experience of their children during the period of prolonged campus closures.

The school also ranked number one globally when it came to parent satisfaction when it came to student progress, with over 90 percent of parents reporting that their children are showing good levels of improvement and development.



BSK Founder
Vera Al-Mutawa

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Heavy traffic at the intersection between Road 55 and the Fourth Ring Road yesterday. - 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)

Kuwait offers more than 21 tons of foodstuffs to Kurdistan

IRBIL: Kuwait Consul General in Irbil Dr Omar Al-Kandari announced yesterday the distribution of more than 21 tons of foodstuffs to several Iraqi governorates. In remarks to the press, Kandari explained that this humanitarian project is provided by the Kuwait Society for Relief and is distributed in coordination with the Barzani Charitable Foundation to the displaced and needy in a number of governorates of Iraq. This assistance comes under the directives of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, he added. Meanwhile, Barzani Charitable Foundation President Musa Ahmad expressed thanks and gratitude to the state of Kuwait for its humanitarian role in supporting the displaced and people in need. Earlier this week, Kuwait offered more than 10 tons of medical supplies to Kurdistan region, north Iraq, to help the region stem the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. — KUNA



IRBIL: This handout photo shows food items provided as part of Kuwait's assistance to people in need in Iraq. — KUNA

NBK honors Paralympic Games medal winners

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait's (NBK) executive management honored the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games winners, celebrating their success in raising the Kuwaiti flag at such a major international sports event.

Paralympic champions Ahmad Naqa Al-Mutairi and Faisal Sorour were welcomed by Essam Al-Sager, NBK Group Chief Executive Officer, Shaikha Al-Bahar, NBK Group Deputy Chief Executive Officer, and Salah Al-Fulaij, Chief Executive Officer - Kuwait. NBK executives congratulated Ahmad Al-Mutairi for winning the silver medal in the 100-meter wheelchair race and Faisal Sorour for winning the bronze medal in the men's standing shot put -F63 at the Tokyo Paralympics 2020.

The Kuwaiti champions expressed their deep appreciation for NBK's initiative to support and honor Kuwaiti athletes. This event reflects NBK's pride in our national champions and their outstanding achievements in the most prestigious global sports event. NBK is committed to supporting all national athletes who strive to raise the Kuwaiti flag in international sports events that attract worldwide attention.

NBK expressed its confidence in Kuwaiti athletes' ability to achieve spec-



KUWAIT: NBK officials honor Paralympic champions Ahmad Naqa Al-Mutairi and Faisal Sorour.

acular results. The Bank is also proud of our athletes' participation in the Olympics, Paralympics and other international championships, wishing them continued successes in the future.

NBK also appreciates the champions' achievements as great role models who motivate and inspire others through their perseverance and dedication, proving that the road to success is not easy to navigate, but with hard work, drive and passion, it's possible to achieve your dreams.

NBK is a key supporter of all national athletes as part of its active enrichment to

sporting activities. The Bank is committed to encourage and promote sports and athletes who successfully advance to a higher level of competitions and proudly step on the podium raising the Kuwaiti flag.

NBK maintains its leading role among banking sector institutions in supporting national competencies across various fields, including sporting activities, through its participation in honoring their achievements and highlighting their successes in the international arena, in addition to providing them with all necessary support to achieve their goals.

NBK supports students at children's hospital

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) is fully committed to meet its social responsibility. With the back-to-school season upon us, NBK, in cooperation with both Bayt Abdullah Children's Hospice (BACCH) and Kuwait Association for the Care of Children in Hospital (KACCH) organized an event to provide school supplies to students at NBK Children's Hospital. School supplies giveaways included backpacks with varying items according to different age groups.

NBK adhered to enhanced public health requirements to protect kids' health and safety, therefore, all backpack and school supplies were fully sanitized and disinfected. Moreover, all social distancing rules and internal hospital regulations were followed while delivering the backpacks to the children. The initiative was praised by the children and their families, as they expressed their appreciation to the Bank's initiatives that caters to entertaining and raising the morale of frequently hospitalized children. On this occasion, Joanne Al-Abduljaleel, NBK

Public Relations Officer said: "We are proud of NBK Children's hospital, and we consistently strive to make meaningful contributions to support its role."

"We are extremely pleased with the positive impacts of our initiatives, not only as reflected on the patients, but on their families and the hospital staff as well." Abduljaleel added. She also stressed that NBK continues to lead by example on assuming social responsibility, promising to carry on its ongoing contributions towards improving health care. The Bank is involved in numerous social contribution activities, especially NBK Children's Hospital.

NBK contributes to supporting the hospital by continuing to invest in developing all its units and sponsoring all its activities that go beyond treatment services to include various activities aiming to relieve the suffering of patients and their families. In line with NBK Hospital's strategy to provide integrated care for patients, the hospital's management embeds the welfare of children and their families as a key competent of the treatment programs and healthcare services. To this end, the hospital organizes many various activities to ensure continuous communication with patients and their families, as well as to raise patients' satisfaction and encourage them to socialize and be distracted from the treatment pain.



KUWAIT: Members of the NBK team who participated at the event to distribute school supplies to students at NBK Children's Hospital.



KUWAIT: Ahmad Al-Sarraf (left) and Khaled bin Sabt (right) honor Abdelmajid Al-Qattan.

Friendship Society honors philanthropist

KUWAIT: Kuwait Humanitarian Friendship Society's Chairman Ahmad Al-Sarraf and General Manager Khaled bin Sabt honored philanthropist Abdelmajid Al-Qattan in appreciation of his generous donation to help achieve the society's goals. During a recent ceremony in which they presented him with a commemorative plaque, Qattan thanked Sarraf and bin Sabt for their visit, saying that his donation was "a small part" in helping the society contribute to removing the burden on many people "who are waiting for solutions to their social and humanitarian problems."



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KABUL: Footwear is seen piled up on the tarmac at the airport in Kabul yesterday. —AFP

Taleban probe bank accounts

Taleban thank world for promised aid, urge US to show 'heart'

KABUL: The Taleban are investigating the accounts of former high-ranking Afghan government members to check for ill-gotten gains, officials said yesterday. The investigation may lead to the freezing of assets and accounts of former civil servants, ministers and lawmakers, an official at Da Afghanistan Bank told AFP, asking not to be named.

A manager of a private bank confirmed a team of "Taleban auditors" had been deployed to the organization to check the accounts of selected former government officials. Corruption was widespread and rampant under the administration of former president Ashraf Ghani, and tens of millions of dollars of aid money is believed to have been siphoned out of the public purse. Ghani himself was accused of taking millions with him when he fled to Abu Dhabi on August 15 as the Taleban entered Kabul, but he has denied the claims and says he is ready to prove his innocence.

On Tuesday, several Taleban officials posted video on their social media accounts purporting to show millions in cash and gold ingots recovered from the Panjshir residence of former vice president Amrullah Saleh. The video, which could not be independently verified, showed Taleban fighters sitting on the floor and counting cash and gold apparently found in suitcases. One fighter says they discovered about \$100,000 the day after Panjshir fell to the

Taleban, and a further \$6.2 million and 18 gold ingots in a later search.

Saleh had holed up in Panjshir after the Taleban took Kabul, and the remote highland valley was the last province to fall to the hardline Islamists. The investigation into possible illegal assets comes as Afghanistan is in the grip of a major cash crisis, with



A total of \$1.2 billion in aid pledged

people limited to withdrawing the equivalent of just \$200 a day from personal accounts—and having to queue for hours even to do that. Even before the Taleban takeover, government salaries were frequently paid late—and in the case of rural workers there is a months-long backlog.

People are resorting to selling their household goods to raise money to pay for essentials, and

bustling second-hand goods markets have mushroomed in most urban centers. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund have halted Afghanistan's access to funding, while the United States has also frozen cash held in its reserve for Kabul. Ajmal Ahmad, former acting governor of the Afghan central bank, tweeted last week that the country no longer had access to around \$9 billion in aid, loans and assets.

Taleban thank world

Meanwhile, Taleban yesterday thanked the world for pledging hundreds of millions of dollars in emergency aid to Afghanistan, and urged the United States to show "heart" in future dealings. Amir Khan Muttaqi, the regime's acting foreign minister, told a press conference the Taleban would spend donor money wisely and use it to alleviate poverty. He was speaking a day after the United Nations said a total of \$1.2 billion in aid had been pledged to Afghanistan, which was taken over by the Taleban on August 15. "The Islamic Emirate will try its best to deliver this aid to the needy people in a completely transparent manner," Muttaqi said. He also asked Washington to show appreciation for the Taleban allowing the US to complete a troop withdrawal and evacuation of more than 120,000 people last month. "America is a big country, they need to have a big heart," he said. — Agencies

Taiwan officials to visit Slovakia, Czech, Lithuania

TAIPEI: A Taiwanese delegation of government officials and business people will visit Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Lithuania, officials said yesterday, defying Beijing's opposition to any diplomatic ties with Taipei. The 65-member group will visit the three countries between October 20 and 30 to promote trade ties and investment, said Chen Li-kuo, chief of the Taiwanese foreign ministry's European affairs department.

"We have continued to deepen our relations with Central and Eastern European countries... in a demonstration of solidarity and friendship among international democratic partners," he told a virtual press briefing. All three countries gave coronavirus vaccines to Taiwan and have shown signs of wanting closer relations with the island, even if that angers China. Lithuania has led the way.

Taiwan announced in July it was setting up a representative office in Vilnius under the name "Taiwan" instead of "Taipei"—a significant diplomatic departure from standard practice. Beijing withdrew its ambassador to Lithuania and demanded Vilnius do the same, which it eventually did. "Taiwan and Lithuania's determination to expand ties has remained unchanged despite external threats," Chen said, adding that preparations for the Taipei office were going "smoothly".

Only 15 countries officially recognize Taipei over Beijing, which claims the self-ruled democratic island as part of its territory and has vowed to one day re-take it-by force if needed. Beijing tries to keep Taipei isolated on the world stage and baulks at any official use of the word "Taiwan" lest it lend the island a sense of international legitimacy. Earlier this year Lithuania announced it was quitting China's 17+1 cooperation forum with central and eastern European states, calling it "divisive".

Lithuania, Slovakia, Czech and Poland all recently pledged to donate coronavirus vaccines to Taiwan. Slovakia is also considering sending a delegation to Taiwan and Chen said the two sides will discuss the matter during next month's visit. Politicians in the Czech Republic have also pushed for closer ties with Taiwan. In 2019, Prague cancelled a sister-city agreement with Beijing and signed one with Taipei, while a high-profile visit to Taiwan last year by Czech senate leader Miroslav Vystrcil infuriated China. — AFP

Putin self-isolates after COVID cases in inner circle

MOSCOW: President Vladimir Putin will self-isolate after coronavirus cases were detected in his inner circle, the Kremlin said yesterday, as Russia struggles with stubbornly high COVID infection rates. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that Putin was "absolutely healthy" and had taken a coronavirus test, without specifying the result. Putin had been due to travel to Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe for a regional summit later this week but in a call with President Emomali Rakhmon said he would not be able to attend in person.

"Putin said that in connection with identified coronavirus cases in his circle, he will observe a self-isolation regime for a certain period of time," the Kremlin said in a statement. Russian authorities have taken exceptional measures to protect Putin—who has been vaccinated with Russia's homegrown Sputnik V jab—since the start of the pandemic. Foreign leaders, journalists and officials have all been required to self-isolate in advance of being in contact with the longtime Russian leader.

Putin on Monday met with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and with Russian athletes returning from the Tokyo Paralympic Games. Russia is

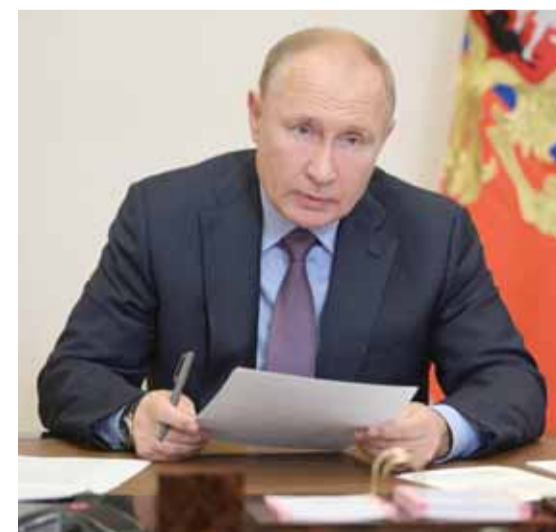
among the countries hardest-hit by the coronavirus pandemic—with the fifth-highest number of recorded cases according to an AFP tally—and has struggled to rein in infections despite easy access to vaccines. As of yesterday the country had recorded 7,176,085 cases and 194,249 deaths, the highest death toll in Europe.

Vaccine-sceptic population

Infections have been falling in recent days after a spike in August, but health officials still reported 17,837 new cases and 781 new deaths yesterday. Authorities have struggled with a vaccine-sceptic population, with independent polls showing that a majority of Russians do not plan to be inoculated.

As of yesterday, about 39.9 million of Russia's 146 million people had been fully vaccinated, according to the Gogov website, which tallies COVID data from the regions. Russia has several homegrown vaccines freely available to the public, but does not distribute any Western-made jabs. Moscow, the epicenter of Russia's outbreak, and a host of regions have introduced mandatory vaccination measures to speed up the inoculation drive, and Putin has repeatedly called on Russians to get vaccinated.

The Kremlin initially set a goal of fully inoculating 60 percent of Russia's population by September, but later dropped that target even though free jabs have been available since early December. Russian authorities have been accused of vastly downplaying the effects of the pandemic



MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin chairs a meeting with members of the government and the United Russia political party leadership via a video link at the Novo-Ogaryovo state residence yesterday. —AFP

and, after a tight first lockdown in 2020, have refrained from introducing restrictive new measures. The country instead pinned its hopes of curbing the pandemic on its four homegrown vaccines—Sputnik V, EpiVacCorona, CoviVac and the one-dose Sputnik Light. — AFP

International

Facebook shields VIPs from some of its rules

Russia fines Facebook, Twitter over banned content

SAN FRANCISCO: Facebook exempts certain celebrities, politicians and other high-profile users from some of its own rules for posts as part of a program launched as a quality-control mechanism, the Wall Street Journal reported on Monday. The program, referred to as "cross check" or "XCheck," shields millions of elite users from rules that Facebook claims to apply equally at the social network, according to a report citing internal documents.

Facebook spokesman Andy Stone in a series of tweets defended the program, but noted the social media giant is aware of its enforcement of rules is "not perfect". "There aren't two systems of justice; it's an attempted safeguard against mistakes," Stone tweeted in response to the Journal report. "We know our enforcement is not perfect and there are trade-offs between speed and accuracy."

The article cites examples of posts from high-profile people, including one from soccer star Neymar showing nude images of a woman who accused him of rape and that Facebook subsequently removed. A double-standard regarding content moderation would defy assurances

Facebook gave to an independent board set up as a final arbiter of disputes regarding what is allowed to be posted at the leading social network.

"The Oversight Board has expressed on multiple occasions its concern about the lack of transparency in Facebook's content moderation processes, especially relating to the company's inconsistent management of high-profile accounts," board spokesman John Taylor said in response to an AFP inquiry. The Journal article reports that some users are "white-listed," given protection from enforcement actions, while in other cases reviews of potentially problematic content simply fail to take place.

"White-listed" accounts have shared claims that Hillary Clinton had covered up "pedophile rings," and that then-President Donald Trump had called all refugees seeking asylum "animals," according to the Journal. XCheck grew to include at least 5.8 million users in 2020, the report indicated. Facebook said in a post about cross-checking three years ago that it does not protect the profile, page or content from being removed but "is simply done to make sure our decision is correct."

Facebook, Twitter fined

In another development, Russia fined Facebook and Twitter yesterday for not deleting banned content, adding to a slew of penalties the government has already imposed on foreign tech giants. Russia has been tightening controls over US-based tech companies and last week accused them of interfering in parliamentary polls due later this month.

A court in Moscow slapped Facebook with five fines on Tuesday totalling 21 million rubles (\$288,000), according to an official Telegram channel. The same court fined Twitter five million rubles. Facebook has so far been fined 90 million rubles in Russia and Twitter 45 million, the state-run TASS news agency reported. Russia often takes legal action against internet platforms for not deleting content it labels illegal, such as pornographic material or posts condoning drugs and suicide.

The judicial authorities have also fined Google citing the same offences and for failing to store the data of Russian users on domestic services. Nearly all Kremlin critics—including allies of jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny—have been barred from running in parliamentary elections on 17-19 September. Russia's foreign ministry said last week it had summoned the US ambassador in Moscow over US tech giants' "interference" in the polls.

Russian media regulator Roskomnadzor has blocked dozens of websites linked to Navalny,



WASHINGTON: A combination of photos shows a photo of the logo of social networking website 'Facebook' on a computer screen and that of US multinational technology company Google. —AFP

including a site that instructs Russians how to vote out politicians of the ruling United Russia party. The media regulator has also urged Google and Apple to remove an app dedicated to Navalny's "Smart Voting" campaign from their stores. The "Smart Voting" tactic led the increasingly unpopular United Russia party to lose a number of seats in local elections in 2019. —Agencies



'XCheck' shields millions of elite users

News in brief

Boris Johnson's mom dies

LONDON: The painter Charlotte Johnson Wahl, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's mother, has died at the age of 79, according to a notice published in The Times yesterday. Charlotte Johnson Wahl, who was diagnosed with Parkinson's aged 40, died "suddenly and peacefully" at St Mary's Hospital in Paddington, west London, on Monday. The prime minister, who was referred to in the notice by his first name, Alexander, is the eldest of her four children with Stanley Johnson, whom she met in 1962. The others are Rachel, a journalist and commentator, Leo, an environmentalist, and Joe, a former Conservative Party lawmaker and minister. Johnson Wahl was the daughter of lawyer James Fawcett, who was president of the European Commission for Human Rights in the 1970s. She studied English at Oxford University. —AFP

Canberra lockdown extended

SYDNEY: Australian authorities yesterday extended a coronavirus lockdown of the nation's capital Canberra to mid-October, saying the measure was necessary while vaccinations are ramped up. About 400,000 Canberra residents have been under stay-at-home orders since August 12, when a single case of COVID-19 was detected. Now at just over 250 active cases, the cluster caused by the highly infectious Delta variant remains small but has been treated with caution in a city that had largely avoided outbreaks. Australian Capital Territory chief minister Andrew Barr said authorities wanted to limit transmission while ensuring Canberra becomes "highly vaccinated". "This is the safest path forward and it will lead to a safer Christmas, a safer summer holiday period and a safer 2022," he told reporters. —AFP

Sudan floods kill over 80

KHARTOUM: Floods following heavy rain in Sudan have killed more than 80 people and damaged or destroyed tens of thousands of homes, an official said Monday. "A total of 84 people were killed and 67 others injured in 11 states across Sudan since the beginning of the rainy season," said Abdel Jalil Abdelreheem, spokesman for Sudan's National Council for Civil Defense. The deaths were drowning, electrocution and house collapses, he added. Some 8,408 houses have also been destroyed and more than 27,200 damaged across Sudan. Torrential rains usually fall in Sudan between June and October, and the country faces severe flooding every year, wrecking properties, infrastructure, and crops. The United Nations estimates that heavy rains and floods have affected some 102,000 people since July. —AFP

Oppn figure on hunger strike

KIGALI: A well-known university professor and opposition figure arrested for alleged rape has launched a hunger strike to protest against the "politically motivated" accusations, his lawyer said yesterday. Christopher Kayumba was detained on Thursday after the allegations were made by several people, including a former student, according to the Rwanda Investigation Bureau (RIB). "He started a hunger strike after he was arrested and has made a decision to continue the hunger strike until the politically motivated charges are dropped," his lawyer Seif Ntirenganya said. "It is funny that all these allegations came up immediately after he had made his political ambitions public." —AFP

Abortion debate splits San Marino as historic vote nears

SAN MARINO: Before dawn, Vanessa and fellow activists slap pro-choice posters on billboards across the predominantly-Catholic state of San Marino, ahead of a highly-charged abortion referendum. The tiny, picturesque republic, which sits on a mountainside in the centre of Italy, is one of the few countries in Europe where terminating a pregnancy is still illegal. "We must put an end to the hypocrisy of sending women across the border" to abort, Muratori, a member of the San Marino Women's Union (UDS) said.

The result of the vote, called for by the UDS, is uncertain. Polls have been too expensive to organize. "Vote 'Yes' for freedom of choice, and come out of hiding," a banner reads. But the Catholic Church's presence here is strong, and the counter-posters pull no punches. "I'm a child even at 12 weeks, save me!" cries a foetus on one, while another featuring a young boy with Down's Syndrome reads: "I'm an anomaly, does that mean I have fewer rights than you?"

San Marino is one of the last places in Europe—along with Malta, Andorra and the Vatican—to have a total ban on abortion, even in cases of rape or incest, severe foetal impairment or risk to the mother's life. On September 26 - some 43 years after neighboring Italy—the tiny statelet of 33,000 inhabitants will decide whether to allow abortion up to

twelve weeks of pregnancy. After the 12th week mark, abortion would only be allowed if the mother's life was in danger or in the case of foetal abnormalities which could harm the woman physically or psychologically.

'Like a criminal'

"I felt like an illegal immigrant, a criminal," one San Marino resident told AFP on condition of anonymity, after having to cross over into Italy to have an abortion at the age of 22 and a cost of almost 2,000 euros. "I wanted to finish my studies first, I didn't feel ready to be a mother," she said. "Having an abortion is never easy, but I didn't regret it," said the woman, now a "happy mother" of two children.

She slammed San Marino for "abandoning" her at such a difficult time. Attempts to legalize abortion over the past 20 years have been vetoed by successive governments, most of them conservative. This time may not prove any easier: the ruling Christian Democratic Party, which has close ties to the Roman Catholic Church, has called on people to vote 'No'.

San Marino has long dragged its feet on women's rights: they were only given the vote in 1964, and divorce was only introduced in 1986. "The influence of the church is very strong," says Rosa Zafferani, 61, a former head of state. "For weeks now", priests have been using their homilies to insist "yes to life, no to abortion".

'A serious act'

"Killing an innocent child is a serious act, a crime," says 73-year old Gabriele Mangiarotti, a priest at the 14th century church of San Francesco, tucked away on a little square in the historic centre.

Mauritius battles COVID explosion

PORT LOUIS: Hospitals are overwhelmed, ventilators are hard to find, and there's no longer enough space at the main cemetery for COVID victims in Mauritius. Barely three weeks before it flings its doors wide open to international travelers at the start of the peak tourist season, the paradise island nation is struggling with an alarming explosion in coronavirus infections and deaths.

In just two months, cases have jumped over five-fold to more than 12,600 as of Friday, by far the largest increase across Africa during this period, according to data compiled by AFP. Since the pandemic started, Mauritius has recorded 1,005 cases of COVID-19 per 100,000 inhabitants, far higher than the continent's average of 598. The crisis is now so acute that 74-year-old former

prime minister Navin Ramgoolam has flown to India for COVID treatment, and the opposition leader has discussed his struggle to find a bed for an ailing friend.

"People do not realize how bad the situation is," said one nurse at a COVID treatment centre, speaking on condition of anonymity for fear of possible reprisals. "We are already above capacity". In July, the idyllic Indian Ocean holiday destination, renowned for its white sandy beaches and turquoise waters, partly reopened to vaccinated international visitors. But they had to remain in "resort bubbles" for 14 days before being allowed to venture further afield, provided they had a negative PCR test.

The government reduced that timeframe to seven days this month ahead of a full reopening planned for October 1, when tourists will be free to explore the island as long as they test negative up to 72 hours before arrival. "The situation is worsening," one doctor said on condition of anonymity, adding that medical professionals had been instructed not to talk about the crisis. "The priority of the government is to ensure a smooth open-

ing of the borders on October 1."

The government has not given any explanation for the surge, but local media reports speak of people ignoring social distancing guidelines and throwing caution to the winds after getting



PORT LOUIS: In this file photo, tourists arrive at the Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport in Port Louis as Mauritius opens its borders to international travelers, both vaccinated and non-vaccinated. —AFP

ing of the borders on October 1."

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61-year-old millionaire who campaigned against social inequalities.

Leftist sweep

The five countries in the Nordic region - a bastion of social democracy - will thus all be governed by left-wing governments soon. "The Conservative government's work is finished for this time around," Solberg told supporters. "I want to congratulate Jonas Gahr Store, who now seems to have a clear majority for a change of government," said the 60-year-old Solberg who has steered the country through multiple crises, including migration, dropping oil prices and the COVID pandemic over the past eight years. The Greens had said they would only support a left-

wing government if it vowed an immediate end to oil exploration in Norway, an ultimatum Store had rejected. Store has like the Conservatives, called for a gradual transition away from the oil economy.

The August "code red for humanity" report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) put the issue at the top of the agenda for the election campaign and forced the country to reflect on the oil that has made it immensely rich. The report energized those who want to get rid of oil, both on the left and, to a lesser extent, the right. The oil sector accounts for 14 percent of Norway's gross domestic product, as well as 40 percent of its exports and 160,000 direct jobs. —AFP

International

Hazaras studying in Iraq fear as Taleban take over Afghanistan

Many still remember Hazaras' brutal treatment

NAJAF: Many Afghans from the Hazara ethnic minority studying in Iraq's city of Najaf watched in terror as their homeland fell back into Taleban hands. And while they feel safe for now, they fear for their families back home - and for their own safety should they ever return.

Millions of Shiite pilgrims come each year to Najaf to mourn the death of the Prophet Mohammed's (PBUH) son-in-law Ali, whose mausoleum stands in the old city. Others, like Sheikh Ali Bassir, 51, have spent years studying at the prestigious seminary that trains Shiite clergy. "I wanted to serve the people of Afghanistan so much, I want to go back, but the situation isn't normal," Bassir says, surrounded by shelves bearing copies of the Quran while a ceiling fan turns above.

His serene smile turns wooden as he considers the fate of the Hazara people, who make up between 10 and 20 percent of Afghanistan's 38 million people and have been long persecuted for their faith in a country riven by deep divisions. With the Taleban back in control since last month, the majority Shiite Muslim group is worried the Sunni hardliners may again turn on them - just as happened during the Taleban's previous 1996-2001 rule.

During the militants' first, scorched-earth takeover of the country in the late 1990s, thousands of Hazaras were believed to have been slaughtered by the militants, who see Shiite Muslims as heretics. Images of the destruction of two massive Buddha statues carved into a cliff in the largely Hazara province of Bamiyan went around the world in March 2001. Just days after the Taleban's return, the

statue of a prominent Hazara leader in Bamiyan was decapitated.

Marginalized and persecuted

Many Afghans and the international community still remember the Hazaras' brutal treatment at the hands of the Taleban. "My brother and sister are in Afghanistan. They're far from the capital, in the countryside, thank God. They're well," says Bassir. But he adds that he is "afraid of how the Taleban will take control over the Shiites," showing a video on his phone of fighters violently putting down a demonstration he says was made up of Hazaras. Throughout the centuries, the group has been subjected to slavery, religious and economic persecution, as well as forced displacement.

By some estimates, nearly half of the Hazara population was wiped out in the late 19th century, with many later enslaved during the conquest of their traditional homeland by Pashtuns, the country's biggest ethnic group. Sunni extremists continued to target Hazaras in attacks even after the US-led invasion in 2001. In May, 50 people were killed near a girls' school in a mostly Hazara district of Kabul. No group claimed responsibility for the attack, but it was widely blamed on the Islamic State group's Afghanistan chapter.

'Iraqi at heart'

Bassir's 21-year-old son Mustafa listens intently from the corner of his father's study. An Afghan national, he feels "Iraqi at heart" after being born and raised there. Even in another country riven by

Saudi Arabia allowed the plane to overfly its airspace.

'Stab in the back'

Trump announces 10 days later that as well as the UAE, Bahrain will also normalize ties with Jewish State. On September 15, the two Gulf states, which have never been in conflict with the Jewish State, sign the accords at the White House. The Palestinians condemn the agreements as a "stab in the back". Jewish State and the UAE suspend visa requirements a month later, a first in the Arab world.

Sudan, Morocco

On October 23, Sudan also normalizes ties as Trump agrees to take it off a US sanctions blacklist of states which allegedly sponsor terrorism. In December, Morocco becomes the fourth Arab state to normalize relations with Jewish State last year in a deal that sees the US recognize Moroccan sovereignty over the disputed Western Sahara.

Saudi 'visit'

Amid Saudi denials, Jewish sources say Netanyahu met Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) during a secret visit to the kingdom on November 22.

Ambassadors

In early 2021, Jewish State announces it will open an embassy in the UAE. In March, the first Emirati ambassador in the Jewish State, Mohamed Al Khaja, presents his credentials to president Reuven Rivlin.

Investment and media

On March 11, the UAE announces the creation of a \$10-billion investment fund in the Jewish State focused

response to huge and often violent democracy protests. The law targets any act deemed subversion, secession, terrorism and collusion with foreign forces.

It has been overwhelmingly deployed against people expressing certain political views and has remoulded the once outspoken and freewheeling city in China's own authoritarian image. The new security law will be directed by Article 23 of Hong Kong's mini-constitution, Tang confirmed. Article 23 calls for Hong Kong to pass its own national security legislation after the 1997 handover to China. An attempt to do so in 2003 sparked huge protests and concerns that Hong Kong would lose its unique freedoms. The legislation was shelved.

Hong Kong's inability to pass its own security laws was one of the reasons Beijing lost patience after the 2019 democracy protests and promulgated its own law last year. Some of Article 23's offences are already covered by that law - such as secession and subversion. But new crimes would include treason, sedition, theft of state secrets and measures to stop "foreign political organizations" operating in Hong Kong - or Hong Kongers contacting them. Tang gave no time-frame for the new law but said it would be passed by the next legislature.

Hong Kong will get a new legislature in December under a new political system imposed by Beijing

such as Russia.

Several suspected cases have been reported among US officials and intelligence officers since 2016, first in Cuba, then in China, Germany, Australia, Taiwan and in Washington itself. But a panel convened by the government of Communist Cuba - 16 experts in a variety of fields and affiliated to the Cuban Academy of Sciences - said the claims were not "scientifically acceptable," and there was "no scientific evidence of attacks" of this nature on Cuban soil.

"We conclude that the narrative of the 'mysterious syndrome' is not scientifically acceptable in any of its components," the panel said in a report published on Cubadebate, an official news site of the one-party



NAJAF: Afghans, from the Hazara ethnic minority studying at the prestigious 'hawza' seminary that trains Shiite clergy, study in their room in the holy city of Najaf. —AFP

40 years of war, "I prefer to stay in Najaf, it's safer," he says in fluent, locally accented Arabic.

Fellow Hazara student Sheikh Mohammed Taqi, in his 20s, wants to bring his family to Iraq from western Afghanistan's Herat province. "My mother, my sister and my wife are still there," he says. "I'm very afraid for them... a woman can't leave her home any longer without her husband." But "we have no idea how to get a visa or even a passport" for travel, Taqi says, as "there is no state anymore" in Afghanistan.

While under the Taleban's previous reign, women were not allowed to leave home unchaperoned, this does not appear to be the case under their new rule. Sheikh Qorban Ali, a 26-year-old from Afghanistan's northern city Mazar-i-Sharif, dreams of going home. But he says that for now "the situation means students can't go and spread their message". He would nevertheless gladly obey if the Shiite authorities in Najaf gave the order, declaring that "we have to go if it's possible". —AFP

Jewish new ties with Arab world

DUBAI: After Naftali Bennett became the first Jewish prime minister to visit Egypt in more than a decade, we look at the Jewish state's wooing of the Arab world. Here is a timeline of the continuing rapprochement that began last August and which has since led to a normalization of ties with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco.

'Huge breakthrough'

In a surprise announcement on August 13, 2020, then US president Donald Trump says Jewish State and the UAE have reached a "historic" agreement to normalize ties. Previously, Egypt and Jordan were the only Arab states to have peace agreements under which they recognize Jewish State. Jewish then-prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu says the agreement means "a new era in relations between Jewish State and the Arab world". The UAE says that under the deal Jewish State will "suspend" its annexation of parts of the occupied West Bank, but Netanyahu says it has simply been put off. Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas calls the deal a "betrayal" of their cause, including their claim to East Jerusalem as capital of their future state.

First direct flight

On August 30, the UAE lifts a boycott of Jewish State. The next day, El Al aircraft makes the first commercial flight between the two countries, linking Tel Aviv and Abu Dhabi. Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law heading a Jewish-US delegation on board, says

Hong Kong to create new national security offences

HONG KONG: Hong Kong will create a host of new national security offences, a senior official confirmed yesterday, building on a law Beijing imposed last year that has criminalized much dissent and transformed the city. Chris Tang, a former police chief promoted to security secretary this year, said officials had started working on local legislation that would define new crimes under the security law. "We hope to complete it within the next term of legislature and we will consult with the public," Tang told the pro-Beijing Ta Kung Pao newspaper in a front-page report published yesterday.

In a separate interview with Sing Tao Daily, another pro-Beijing media outlet, Tang said officials were studying ongoing national security trials to guide their new legislation. "We didn't pay much attention to espionage activities in the past and now we are studying whether we need to regulate that," Tang told Sing Tao's EastWeek magazine. China imposed a sweeping national security law on Hong Kong last year in

Cuban scientists reject US 'Havana Syndrome' claims

HAVANA: Cuban scientists said Monday there was no evidence for claims of US diplomats coming down with so-called "Havana Syndrome" on the island. The mysterious affliction is said to cause headaches, nausea and possible brain damage, and is speculated to be caused by electronic weapons possibly wielded by a US rival

News in brief

China FM visits Singapore

SINGAPORE: China's foreign minister held talks with Singaporean leader Lee Hsien Loong yesterday during a Southeast Asian tour seen as a pushback against Washington's efforts to reassert its influence in the region. In recent weeks, both US Vice President Kamala Harris and Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin have visited the city-state and strongly criticized Beijing's growing aggression in Asia. The trips were part of efforts by the new US administration to reset relations in the region after the turbulent Donald Trump era, and build a bulwark against China's rising might. As well as Singapore, Foreign Minister Wang Yi had stops in Vietnam and Cambodia on his trip - both countries visited by senior US officials in recent months. Yesterday he held talks with Singaporean Prime Minister Lee, who said the pair had a "productive and candid discussion on international and regional developments". —AFP

108 inmates recaptured

ABUJA: At least 108 out of 240 inmates who escaped from a prison in central Nigeria have been recaptured, a prison official said yesterday. Heavily armed gunmen stormed the Security Custodial Centre in Kappa, in Kogi State, late on Sunday, freeing scores of inmates. It was unclear who the gunmen were but criminal gangs have terrorized central and northwest Nigeria for years. "We have a total of 108 inmates rearrested," Nigeria's correctional service spokesman Francis Enobore told AFP by phone. "But as the day progresses, the figure will definitely increase," he added, saying "several processes have been activated to ensure all inmates are rearrested." At about 2245 GMT on Sunday, the spokesman had said earlier in a statement, numerous attackers "engaged the armed guards in a fierce gun battle." —AFP

Singapore news site suspended

SINGAPORE: A Singaporean news website often critical of authorities had its license suspended yesterday for failing to declare funding sources, regulators said, with a rights group slamming the move as "unacceptable censorship". Critics frequently accuse the tightly-regulated city-state of curbing media freedoms, and The Online Citizen (TOC) had long been in the government's crosshairs. One of Singapore's few alternative news sources, it often ran stories more critical of the authorities than those in the pro-government mainstream media. The city-state's media regulator said it had suspended the company's licence to operate its websites and social media channels as it had not fully met obligations to declare funding. —AFP

EU court condemns Turkey

STRASBOURG: The European Court of Human Rights yesterday condemned Turkey for detaining an opposition mayor for over two years without trial, the latest in a string of rulings against Ankara over the imprisonment of political figures. The Strasbourg-based tribunal said the removal from office of Tuncer Bakirhan, a veteran pro-Kurd activist, just after his March 2014 election as mayor of Siirt was "manifestly disproportionate" and a violation of his liberty and free speech. Bakirhan, a member of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), was accused of belonging to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has waged a deadly separatist insurgency against Turkey since 1984. He was jailed for two years and eight months before appearing in court, and in October 2019 was handed a 10-year prison term. Bakirhan brought the application against Turkey over his pre-trial detention before the European court. —AFP



TEL AVIV: Billboards by the United Arab Emirates Embassy marking the signing of the US-brokered Abraham Accords are seen along the expressway in the coastal city of Tel Aviv yesterday. —AFP

on strategic sectors. The international television channel i24News in June opens a permanent bureau in Dubai, a first for an Jewish-based media outlet.

Jewish embassies

On June 29, Lapid visits the UAE to open first embassy in the Gulf. On July 26, the day after the direct first commercial flight between Jewish State and Morocco, Lapid says both countries will open embassies within "a few months".

Cairo visit

On Monday Bennett meets Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi in the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Sharm El-Sheikh, hours after he became the first Jewish premier to visit Cairo since 2011. —AFP



HONG KONG: Pro-democracy activist Alexandra Wong, also known as Grandma Wong, gestures outside West Kowloon court in Hong Kong. —AFP

where less than a quarter of the body's seats will now be directly elected and only those deemed "patriotic" may stand for office. The legislature usually sits for four years. National security offences are treated differently than other crimes. In Hong Kong, only hand-picked national security judges can adjudicate trials, bail is usually denied to those who are arrested and juries are not a requirement, despite offences carrying up to life in jail. —AFP

state. In July, the New Yorker magazine reported there had been dozens of new "Havana Syndrome" cases among US officials in Vienna, Austria since the beginning of 2021. Last month, US Vice President Kamala Harris delayed a trip to Vietnam after the US embassy in Hanoi reported a possible case, raising concerns she could be a target.

The Cuban expert report said some have accepted "as an axiom that attacks occurred in Havana." "However, after four years, no evidence of attacks has appeared," and "neither the Cuban police, nor the FBI, nor the Royal Canadian Mounted Police have discovered evidence of 'attacks' on diplomats in Havana despite intense investigations." —AFP

Business

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2021

Global oil demand poised to rebound next month: IEA

Facing investor pressure, Chevron to boost 'lower carbon' spending

PARIS: Global oil demand has dropped for three straight months as COVID cases have risen in Asia but it is expected to bounce back next month, the International Energy Agency said yesterday. Demand fell from July after rebounding the previous month, with major crude consumer China leading the decline, the IEA said in a monthly report. "Global oil demand remains under pressure from the virulent COVID-19 Delta variant in key consuming regions, especially in parts of Asia," the report said.

Demand fell by 310,000 barrels per day on average over the three months to September. But it is expected to recover in October with an increase of 1.6 million barrels per day (mbd) and continue to rise until the end of the year, said the IEA, which advises developed countries on energy policy.

"The latest news on the COVID front is more optimistic, with global cases falling in recent weeks, continued progress in vaccine manufacturing and inoculations, and less restrictive social distancing measures in many countries," it said. Global oil demand is expected to rise by 5.2 mbd this year, slightly lower than previously forecast, but 2022 growth will be slightly higher at 3.2 mbd, according to the report.

The IEA said Hurricane Ida "wreaked havoc on the key US Gulf Coast oil producing region" in late August and is "still causing problems for US and global markets."

Offshore installations and refineries have been slow to restart, forcing massive draws of stocks of both crude and products in key markets, it said. "It is only by early 2022 that supply will be high enough to allow oil stocks to be replenished," the IEA said.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting

Countries said on Monday that it expects global oil demand to exceed its pre-pandemic level next year thanks to the roll out of vaccines and the economic recovery. The forecast came as OPEC cartel nations and their allies, together known as OPEC+, are beginning to raise output to meet recovering demand.

Meanwhile, Chevron said yesterday it will lift spending on lower carbon energy while still investing primarily in fossil fuels as it updated its climate strategy in the face of investor pressure. The US oil giant said it would more than triple spending through 2028 to \$10 billion on its "lower carbon businesses," including \$2 billion to lower the carbon intensity of Chevron's operations. The program includes increasing production of renewable natural gas, renewable fuels and boosting hydrogen production, according to a press release ahead of presentations by executives.

However, the capital spending is still much lower than that planned for conventional oil and gas. Chevron said in March it plans \$14 billion to \$16 billion in annual capital spending between 2021 and 2025. Also, the company did not promise to reach "net zero" emissions in its overall business by 2050, a pledge taken by rivals such as Royal Dutch Shell and Total. Like its US rival ExxonMobil, Chevron has faced intensifying pressure from investors on climate policy. In May, 61 percent of shareholder voted in favor of a shareholder proposal calling on Chevron to reduce its "Scope 3" carbon emissions, those connected to products sold by the company.

Shareholders also narrowly defeated a proposal requiring a report on a "Net Zero 2050" scenario, such as ones discussed by the International Energy Agency. In a presentation on Chevron's



MILL VALLEY, US: In this file photo, gas prices are displayed at a Chevron gas station in Mill Valley, California. —AFP

website. Chief Executive Mike Worth said the company would update its climate change report next month to include a response to the Scope 3 proposal and net zero.

Activists expressed skepticism about Chevron's approach to climate change and the energy transition in interviews ahead of investor presentations.

The company's statements since the shareholder vote have been "not very promising," said Mark van Baal, founder of Follow This, a Dutch activist shareholder group that authored the Scope 3 resolution at Chevron. "If the world is to avoid climate disaster, then the reductions need to be done this decade," van Baal said on Monday. —AFP

Evergrande dream turns to nightmare for property buyers

BEIJING: Sleepless nights are now the routine for Ji Wenchen six months after she laid out \$100,000 for a deposit on a new apartment that is yet to be completed by China's rattled property giant Evergrande. She handed over the cash to the sprawling conglomerate in March but is yet to receive documents showing she owns the apartment. "I can barely eat or sleep these days," the 30-year-old told AFP.

"My name has not been written on the apartment that means, Evergrande has not handed over my money to the local government. As a rule, it should be filed within one month." Ji is one of tens of thousands of ordinary investors, whose financial futures are pegged to promised windfalls from Evergrande, China's largest developer whose bullish expansion into 280 cities was driven by a \$300 billion debt binge that has left it teetering.

Analysts Capital Economics estimate Evergrande has some 1.4 million properties that it has committed to complete—around 1.3 trillion yuan (\$200 billion) in pre-sale liabilities, as of the end of June. But those developments and debt repayments have been cast into doubt as it has struggled to sell properties, meaning it does not have the cash to complete other projects to then sell.

It has also failed to offload assets including its Hong Kong headquarters. Yesterday, the company filed a statement to the Hong Kong exchange warning of the "tremendous pressure" it faces. "There is

no guarantee that the Group will be able to meet its financial obligations," the statement said, as the property giant sags under its colossal debts.

Three red lines

The housing group, which rode the investment wave of the 90s to capitalize on the country's wealth boom, is now struggling to meet metrics imposed by Beijing last year. The "three red lines" set limits on borrowing and forced property developers to reduce their liabilities, following years where China let companies borrow heavily in order to expand.

Many offered attractive incentives to homebuyers to shift new-build properties.

But now complaints pepper Chinese social media from frustrated Evergrande investors whose apartments seem to have stalled. One wrote that he had bought an apartment in a block in southwestern Kunming that was supposed to complete in August, but the building is still not finished and the construction site is empty.

Dozens of protesters gathered outside the company's headquarters in Shenzhen yesterday, including investors and contractors. The anxious groups crowded in front of the building's entrance as police were deployed to maintain order, according to AFP reporters at the scene. "Our boss is owed over 20 million yuan (\$3.1 million), and many people here are owed even more," one Shenzhen protester, who gave his surname only as Chen, told AFP.

Owning property has become an important social marker of wealth in China, and is often considered a requirement for a man before getting married. "I'm worried about my apartment—it was supposed to be delivered before 31 October according to the contract," Kevin, a buyer in Jiozuo, central Henan province, told AFP. "But I asked Evergrande a few



SHENZHEN, China: The Evergrande headquarters is reflected on a puddle along a street in Shenzhen, southeastern China yesterday as the Chinese property giant said it is facing "unprecedented difficulties" but denied rumors that it is about to go under. —AFP

days ago, and they said it may be delayed because they don't have enough workers. I don't have any other choice but just to wait."

'I believed Evergrande'

But stabilizing the market has become a key aim of Chinese President Xi Jinping, under the motto of "housing is for living, not for speculation". The sector is of vital importance to the economy, and with millions of families tying up their wealth in property ownership experts have warned of potentially dire consequences if house prices drop below the cost of mortgages. Evergrande's woes come as authorities crack down on a range of corporate giants, including many listed home-grown conglomerates, sending shivers through stock markets as investors lose confidence in China's private sector. —AFP

US consumer prices slow in August as inflation pressures ease

WASHINGTON: US consumer prices slowed in August as some of the inflation pressures caused by the havoc of the COVID-19 pandemic showed signs of easing, according to government data released yesterday.

Spiking prices for gasoline and food, including beef, remain a political vulnerability for President Joe Biden. But with other prices starting to pull back, the Federal Reserve can take comfort heading into next week's policy meeting that it will not need to rush to tighten monetary policy.

The consumer price index (CPI) rose just 0.3 percent compared to July, while the annual rate eased to 5.3 percent, the Labor Department reported. Rising gasoline prices remained a key driver of inflation last month, but excluding volatile food and energy prices, "core" CPI rose just 0.1 percent — its smallest increase since February, the report said.

And over the past 12 months, core CPI rose four percent, three-tenths slower than the yearly jump in July. The gains in the month were slower than economists had expected, and the easing of price pressures supports the central bank's argument that much of the recent inflation spike is due to temporary factors that will fade as the world's largest economy rights itself following the coronavirus shock. The Fed's policy-setting Federal Open

Market Committee (FOMC) holds its two-day meeting next week, and financial markets are awaiting the signal on when the central bank will begin to ease up on its stimulus, including its massive bond-buying program.

Easing price pressures means it will not have to move more aggressively, and can start to taper as expected before the end of the year, according to analysts. "Pandemic-related effects will diminish further over coming months. And it appears the impact of supply chain disruptions and shortages is also fading, a positive development," said Rubeeela Farooqi of High Frequency Economics.

"But inflation readings remain high enough for the Fed to move away from emergency support, perhaps later this year," she said in an analysis.

Gas prices still high

The Fed wants to see inflation trending down towards its two percent goal over time, but has said it will accept a higher rate for some time to allow the economy, and employment, to recover. But the impact of COVID-19 is still apparent in the data. After plunging as the pandemic began and travel ground to a halt, oil prices have surged in the past three months as Americans returned to the roads and skies.

Gasoline prices jumped 2.8 percent in August, seasonally adjusted, in the third consecutive monthly increase, and have spiked 42.7 percent over the past year, the Labor Department said. Prices for used cars and airfares actually fell in the month, while new car prices rose but more slowly.

Food prices continue to rise, though also at a slower



LOS ANGELES: In this file photo, a woman pumps gas into a vehicle in Los Angeles, California. US consumer price inflation slowed in August. —AFP

pace, with beef prices up 12.2 percent over the past year, the data showed. The White House was so concerned about rising meat prices that it launched an initiative last week to take on the four dominant meat packing firms and look into price fixing — factors it blames for the increases.

But production and supply issues caused by the pandemic worldwide continue to play a role in US inflation, including shortages of things like semiconductors as well as shipping backlogs. "Price increases stemming from the ongoing supply chain bottlenecks amid strong demand will keep the rate of inflation elevated and sticky as supply/demand imbalances are only gradually resolved," said Kathy Bostjancic of Oxford Economics. —AFP

Boeing sees full commercial air recovery by 2024

WASHINGTON: Boeing said yesterday that the commercial aviation market should fully recover by 2024 from its pandemic slump, as the industry giant lifted its aerospace forecast for the next decade. Boeing projected a \$9 trillion aerospace market over the next decade, up from the \$8.5 trillion outlook a year ago, according to its annual market outlook report.

"As our industry recovers and continues to adapt to meet new global needs, we remain confident in long-term growth for aerospace," said Boeing Chief Strategy Officer Marc Allen. "We are encouraged by the fact that scientists have delivered vaccines more rapidly than imaginable and that passengers are demonstrating strong confidence in airplane travel."

Compared with last fall's projection, Boeing now sees increased orders for commercial planes and aviation services over the next decade, and the same level of demand for defense and space as previously forecast. "We've lost about two years of growth," Darren Hulst, vice president for commercial marketing at Boeing, said in a media briefing. "However, we see a recovery to previous levels by the end of 2023 or early 2024."

Looking further out, Boeing said the 20-year growth outlook "remains intact," with passenger travel averaging four percent annual growth, above the 2.7 percent in global economic growth expected over this period. Thus far, domestic travel has recovered much more quickly than international travel, reflecting a discrepancy in travel restrictions.

About 84 percent of domestic travel returned to 2019 levels in July, compared with only about one-fourth of international travel, according to a Boeing presentation. Boeing expects demand for 32,500 new single-aisle planes through 2040, about the same level as the pre-pandemic forecast. The company projected 7,500 new widebody jets over the period, down eight percent from the 2019 outlook.

One of the hottest areas of growth centers on planes that carry freight, including converted passenger planes. Boeing projected the 2040 fleet of global freighters would rise 70 percent from the pre-pandemic level, reflecting soaring demand connected to e-commerce. —AFP

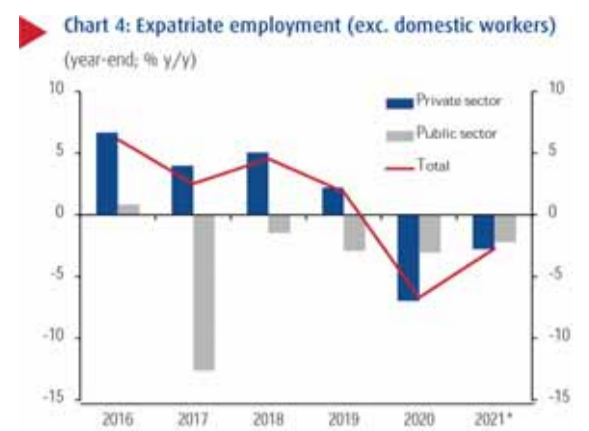
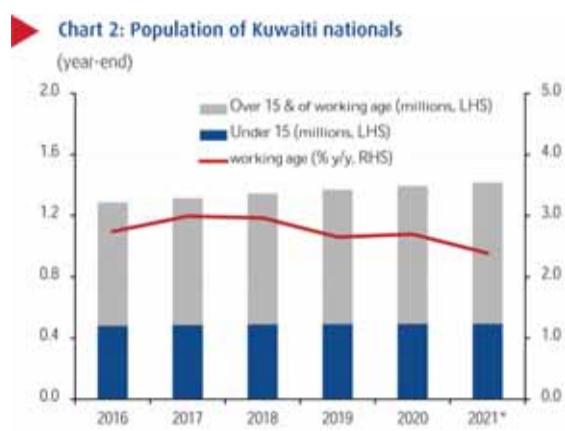
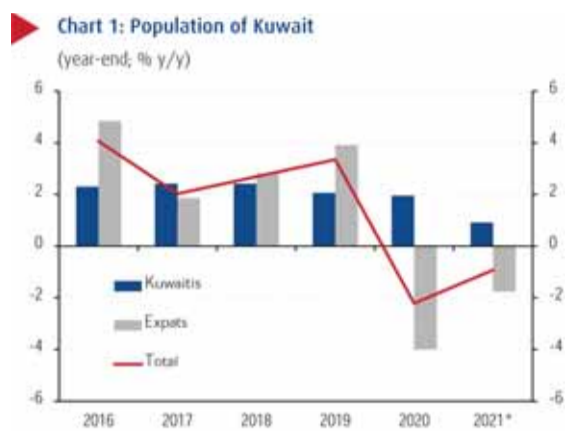


ARLINGTON: In this file photo taken on July 28, 2021, the cockpit of a Boeing 737-A during a Boeing ecoDemonstrator program at Washington Reagan National Airport in Arlington Virginia. —AFP

Business

Kuwait's population continues to decline as residents' numbers fall

Over 56,000 residents left Kuwait in 1H21; total departures near 190,000 since start of pandemic



Source: PACI * As of June 2021; growth rates are Jun 21/Dec 20

Source: PACI * As of June 2021; y/y growth rate is an estimate

Source: PACI * As of June 2021; growth rates are Jun 21/Dec 20

Source: PACI * As of June 2021; growth rates are Jun 21/Dec 20

KUWAIT: Following the biggest annual drop recorded in almost 30 years (-2.2 percent) in 2020, Kuwait's population decreased by a further 0.9 percent in the six months to 1H21 to 4.62 million. This is mainly due to a continued fall in the number of resident expatriates, while the number of Kuwaiti nationals continued to rise. In fact, the ongoing enforcement of Kuwaitization policies and the weak economic environment caused by the pandemic have forced companies to shed workers, pushing thousands of expat households to leave the country.

According to the latest demographic data from the Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI), Kuwait's population decreased by 0.9 percent in 1H21 to 4.62 million, after a drop of 2.2 percent y/y in 2020. This was driven by a decline in resident numbers (-1.8 percent) while Kuwait nationals saw modest growth (+0.9 percent). The share of expatriates in the total population fell back to 68.2 percent, its lowest in ten years.

In terms of numbers, more than 56,000 residents left the country in 1H21, pushing the total numbers to about 190,000 since the start of the pandemic and the implementation of the lockdown and restriction measures in early 2020.

Large youth population to weigh on the labor market

The number of Kuwaitis under the age of 15 continues its deceleration to 0.1 percent y/y in 1H21 from 0.6 percent y/y last year and 1.0 percent in 2018. Despite this moderation, this cohort of around 493,000 still accounts for more than a third of the Kuwaiti population and is likely to put more pressure on the labor market in the future. Meanwhile, growth in the number of working-age nationals above the age of 15 has remained robust estimated at 2.4 percent y/y in 1H21.

Total employment declined

After a drop of 4.2 percent y/y in 2020, total employment declined by 1.7 percent 6m/6m in 1H21. This is attributed to moderation in hiring activity among Kuwaiti nationals and a drop in resident expat employment. Employment growth among Kuwaitis moderated from 2.1 percent in 2020 to 1.3 percent in 1H21, driven mainly by a decline in the private sector (-1.5 percent or about 940 Kuwaitis). However, the public sector kept its hiring apace (+1.8 percent or about 6,200 Kuwaitis) partly due to Kuwaitization efforts. Such hiring will add pressure to the budget with the wage bill alone accounting for about 60 percent of total spending.

In contrast, resident expatriate employment dropped by 2.2 percent in 1H21 after a drop of 5.2 percent in 2020, on the back of low hiring activity in both the public (-2.2 percent) and private sector (-2.8 percent). However, domestic (i.e. household) workers' employment was less affected, as their numbers decreased only by 1.1 percent in 1H21. In fact, the government allowed domestic helpers to enter the country once flights resumed (even if they are not vaccinated). Excluding domestic workers, expat employment decreased by 2.7 percent, led by a decline in hiring activity in the private sector (-2.8 percent versus -7 percent in 2020).

The drop in expat employment in the private sector (excluding domestic workers) was due

Table 1: Population (end-year)

	Population ('000)			% y/y		
	Kuwaiti	Non-Kuwaiti	Total	Kuwaiti	Non-Kuwaiti	Total
2015	1,308	2,931	4,239	2.5	4.1	3.6
2016	1,338	3,073	4,411	2.3	4.8	4.1
2017	1,370	3,130	4,500	2.4	1.9	2.0
2018	1,403	3,219	4,622	2.4	2.8	2.7
2019	1,432	3,344	4,776	2.1	3.9	3.3
2020	1,460	3,211	4,671	2.0	-4.0	-2.2
2021*	1,473	3,154	4,628	0.9	-1.8	-0.9

Source: Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) * As of June 2021; As of June 2021; growth rates are Jun 21/Dec 20

mainly to a sharp decline in hiring in construction (-9.8 percent) and real estate (-5.1 percent), in line with weaker project activity and muted property market activity during the pandemic period. Expat employment also declined in other sectors such as manufacturing (-5.3 percent) and hotels & restaurants (-2.1 percent). It's

worth mentioning that the low-paid and low-skilled expatriate workers were the most affected by the pandemic fallout (about 94 percent of the expatriate job losses according to our estimation).

In addition, job losses and higher living costs have forced some workers to send their dependents back home. The number of resident dependents has continued to decline, falling by 0.4 percent in 1H21 following a similar drop in 2020.

Looking ahead, and while some of those residents who are stuck outside Kuwait may return with the resumption of flights, generally more expat workers are expected to leave in the coming period, as the pandemic fallout and Kuwaitization efforts continue to push companies to shed workers amid a weaker economic environment.

Highlights

- Kuwait's population decreased by 0.9% in the 6M to 1H21 to 4.62 million, as number of residents continued to decline.
- Over a third of the Kuwaiti population is below the age of 15, highlighting the importance of accelerating job creation for this large cohort.
- Total employment declined by 1.7% year-to-date in 1H21, due to moderation in hiring activity among Kuwaiti nationals in the private sector and a drop in expat employment.

Philippines eases lockdown in Manila to spur economy

MANILA: The Philippines will ease coronavirus restrictions in the capital Manila despite record infection numbers, officials said yesterday, as it seeks to spur economic activity. Restaurants, churches and beauty salons in the national capital region will open at lower capacities from Thursday to get tens of thousands more people back to work.

"We should strive for total health and this can only be realized by carefully balancing our COVID-19 response by considering both the health of our people and the economic health of the nation," President Rodrigo Duterte's spokesman Harry Roque said. Virus cases have surged to record levels—more than 140,000 cases in the past week—thanks to an outbreak of the highly contagious Delta variant.

Metropolitan Manila will be placed on the second-highest alert under a new classification system that replaces guidelines that left many residents and business owners confused about which activities were allowed. Localized lockdowns tar-

geting specific buildings, streets or neighborhoods will be enforced to check the spread of the virus, replacing the current scheme that covers entire cities and regions.

Fully vaccinated customers in the capital region can now be served indoors in restaurants and beauty salons at up to 10 percent capacity, and at outdoor venues at up to 30 percent capacity regardless of vaccination status. Six out of 10 adults in Manila are inoculated, compared to 22 percent of Filipino adults nationwide, officials said.

Churches will also be allowed to seat 10 percent of their capacity for services but other indoor group activities, including those that lead to crowding, remain banned.

Cost of lockdown

A succession of shutdowns since the start of the pandemic has sidelined more than two million workers in the food and leisure sectors in the capital alone, according to Trade Secretary Ramon Lopez. Millions of children started a second year of remote lessons this week in the Philippines, which has kept schools closed since the start of the coronavirus pandemic.

Officials said yesterday that when the alert level is reduced to the second-lowest, classrooms may reopen alongside indoor entertainment and social events at up to 50 percent capacity. Duterte has pre-



MANILA: Adults arrive to pick up distance learning materials for their children at a school in Quezon City, suburban Manila. —AFP

viously said the country cannot afford more lockdowns. But authorities have had few options to slow the spread of the virus as hospitals have filled up. The president said in a pre-recorded television address aired yesterday that vaccinations—now limited to priority sectors—could start for the general adult population next month "if there is a stable vaccine supply". The coronavirus has infected more than 2.2 million people and killed more than 35,000 in the country since the start of the pandemic. —AFP

UK unemployment dips ahead of furlough ending

LONDON: British unemployment dipped in July as the economy reopened further, official data showed yesterday, but the outlook remains clouded with the government's furlough jobs support scheme ending soon. Unemployment dropped to 4.6 percent in the three months to the end of July compared with 4.7 percent in the second quarter, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement.

Vacancies are meanwhile at a record high with certain sectors including road haulage and hospitality seriously affected by a shortage of staff owing to the virus outbreak and Brexit. At the same time, the number of UK workers on payrolls has rebounded above pre-pandemic levels, the ONS added yesterday.

The UK government's furlough scheme that has kept millions of private sector workers in jobs during the pandemic by paying the bulk of their wages ends on September 30. —AFP

UK delays full post-Brexit border checks from EU

LONDON: Britain yesterday said it would push back its implementation of full post-Brexit borders checks on goods from the European Union, as the pandemic, red tape and new immigration rules fuel supply problems. Plans to introduce full controls in areas such as the import of food and animal products had been due from next month but would now start from January next year under a "pragmatic new timetable", Downing Street said.

Britain will still introduce full customs declarations and controls on January 1, 2022, as planned. Certification and physical checks on food and animal goods designed to protect against diseases, pests and contaminants—due to be introduced on January 1—will now be introduced in July 2022.

Requirements for Safety and Security declarations will be also be pushed back to July. "We want

businesses to focus on their recovery from the pandemic rather than have to deal with new requirements at the border, which is why we've set out a pragmatic new timetable for introducing full border controls," said minister David Frost.

"Businesses will now have more time to prepare for these controls which will be phased in throughout 2022. "We remain on track to deliver new systems, infrastructure and resourcing needed for these controls," he added.

The pandemic and the effects of leaving the EU single market have left Britain short of truck drivers, causing supply problems, particularly in the food and drink sector. The UK has similarly postponed the full implementation of post-Brexit rules governing trade from mainland Great Britain (England, Scotland, Wales) to Northern Ireland. London is in talks with Brussels about how to put into practice the Northern Ireland Protocol, which is designed to prevent unchecked goods heading into the EU single market via the UK's only land border with the EU to Ireland.

Christmas pressure

Fears are growing that supply side problems will hit Christmas in shops and supermarkets, particular-

ly if tougher checks are introduced at busy Channel ports in October. "Additional time could help to relieve pressure on supply chains ahead of the traditionally busy Christmas period for retailers, especially given current headwinds," said Sean McGuire, Europe director at employers group the CBI.

"But the impact will be fleeting unless that extra time delivers progress on the challenges firms are facing. "That includes both sides giving fresh consideration to business' suggestion for a bespoke veterinary agreement, which could avoid the majority of checks and reflect the unique nature of trade between the UK and the EU. "And where supply bottlenecks are caused by labor shortages, the UK should use the immigration levers within its gift to alleviate short-term pressures." Britain is set for the strongest growth since official records began over 2021, with gross domestic product (GDP) set to expand by 7.1 percent, according to the British Chambers of Commerce. But it said the driver shortage, global supply issues and recruitment troubles could hamper the recovery.

Recent data "points to a loss of momentum in the coming months as staff shortages, supply chain disruption and rising cost pressures limit output from



DOVER: In this file photo taken on December 31, 2020 after disembarking from a ferry, lorries undergo checks at the port of Dover on the south-east coast of England. Britain yesterday said it would push back its implementation of full post-Brexit borders checks on goods from the European Union. —AFP

many sectors," said Suren Thiru, head of economics at the BCC. London's Mayor Sadiq Khan yesterday called for a time-limited "COVID recovery visa" to help recruit and train EU workers to alleviate labor shortages after Brexit and the pandemic. —AFP

Oil gains on hurricanes; strategic reserve deployed to temper prices

COVID-19 cases in Asia affect global oil demand expectations

KUWAIT: Crude oil regained the \$70/b mark following the impact of Hurricane Ida, and more recently Hurricane Nicholas, after briefly trading below the key support level last month. However, despite elevated prices, the upward trend has recently softened led by disappointing economic data coming from two of the world's biggest crude oil consumers, the US and China, that affected sentiments around crude oil demand. Economic data released in the US highlighted some economies concerns as jobs creation weakened. On the other hand, fear of growth of COVID-19 cases in Asia also affected global oil demand expectations.

Hurricane Ida, which made landfall at the close of August-2021, had a severe impact on oil production, refining and oil pipelines. The category 4 storm affected around 94 percent of offshore Gulf of Mexico oil and gas production. Oil facilities remained offline for an extended period of time and only resumed partially during the first week of September-2021. The slow restoration process affected 1.72 mb/d in oil production and 2.01 billion cubic feet per day in natural gas production.

The closure of refineries also led to higher domestic gasoline prices in the US. In China, refinery throughput continued to slide due to the investigations related to oil quotas as well as led by the refinery maintenance season. On the other hand, reports suggested that Typhoon Chanthu affected port operations in Zhoushan that houses some of China's largest oil storage tanks and refineries. Economic data from China remained mixed as seen from higher exports in August-2021, but broadly negative pointing to a faltering recovery. This was reflected in manufacturing activity data for August-2021 that recorded a slowdown to the lowest level since February-2020. The services sector had a more severe impact resulting in a contraction due to a recent outbreak of COVID-19 that affected overall economy. The economy is also affected by higher raw material prices and a slowdown in the property sector.

In order to contain the elevated prices and its impact on domestic inflation, both US and China tapped their strategic crude oil reserves. The development was unprecedented in the case of China as the country released crude for the first time to lower prices. Moreover, the official statement pointed to continued intervention in the future in order to balance the market and stabilize supply and demand through open auctions.

Meanwhile, weekly oil production data from the EIA showed a record decline in crude output in the US led by the closures caused by Hurricane Ida. According to the report, US crude production dropped by 1.5 mb/d to 10 mb/d during the week ended 3-September-2021.

This was the lowest production rate since the pandemic that affected production last year in February-2020. On the other hand, oil production by OPEC continued to rise for the fourth consecutive month to reach the highest in 16 months at 27.11 mb/d.

Gulf Bank announces Al-Enezi as winner of cash prize worth 12 times his salary

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank conducted its eighth monthly Salary Package draw of the year to announce the winner for August 2021. The lucky winner, Dhari Ali Oqlah Al Enezi, will claim a cash prize worth 12 times his salary. The draw was held on Monday at Gulf Bank's main branch, in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce & Industry.

Mohammad Al-Qattan, the General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank, said: "We would like to congratulate Dhari Ali Oqlah Al-Enezi, this year's eighth Salary Package draw winner. We would also like to wish all our clients the best of luck in our upcoming monthly draws, in addition to our annual draw for the grand prize of 100 times the winner's salary. Gulf Bank's Salary Account is the only account in Kuwait that offers cash prizes to reward its clients, in addition to exclusive offers that are specifically tailored to meet our clients' needs."

Throughout 2021, Gulf Bank's Salary Package offers clients a wide range of exclusive offers, including the ability to choose between an interest-free loan or a cash prize of up to KD 300, and a free credit card, with these offers being valid for workers in both the public and private sectors. Gulf Bank is also providing special offers for frontline workers in appreciation of their continuous efforts in combating the pandemic.

Frontline workers' salary package

Gulf Bank recently tailored a special offer for employed Kuwaiti frontline workers who wish to transfer their salaries to Gulf Bank. Upon transferring their salaries, these clients will immediately receive a set of benefits, including a cash gift of KD 300, or an interest-free loan of up to KD 25,000 or a special car loan offer from approved showrooms. They will also be eligible to receive a Visa or MasterCard credit card with all annual fees waived

Oil prices

After posting the biggest weekly loss in nine months during the 3rd week of August-2021, crude oil prices witnessed consistent gains during the 4th week of August-2021 led by weaker USD and vaccine approval in the US that led to hopes of demand recovery in the near-term. Crude oil future prices were up more than 11 percent during the week ended 27-August-2021, the biggest gain since June-2020. These gains were also supported by the expected impact of Hurricane Ida hitting the US side of Gulf of Mexico. However, the price gains eased during September-2021 despite the supply impact from the hurricane as demand concerns from Asia reemerged as a result of lockdowns in several Asian countries to combat the delta variant of COVID-19.

Markets considered the lowering of Asian crude official selling price (OSP) by Saudi Arabia as a sign of tepid demand growth in Asia, although prices for the Saudi Arabia's European and US customers remained steady. Nevertheless, despite a volatile month of trades, crude oil benchmarks averaged above the \$70/b mark in August-2021. Brent crude oil basket monthly average stood at \$70.8/b, registering a m-o-m decline of 5.6 percent, the biggest monthly decline in 11 months. The decline in OPEC crude and Kuwait crude grades were slightly smaller at 4.4 percent and 3.7 percent to average at \$70.3/b and \$71.1/b, respectively for the two crude oil grades.

World oil demand

OPEC kept its world oil demand growth forecast unchanged for 2021 at a growth of 6 mb/d to average at 96.7 mb/d, although quarterly estimates underwent offsetting changes. According to the OPEC monthly report, demand estimates were raised for Q3-2021 based on resilient demand backed by positive mobility indicators mainly for the OECD region. Demand estimates for the region was revised up by 0.32 mb/d for Q3-2021 to 45.93 mb/d mainly backed by an upward revision of 0.21 mb/d for

OECD Americas region, and 0.1 mb/d revision for the OECD Europe region. Demand estimates for the US was raised by 0.1 mb/d to 20.44 mb/d for Q3-2021. However, demand estimates for the Other Asia region for lowered for the quarter by 0.1 mb/d and for by 0.05 mb/d for the Latin America region. Downward revisions were also made to demand data for Q4-2021 mainly on the back of the increase in COVID-19 cases. Demand estimates for Q4-2021 was lowered by 0.12 mb/d for the OECD region in addition to downward revisions of 0.03 mb/d each for the Other Asia and Latin America regions. As a result, OPEC lowered demand estimates for 2H-2021 that is now expected to be pushed in 1H-2022. The net impact of the aforementioned revisions at the full year level was an upward revision of 0.06 mb/d for demand in the OECD region.

For 2022, oil demand forecast witnessed a steep upward revision of 0.9 mb/d led by steady economic outlook for the world economy that is expected to result in stronger-than-expected growth in demand

for the first year, a free MasterCard World card (upon KD 5,000 expenditure). The frontline offer also consists of other benefits, including a free safety deposit box for a period of one year upon opening the account, free concierge services, and a customer segment upgrade. The new frontline offer is open to Kuwaiti employees working in the Fire Brigade, National Guard, Civil Aviation (including Kuwait Airways) and in the following Ministries: Health, Defense, Information and Interior.

Salary package - exclusive offer

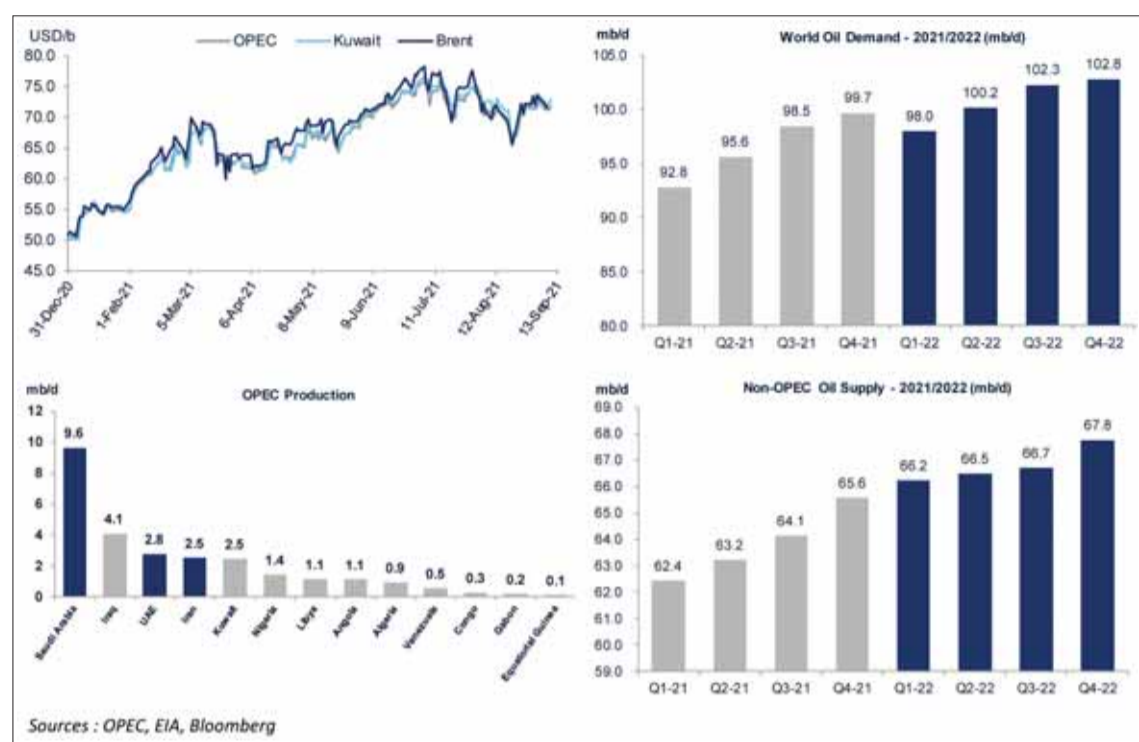
As part of the vast range of services and benefits available to Salary Account customers, Gulf Bank offers its clients the opportunity to choose the most appropriate benefits from a wide selection of attractive options. With the 2021 Kuwaiti Salary Offer, new customers who transfer their salaries to Gulf Bank are automatically enrolled in the monthly draws, giving them the chance to win cash prizes of up to 12 times their salary. Customers are also enrolled in a yearly draw of Kuwait's largest salary prize, a cash prize of up to 100 times the winner's salary.

Gulf Bank's Salary Account also gives new customers the opportunity to receive either a KD 300 cash gift upon transferring their salaries to Gulf Bank, or an interest-free loan of up to KD 25,000. Customers must have a minimum salary of KD 500 and are eligible for the offer following their first salary transfer to Gulf Bank. Customers can also enjoy additional benefits like a Visa or MasterCard credit card free of charge for a year. They can also apply for a loan of up to KD 70,000 with a repayment period of 15 years, or a consumer loan of up to KD 25,000.

Salary account draws

Gulf Bank conducts monthly and annual Salary Account draws, in which all salaried customers who transferred their salaries to Gulf Bank in 2019, 2020 and 2021 are automatically enrolled. During the monthly draws, Salary Account customers have the chance to win a prize of up to 12 times their salaries and can even win up to 100 times their salaries in the annual draw.

It is worth noting that Gulf Bank is the only bank in Kuwait that offers its salaried customers the opportunity to win sums of these amounts on a monthly and annual basis, as a reward for transferring their salaries to Gulf Bank.



for crude oil. Demand is expected to grow by 4.2 mb/d and average above the 100 mb/d mark and breach pre-pandemic levels to reach 100.8 mb/d. The increase in vaccination rates is expected to be one of the key drivers of oil demand rates next year. Demand growth forecast for the OECD region was revised up by 0.3 mb/d to a growth of 1.8 mb/d to average at 46.53 mb/d in 2022. Demand growth expectations for the non-OECD region was revised by 0.6 mb/d to a growth of 2.3 mb/d and demand is expected to average at 54.3 mb/d for the region. The non-OECD region is expected to witness steady economic activity next year, particularly in the key demand centers of India, China and other Asia. In terms of product category, transportation fuels are expected to see a significant improvement next year.

World oil supply

World liquids production declined marginally m-o-m by 0.03 mb/d during August-2021 to average at 95.69 mb/d. The decline mainly reflected a fall in non-OPEC production during the month by 0.18 mb/d to an average of 68.93 mb/d. The decline was primarily seen in the OECD region mainly due to the fall in production in North America led by the disruptions caused by Hurricane Ida. On the other hand, non-OECD production increased by 0.17 mb/d during August-2021. The higher production by OPEC resulted in a marginal growth in its market share that reached 28.0 percent. Non-OPEC liquids supply growth forecast for 2021 was lowered by the OPEC in its latest monthly report by around 0.17 mb/d.

OPEC oil production & spare capacity

Oil production in OPEC showed gains for the fourth consecutive month after most of the produc-

ers raised production during the month as per the OPEC+ agreement. Bloomberg data showed OPEC production increased by 290 tb/d to reach a 16-month high level of 27.1 mb/d. Production growth as per OPEC secondary sources was much more modest at 151 tb/d to an average of 26.76 mb/d. Saudi Arabia and Iraq, the top two producers in the OPEC, reported the biggest monthly increases in production, while Nigeria reported the biggest decline. Bloomberg data showed that OPEC producers have added close to 1.9 mb/d in additional crude oil production over the last four months. And, as a result, spare capacity with the group now stands at 7.4 mb/d as compared to 9.2 mb/d at the end of last year. The top five producers in the group reported a spare capacity of 6 mb/d based on production data for August-2021.

August-2021 marked the first month of planned output increase of 400 tb/d each month to be implemented by OPEC producers until the end of the year. At a meeting at the start of September-2021, OPEC members announced that the group would stick to its original plan of raising crude oil production gradually each month to restore 2 mb/d by year end. This came despite a number of reports that said that the US has urged OPEC to raise production in order to contain prices.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia's move earlier this month to lower its crude oil OSP for Asian buyers was seen as a strategy to get customers to buy crude oil via contracts instead of the spot market. In addition, the Kingdom also is said to be in talks with Sudan to supply crude oil via a long-term contract. According to Bloomberg, Saudi Arabia has already begun fuel shipments to Sudan and a long-term supply agreement with Aramco is expected.

Kalyan Jewellers launches digital gold

KUWAIT: Kalyan Jewellers, one of the most trusted and leading jewelry brands, recently announced the launch of Kalyan Jewellers Digital Gold. Venturing into the new digital gold category, the company has entered into a partnership with Augmont, which is India's largest completely integrated gold ecosystem.

With gold continuing to shine bright, and technology offering convenient solutions, Kalyan Jewellers Digital Gold powered by Augmont provides a safe, easy and reliable method of buying 24-Karat pure gold, digitally. When customers purchase Kalyan Jewellers digital gold powered by Augmont, an equivalent amount of physical gold is stored under the customer name for a period of up to 5 years - at no additional cost, in secured and insured vaults managed by IDBI Trustee Company Limited.

Millennial or Gen-Z customers looking to

make systematic purchases in gold, can opt for this feature, and start buying gold for as low as KD 40 (INR 100) on the platform. At a later stage, the overall gold purchase in their free-wallet can be redeemed as physical gold coins or jewelry, at the Kalyan Jewellers showroom. They can also opt for door step delivery of gold coins or bullion. Customers can also sell digital gold from the safe confines of their home, thus providing larger flexibility.

Talking about this partnership, Ramesh Kalyanaram, Executive Director - Kalyan Jewellers said, "Gold has always been a preferred saving option, and in the post COVID-19 era it has also emerged as the safest and most lucrative long-term asset. We have witnessed a renewed interest in gold from younger, first time customers, who are looking at convenient and easy means of purchasing the yellow metal. The introduction of digital gold will provide a holistic ecosystem for consumers."

Since the restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Kalyan Jewellers has introduced a range of digital, customer-centric initiatives, enabling patrons to purchase jewelry with flexibility, convenience and security with the LIVE video shopping facility.

S Korea fines Google almost \$180m for market abuse

SEOUL: South Korea's antitrust watchdog fined Google nearly \$180 million yesterday for abusing its dominance in the mobile operating systems and app markets, it said, the latest in a series of regulatory moves against tech giants around the world. The penalty came weeks after South Korea passed a law banning major app store operators such as Google and Apple from forcing software developers to use their payment systems, effectively declaring their lucrative Play Store and App Store monopolies illegal.

And last week a US judge ordered Apple to loosen control over its App Store payment system in an antitrust battle with Fortnite maker Epic Games. Google and Apple dominate the online app market in South Korea, the world's 12th largest economy and known for its technological prowess.

The Korea Fair Trade Commission (KFTC) has investigated Google since 2016 for allegedly preventing local smartphone makers such as Samsung Electronics from customizing its Android OS.

It said Google hampered market competition through an "anti-fragmentation agreement" preventing smartphone makers installing modified versions of Android, known as "Android forks", on their devices. "Because of this, device makers could not launch innovative products with new services," the KFTC added in a statement.

"As a result, Google could further cement its market dominance in the mobile OS market." It fined Google 207.4 billion won (\$176.8 million) and ordered the global tech giant to take corrective steps. Google said the decision "will undermine the advantages enjoyed by consumers" and added it plans to appeal, according to Yonhap news agency.

"Android's compatibility program has spurred incredible hardware and software innovation, and brought enormous success to Korean OEMs (original equipment manufacturers) and developers," it cited Google saying in a statement. "This in turn has led to greater choice, quality and a better user experience for Korean consumers." —AFP



Mohammad Al-Qattan

Lifestyle | Features



Fans attend the inauguration of the Johnny Hallyday esplanade in Paris.

Laeticia Hallyday, widow of late French singer Johnny Hallyday, flanked by their daughter Joy (left) and Jade (right) and Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo (second right) touches the plaque during the inauguration of the Johnny Hallyday esplanade in Paris.

A biker and fan poses for a photograph.

'French Elvis' Johnny Hallyday honored with new statue

Adoring fans paid tribute to late French rocker Johnny Hallyday yesterday as a statue went up in Paris in honor of the "French Elvis". The beloved star, who died in December 2017, will also be feted with a concert and his very own "Johnny's Bar" at one of the city's biggest arenas. But like much of Hallyday's life, the homage has not been without controversy. The local Green party mayor initially objected to the statue, featuring his beloved Harley Davidson perched on the end of a guitar, feeling it was not in keeping with the city's environmentalist turn. And the family feud that

erupted over the partition of his vast estate means two of his four children — actress Laura Smet and singer David Hallyday — are not expected to attend.

Hallyday parlayed the huge success from Gallic covers of US rock 'n' roll, such as "Blue Suede Shoes" and "C'est Le Mash Potatoes", into a long career in music, film and tabloid gossip before his death at age 74. His fourth and final wife, Laeticia Hallyday, was on hand as the area in front of the Accor Arena in Paris — a site where the rocker played 101 shows — was renamed Esplanade Hallyday. "Johnny would have been

proud to see his name anchored forever in the soil of Paris," she said. Laeticia turned down the idea of a hologram Johnny at the concert, however, telling Le Parisien: "I'm not ready for that." She also admitted that tensions remain within the extended family. — AFP

Fans gather next to an artwork showing a motorcycle sitting atop a guitar neck during the inauguration of the Johnny Hallyday esplanade in Paris. — AFP photos



In this file photo French actress and singer Vanessa Paradis (right) and French film director Samuel Benchetrit pose during a photocall for the film 'Cette musique ne joue pour personne' (This music is played for nobody) during the 14th Francophone Angouleme film festival in Angouleme, western France. — AFP

Theatre debut 'perilous', says French star Vanessa Paradis

She's been in front of cameras since she was a little girl, but Vanessa Paradis admits that treading the boards for the first time yesterday is a "perilous" undertaking. Speaking to AFP ahead of the opening night of "Maman" at the Edouard VII theatre in Paris, the singer and actress said she had been "inhabited" by the script, written by her husband Samuel Benchetrit, who also directs the play. "In several weeks, in several months, I will relax, but for now, it's all I'm thinking about," she said.

The 48-year-old has been in the lime-light for decades: A teen pop idol, appearances in some 20 films, a high-profile relationship with Johnny Depp. But theatre is finally introducing Paradis to stage-fright. "I already had a lot of admiration for theatre actors, but now that I've tried it, I admire them even more," she told AFP. "It's very perilous trying to do justice to the story while projecting your voice loudly."

'Exciting, but dangerous'

It took the right project to come along for Paradis to take the plunge, saying she was "a little afraid of the theatre". "You have to give a lot to theatre, rehearsing for several weeks and if it goes well, you're playing for several months... you can't do anything else." Paradis says she has definitely caught the bug, though, describing theatre work as "exciting, but dangerous". In "Maman", she plays Jeanne, married for 25 years—something she admits, with a chuckle, would be "a challenge". Paradis managed 14 years with Depp, with whom she has two children.

She married Benchetrit in 2018. They have already worked together on a movie, "Love Songs for Tough Guys", that premiered at the Cannes Film Festival this year. Paradis came to fame very early, appearing on a TV talent show at just eight years old, and then scoring a huge hit at 14 with "Joe le Taxi". She says she would love to return to songwriting, but that the play makes it impossible. "I'm not able. It's such a heavy piece—you have to have time, but also the will." — AFP



Musicians attend a rehearsal of 'The Time of Our Singing' opera created by Belgian musician Kris Defoort.

New Belgian opera evokes US racial discord

Baroque, jazz, rap: Centuries of musical heritage intertwine to tell the tale of a mixed-race family in a new opera being premiered in Brussels based on an epic novel of America's troubled 20th century. Belgian composer Kris Defoort's "The Time of Our Singing" is based on the 2003 book of the same name by Richard Powers, a half-century-long historical saga on a family united by music, but haunted by segregation. The novel tells of David Strom and Delia Daley, who meet after a concert by African-American contralto Marian Anderson in 1939 on the steps of the historic Lincoln Memorial in Washington.

The story continues with the birth of their sons, Jonah and Joseph Strom, as the mixed-race family grows up through music and through the dangerous era of the US civil rights struggle. Now, the music-laden narrative has inspired a musical work of its own, premiered on Tuesday at the Theatre de la Monnaie in the Belgian capital. Each character has a musical style reflecting their own quest for identity: Bach or Schubert for Jonah the tenor; blues for Delia; and hip-hop for Ruth, the rebel sister who joins the Black Panthers. "I follow the book very closely," Defoort told AFP. "But the book treats, in a very subtle, complex way, the topics of racism and segregation, the history of the (United) States, because it is about a family that is mixed," he explained. "So it is also more about searching for identity and finding your personality within this classical music world." — AFP

Five things to know about Dante on the anniversary of his death

Dante Alighieri is chiefly remembered as the author of the "Divine Comedy" and as the father of the Italian language. On the 700th anniversary of his death in the night between September 13 to 14th, 1321, here are five things to know about a titan of world literature.

Father of Italian language

Dante is credited with helping create the Italian language by using the Tuscan vernacular of his time—rather than Latin—to write his masterpiece. The "Divine Comedy", originally called simply "Comedy", is an imaginary journey through hell, purgatory and heaven, published in several stages in the early 14th century. Its popularity led other medieval Italian authors, such as Petrarch and Boccaccio, to also write in the vernacular, laying the literary foundations of Italian.

It is no coincidence that the institute for spreading Italian language and culture abroad is called the "Dante Alighieri Society." As part of 700th anniversary events this year, Italy is also preparing to open a Museum of the Italian Language in Florence, housed within the Santa Maria Novella church complex.

On par with Shakespeare

The "Divine Comedy" is a poem, a personal tale of redemption, a treaty on human virtue, as well as one of the most influential pieces of science fiction. Its first section, the "Inferno" (Hell) — with its circles of hell where punishments are inflicted on those having committed the seven deadly sins—still shapes the way we imagine the afterlife, at least in Christian terms. British poet T.S. Eliot famously said: "Dante and Shakespeare divide the modern world between them; there is no third." Argentine writer and bibliophile Jorge Luis Borges considered the "Divine Comedy" as "the best book literature has ever achieved."

Dante in popular culture

Generations of writers, painters, sculptors, musicians, filmmakers and cartoonists have been inspired by the "Divine Comedy", particularly the "Inferno". These include everyone from Sandro Botticelli, William Blake, Salvador Dali and Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, to the creators of X-Men comic books and novelist Dan Brown. Auguste Rodin's famous "The Kiss" sculpture depicts Paolo and Francesca, the adulterous lovers Dante meets in the second circle of hell. The "Divine Comedy" was also a key inspiration for Oscar-nominated thriller "Se7en", for a popular video game ("Dante's Inferno"), while Dante is quoted in popular TV series such as "Mad Men". Bret Easton Ellis' black comedy "American Psycho" opens with the epigraph "Abandon hope all ye who enter here"—one of the most-used quotes from the "Inferno".

Durante, but call me Dante

Like many other greats from Italy's cultural past—Giotto, Leonardo, Michelangelo—Dante is usually known only by his first name, which is a diminutive

of "Durante." He was born in Florence in 1265, exiled in 1302, and he died in Ravenna, on Italy's eastern Adriatic coast, on September 13 or 14, 1321. Hailing from a wealthy family, albeit not aristocratic, Dante never worked for a living and dabbled in politics as well as literature, philosophy and cosmology. He had at least three children with his wife Gemma Donati, but his lifelong muse was another woman, Beatrice, who appears in the "Divine Comedy" as his guide in heaven.



Dante the politician

Dante was active in politics, serving as one of Florence's nine elected rulers, or priors, for a regular two-month term in 1300. At the time, Italian cities were constantly on the verge of civil war between Guelfs, the papal faction, and Ghibellines, who sided with Holy Roman emperors. Dante started out as a Guelf, but after being exiled with the indirect help of Pope Boniface VIII, he became increasingly critical of papal encroachment in political affairs.

He was put on trial and banished from Florence after a new regime took over the city and persecuted its old ruling class, and remained in exile until his death. In 1302, a judge ordered Dante and his allies to be burnt at the stake if they tried to come back. The sentence was later changed to death by beheading. In the "Divine Comedy", the poet takes the opportunity to settle scores with many of his foes, notably reserving a place in hell for Boniface VIII. — AFP

Feline generous: Japan cat lovers give \$2 million to kidney research

Cats may have nine lives, but their time on Earth is often cut short by kidney problems—so people in Japan who want their feline friends to live longer have donated nearly \$2 million to the search for a cure. As the coronavirus pandemic hit the economy last year, scientists at the University of Tokyo lost their corporate funding for a study on preventing kidney disease in cats. But thousands of Japanese cat lovers mobilized online to donate to the researchers after an article about their plight by news agency Jiji Press went viral.

"I lost my beloved cat to kidney disease last December... I hope this research will progress and help many cats to live without this disease," one woman wrote in a message alongside her \$20 donation. Another donor, who gave \$90, said: "I recently got a kitten. I make a donation in the hope that it will be in time for this cat." Domesticated cats and their bigger cousins in the wild are highly prone to kidney problems because of a genetic inability to activate a key protein discovered by the Tokyo researchers. The protein called AIM helps clean up dead cells and other waste in the body, preventing the kidneys from becoming clogged.

Immunology professor Toru Miyazaki and his team are working on ways to produce the protein in a stable quantity and quality. They hope to develop a new remedy they say could double the current feline life expectancy of roughly 15 years. "I hope that ultimately veterinarians will give (cats) jabs every year like vaccines," Miyazaki told the AFP-affiliated AFPBB News. "It would be good to give them one or two doses every year" of AIM, he said.

Around 3,000 unsolicited donations were sent to the team hours after the article was published in July. This surged to 10,000 in just a few days—more than the total number of donations the university usually receives in a year. And by mid-September, the amount donated had reached 207 million yen (\$1.9 million). "It was the first time I understood first-hand how much my research is anticipated," said Miyazaki. His team's research on how AIM-short for apoptosis inhibitor of macrophage-functions in the body was published in 2016 in the Journal Nature Medicine. They are also developing pet food containing a substance that could help activate the non-functional AIM in feline blood. — AFP

Lifestyle | Gala



US socialite Kim Kardashian arrives for the 2021 Met Gala at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. — AFP photos



Hunter Schafer arrives for the 2021 Met Gala.



US singer/songwriter Billie Eilish arrives for the 2021 Met Gala.

Stars dazzle in defiant fashion at 'surreal' Met Gala



US actress Sharon Stone arrives for the 2021 Met Gala.

New York is done with dressing down: the splashy black-tie Met Gala returned Monday, with a cohort of Gen-Z's glitterati hosting the A-lister bash famed for its over-the-top panache-and, despite the pandemic, this year the fashion was so fierce one guest wielded a sword. The crowd of some 400 actors, athletes, poets and performers—all of whom were either vaccinated or had tested negative for COVID-19 — was largely maskless on the cream carpet, defying the global coronavirus pandemic that forced the cancellation of last year's event.

"It's so surreal," US rapper Megan Thee Stallion, attending the Gala for the first time and dressed by designer Coach to evoke old Hollywood glamor, told AFP. "I feel like, oh my gosh, Houston, Texas we made it! ... I'm excited to be here." But she did admit that it was "kinda weird" to be around so many people, more than 18 months into the coron-



English model Cara Delevingne.

US lawmaker Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez added to the revolutionary spirit with a white off-shoulder dress, on the back of which was written in scarlet capital letters: "Tax the rich"—an inflammatory statement at an event where tickets cost



Anna Wintour's daughter Bee Shaffer



Italian fashion designer Donatella Versace (left) and Colombian singer Maluma arrive for the 2021 Met Gala.



US singer Jennifer Lopez

avirus pandemic. "I've kinda gotten used to being a little introvert like-but I'm back on side so I'm excited to see everybody," she said. Canadian musician Grimes, who was one of the few wearing a face mask, set Twitter alight by carrying a sword—perhaps to, as one user suggested, "make sure people stay 6 ft away."

\$35,000 apiece and tables were up to \$300,000. Singer Normani said her yellow Valentino gown "chose me." "I feel like a princess... sorry I'm breathing heavy, my waist is snatched," she said. "I feel like... amazing. A Black queen."

Rapper Lil Nas X stripped down to reveal not one, but three gold outfits,

singer Frank Ocean appeared with lime green hair and carrying what Twitter users described as a "robot baby" and Simone Biles' glittering silver-and-black dress was so heavy that the gymnastics superstar could only climb the stairs one foot at a time and needed six men to help her lift it. The rapper ASAP Rocky appeared wrapped in a patchwork quilt, which he said was a sartorial message of unity. "We part of the same cloth, part of the same quilt, you know?" he said with a grin-later tossing the quilt to the ground to reveal a sharp black suit underneath, to the delight of singer Rihanna, his date.

One mysterious guest appeared head to toe in black—her face, mouth, eyes and head also covered, with only a long black ponytail visible, leading many to identify her as reality star Kim Kardashian. "Maybe? We think it's her?" tweeted New York Times fashion critic Vanessa Friedman.



Barbadian singer Rihanna



US poet Amanda Gorman



US gymnast Simone Biles



Japanese tennis player Naomi Osaka

Lifestyle | Gala

Wednesday, September 15, 2021



Barbie Ferreira and Jonathan Simkha



US fashion model Kaia Gerber



US-French actor Timothee Chalamet



Jameel Mohammed



Lil Uzi Vert

'Evolving language of fashion'
Actor Timothee Chalamet, poet Amanda Gorman, singer Billie Eilish and tennis player Naomi Osaka co-chaired the charity ball often heralded as the celebrity world's "party of the year." Normally held in early May, the Manhattan soiree on steroids was postponed to Monday with the hope that COVID-19 restrictions would be lifted. The 2020 edition was canceled due to the pandemic. The honorary co-chairs were Anna Wintour, the editor-in-chief of Vogue, who has turned the gala into a global event, designer Tom Ford and Adam Mosseri, director of Instagram, which is sponsoring the extravaganza. Plans for an opulent spectacle as much of the United States and the world is still reeling from the coronavirus pandemic had risked criticism, but the primary reason for holding the benefit was almost certainly financial. The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute relies on the Met Gala to fund its work, including exhibitions and acquisitions, and the cancellation of last year's event badly damaged its finances. The bash heralded the opening of the

Metropolitan Museum of Art's annual sartorial exhibit, which this year will happen in two parts.

The first show, titled "In America: A Lexicon of Fashion," is opening to the public September 18 to celebrate The



Costume Institute's 75th anniversary. The second exhibit-"In America: An Anthology of Fashion"-will kick off May 5, 2022. Both will run until September 5 of that year. The exhibits themselves will see Costume Institute curator Andrew Bolton continue to explore broad themes-"Camp," Catholicism and China were among the focuses in recent years-rather than offer retrospectives of a specific designer. The two-part show will assess the state of American fashion-its contemporary players, the industry's identity, and important figures the rarified world of fashion may have overlooked or left out. Bolton said the exhibit's first stage would focus on modernizing fashion vocabulary in connection with "equity, diversity and inclusion," as part two would see collaborations with American filmmakers to "further investigate the evolving language of American fashion."-AFP

Canadian musician Grimes



Brazilian model-actress Valentina Sampaio



Somali-US fashion model Iman (right) and fashion designer Harris Reed



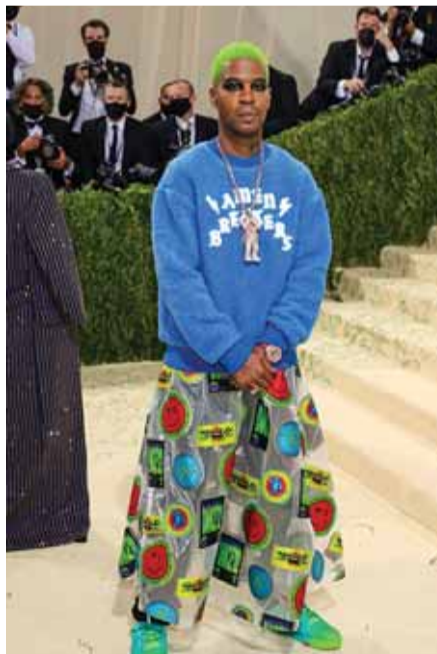
German singer Kim Petras



Canadian singer Justin Bieber



English actress Emily Blunt



Kid Cudi



Natalie Bryant



US tennis player Serena Williams



Canadian musician Grimes arrives for the 2021 Met Gala.



Whoopi Goldberg, creative director for Valentino-Pierpaolo Piccioli and Carey Mulligan



Erykah Badu



Gigi Hadid

Sports

AC Milan dreaming big ahead of Champions League return

Reds have become one of the most feared sides

MILAN: AC Milan make their long-awaited return to the Champions League this week on one of the biggest stages the game has to offer, a trip to Liverpool today allowing them to dream of Europe's biggest prize once again. There will be 13 European Cups between the two teams at Anfield, but while Reds have become one of the continent's most feared sides under Jurgen Klopp, winning their most recent Champions league in 2019, the Italian side will run out for their first group fixture in the competition since 2013.

They are in confident mood after a fast start to the new Serie A season which has earned them a perfect nine points from their opening three matches. Stefano Pioli, who has never won a major honor as a coach, has a promising team on his hands with the progress made since his arrival in 2019 crystallized by Sunday's 2-0 stroll against much-fancied Lazio at the San Siro. Asked whether his side were dreaming of going big in Europe, Pioli said: "We should only be dreaming at night, in the day we need to work hard to realize those dreams".

The last eight years have been arid for the seven-time European champions, who haven't won Serie A in a decade and were last crowned the continent's top team way back in 2007, when they beat Liverpool in Athens. That was the last meeting between the pair and came two years after the Reds inflicted one of the most traumatic defeats in Milan's history, coming back from three goals down at half-time against a star-studded Rossoneri lineup before eventually winning a historic final on penalties.

Since then Milan, by far Italy's most successful team in Europe, have failed to get past the quarter-finals of the Champions League and in 2019, while recovering from major financial problems brought to the fore by a disastrous Chinese ownership, even failed to get out of a Europa League group which contained Dudelange, Olympiakos and Real Betis.

Sacchi hails Milan style

This year's group is a much tougher proposition, with La Liga holders Atletico Madrid and Portuguese champions Porto also potentially blocking their path to the knockout stages, but legendary Milan boss Arrigo Sacchi told AFP current coach Stefano Pioli is on the right track. "Milan have a difficult group, which will cost them a few points in the league. But the important thing is to win in this competition," Sacchi, who twice won the European Cup, said.

"I've known Pioli for a long time, because he is from Parma where I worked for a few years. Back then he was already an excellent tactical coach, but he was one who couldn't quite transmit an identity to his teams. "He's gone onto the next level now though, as his team has a style." Zlatan Ibrahimovic hadn't even begun his first spell at Milan when they were last crowned kings of Europe, as he was instead firing their local rivals Inter to the Serie A title.

However, approaching 40 and back in the red and black of Milan for a second time, the Swedish star will be a key figure for Pioli after scoring on Sunday, seven minutes into his return to action



MILAN: AC Milan's Italian coach Stefano Pioli speaks to his players during the Italian Serie A football match between AC Milan and Lazio at The San Siro Stadium in Milan. —AFP

after four months out with a knee injury. "He's got this passion," said Pioli. "I believe that apart from his evident talent it's the passion, the fire that he

has inside him that makes training for him a pleasure... When you're like that you don't feel the advancing years." —AFP

New-look Inter host Real aiming to outdo big name old boys

MILAN: Simone Inzaghi is trying to put Inter Milan's rocky recent European past behind him as his side prepare for the visit of Real Madrid and an attempt to finally make it to the Champions league knockouts. A long, hot summer at the Italian champions seems to be cooling down now that the new season has got underway, as memories of the departed stars Romelu Lukaku, Achraf Hakimi and Antonio Conte - as well as the financial problems that led to their exits - are shunted aside in face of a new-look Nerazzurri side which has started the campaign well.

Seven points from the first three matches of the season is not a bad haul for new coach Inzaghi, although after missing a host of chances in Sunday's 2-2 draw at Sampdoria the former Lazio boss will be wondering why it isn't a perfect nine. And after a promising opening few weeks domestically he now he has the chance to go one better than his more illustrious predecessor Conte did in his two years in charge at the San Siro and make it past

the group stage.

"I'm not thinking about last season because it's since 2010 (2011, Ed) that Inter haven't get into the last 16. That's not last season, it's the last 10 years," Inzaghi told reporters yesterday. "That's a statistic that we want to change at all costs." Inter also have the chance to get revenge on two of the sides who denied them a place in the knockout rounds last year, with Madrid and Shakhtar Donetsk again paired with Inter, this time in Group D with minnows Sheriff FC. "I think that what happened with the two matches with Madrid last season is the past. Now we have a great chance to write an exciting new page," said Inzaghi. "It won't be a very easy group but our hope is that we can get through it."

While Inter obviously miss the firepower of one of the world's best strikers, Inzaghi still has a strong base from which to attack the competition, with Copa America winner Lautaro Martinez in form up front and one of Italy's Euro 2020 heroes Nicolò Barella shining in midfield. New signings Edin Dzeko, Hakan Calhanoglu and Joaquin Correa have all settled in well but up to now have only faced modest opposition. Today's match is a much sterner test against a Madrid side which lead La Liga and have scored 13 times in four matches, with nine of those strikes coming from red-hot Karim Benzema and Vinicius Junior.

Inter will be missing the talented but injury-prone

in a group that could hardly have been tougher, but this is a team built to go all the way.

"It makes me think of Liverpool when I arrived there. Liverpool were building a team to win the Premier League. Here I have joined a team that has been built to win something. I said to myself: 'This is going to be massive.'" Georginio Wijnaldum, another of PSG's summer signings, told sports daily L'Equipe.

Lucky?

They should, at the very least, be far too strong for their first opponents, even if the former European Cup finalists have been Belgian champions in three of the last four seasons. The last time PSG went to Bruges was in the group stage two years ago. There was no Messi then, and there was no Neymar either, but Mbappe bagged a hat-trick in a 5-0 win.

This summer Wijnaldum and Messi were joined at the Parc des Princes by Italy goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma, flying full-back Achraf Hakimi and former Real Madrid skipper Sergio Ramos, as well as Portuguese prospect Nuno Mendes. Ramos has not played at all yet, while Messi has been slowly preparing himself, but PSG have still won five games out of five in Ligue 1, scoring 16 goals. Their recruitment drive, coupled with their decision to knock back up to 200 million euros from Real Madrid for Mbappe even with the France star in the final year of his contract, has had some of their European rivals up in arms.

"State-owned clubs are as dangerous for football's ecosystem as the Super League was," said La Liga president Javier Tebas, calling PSG's spending "unsustainable" in a football economy suffering from the impact of the pandemic. PSG have always claimed they have not

Madrid, who have themselves retained all of their key players and been boosted by the return of Antoine Griezmann.

But the task of reclaiming the Champions League appears even more formidable, when set against the trajectories of English rivals like Manchester City, Chelsea and Manchester United, and in France, Paris Saint-Germain. United, City and Chelsea spent around 400 million euros (\$472 million) combined in the summer transfer window as Ronaldo, Varane, Jadon Sancho, Jack Grealish and Romelu Lukaku bolstered already-glimmering squads at the top of the Premier League.

PSG gladly swept up Ramos and Lionel Messi, La Liga's two remaining grandeecs, to go with Gianluigi Donnarumma, Achraf Hakimi and Georginio Wijnaldum. Madrid, meanwhile, made a profit of around 20 million euros, deals for Eduardo Camavinga and David Alaba more than offset by the sales of Varane and Martin Odegaard. And while PSG's determination to keep Kylian Mbappe for at least the final year of his contract was tested by Florentino Perez, many suspect Madrid's president was not too unhappy to wait nine months, when he can sign the France World Cup winner for free.

Ancelotti's job now is to manage the year in between, the season without Mbappe to lead the next era and with the ageing leftovers of the last one - even if Luka Modric and



LOMBARDY: Inter Milan's Chilean midfielder Arturo Vidal (center) is pictured during a training session in Appiano Gentile, on the eve of the UEFA Champions League Group D football match between Inter Milan and Real Madrid in Milan yesterday. —AFP

Stefano Sensi, who came on as Inzaghi's fifth substitute in the second-half but almost immediately suffered what Inter later revealed to be a ligament sprain in his right knee. Madrid meanwhile will be without Gareth Bale, Toni Kroos, Dani Ceballos, Marcelo and Ferland Mendy, with Bale reportedly suffering a hamstring injury that could keep him out for some time. —AFP



PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain's Argentine forward Lionel Messi attends the French L1 football match between Paris-Saint Germain (PSG) and Clermont Foot 63 at The Parc des Princes Stadium in Paris. —AFP

breached UEFA's Financial Fair Play regulations and issued a stinging rebuke to Tebas, calling his remarks "insulting and defamatory". When it comes to Messi, La Liga's loss is PSG's gain. That is clear even if Messi has hardly contributed anything on the field for his new team.

"There are many more people who have a wider vocabulary to describe him closer to the reality Leo deserves," Pochettino told UEFA.com when asked for his impressions of the compatriot. Pochettino, who is without the suspended Angel di Maria for the start of the European campaign, was wary of playing up PSG's Champions League chances just yet. "This is a really unpredictable competition...you need to be lucky," he told UEFA.com. Then again you can't get much luckier as a coach than having Messi, Neymar and Mbappe in your team. —AFP

Karim Benzema might arguably grace all the starting line-ups of Europe's elite. There are talented youngsters too, like Vinicius Junior and Rodrygo in attack and Miguel Gutierrez at left-back. The 18-year-old Camavinga showed in his debut on Sunday - when he scored just six minutes after coming on - he could contribute sooner than many think. And if Ancelotti can revive the injury-ridden Eden Hazard, Madrid might have the best new signing of the lot.

Yet the odds are stacked against Ancelotti, as the base of power - in terms of wealth, talent and tactics - shifts decisively away from Spain, in the direction of Manchester and Paris. Ancelotti's appointment was perhaps even an admission of that shift: A low-maintenance, popular, potentially short-term coach, capable of making the most of what he has and trusted not to demand more. Already, there has been something of a release, with 13 goals scored in Madrid's first four games bringing a welcome change in tone following the more conscientious approach under Zidane. "Football has changed in the last five years: It is more intense, more aggressive, more organized, even some rules have changed," said Ancelotti at his unveiling. "But the idea is always the same for Real Madrid: Attacking, spectacular football because that is what the history of this club demands and the fans want." —AFP



LEEDS: Liverpool's German manager Jurgen Klopp applauds the supporters at the end of the match during the English Premier League football match between Leeds United and Liverpool at Elland Road in Leeds. —AFP

Liverpool facing toughest Champions League group

LIVERPOOL: Jurgen Klopp says his Liverpool team face the "strongest" Champions League group since he joined the club, defending the competition's current format as he prepares for today's blockbuster clash against AC Milan. Klopp's Reds will face seven-time European champions AC Milan, Spanish league title holders Atletico Madrid and 2004 Champions League winners Porto in a daunting Group B. European football's governing body UEFA earlier this year announced a new format for the Champions League from 2024 - replacing the 32-team group stage with a single league made up of 36 clubs.

That prompted fears that the quality of the tournament would be diluted, with managers also speaking out over player workloads. Klopp told his pre-match press conference yesterday that the make-up of Liverpool's group this season showed the strength of the current format. "This is the strongest group since I'm at Liverpool, no doubt about that," said the German, whose side were crowned European champions in 2019.

"I never understand that when people talk about changes in the Champions League. It's just the right thing. "I like the Champions League how it is. This group shows there are no games where people think, 'Do we really want to watch that?'" Today's match at Anfield features two teams who have been crowned European champions 13 times between them and is a re-match of the 2005 final in Istanbul, when Liverpool recovered from a 3-0 half-time deficit to win on penalties.

Milan gained revenge when they defeated Liverpool 2-1 in the 2007 final in Athens. Stefano Pioli's Rossoneri are a force to be reckoned with once more after failing to qualify for Europe's top club competition for seven consecutive seasons. Klopp predicted Liverpool's group would be "exciting from the first second to the last second". "I can't see early decisions made in this group," he said. "That keeps us on our toes - it's exactly what we wanted." Klopp said he relished the return of crowds after they were largely shut out last season due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"Unbelievable stadiums, great crowd, passionate fanbase - it's exactly how we want football," said the 54-year-old. The Liverpool boss also said 18-year-old midfielder Harvey Elliott was having surgery on his ankle on Tuesday after he was stretchered off during the 3-0 win at Leeds at the weekend following a challenge by Pascal Struijk. "I spoke to him the night after the game and he was in the best possible place at that moment," said Klopp. "Today he is in London and will have surgery today. We all wait for news from that." —AFP

This is it: Messi set for PSG Champions League bow

BRUGES: Lionel Messi came to Paris to win the Champions League again and today he is set to finally make his first start for his new club when they kick off their European campaign in Bruges. Five weeks have passed since Messi was presented as a Paris Saint-Germain player and declared he was in "the ideal place" to win the biggest prize in club football for the fifth time. In more than a month he has been seen in a PSG jersey for just 24 minutes as a substitute in a Ligue 1 game at Reims.

The 34-year-old had been expected to make his full debut for the Qatar-owned club last weekend but in the end he was rested against Clermont after returning from international duty with Argentina. However, PSG coach Mauricio Pochettino is expected to finally unleash the six-time Ballon d'Or winner from the start at the Jan Breydel Stadium against Belgian champions Club Brugge in the Group A opener.

If Neymar and Kylian Mbappe start too, it will be the first time the superstar attacking trio will have been on the pitch together for the Parisians. Expectations are sky-high, both for Messi at his new club and for PSG in the Champions League, a trophy they have yet to win but crave more than anything. PSG will play Abu Dhabi-backed Manchester City - the team that knocked them out in last season's semi-finals - as well as RB Leipzig

Real Madrid aim to defy power-shift

MADRID: After winning the Champions League three years in a row, Real Madrid have gone three years without getting close, the task now belonging to Carlo Ancelotti to put the club back where they believe they belong. Madrid reached the semi-finals last season but were resoundingly beaten by Chelsea, whose 3-1 win on aggregate would have been more emphatic had they not missed a cluster of chances in the second leg. Before that, Madrid were outclassed by Manchester City and outplayed by Ajax, a pair of deflating exits in the last 16 serving as a painful reality check after the giddy years between 2014 and 2018. Four successes in that half-decade, and three in a row, established Real Madrid at the pinnacle of Europe, even if Barcelona continued to reign supreme in Spain.

But an iconic generation grew older and many have now departed, with Cristiano Ronaldo, Sergio Ramos and Raphael Varane - the spine of the team - all gone. Zinedine Zidane, the coach, left too at the end of last season. His replacement, Ancelotti, has a difficult job reclaiming La Liga from Atletico

Sports

Separatist Transnistria relishes Champions League 'fairytale'

Coach hopes games would unite fans in Moldova and Transnistria

TIRASPOL, Moldova: Fans of European giants Real Madrid and Inter Milan will see their teams face unusual competition this autumn: a club from a tiny separatist region in one of Europe's least known countries, Moldova.

After a couple of failed attempts, Sheriff FC are making their debut this week as the first club from the ex-Soviet country to reach the group stage of the Champions League. But their historic success is highlighting divisions in the wake of a brief civil war after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which resulted in the creation of Transnistria.

The tiny breakaway state has its own currency, border police, army and cellular network but is not recognized internationally, allowing Sheriff to continue playing in the Moldovan league. The Moldovan football federation celebrated the qualification as "EUROFANTASTIC!!!", a sentiment echoed by sports blogger Sandu Grecu, who called it a "massive achievement for Moldovan football."

Not everyone is so thrilled. "I don't see much reason to be happy," sports journalist Cristian Jardan told AFP. "The team represents a separatist enclave where corruption, smuggling and shadow economy deals are rife, which directly damage the budget and state interests of the Republic of Moldova." The Champions League place, he said, will only benefit the owners of Sheriff — "and nothing more".

Dwarfed by rivals

Founded in 1997, the young club based in the breakaway region's administrative hub, Tiraspol, have been on a steady climb into the limelight. They have won six straight Moldovan league titles and 19 out of the last 21.

At a training session last weekend at Sheriff Stadium — soon to host the likes of Karim Benzema and Lautaro Martinez — coach Yuriy Vernydub was still processing Champions League qualification. "Honestly, I didn't expect it," the 55-year-old Ukrainian told AFP. "It's a fairytale."

He acknowledged there were political overtones to the moment but was upbeat about the opportunity it presented. "People say sport isn't politics," the 55-year-old said. "Sport is politics." The games, he said optimistically, "will probably unite" fans in Moldova and Transnistria.

Since 2009, the side have played four times in Europe's second-tier competition, the Europa League, and have twice been eliminated in the Champions League qualifying rounds. This year saw them earn a coveted Champions League group stage place and about 16 million euros (\$19 million) in guaranteed prize money.

Sheriff FC plays Real Madrid late September

It's a significant sum for a team whose entire squad is valued at just 12 million euros (\$14 million) and are dwarfed by their Group D rivals. The specialist website Transfermarkt estimates that Real Madrid boast a team worth 780 million euros, Inter Milan's players are valued at 575 million euros and Shakhtar Donetsk's 180 million.

At weekend training, the team were looking past their first Champions League game with Shakhtar Donetsk today to their encounter with Real Madrid later this month. Ghanaian midfielder Edmund Addo called out: "Benzema! Benzema!" as he dribbled past Brazilian defender Cristiano da Silva Leite, referring to Real's superstar French striker.

The Sheriff pair are part of a multi-national line-



TIRASPOL: FC Sheriff's players attend a training session before a Moldovan league match at Sheriff Stadium in Tiraspol, the capital of Transnistria on September 11, 2021. — AFP

up. In a league game Sunday, the club fielded three Brazilians, two Greeks, two Colombians, one Peruvian, one Guinean, one Ghanaian, one Luxembourger and zero Moldovans. The players do their research before coming to the little-known pro-Russian breakaway state.

Politics inescapable

Gustavo Dulanto, a 26-year-old Peruvian defender, messaged the team's captain Frank Castenada on Instagram and Googled Sheriff FC before coming to a separatist sliver of land one-fifth the size of Wales.

Yet the politics are inescapable. The club is owned by the Sheriff conglomerate that has an economic and political monopoly in Transnistria. Founded by two Soviet police officers, the company is shrouded in allegations of corruption.

In Tiraspol, a city of about 130,000 people, Sheriff's logo is everywhere: supermarkets, gas stations, even a casino. One of its co-founders, Viktor Gushan, is Sheriff FC's president. He has built a sprawling complex featuring a 13,000-seat stadium, a second 9,000-seat stadium, an indoor arena, 16 training fields, tennis courts and an indoor pool. — AFP

Haaland-inspired Dortmund braced for 'emotional' test

BERLIN: Borussia Dortmund expect a highly-charged atmosphere at Besiktas today where the visitors' "world-class" striker Erling Braut Haaland is looking to add to his 20 Champions League goals. Last season, Haaland claimed records as the youngest player to reach the milestone of 20 Champions League goals in the fewest games, which he managed in just 14.

This season, the 21-year-old has knocked in 13 goals for Norway and

Dortmund, for whom he scored twice Saturday to seal a 4-3 win at Leverkusen, whose coach Gerardo Seoane described Haaland as "world-class".

The towering Norwegian was pelted with beer cups by Leverkusen fans during his celebrations after converting a late penalty and Dortmund expect another charged atmosphere in Istanbul. "It'll be another very emotional game. The Turkish fans will make sure of that, but we have the means to stand up to Besiktas," said Dortmund's licensed players director Sebastian Kehl.

Haaland has a habit of shining in the Champions League, where he has scored 12 goals in 10 games for Dortmund after netting eight times in six matches for his previous club Red Bull Salzburg. Manchester City, Real Madrid, Manchester United, Chelsea and Paris Saint-Germain are among the top European clubs report-

edly chasing him. The Norwegian goal-machine has a release clause in his contract of 75 million euros (\$88 million) which becomes active in 2022.

Haaland is under contract until 2024 and Dortmund have repeatedly said they will not let him leave unless they have to. "Our position is clear — I don't have to play the parrot all the time," said sports director Michael Zorc at the start of the month.

Dortmund will need Haaland's goals if they are to reach the Champions League's knock-out stages, having bowed out to Manchester City in the quarter-finals last season. The Germans are favorites to win their group, which also contains Ajax and Sporting Lisbon.

Dortmund need to fix their leaking defense, which has conceded nine goals in four Bundesliga games and German center-back Mats Hummels could return after a



LEVERKUSEN: Borussia Dortmund's defender Mats Hummels (left) and forward Erling Haaland celebrate after their team's German Bundesliga match against Bayer Leverkusen in Leverkusen, western Germany, on September 11, 2021. — AFP

knee injury. The Germans must contain Besiktas striker Michy Batshuayi, on loan from Chelsea, who scored nine goals in 14

games for Dortmund in 2017/18. The Belgian netted twice in Saturday's 3-0 win over Malatyaspor in the Turkish league. — AFP

Man City legacy rests on Champions League glory, admits Guardiola

MANCHESTER: Pep Guardiola said yesterday he accepts his Manchester City legacy hinges on whether he can deliver Champions League glory for the club after they fell at the final hurdle last season. The Premier League champions start their campaign against Bundesliga side RB Leipzig today, less than four months after their painful 1-0 defeat to Chelsea.

But Guardiola said he would not be dwelling on the missed opportunity in Porto — City's first-ever Champions League final — and that it would be a mistake to regard last season's European campaign as a failure. "Every season is different," he said at his pre-match press conference. "We made an incredible tournament last season but now we start the new one."

"People can say Man City was a failure but it was an incredible achievement last season, playing really well in many of the games and losing against a big contender," he added. The City boss, 50, has learned to live with the perception that he needs to win the Champions League to be judged a success at the club, even though he has led them to three Premier League titles and other silverware.

"I accept it," said Guardiola, who lifted the Champions League trophy as Barcelona manager in 2009 and 2011 but has not won it since in his spells at Bayern Munich and City. "Every year is the same. If I win the Champions League, I will be happy for the club. If I'm not able to do it, I'm not able. After, you can judge the success of my period."

Spain midfielder Rodri said the City team had no regrets over last season's near-miss in Europe's top club competition, adding the players were determined to go one better this season. "We have no regrets," he said. "We will learn from this experience. The Champions League is decided by little differences. We have to build another building — a huge building — this season to achieve the Champions League." — AFP



LEICESTER: Manchester City's manager Pep Guardiola watches during his team's English Premier League match against Leicester City at King Power Stadium in Leicester on September 11, 2021. — AFP

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I, PASUPULETI MUNI KUMAR, S/o PASUPULETI SUBRAMANYAM, holder of Indian passport no: M2288252, R/o D.No.9/335-3, SRI RAM NAGAR, Ply. Kodur Town & MANDAL, KADAPA DIST., A.P. - 516 101. (NEW) has changed my name from NEMALI MUNI KUMAR (OLD NAME) to PASUPULETI MUNI KUMAR (NEW 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, OTHMAN ALLAH SHAIK, holder of Indian Passport No. S3697946 change my name to SHAIK USMANULLAH. So hereafter I will be known as SHAIK USMANULLAH, address: 7/614 Mochampet street, Kadapa, Andhra Pradesh. (C 647) 14-9-2021

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

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Carr shines as Raiders rally past Ravens in thrilling OT opener

First regular-season game with fans at Las Vegas' Allegiant Stadium



LAS VEGAS: Quarterback Derek Carr #4 of the Las Vegas Raiders throws against the Baltimore Ravens during the second half of their game at Allegiant Stadium Monday night in Las Vegas, Nevada. —AFP

LOS ANGELES: Derek Carr's 31-yard touchdown pass to Zay Jones lifted the Las Vegas Raiders to a 33-27 overtime win over the Baltimore Ravens in the NFL season opener for both teams on Monday night.

that included a wild ending in which the Raiders prematurely celebrated a victory before making it official just over three minutes later in overtime. "I am thankful we won because going to sleep tonight and losing that one would have hurt," said quarterback Carr.

Carr lofted the ball over the Ravens' defense with 3:38 left in the extra session to a wide-open Jones who waltzed into the end zone to end the marathon contest. The Raiders squandered their first possession of overtime after winning the coin toss.

They appeared to have won the game and celebrated on the field after Carr hit Bryan Edwards with a 33-yard pass down the sideline that was ruled a touchdown by the officials. But after a video review, the call was changed because Edwards' knee hit the ground before he reached across the goal line with the ball in his outstretched hand.

On the next play, Carr was stopped on a

quarterback sneak attempt. Raiders tackle Alex Leatherwood was also slapped with a five-yard false start penalty. Then Carr's attempted pass into the end zone was deflected and intercepted by Anthony Averett. "I am really proud of the character they showed," Raiders coach Jon Gruden said. "If you can come back and find a way to win against a team like that, then that is impressive."

Carr, who completed 34-of-56 passes for 435 yards and two touchdowns and an interception, said the twists and turns had a familiar feel to it. "It reminded me of my career so far," Carr said. "But the only thing that matters is that score, so I am glad we won."

Ravens quarterback Lamar Jackson completed 19-of-30 passes for 235 yards and a touchdown but had two fumbles. He also rushed for 86 yards on 12 carries. The Raiders winning touchdown came two plays after Carl Nassib forced a fumble by Jackson, and Darius Philon recovered at the Ravens' 27-yard line. —AFP



LAS VEGAS: Las Vegas Raiders fans, including Pablo "Toozak" Navarro (right), react during a game between the Baltimore Ravens and the Raiders at Allegiant Stadium on September 13, 2021 in Las Vegas, Nevada. — AFP



Lamar Jackson completed 19-of-30 passes

The thrilling Las Vegas victory capped the opening week of the 2021 NFL season and marked the Raiders first regular-season game with fans in attendance at the \$1.9 billion state-of-the-art Allegiant Stadium in Las Vegas.

The near-capacity crowd of 61,700 were treated to a dynamic come-from-behind win

Educating young key to combatting corruption in sport: Ex-Commissioner

PARIS: Educating the young should be the priority in the fight against corruption in sport, says former European Union Justice Commissioner Franco Frattini, who warned that "sport is more than ever vulnerable to crime".

"I very much prefer the school of sport rather the school of crime but unfortunately in our cities in some rundown suburbs there are schools of crime," said Frattini, the chairman of Sport Integrity Global Alliance (SIGA).

"Sport mobilizes a huge amount of money around the world and is very attractive to criminals," the 64-year-old told SIGA's Sports Integrity Week conference. "As a judge I know the mafia's attempts to infiltrate and intimidate clubs."

The former Italian Foreign Minister believes the young needed to be taught the right values and not allowed to fall prey to bad influencers. "We should

not forget the young, they are the first victim" he said, speaking on the panel 'Sport's Big Fight: Anti-Corruption in Sport'.

"The mission should be one of education and instilling the key values of loyalty, honesty and transparency. It is not just about affecting our society today but even more of tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. We cannot divide school from sport, sport should be part of the early education of the younger generation."

Frattini says it is best to keep a constant watch over the young. "Let us not leave the young free to I would say be playing dangerous video games or in contact with dangerous people rather than learning how to compete honestly," he said.

He said organized crime had a negative effect not only on sports competitions but also in a wider context. "It has a huge impact on communities where

organized crime as it happens in Italy find very lucrative opportunities in altering sport competitions and getting easily dirty money," he said. "Unfortunately, they are trying to broaden their perspective and network and these are concepts around which the fight and prevention of corruption has to be focused."

'Surrounded in secrecy'

For Juan Antonio Salazar, the European Commission's Legal and Policy Officer for Anti-Money Laundering and Countering Terrorist Financing, organized crime is a "major threat to citizens, business, institutions and economies of our countries". "In 2019 criminal revenues in main criminal markets in Europe amounted to at least, and this is a conservative estimate, 1 percent of the European Union's Gross Domestic Product that is 140 billion euros," he said. Salazar said transparency in financial investments is key vis-a-vis corruption in sport. "We need to know who is behind financial operations that affect professional sports as a starting point," he said.

Salazar identified three major threats of activity.

"Investments by private funds in professional sports because it is not always that clear," he said. "We can trace investors of money flows that appear in any given sector. However, in the professional sports sector in some cases the entity of individuals which appear managing funds are visible but the identities of the investors is still opaque and surrounded in secrecy." Salazar said foreign ownership of clubs also presented a threat. "In the EU we already have minimum common legislation regarding this," he said. "When investments originate from other third countries the transparency over level of control and investments shareholding, we could also have problems here."

Salazar is especially exercised by those who take stakes in several clubs. "From my point of view multi-club owners is a threat," he said. "In those cases where we have individual parties who have stakes in more than one professional club in the case of football the situation can create opportunities and risks of corruption and money laundering for organized crime activities. Again, I come back to my initial point we need transparency as much as possible and it is never going to be enough." — AFP