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team flees to Pakistan



Lawmaker questions security, privacy of app

MP asks why private company still occupies port land



KUWAIT: A man inspects a falcon during a falcon auction yesterday, held for the first time since the COVID-19 outbreak. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (More pics on Page 4)

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: MP Bader Al-Mulla said yesterday he has sent a series of questions regarding safeguarding of personal information while using a new government application that provides all official online services. The lawmaker said he is not seeking to obstruct the use of the application and the adoption of electronic services, but wants to make sure that security of information and privacy of individuals are guaranteed before introducing the application.

Mulla said he asked Minister of State for Communications and Information Technology Rana Al-Fares if a technical study was conducted on the project and the department that programmed the application. He also asked if the project had been awarded to a company that subcontracted another company, and if their employees are governed by laws safeguarding personal information.

Mulla said he also asked the minister about the owners of the company and if it is possible that its ownership is sold to a third company with foreign links. The spokesman for the Sahel application Yousef Al-Kazem denied there are any legal implications

regarding the application's technical and security features, adding that it provides all online government services. He said the program has been designed and implemented entirely by government teams and that it is being managed by a team of young Kuwaiti staff.

Meanwhile, MP Osama Al-Shaheen yesterday accused the commerce and industry ministry of failing to safeguard public property and funds. He said that although final court verdicts had been issued ordering the eviction of a company from around one million square meters of land at Mina Abdullah Port, the ministry is still dealing normally with the company.

He said that the Kuwait Ports Authority has complained the company is utilizing the land without obtaining any license from any government side including the fire department, exacerbating the risks if a fire breaks out in the area. The lawmaker said that in spite of the court verdicts ordering the company to leave, Commerce and Industry Minister Abdullah Al-Salman is still cooperating with the company. He said that he has sent a question to the minister asking him why he has refused to liquidate the bank guarantee of the company with the Kuwait Ports Authority.

CONDOLENCES

**Kuwait Times Editor-in-Chief,
management and staff
convey their deepest condolences to**

**Al-Ayyar family
on the sad demise of**

**Ambassador
Adel Al-Ayyar**

May Allah Almighty bestow His mercy on him

Amir receives Crown Prince, Prime Minister

Sheikh Nawaf condolences with UK PM over demise of his mother



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



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

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

received His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince received His Highness the Prime Minister yesterday at Bayan Palace.

In the meantime, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent yesterday a cable of condolences to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Boris Johnson over the death of his mother Charlotte

Johnson Wahl. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Minister of State for Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah meets Ambassador of Spain to Kuwait Miguel Jose Moro Aguilar. — Amiri Diwan and Interior Ministry photos

Amiri Diwan minister meets Spanish envoy

KUWAIT: Minister of State for Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah received Ambassador of Spain to Kuwait Miguel Jose Moro Aguilar, in his office at Bayan Palace yesterday.

Meanwhile, Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah received in his office yesterday the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Kuwait Chung, Byung-ha. The two sides discussed issues of mutual interest as well as means of boosting cooperation, especially in the security field.

In the meantime, Sheikh Thamer received Qatar's Ambassador to Kuwait Ali Bin Abdullah Al Mahmoud, on the occasion of the start of his tenure in the country. The exceptional relations between the two Gulf Cooperation Council countries and ways of enhancing them highlighted talks between the two officials, the Interior Ministry said in a statement yesterday.



Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah meets Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Kuwait Chung, Byung-ha.



Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah meets Qatar's Ambassador to Kuwait Ali Bin Abdullah Al Mahmoud.

Macron, MBZ vow fight against 'extremism'

FONTAINEBLEAU, France: French President Emmanuel Macron and the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, one of France's closest allies in the Gulf, yesterday vowed to work together to counter Islamist extremism after talks that underlined the strength of their partnership. The two met for a working lunch at the historic Fontainebleau Chateau outside Paris, where the United Arab Emirates has played a key role in restoration works.

France has close military, political and cultural ties to the United Arab Emirates, the capital of which is Abu Dhabi. Abu Dhabi has in the last month served as a hub for the evacuation by Paris of French

nationals and Afghans from Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. "Both sides emphasized... they were both determined to fight extremism and terrorism and to strengthen their cooperation in security and defense," the French presidency said in a statement after the talks.

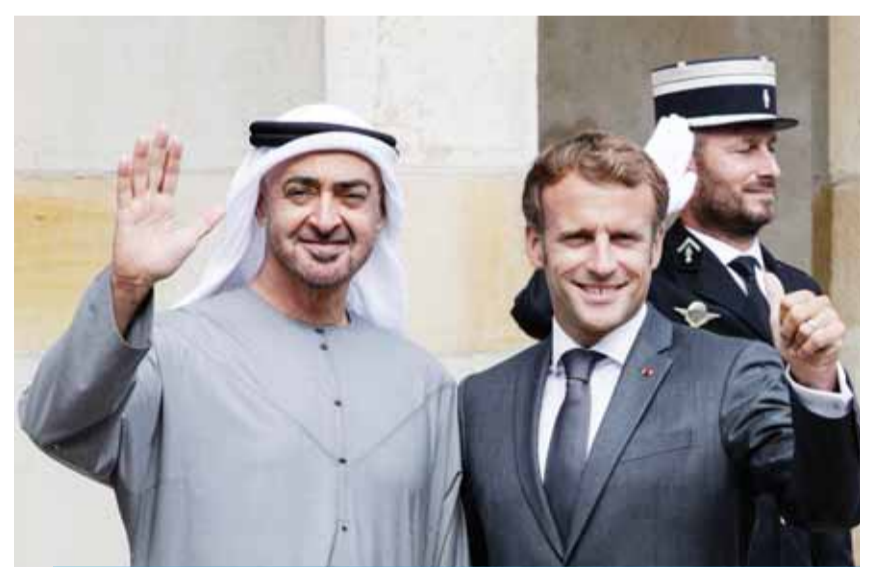
On Afghanistan, both sides also insisted on the need "to respect the rights of women and girls, as well as minorities" after the takeover by the Taliban. Macron has a strong personal relationship with Mohammed bin Zayed, known as MBZ, who is seen as one of the most powerful figures in the Gulf, along with his close ally Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman, known as MBS.

Analysts believe Macron and MBZ are united by a shared distrust of political Islam and particularly activities of Islamist political parties such as the Muslim Brotherhood in the Middle East. They also both have thorny relations with Turkey under its strongman President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, even if

there have been signs of a thaw in ties between Ankara and the UAE and Paris over the last weeks. "We discussed our shared interest in deepening the strong and longstanding strategic ties between the UAE and France," MBZ tweeted after the talks.

They also visited the historic theatre at the Fontainebleau Palace built between 1853 and 1856 under the nephew of emperor Napoleon I, Napoleon III, which has been painstakingly restored thanks to UAE funding and is now named after MBZ's half brother Sheikh Khalifa, the ruler of Abu Dhabi and president of the United Arab Emirates.

The UAE capital already hosts the Louvre Abu Dhabi, opened by MBZ and Macron in 2017, the first foreign institution to carry the name of the great Paris museum. "Building on the breadth and depth of their partnership, the two leaders believe they can meet together the challenges of today and tomorrow," the French presidency added. — AFP



FONTAINEBLEAU, France: French President Emmanuel Macron poses with Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed upon their arrival at the Fontainebleau castle in Fontainebleau yesterday ahead of their working lunch. — AFP

Vaccine, PCR test needed to enter Dubai Expo 2020

DUBAI: Expo 2020 visitors will need a coronavirus vaccination or a negative PCR test to enter, organizers in Dubai said yesterday, two weeks before the giant event opens. The six-month world fair, featuring exhibitions by 192 countries, is expected to attract more than 20 million international visitors when it opens on October 1 after a year's COVID delay.

PCR tests will be free for ticketholders with a "network" of testing centers available across the city, organizers said. The new

rules apply to visitors aged 18 and over. "By updating our vaccination and testing requirements, we are opening up a world of discovery and education for every visitor from every corner of the planet," Expo 2020 director-general Reem Al-Hashimy said in a statement.

"This enhanced measure is responsible, agile and necessary as we prepare to open our doors to the world," she added. Vaccines are mandatory for all Expo staff and employees of international participants, while the site will have mandatory masks, two-meter social distancing rules and sanitization stations. The United Arab Emirates has administered 19 million vaccination doses, with 80 percent of the population fully vaccinated. The Gulf country has reported 730,135 cases and 2,066 deaths. — AFP

Campaigning opens for first ever Qatar legislative polls

DOHA: Campaigning officially opened in Qatar yesterday ahead of its first legislative polls next month, as debate swirls about voter and candidate eligibility and online distortion. The start of the two-week campaign coincided with the interior ministry's publication of the final candidate list, with 294 people seeking to contest the 30 seats in the Gulf state's shura council.

Of those, 284 candidates were approved by the authorities to run, including 28 women, the state-run Qatar News Agency reported, with no reason given for the removal of 10

names from the list. The much-delayed polls will be held on Oct 2, with only descendants of Qataris who were citizens in 1930 eligible to vote and stand, disqualifying members of families naturalized since then.

The issue has stirred fierce debate on social media. Candidates will have to stand in constituencies linked to where their family or tribe was based in the 1930s, using data compiled by the then British-controlled authorities. The council, to be made up of 30 elected members and 15 appointed by the amir, can propose legislation, sack ministers and approve the

annual budget, but its decisions are subject to veto by the gas-rich country's ruler.

There was no sign of campaigning underway in Doha yesterday with no election posters or material visible in the city center and limited media coverage of the start of campaigning. Under the law, political parties are banned as is "stirring up tribal or sectarian strife among citizens in any way".

The election law has sparked a torrent of fake news on social media with the hashtag #BoycottQatarElections trending on Twitter, despite initially being posted by only one account, indicating manipulation. Officials fear the polls could be exploited by Qatar's neighbors, which they say have objected to Doha breaking ranks and holding elections. — AFP

Local

Several arrests in crackdown in Fahaheel Industrial Area

Girl disappears, tells family she plans to 'join Taleban'

KUWAIT: Ahmadi security department carried out a campaign to crack down on violators in Fahaheel Industrial Area yesterday. Police arrested 64 residency law violators and eight juveniles during the campaign, while officers also impounded seven vehicles and issued 23 traffic citations. Meanwhile, five vehicles were found in body shops without repair permits, the Interior Ministry announced. Yesterday's crackdown is the second operation of its kind in as many days after police carried out a similar campaign in Bneid Al-Gar, during which 96 people were arrested.

Separately, fire broke out at Naayem scrap area at dawn yesterday. Shiqaya, Jahra, Kazma and backup centers responded and put out the fire that engulfed several vehicles. No injuries were reported as an investigation was opened to reveal the cause of the blaze, Kuwait Fire Force said in a press statement.



'Cheating wife' ordered to pay KD 20,000

A police source quoted in the report published by Al-Anbaa Arabic newspaper yesterday said that after a 15-year-old Pakistani girl was reported missing at Khaitan police station, the case was handed over to state security due to a message she sent to her father in which she said she was going to join the Taleban in Afghanistan "to destroy the Zionist entity." The source said the girl did not leave Kuwait according to records, and that she is in Salmiya. Her name was placed on the travel ban list and she is being sought.

The source said it is most likely that the girl left her home at the behest of a man, adding her escape and whereabouts are being probed by police and state security detectives. According to the source who spoke on the condition of anonymity, a Pakistani resident in his 50s informed Khaitan police about his daughter's disappearance, adding her civil ID and passport were missing too. He said she sent him a message on WhatsApp telling him she plans to join the Taleban to commit a suicide bombing in the Zionist entity.

Husband compensated

In another case, the civil court ordered a woman to pay her husband and their children KD 20,000 in



KUWAIT: This handout photo released by the Interior Ministry yesterday shows police officers at the site of a crackdown in Fahaheel Industrial Area.

compensation for material and moral damages. The lawyer in the case said his client discovered that his wife had another phone through which she communicated with 13 men and exchanged pornographic messages and pictures, which caused him great pain. He was temporarily blinded, which kept him isolated from his neighbors and severely affected his children's psychological health and schooling. Al-Anbaa Arabic daily reported yesterday, quoting the lawyer.

After the court ruled for temporary compensation of KD 5,001, the lawyer asked for a final compensation verdict and attached documents including the children's maternal grandfather relinquishing visitation rights and a copy of the separation certificate. The lawyer also attached a final ruling authenticating the signature of the woman and copies of her conversations with others indicating that there were physical contacts with them, as well as a denial of visitation rights.

Five Municipality online services via 'Sahel' app

KUWAIT: Director General of Kuwait Municipality Ahmad Al-Manfouhi said the Municipality would offer five electronic services on 'Sahel' application. During its meeting yesterday, the Municipality's coordination committee agreed that services related to area layout would be available only online; paper applications will be no longer needed, Manfouhi said in a press release. The committee approved a plan to allow landowners of farmland to allocate three percent of their respective areas as cooling warehouses for farm produce. The Municipality will ask the Public Authority of Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources to activate its jurisdiction over expansion of farmland appropriations without referring to municipality, Manfouhi noted. The coordination committee also agreed issuing online home gardening clearances, he added. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Director General of Kuwait Municipality Ahmad Al-Manfouhi (right) chairs a meeting with Municipality officials yesterday. —KUNA

Over 1,710 volunteer to join Kuwait Army



KUWAIT: Volunteers apply to register with the Kuwait Army at its premises yesterday. —Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: Over 1,710 volunteers have already registered with the Kuwait Army after it launched a campaign titled 'Be One of Them' earlier this month. Those interested can attend a three-and-a-half month course to become noncommissioned officers

or a three-month course to become cadets. The last day for registration is Saturday, September 18, 2021. Last week, registrations were held at The Avenues mall. Due to the huge level of interest, the army decided to hold another registration session at its premises yesterday. Volunteers had the opportunity to get full information on the allowances and

bonuses they will receive during the course and after completing it to get employed in the army. Interested volunteers can register online at <https://vc.kuwaitarmy.gov.kw>. After registering, they will receive an SMS text to undergo medical checkups. This will be followed by a final interview to be accepted for the course.

News in brief

Proof of payment for vehicle transfer

KUWAIT: Interior Ministry Assistant Undersecretary for the Traffic Sector Maj Gen Jamal Al-Sayegh issued a decision banning the transfer of vehicle ownership until after making sure how the money was paid. The transaction must have a copy of a check, receipt or bank transfer attached to it. Al-Rai Arabic newspaper yesterday quoted a source at the ministry who said the decision aims to stop money laundering that takes place through the sale of luxury vehicles or by paying cash to dealerships. "This should deter those who carry out suspicious activities with cash of unknown provenance," the anonymous source said.

COVID patients in ICUs down again

KUWAIT: The number of patients in COVID-19 wards continued to drop as it reached 28 on Tuesday out of a total of 84 hospitalized patients. Meanwhile, 1,071 others were receiving regular treatment, Health Ministry Spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said. The ministry had said on Tuesday that Kuwait's daily coronavirus cases rose by 59 to 410,901 as deaths increased by two to 2,434. Another 134 people were cured of the virus during the same period, raising total recoveries to 406,396.

Kuwait crude oil up to \$74.73 pb

KUWAIT: Kuwait's crude oil price went up 62 cents during Tuesday's trading sessions to reach \$74.73 pb compared to \$74.11 pb the day before, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. Meanwhile, Brent crude closed up nine cents to \$73.60 pb and West Texas Intermediate was up one cent to \$70.46 pb.

Kuwait eyes closer Arab-German health cooperation

BERLIN: Kuwait's Ambassador to Germany Najeeb Al-Bader yesterday stressed the need of enhanced health cooperation between the Arab countries and Germany particularly amid the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The pandemic brought about huge challenges which require closer cooperation and experience sharing between the Arab region, on one hand, and the German institutions on the other, he said. He made the remarks after representing the State of Kuwait at the Arab-German Health Forum. The two-day gathering, held under auspices of the German-Arab Chamber of Commerce and Industry, came to a close earlier yesterday.

Ambassador Bader noted that the gathering saw workshops and panel discussions on ways to enhance the efficacy of healthcare systems, vaccination strategies and medical technologies. Panelists shed light on the outlook of the health sector, and the strategies to combat epidemic outbreaks and exchange expertise, he added. The German-Arab Health Forum is an information platform and network for establishing and strengthening long-term Arab-German trade relations in the health care sector with the aim of promoting health cooperation and exchanging experiences between the two sides. —KUNA

Local

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Email: info@kuwaittimes.com
Website: www.kuwaittimes.netKuwait marks
World Patient
Safety Day

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: World Patient Safety Day is marked on September 17, so on this occasion, Chairman of Kuwait Surgeons Society and Head of Surgery Department at Jaber Hospital Dr Salman Al-Sabah said the issue of patient safety and health is the top priority for health systems around the world.



Dr Salman Al-Sabah

Dr Salman Al-Sabah stressed the importance of law 70/2020 with regards to patients' rights as one of the most important laws in the field of health services in developed countries, adding that the law will allow Kuwait to join pioneering countries in this field in order to make a qualitative move in patient care in particular and human rights in general.

He said the existence of such a law within Kuwait's health legislations will strengthen confidence in the health system and preserve patients' rights and those benefiting from healthcare at all levels. He said patients' rights has become a top issue for all those interested in developing health services and improving its quality to meet people's needs around the world.

Dr Salman said among the most important items of the law is for the patient to have the right to receive healthcare that is suitable for their health condition and agrees with quality and safety standards, as well as preventive and medication measures. He added the law confirms the patient's right to receive all medical information about their health condition including their tests and the correct diagnosis of their condition, as well as medical steps, be they medication or surgery, while explaining the importance of the procedures and risks and complications that may occur.

The law confirms patients' privacy, their human dignity and privacy of information related to their condition. Dr Salman said Kuwait Surgeons Society is committed to the safe surgery initiative and the checklist of medical education, research and studies supported by the society in the field of patient safety and solutions to challenges patient safety faces.

Dr Salman Al-Sabah renewed the surgeons society's commitment to the international work plan with regards to patients' safety for 2021-2030, approved by the World Health Organization, adding the society is proud to be a main partner with the health ministry to strengthen the culture of patient safety and protect their rights. He lauded the patient safety program of the health ministry and considered ministerial decision 147/2015 to form a permanent national committee to follow patients' safety as a distinguished local, regional, and Arab achievement in the history of patient safety. He said WHO has chosen the theme "safe maternal and newborn care" to mark this day this year.



KUWAIT: Falcons are seen during an auction, held for the first time since the COVID-19 outbreak, in Kuwait City on Tuesday. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Diplomatic Women's
Committee discuss
new cultural season

KUWAIT: Head of the Diplomatic Women's Committee Eshata Thomas, the Ambassador of the Republic of Sierra Leone, hosted a meeting at her residence in the presence of the Ambassador of Republic of Chad Batoul Zakaria and the Honorary Chairperson of the Committee Sheikha Halah Bader Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.



Dr Kamel Al-Abduljaleel

Among the attendees were the President of the committee Madam Rouba Ouro, spouse of the Ambassador of Republic of Togo and Kady Al-Kharousi, spouse of the Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman, as well as the committee's advisor Narjis Al-Shatti, and Fouzia Abdul Basit, media and public relations officer for DWC and other committee members.

The committee discussed programs and activities for the new cultural season 2021/2022 with the return of normal life after coronavirus pandemic. The DWC's new season program will have many



KUWAIT: Members of the Diplomatic Women's Committee pose for a group photo during their meeting.

cultural exchange activities with a group of participant countries including State of Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Republic of Pakistan, Republic of South Africa, and the countries of Balkan region.

The Secretary-General of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters Dr Kamel Al-Abduljaleel promised NCCAL's cooperation with DWC, encouraging its distinguished and diverse activities throughout the previous years. The new season programs have also been prepared in cooperation with civil society institutions in Kuwait to participate in DWC's cultural exchange season

activities. There will also be cooperation with the United Nations office in Kuwait under UN's training and sustainable development program through DWC volunteer work.

At the end of the meeting, the head of DWC, the Ambassador of the Republic of Sierra Leone thanked the members for preparing wonderful program for the season 2021-2022 that achieves the goals of the committee, hoping for the normal and healthy life would return to the whole world, and together we would achieve success that honors the goals of the committee.

ICSK Junior celebrates virtual 'Grandparents Day'

KUWAIT: ICSK Junior celebrated its second virtual Grandparents Day recently. The function began with an introduction speech by Supervisor Shafika Yunus. The entire program was anchored by the little stars of kindergarten. Students presented a retro dance and enacted like their grandparents in the skit which was enjoyed by all. The Director of ISEK and Principal - ICSK Junior, Sheryl Dennis welcomed the gathering and thanked the grandparents for attending the program. She further thanked the parents for their efforts in helping their children's active participation.

The guest speaker for the evening, Sunil Menon - CEO of Al-Qabandi United Company, addressed the gathering. He thanked the teachers for the very important role they played in shaping these young minds and dedicating their time in teaching them online. He further emphasized the importance of children spending time with their grandparents and stressed that parents should minimize the use of mobiles and spend valuable time with their family. Grandparents are amongst the most wonderful relations that children have in their lives. Finally, the vote of thanks was rendered by the Vice Principal Sheeja.





North Korea fires 2 ballistic missiles

Stench of death: Villagers flee site of Ethiopian mass killings

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ZHUMADIAN, China: Chinese soldiers take part in a counterterrorism exercise during the multinational UN peacekeeping live exercise 'Shared Destiny-2021' held by Chinese military at a tactical training base of the Chinese People's Liberation Army in Zhumadian, central China's Henan province yesterday. —AFP

China hosts multinational exercise

Taiwan jets land on highway for Chinese invasion wargame

ZHUMADIAN: China wrapped up the country's first multinational peacekeeping exercise yesterday, demonstrating the extent of its military might on a huge training ground ringed by mountains. China's defense spending is the second largest in the world after the US, and tensions have dramatically increased between rival powers as Beijing has poured trillions of yuan into the modernization of its military. But the country has repeatedly sought to ally fears over its military intentions, projecting itself as a peaceful counterpoint to what it calls the "bullying, hegemonic behavior" of Washington.

Troops from Thailand, Mongolia and Pakistan joined China's armed forces for the 10-day exercise dubbed "Shared Destiny 2021" at the military base in Queshan county in central Henan province. Senior Colonel Lu Jianxin told journalists invited to the base that the exercise "demonstrates China's support for the multilateral system centered on the UN" as Beijing sought to put its defense diplomacy on full display. Blue-helmeted soldiers took turns role-playing various scenarios: civilians and refugees caught up in a brawl, or armed militants attacking UN forces.

Dozens of armored vehicles, bulldozers, helicopters and tanks - all bearing the UN logo - were mobilized for the event. As of the end of July, China was the eighth-largest contributor to peacekeeping troops, with 2,158 military personnel engaged around the world, according to UN data. Chinese forces are mainly engaged in South Sudan, Mali, Lebanon and the Democratic Republic of Congo. During her trip to Asia last month, US Vice President Kamala Harris described China's disputes with its neighbors over the South China Sea as undermining "the rules-based order and threaten[ing] the sovereignty of nations".

Invasion wargame
In another development, fighter jets practiced landing on a highway in southern Taiwan yesterday as part of an annual live-fire military exercise that simulates defending the island against an invasion by China. Democratic Taiwan lives under constant threat of invasion by Beijing, which claims the island as part of its territory and has vowed to one day seize it, by force if necessary.

Military tensions have risen to their highest in decades under President Xi Jinping with China now routinely sending fighter jets and nuclear capable



10-day exercise dubbed 'Shared Destiny 2021'

bombers into Taiwan's air defense zone and state media regularly publicizing invasion drills. Yesterday morning, various Taiwanese fighter jets as well as an early warning aircraft practised taking off and landing on a provincial highway in Pingtung county.

The drill, which was watched by President Tsai Ing-wen, is supposed to hone Taiwanese pilot skills if the island's airstrips are wiped out. "Such excellent combat skills, precise and swift movements come from rigorous training and demonstrate the air force's confidence to protect our airspace," Tsai said in a post on her Facebook. Part of its annual Han Kuang



PINGTUNG: A US-made E2K Early Warning Aircraft (EWA) takes off from a motorway in Pingtung, southern Taiwan, during the annual Han Kuang drill yesterday. —AFP

military exercises, yesterday's drill took place on one of five highways that have been deliberately built with long sections that can accommodate planes landing.

An invasion of Taiwan would be a hugely costly and difficult endeavor but Beijing has increasingly closed the military gap in recent years and Xi has made no secret of his desire to see the island taken. Senior US generals have publicly warned that China could potentially carry off an invasion and the defense of Taiwan has become a rare bipartisan issue in Washington. Last year Chinese jets and bombers made a record 380 incursions into Taiwan's air defense identification zone (ADIZ).

The number of incursions for the first eight months of this year has already exceeded 400. In June, 28 Chinese jets breached Taiwan's ADIZ in the largest single-day incursion. That came shortly after G7 leaders issued a landmark statement urging peace in the Taiwan Strait. The previous biggest incursion - 25 jets - was in April after US Secretary of State Antony Blinken warned China not to attempt to change the status quo of Taiwan. Taiwan's ageing fighter fleet has suffered a string of fatal accidents in recent years as its air force is kept under constant pressure by China. — AFP

UAE, Zionist state eye trillion-dollar prize one year into Abraham Accords

DUBAI: The United Arab Emirates marks one year since normalizing ties with Zionist state yesterday, a move which drew Palestinian anger but that leaders hope could reap a trillion dollars in economic exchanges. Watched by then US president Donald Trump, the UAE and Gulf neighbor Bahrain formally recognized Zionist state on September 15, 2020 in Washington, prompting Palestinian accusations of a "stab in the back".

The surprise step, under the US-brokered Abraham Accords, broke with decades of Arab consensus that ruled out formal ties while the Palestinian conflict was unresolved. However, it marked a thaw in the region, with Morocco and Sudan soon following suit and regional power Saudi Arabia, the world's top oil producer, allowing some overflights from the Zionist state. The economic benefits have come quickly for the UAE and Zionist state, who signed a series of deals ranging from tourism to aviation and financial services.

Zionist Foreign Minister Yair Lapid made a landmark visit to the UAE in July, opening an embassy in Abu Dhabi and a consulate in Dubai, while the UAE

established an embassy in Tel Aviv. "After a year of the Abraham Accords, we have a story to say," UAE Minister of Economy Abdulla bin Touq Al Marri told a panel discussion by the Atlantic Council, a US think-tank, on Monday. "We exchanged ambassadors, we have signed over 60 MOUs (memorandums of understanding). We have 600-700 million of bilateral trade happening, we have funds of billions of dollars that has been announced.

"We're looking to create over a trillion dollars of economic activity over the next decade." Further benefits will come if a major deal to ship Emirati oil to Europe via a Zionist pipeline clears objections from environmentalists, who fear damage to unique coral reefs in the Red Sea. Beyond economics, the rapprochement was also pushed by mutual concern over Iran, with the regional rivalry even pushing Riyadh into quietly building relations with the Zionist state over the past several years.

'It's really strategic'

Online criticism of Zionist is frequent in both the

UAE and Bahrain but open dissent over the normalization is rare, likely to avoid angering authorities. Even when Zionist air strikes leveled buildings during an 11-day conflict with Hamas in May, triggering an upswell of outrage, the relationship continued unhindered.

"All the Arab world was a bit preoccupied with what was happening in Gaza and with the pictures coming out," Ilan Sztulman Starosta, head of the Zionist consulate in Dubai, told AFP in an interview. "But still they didn't change the policy because the peace with Zionists is a national interest for the Emirati government, and the same from the Zionist government." "For us, it's really strategic," Sztulman Starosta said about 200,000 Zionists had visited the UAE over the past year, despite COVID, and an estimated 40 companies from his country had set up in the Gulf state's free-trade zones.

The Emirates now has its first students enrolled in Zionist universities, added Sztulman Starosta, who is hoping the Abraham Accords can inspire further ties around the region. "If we can make it work here, we can make it everywhere," he said. "If we managed to make this peace work, and it is working, for the better of Zionists and Emirati citizens, then this model can be applied to other countries in the area. "And that's how we're going to change the paradigm that Jews and Muslims can live and have normal relations and fruitful and enjoyable (collaborations)." — AFP

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International

Stench of death: Villagers flee site of Ethiopian mass killings

Government accuses rebels of massacring 200 civilians

CHENNA: Bodies of rebel fighters dot the roads and fields leading to Chenna, a village in the mountains of northern Ethiopia that this month saw one of the most gruesome reported incidents in the country's 10-month-old war. Last week, the government accused the rebels, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), of massacring as many as 200 civilians in Chenna, including women and children. Medics put the death toll at 125 but told AFP it could climb.

The TPLF rejected the allegations, while accusing Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed of sending "priests, women and children" into battle as cannon fodder. Chenna is located in Ethiopia's Amhara region which lies south of Tigray, where fighting broke out last November between pro-government forces and the TPLF. Despite Abiy vowing a swift victory, fighting has spread in recent months into the neighboring regions of Amhara and Afar, displacing hundreds of thousands of people and killing an untold number of civilians.

The violence in Chenna unfolded in early September, and the village - a rambling collection of mud homes - is now mostly empty, its residents driven away by the stench of death. "We haven't buried all the people. We have been burying our people who have been massacred. We were doing that for four days straight," Amhara militia fighter Yalew Kasse told AFP on Tuesday.

Entire family 'annihilated'

Stones and leaves have been placed over a fresh-

ly dug mass grave outside the village's Orthodox Christian church, and militia fighters said the graves of still more civilians could be found elsewhere, sometimes right outside their homes. "They annihilated one whole family: a mother, a father, a four-year-old boy and a six-year-old girl," Yalew said. Mebratu Adane, a spokesman for a local militia, said most of the bodies that have not been buried were those of TPLF rebels. "The villagers couldn't stand

“They annihilated one whole family”

the smell of the bodies so they fled," he said.

AFP has not been able to independently confirm the number of victims or verify whether any of the civilians reportedly killed in Chenna might have been combatants. The fighting in Amhara has amplified global concern about the war in northern Ethiopia, which has killed many thousands of people and pushed hundreds of thousands into famine-like conditions, according to the United Nations.

UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet warned



CHENNA: An unidentified corpse is seen on the ground near the village of Chenna, 95 kilometers northeast of the city of Gondar, Ethiopia. — AFP

Monday that the widening war "risks spilling over to the whole Horn of Africa". "Even with the changing dynamics in the conflict, there has been one constant: multiple and severe reports of alleged gross violations of human rights, humanitarian and refugee law by all parties," she said. Outside efforts to broker talks have made no visible headway, meaning more intense fighting is likely in the offing.

In Dabat, a town southeast of Chenna, Ethiopian soldiers conducted weapons and fitness drills on

Tuesday while preparing to push farther north. "We'll beat the junta," the soldiers sang as they marched through the streets of Dabat once the drills were over, using a pejorative term to refer to the TPLF. "We are planning to go to the north and destroy the junta, and we are well prepared," said Colonel Eshetu, who gave only his first name. "We have been training for more than three weeks," he said. "Our soldiers are more than capable of destroying the Tigray rebel force." — AFP

News in brief

Iran demotes negotiator

TEHRAN: Iran has demoted its chief nuclear negotiator and replaced him as deputy foreign minister with an opponent of concessions to the West, state media reported yesterday. Abbas Araghchi will remain part of Iran's negotiating team in talks on reviving a landmark nuclear agreement with major powers but will no longer be styled chief negotiator. He will be replaced as deputy minister by Ali Bagheri, a protégé of ultraconservative President Ebrahim Raisi who served as his deputy for international affairs when Raisi was judiciary chief. Raisi became president in early August, taking over from moderate Hassan Rouhani, the principal architect on the Iranian side of the 2015 nuclear agreement. The deal gave Iran an easing of Western and UN sanctions in return for tight controls on its nuclear program, monitored by the UN. — AFP

Sweden jails 'Russia's spy'

STOCKHOLM: A Swedish tech consultant was handed three years in jail yesterday for selling sensitive information about truckmaker Scania to Russia, the district court said. Prosecutors said the 47-year-old man's actions could have compromised Sweden's national security. It was the first espionage trial in the country in 18 years, according to broadcaster SVT. The man was arrested in February 2019 while dining at a restaurant in central Stockholm with a Russian diplomat suspected of being an intelligence officer. The diplomat was briefly detained but released because of his diplomatic immunity. At the time of his arrest, the consultant had just received 27,800 kronor (\$3,200, 2,700 euros) for passing information to Moscow, prosecutor Mats Ljungqvist said in February. — AFP

Australian, 64, surrenders

SYDNEY: A 64-year-old man who escaped from an Australian jail in the 1990s has surrendered after almost 30 years on the run, police said yesterday. New South Wales police said the man allegedly used a hacksaw and bolt cutters to free himself from a prison north of Sydney in 1992. "Between 7pm Friday 31 July and 7am Saturday 1 August 1992, a 35-year-old man escaped from a correctional centre on Hoof Street at Grafton," a statement said. "At the time, efforts to locate the man were unsuccessful." The Sydney Morning Herald, which said the man had been jailed on two counts of "cultivating a prohibited plant", reported he spent his time on the run living on Sydney's northern beaches. On Sunday, the man walked into a Sydney police station to hand himself in. — AFP

Gunmen abduct migrants

MEXICO CITY: Gunmen on Tuesday abducted around 20 migrants, mostly Haitians and Venezuelans, from a hotel in central Mexico, authorities said. "A search was immediately launched to find out what happened and to locate the whereabouts of these people," the prosecutor's office in the state of San Luis Potosi said. Armed men traveling in three vehicles arrived at the hotel in the city of Matehuala in the early morning and took the men and women, it said in a statement. Migrants fleeing violence and poverty in their countries risk exploitation at the hands of criminal gangs while crossing Mexico on the way to the US border. Mexico has seen increased arrivals of migrants since US President Joe Biden took up residence in the White House with a promise of a more humane approach. — AFP

US approaching Delta wave peak

WASHINGTON: The latest coronavirus wave in the United States driven by the Delta variant could soon peak, but experts warn against complacency and expect the virus will be part of everyday life for years to come. The seven-day-average of daily cases as of Monday was 172,000, its highest level of this surge even as the growth rate is slowing and cases are headed down in most states, according to data compiled by the COVID Act Now tracker.

But more than 1,800 people are still dying a day, and over 100,000 remain hospitalized with severe COVID—a grim reminder of the challenges authorities have faced in getting enough Americans vaccinated in the face of misinformation and a polarized political climate. Bhakti Hansoti, an associate professor in emergency medicine at Johns Hopkins University and expert in COVID critical care told AFP she saw the US following a similar trajectory to India. Countries in western Europe have also seen similar downturns in their Delta surges. But while Hansoti breathed a sigh of relief when the spring wave ended, "I'm a little hesitant this time around," she admitted.

The possible emergence of newer variants of concern and the advent of colder weather leading to more socialization indoors could lead to a rebound, "unless we learn from the lessons of the fourth wave," Angela Rasmussen, a virologist at

'Candidate in handcuffs': Kremlin critic campaigns from prison

KRASNODAR: With parliamentary elections in Russia around the corner, canvassers in the southern city of Krasnodar are asking passersby to write letters to their candidate, who has no way to meet them. That's because Kremlin critic Andrei Pivovarov is behind bars just down the road. Arrested at the end of May, Pivovarov's supporters say he was caught in a dragnet that has seen Russia's opposition dismantled ahead of State Duma elections this weekend.

With household names like Alexei Navalny in prison, his allies in exile and lesser known activists barred from running or jailed like Pivovarov, the Kremlin is set to maintain its stranglehold on the legislature. In a handwritten letter to AFP from Detention Centre No 1 - surrounded by barbed wire topped concrete walls-Pivovarov conceded his election chances were minimal. He said his campaign-managed by mail via one of his lawyers and run by several dozen volunteers from Krasnodar, Moscow and his hometown of Saint Petersburg-was a platform for his message.

Instagram seeks to curb mental harm to teenagers

SAN FRANCISCO: Instagram on Tuesday defended itself against a report that the social network harms the mental health of young girls, saying it plans to play down posts promoting myths about beautiful bodies. Instagram head of public policy Karina Newton pushed back against a Wall Street Journal report that cited Facebook research as showing its photo-centric Instagram service takes a toll on teenagers, especially girls.

"The research on the effects of social media on



HOUSTON: Houston Fire Department paramedics transport a man suffering from breathing difficulties to a hospital in Houston, Texas. — AFP

University of Saskatchewan in Canada, added she was not certain the fourth wave was over. "If you look at the fall-winter wave, there were periods in which there was a steep exponential increase, and then it looked like it was falling-and then there would be another increase."

To ensure gains are sustained, rapidly increasing the number of people vaccinated is vital. Currently 63.1 percent of the eligible population over-12 are fully vaccinated, or 54 percent of the total population. This places the United States well behind global leaders like Portugal and the UAE (81 and 79 percent fully vaccinated), despite its abun-

dance of shots. The administration of President Joe Biden last week announced a number of new measures to ramp up the immunization campaign, including new vaccine requirements on companies of over 100 employees, but the impact is yet to be clearly seen.

Beyond vaccinations, experts want to see other interventions continue. Thomas Tsai, a surgeon and health policy researcher at Harvard, said hotspots need to follow through on masking, adding that the US should also look to other countries that have adopted widespread rapid testing for schools and businesses. — AFP



KRASNODAR: Activists run a campaign event for Andrei Pivovarov - who is being held in the city's Detention Centre No 1. — AFP

support for a Khodorkovsky-aligned activist running in local elections. In his letter, which he signed "candidate in handcuffs," Pivovarov said the authorities wanted to "shut my mouth". "That's why the case was launched in Krasnodar, far from Moscow and Saint Petersburg," he wrote from prison.

Pivovarov is the only opposition candidate still running among at least seven who planned to ballot but were

arrested. The liberal Yabloko party included Pivovarov on their Krasnodar list in a "humanitarian" gesture, it said. But analyst Alexander Kynev says he has "no chance" of being elected. Yabloko, Kynev noted, has never won more than two percent of the vote in Krasnodar—a city of some one million people and a stronghold of President Vladimir Putin's United Russia party. — AFP

people's well-being is mixed, and our own research mirrors external research," Newton said in the post. "What seems to matter most is how people use social media, and their state of mind when they use it." She cited a Harvard study noting a "see-saw" of positive and negative experiences US teenagers have on social media.

A teenager may enjoy connecting with friends on the social network one day, then clash with the same person another day. The Journal reported that Instagram has played down harm done to millions of young people who connect daily, particularly when it comes to feeling shame about their bodies after seeing what is branded beauty in imagery there. "Issues like negative social comparison and anxiety exist in the world, so they're going to exist on social media too," Newton said.

The internal research pointed out that teenagers

accused Instagram of increasing anxiety and depression, according to the Journal. Instagram has worked to address problems of bullying, suicide, self-injury and eating disorders exposed at the platform, Newton said. Instagram is now exploring ways to understand what kinds of posts make viewers feel bad in comparison and then "nudge" people to content more likely to make them feel good, according to Newton.

"We're increasingly focused on addressing negative social comparison and negative body image," Newton said. "We're cautiously optimistic that these nudges will help point people towards content that inspires and uplifts them, and to a larger extent, will shift the part of Instagram's culture that focuses on how people look." Instagram is making a version of the social network for children 13 years old or younger, a move opposed by child safety advocates. — AFP

International

South Korea test-fires first submarine-launched missile

North Korea fires two ballistic missiles

SEOUL: South Korea successfully test-fired a submarine-launched ballistic missile yesterday, becoming only the seventh country in the world with the advanced technology and raising the prospect of a regional arms race. The test, supervised by President Moon Jae-in, came hours after nuclear-armed North Korea fired two ballistic missiles into the sea, according to the South's military, and as China's foreign minister visited Seoul.

It is a strategic advance for the South, which has been strengthening its military capabilities as it seeks to counter the threat posed by the North, which is under international sanctions for its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs. "It's extraordinary timing that you have not one but two Koreas testing ballistic missiles on the same day," Yonsei University professor John Delury said. "It does speak to the fact that there's an arms race in this region that everyone needs to pay attention to."

The South's missile was fired underwater from its newly commissioned submarine Ahn Chang-ho, and flew the planned distance before hitting its target, the presidential Blue House said. All other countries with proven SLBM capabilities have nuclear weapons of their own. With the successful tests, South Korea now has "sufficient deterrence to respond to North Korea's provocations at any time", President Moon said, urging the South to continue increasing its weapons programs to "overwhelm North Korea's asymmetric power".

Earlier in the day the North fired "two short-range ballistic missiles" from South Pyongan province into the sea off its east coast, Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement. They flew about 800 kilometers at a maximum altitude of around 60 kilometers. It was Pyongyang's sec-

ond firing in less than a week, after its official Korean Central News Agency reported it had test-fired a new "long-range cruise missile" over the weekend, calling it a "strategic weapon of great significance".

Wednesday's launches—both of them in the early afternoon—came shortly after Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi held talks in Seoul with his South Korean counterpart and Moon. Wang had earlier said he hoped all countries would help "peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula", Yonhap news agency reported. "For example, not only the North, but also other countries are engaging in military activities," he added.

China signal

Analysts said the timing of Pyongyang's launch was an unmistakable signal to Beijing, the North's key diplomatic ally and main partner for trade and aid—although at times their relationship has been deeply strained. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un did not visit China for more than six years after inheriting power from his father Kim Jong Il, and tensions mounted in the allies' relationship.

But he and Chinese President Xi Jinping have since met several times, and Beijing sees the North as very much part of its sphere of influence. Yang Moon-jin, a professor at the University of North Korea Studies in Seoul, said yesterday's launch "looks like North Korea's indirect message and even request to Beijing for the Korean peninsula to be addressed as a central agenda issue for China". The US and South Korea are treaty allies, with around 28,500 American troops stationed in the South to defend it against its neighbor, which invaded in 1950.

The impoverished North says it needs its nuclear arsenal to deter a US invasion, and its weapons pro-



SEOUL: People watch television news broadcast showing file footage of a North Korean missile test, at a railway station in Seoul yesterday after North Korea fired two ballistic missiles into the sea according to the South's military. —AFP

grams have made rapid progress under Kim, even without carrying out a nuclear test or intercontinental ballistic missile launch since 2017. But it is more isolated than ever after it closed its borders early last year to protect itself against the coronavirus pandemic. Talks with the United States have been stalled since the collapse of a 2019 summit between Kim and then president Donald Trump over sanctions relief and what Pyongyang would be willing to give up in return.

The US, Japanese and South Korean envoys on the North met in Tokyo earlier this week when

Washington's representative Sung Kim reiterated: "We hope that the DPRK will respond positively to our multiple offers to meet without preconditions." Pyongyang has long sought to develop SLBM technology itself, and showed off four such devices at a military parade overseen by Kim in January, with KCNA calling them "the world's most powerful weapon". But while North Korea has released pictures of underwater launches, most recently in 2019, analysts believe they were from a fixed platform or submersible barge, rather than a submarine. —AFP



7th country in the world with advanced tech

The new Uzbekistan: New possibilities for investors



Shavkat Mirziyoyev, President of Uzbekistan

KUWAIT: The declaration of State Independence of the Republic of Uzbekistan on 31 August 1991 opened a new chapter in modern history of the country. This year the Uzbek people celebrate 30th anniversary of this significant date. During this historically short period, Uzbekistan had a great achievement in all spheres, including his internal and foreign policy.

Today, Uzbekistan under the leadership of President HE Shavkat Mirziyoyev is in the new historical stage of its development. The new Uzbekistan is, primarily, is the new economic relations, the new economic vision. The economic system of our country is being completely restructured and it is even difficult, we have begun to put into practice the market mechanisms.

The reforms have a positive effect on the interests of all segments of the population: The entrepreneurs are gaining freedom and new opportunities to develop their businesses, peasants and farming enterprises, the clusters are becoming the owners of the crops they have been growing. New fields of industry such as automobile construction, petrochemical and gas processing, the textile and light industries have become the engine of the industrial development of the country. Agriculture is one of the important sectors of national economy. The development of small business and private entrepreneurship occupy very important place in the economic policies of the government.

The country develops manufacture, creates new jobs, extends economic capacity, improves social security system and provides ample access to education and health care, reforms of all spheres of society. The country creates a favorable and attractive investment climate for foreign partners for the achievement of the goals. The investment legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan is constantly updated. Already now, in Uzbekistan, one of the drivers of economic growth is the attraction of foreign capital to the national economy. According to the UNCTAD's 2020 World Investment Report, FDI inflows increased significantly to \$2.3 billion, compared to \$625 million in 2018. Investments focus on the energy sector, including alternative/renewable energy in recent years. In addition, over two years, the number of enterprises with foreign investment doubled - the figure is more than ten thousand. The share of investments in the GDP of Uzbekistan for the first time amounted to 38%.

Uzbekistan was ranked 69th among 190 countries in the World Bank 2020 Doing Business and entered the top 20 reformer countries in terms of creating the most favorable conditions for doing business. For comparison, we note that in 2012, the country in this rating occupied only 166 place. Uzbekistan has also resumed active negotiations on accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Joining the WTO will provide an opportunity, for Uzbek entrepreneurs, to raise the prospects for increasing scientific and technological progress in the sectors through the acquisition and purchase of efficient and reliable imported equipment. In addition, upon entry into the WTO, domestic exporters will gain easier access to foreign markets.

Dubious of Trump's sanity, US general secretly called China

WASHINGTON: The top US general was so worried in early January that Donald Trump was out of control that he took secret action to prevent the outgoing president from sparking a war with China, according to a new book. Joint Chiefs Chair General Mark Milley ordered aides to not act immediately on any move by Trump to use US nuclear forces, and he called a Chinese general to reassure Beijing, presidential chronicler Bob Woodward and co-author Robert Costa wrote in their soon-to-be-released book.

The Washington Post-Woodward's and Costa's employer and other media on Tuesday reported excerpts from the book "Peril," depicting Milley as organizing the Pentagon and intelligence community to resist any move by Trump to ratchet up tensions with China or Iran after he lost the November 2020 presidential election.

Milley called Chinese counterpart General Li Zuocheng twice, on October 30 just before Trump's election defeat, and on January 8, two days after Trump supporters attacked the US Capitol, to reassure him that the Republican president's anti-China rhetoric could not translate into military action. "General Li, I want to assure you that the American government is stable and everything is going to be okay," Milley told Li in the October call, Woodward and Costa write. "We are not going to attack or conduct any kinetic operations against you," Milley said.

Two months later, Milley used the secret back-

Kosovo ex-commander slams 'Gestapo' court

THE HAGUE: A former Kosovo rebel commander compared a war crimes court to Nazi Germany's secret police as it began its first trial in The Hague yesterday. Salih Mustafa is accused of murder and torture at a makeshift Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) detention centre during the 1998-1999 independence war with Serbia. "I am not guilty of any of the counts brought here before me by this Gestapo office," Mustafa, 49, said as his trial started at the Kosovo Specialist Chambers. Wearing a black hooded top and jogging pants, Mustafa swung in his chair and repeatedly tapped a pen on his fingers as he listened to the opening of the trial through headphones.

Mustafa, who was arrested last year while working as an adviser at Kosovo's defense ministry, is the first suspect to go on trial at the court, set up in 2015 to probe atrocities by the separatist KLA. Prosecutors said Mustafa and his men "brutalized and tortured" fellow ethnic Kosovo Albanians whom they accused of collaborating with Serbs in Zllash, a village east of the capital Pristina. "These were not enemies of Kosovo, they were not spies," senior prosecutor Jack Smith told the court in his opening statement. "Their only crime was to have political views that differed from the KLA and its senior leaders."

'Beaten and tortured'

The prosecutor said the hearing was a "milestone" for the court, which has taken six years to bring anyone to trial and faced problems with witness intimidation. Mustafa faces charges of murder,



WASHINGTON: In this file photo, US Army General Mark Milley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, arrives for a press briefing about the US military drawdown in Afghanistan, at the Pentagon. —AFP

channel with Li again after the US Capitol riot, amid concerns both in Beijing and Washington that Trump was unstable. "We are 100 percent steady. Everything's fine. But democracy can be sloppy sometimes," Milley told Li, according to the book. To reassure the Chinese, Milley went so far as to have the Pentagon's Indo-Pacific Command postpone military exercises that Beijing might have viewed as a possible threat.

Separately, Milley told his top staff that if Trump sought to exercise his power to order a nuclear strike, that they had to inform him first. And Milley discussed with other top officials, including CIA director Gina Haspel and National Security Agency head Paul Nakasone, the need to be vigilant amid concerns Trump could act irrationally. Haspel said they were in a "highly dangerous situation." "Some might contend that Milley had overstepped his authority and taken extraordinary power for himself," the authors wrote. —AFP



THE HAGUE: Salih Mustafa, former commander in the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), looks on as he waits for the start of his first trial at the Kosovo Specialist Chambers court in The Hague. —AFP

torture, cruel treatment and arbitrary detention relating to at least six detainees. According to the indictment, detainees were allegedly held in a locked stable and subjected to "beatings with various instruments, burning and the administration of electric shocks". Some were urinated on in front of other detainees.

Mustafa is alleged to have personally beaten one detainee with a baseball bat and slapped, punched and kicked another. Smith said prisoners were kept in "inhumane" conditions with Mustafa personally taking part in the beatings. One young man died after being "repeatedly beaten and tortured". Mustafa is accused of being jointly responsible for the murder by either being aware that the crime was being carried out, or knowing that the victim was at risk of being killed. The trial will hear from 16 witnesses, including former detainees, during September and October. —AFP

News in brief

3 pro-Iran fighters killed

BEIRUT: Air strikes from unidentified drones killed three pro-Iran fighters in Syria's eastern province of Deir Ezzor near the Iraqi border, a Britain-based war monitor said yesterday. The drones late Tuesday targeted trucks of the Iraqi paramilitary network Hashed Al-Shaabi after they had crossed the border into the Syrian border district of Albu Kamal, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. Three were killed and several severely wounded, the monitoring group said. A source within the Hashed Al-Shaabi in Iraq however said that "the strikes destroyed four vehicles, but no one was killed". "The site targeted was near a border post of the factions on the Iraqi-Syrian border," the source said. The Fatah alliance, the political wing of the Hashed Al-Shaabi, condemned an "abject attack" on its forces on the frontier. —AFP

9 Hong Kong activists jailed

HONG KONG: Nine veteran democracy activists in Hong Kong were sentenced to between six and 10 months in jail yesterday for joining a Tiananmen vigil banned by police last year. Three others were handed suspended sentences on the same charges of joining an unlawful assembly or inciting others to join. The sentencing came one week after leaders of the group behind the annual vigil were separately accused of inciting subversion following a police raid at a museum in the city dedicated to Beijing's Tiananmen Square crackdown in 1989. The Hong Kong Alliance had organized three decades of vigils commemorating the victims of the operation. Once one of the most visible symbols of Hong Kong's political freedoms, the June 4 event has been banned over the past two years, with authorities citing the coronavirus pandemic and security fears. —AFP

Sydney lifts COVID curfews

SYDNEY: Sydney authorities moved to lift curfews for coronavirus hotspots yesterday, as infection numbers stabilized and vaccination rates surged. Almost three months after activity in Australia's largest city was frozen by lockdown orders, state authorities announced easing restrictions for the worst-hit areas. New South Wales Premier Gladys Berejiklian said the 9 pm to 5 am curfew for virus hotspots would be lifted, in what Sydneysiders hope signals the beginning of the end of a long lockdown. Infection rates appear to have plateaued at around 1,300 a day and 80 percent of people in Australia's most populous state have received at least one vaccine dose. "We've seen a stabilization in the last few days," said state premier Berejiklian, while urging residents to continue to be vigilant and respect stay-at-home orders. —AFP

Iran resumes Afghanistan flights

TEHRAN: Iran yesterday resumed commercial flights to neighboring Afghanistan, where the Taliban took control last month. "Today Mahan Air carried passengers between Mashhad and Kabul airport," Fars news agency reported, referring to Iran's second-largest city, in the northeast, and the Afghan capital. "At present, this airliner is returning to Mashhad with passengers." It was the first such flight between the two countries since the return of the Taliban to power on August 15. The Iranian civil aviation agency had announced the interruption of flights to Kabul on August 16 for security reasons. Previously, Mahan Air had operated two flights per week between Mashhad and Kabul. Mahan Air, the second largest Iranian airline after the state-owned Iran Air, has been on the blacklist of entities targeted by US sanctions against Iran since 2011. —AFP

Business

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2021

As pandemic roils economy, more US workers call it a day

Pandemic remaking the playbook for when to retire in US

WASHINGTON: Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, Antonio Fernandez, 64, had envisioned staying in his job at Chevron in Houston for perhaps another five years. "I probably think I had five more years to work, at least," Fernandez said of his role with the oil giant. "I wasn't looking forward to being retired."

But as with so many other things, the pandemic is remaking the playbook for when to retire in the United States. Retiring older had been a clear trend in the pre-pandemic era of the world's largest economy, sometimes due to preference, but often out of necessity.

Some have opted to stay employed into their 70s to maintain benefits in a country where healthcare costs are notoriously high. In other cases, people were forced to keep working after their savings were hit by the 2008 financial crisis. But since the spring of 2020, millions over the age of 65 have exited the workforce, often earlier than expected. In June alone, more than 1.7 million more older workers than expected retired, said Teresa Ghilarducci, a scholar on labor and retirement at the New School For Social Research in New York.

After being laid off last fall, Fernandez applied for other jobs, but was not successful. "I have mixed feelings," he told AFP, adding that the company mainly kept on lower-paid staff, a shift from its approach to earlier rounds of downsizing. "In the end, even though it does not feel fair, it's not a bad outcome for those like me fortunate enough to have enough years of service and being relatively close to retirement to receive a lump sum

pension boosted by the low interest rates."

Not ready to leave

Departing early was also difficult for Brenda Bates. After 43 years of work at a nursing facility in Florida, her job became much more taxing during the pandemic when she was required to wear a mask and goggles. Bates suffered a transient ischemic attack, a stroke-like incident with lingering effects. After struggling for breath during a swim, Bates discussed options with her husband.

"We made the decision to do it for my health," Bates said. "Before the pandemic I thought I would work at least till I was 65 to get Medicare," she said. "I love my job so I expected to stay as long as I really wanted to." Bates is far from alone in departing earlier than she expected.

Whether due to fears of an unsafe workplace or job loss amid the economic upheaval, "millions of older workers are simply retiring and often earlier than they are ready," Ghilarducci said.

"It's scary," said Bates, who now works as an independent contractor for a company that does placement for senior living. "You're giving up a very good salary and all your benefits. One day you have nothing left." While most of the departures involve workers 65 and older, more workers over 55 without a college degree are also leaving jobs, Ghilarducci said. Retirements of Black workers without a college diploma increased by 9.2 percent, while white workers with the same education profile saw a 7.5 percent

McGee in Texas—a 39-year-old mother of four who switched from an Amazon warehouse job to remote customer service work for another company when pandemic lockdowns hit about 18 months ago.

She had to plunk down \$2,000 to get a computer, not to mention the price of internet and the process of installing software and updates. "Not everybody can afford a computer. So it's taking jobs from people that can't (buy one) or actually don't have the skills (to use one)," she said.

Her machine broke a few days ago and because she had exhausted her paid time off, McGee can't work or make money until her computer is back online.

Risk of being left out

The digital divisions exposed by the pandemic are well-documented with striking examples like families using the wireless internet at fast food restaurants so their children could attend school online.

As schools and workplaces have, in many areas, moved gradually back toward in-person activity, some inequalities have been eased. But a percentage of workers have come to appreciate the flexibility and utility of a "hybrid" mix where they can work from home sometimes. "It's one of these innocuous seeming things that looks like it's convenience but it can be—unless we really address and acknowledge it—another tool for increasing inequality," said Monica Sanders, a Georgetown University professor.

Sanders noted that this is different than other technological developments, like the latest smartphone or even having a videocassette player when the machines revolutionized home entertainment.

a child abuse prevention move, after privacy advocates howled over the risk of opening a backdoor for government surveillance. And then Monday it was forced to roll out an urgent fix after cybersecurity researchers found a weakness that allowed Pegasus spyware to infect Apple devices without users so much as clicking a malicious message.

That said, Apple still possesses massive reach in the digital world and beyond, and manages to be worth over \$2 trillion. Its fans cheered the release of the updated products Tuesday, including analyst Daniel Ives who noted "the supercycle for Cupertino," referring to the California city that is home to Apple's headquarters.

"Apple remains in the midst of its strongest overall product cycle in roughly a decade," he added. The iPhone 13 range includes four models, from the Mini version to the Pro Max, with prices similar to iPhone 12 at last year's release. Their cameras and batteries are more powerful, and 5G capability is to be extended to more than 200 mobile operators in 60 countries and regions by the end of the year.

Array of challenges

It is true the company has racked up

Remote work goes 'luxury', but many may be left out

WASHINGTON: Virtual reality meetings, \$7,000 all-in-one kits and digital hot desking: Big Tech is rolling out premium tools as the work-from-home era looks set to last well beyond the pandemic.

But experts warn that while top-of-the-line features may benefit privileged Americans, millions of others can barely access remote work tools already available. Facebook has unveiled online "workrooms" for users of its Oculus virtual reality gear, and Google showed off interactive conferencing displays, declaring the "hybrid" mix of in-person and remote work is here to stay.

Yet outside of Silicon Valley and other urban centers, basics like a fast internet connection and proficiency in remote tech is beyond the reach of tens of millions in the United States.

"For many people, being able to work from home is still a luxury," said Michelle Burris, a senior policy associate at progressive think tank The Century Foundation. One reason is access to high-speed connections, with advocacy group BroadbandNow saying in a May report that 42 million Americans—about 13 percent of the population—cannot get broadband internet.

Another problem is equipment as many workers have to buy their own. Take the example of Patricia

Embattled Apple unveils new iPhone

SAN FRANCISCO: Apple CEO Tim Cook strode through a slickly produced video Tuesday to launch a new iPhone, with few hints of the exceptional string of troubles facing his company including policy reversals, a spyware attack and legal fights. Cook—from an empty, darkened auditorium—raved over upgraded cameras, brighter screens and new features for some of the Silicon Valley giant's other devices like the iPad.

"These are the best iPhones we've ever created," Cook said, noting Apple's work to design the "very best products and services to enrich people's lives." Yet a head-spinning series of problems have occupied the recent public discussion of one of the world's most valuable companies.

Due to a long and loud fight over its online app marketplace, a judge ordered Apple last week to allow developers to sidestep its hefty commission on purchases. It has also delayed a plan to scan its customers' devices as part of

Departing early is also difficult



BELLAIRE, US: Antonio Fernandez, 64, poses in his house in Bellaire, Texas. Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, Antonio 64, had envisioned staying in his job at Chevron in Houston for perhaps another five years. —AFP

rise, she said. One risk from the early retirements is an uptick of poverty among the senior population. At the same time, some older workers are actually in a relatively good position to retire—at least compared to earlier crises.

"During the global financial crisis there was obviously a very large number of people that had lost

their entire retirement savings, and 10 years after they could not retire," said Jacob Kirkegaard, a fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics. "Right now the situation is exactly the opposite," said Kirkegaard, noting that the stock market has risen during the pandemic, along with housing prices, which sank after the 2008 market crash. —AFP



MENLO PARK, California: In this file photo, Facebook employee Eliza Uzmanoff tries out an Oculus device at the company's corporate headquarters campus in Menlo Park, California. —AFP

They didn't "impact your earning power or where you live or how you work," she said.

The change in how people work has not gone unnoticed for employers, with digital skills for zoom presentation or remote management tools working their way into job ads. Author and remote work expert Rhiannon Payne said virtual reality will become as normal a part of how people do their jobs as cell phones and laptops.

She agreed the risks of excluding people cannot be ignored, but also that high tech tools can make life better. "Companies are trying to find ways to make remote work genuinely easier and to help us increase connections with our colleagues," she said. —AFP



CUPERTINO, California: This handout image shows Apple's senior vice president of Worldwide Marketing Greg Joswiak talking about the new iPhone 13 Pro during a special Apple event as seen in this still image from the keynote video. —AFP

massive profits driven by the demand for its devices as much of the world hunkered down at home due to the pandemic. At the same time legal battles, new laws and the scrutiny of regulators around the world has added up to a series of challenges for the company.

As Cook expounded on iPhone developments, a group fighting to loosen Apple's control over its App Store tweeted its verdict on the new handset. "Today's rollout of the iPhone 13 only tells us one thing: new iPhone,

same bad App Store," wrote Coalition for App Fairness. "It's time for @Apple to #OpenTheAppStore and level the playing field for app developers and innovators."

Apple has started to cede ground on its App Store dominance, including in an agreement with Japanese regulators. It also faces the legislation adopted by South Korean lawmakers, which banned Apple and Google from forcing app developers to use the tech giants' payment systems. —AFP

Evergrande tries to pay bills with parking spots

BEIJING: Protests against teetering developer Evergrande spread to more Chinese cities yesterday after a company offer of property and parking spaces instead of cash repayments of its debts was rejected by investors. The troubled property titan has warned it may not be able to service its colossal debts of more than \$300 billion, seeding panic among property buyers, bond holders and contractors while fanning fears of a default that could ripple through the world's second-biggest economy.

Several dozen protesters returned for a third straight day to the firm's headquarters in the southern city of Shenzhen, where the company began its ascent in 1996 into a sprawling conglomerate minting the dreams of home ownership among China's middle classes. Chanting "Evergrande, give us our money back", they were met by a heavy police presence but refused to disperse. The fresh demonstration came after an apparent effort overnight by Evergrande to repay debts with promises of property, parking spaces and commercial units soured the mood.

"They offered us (ownership of) shops, kindergartens and parking units... but we can't use them. None of us agree to this," said a woman who gave her surname only as Wang. She said her financial company in the central city of Chongqing is "not really functioning" because of unpaid debts from the developer. Experts say the Hong Kong-listed firm has more than a million units pre-paid by customers yet to be built, adding to the sense of dread among Chinese investors, many of them first-time buyers trying to get a foot on the runaway property market.

The company on Tuesday admitted it is under "tremendous pressure" and may not be able to meet its liabilities. Yesterday it declined a request for comment from AFP. The privately-owned firm, whose rapid expansion into 280 Chinese cities had bolstered its reputation, now appears on the brink of buckling, but experts say Beijing will not allow it to collapse chaotically. In eastern Jiangsu province, anxious investors gathered yesterday morning outside company offices in Taizhou city, while similar protests have been reported in Anhui as unpaid workers have demanded their wages in Ezhou city, Hubei. —AFP



SHENZHEN, Guangdong: People gather at the Evergrande headquarters in Shenzhen, China's southern Guangdong province yesterday. —AFP

\$12m seized from ex-officials as cash crunch hits Afghanistan

CB calls for all transactions to be made in local currency

KABUL: Afghanistan's central bank said yesterday that the Taliban had seized more than \$12 million in cash and gold from the homes of former government officials, as it called for all transactions to be made in local currency. A foreign exchange crunch in the aid-dependent country threatens the Taliban's rule one month after they seized power.

Most government employees have yet to return to work—and in many cases salaries had already not been paid for months—leaving millions scrambling to make ends meet. Even those with money in the bank are struggling, as branches limit withdrawals to the equivalent of \$200 a week—with customers having to queue for hours.

And while remittances have resumed from abroad, customers awaiting funds at international chains such as Western Union and MoneyGram complained yesterday that branches they visited had run out of cash. "All Afghans in the government and non-governmental organizations are asked to use afghani in their contracts and economic transactions," the central bank said in a statement yesterday.

The bank later issued another statement saying Taliban fighters had handed over \$12.3 million in cash and gold seized from the homes of officials from the former government—a large part discovered at the home of former vice president Amrullah Saleh. "The money recovered came from high-ranking officials... and a number of national security agencies who kept cash and gold in their homes," the statement said.

"It is, however, still not known for what purpose they were kept."

Thanking donors

Abdul Rahim, a demobbed soldier in the former Afghan army, travelled nearly 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) from Faryab to the capital to try and collect his backpay. "The branches of the banks are closed in the provinces," he said yesterday, "and in Kabul thousands of people queue to get their money out."

"I have been going to the bank for the past three days but in vain. Today I arrived at around 10am and there were already about 2,000 people waiting." The Taliban on Tuesday thanked the world after a donor



Forex crisis could imperil Taliban rule

conference in Geneva pledged \$1.2 billion in aid for Afghanistan, but the country's needs are immediate.

Donor nations, however, want conditions attached to their contributions and are loath to support a regime with as bloody a reputation as the Taliban. The hardline Islamists have promised a milder form of rule compared to their first stint in power from 1996 to 2001, but have moved swiftly to crush dissent—



KABUL: Women wait in front of a bank to withdraw money in Kabul yesterday. —AFP

including firing in the air to disperse recent protests by women calling for the right to work.

Still, UN chief Antonio Guterres said this week he believed aid could be used as leverage with the Islamist hardliners to exact improvements on human rights. "It is very important to engage with the Taliban at the present moment," he said. One month into their second rule, some Afghans are conceding there have been some improvements in their lives—not least security in the capital, which for years was plagued by

deadly suicide bomb attacks and targeted assassinations blamed largely on the Taliban. "Currently the situation of the country is good, there is no war," said Mohammad Ashraf Laalagha, a street vendor, said he was no longer being shaken down by corrupt police officers—although he had turned to selling fruit as no one could afford to buy flowers. "I am really satisfied with my new job. In the past the situation was like this... a policeman would come and puncture the stall's tyre and he would beat you." —AFP

Evergrande anger boils on social media

BEIJING: China's social media was flooded with discussions on the potential demise of housing giant Evergrande as rare images of protests and public anger were shared across a tightly controlled internet. Videos of protestors bearing furious signs filled the popular Weibo and WeChat platforms this week, with homebuyers using social media to share information and organize future demonstrations.

"The more people there are the stronger our power, this is our blood-and-sweat money," one user wrote in a post calling for supporters to gather at Evergrande's Shenzhen headquarters. In a country where demonstrations are promptly squashed with authorities working to maintain stability above all else, the topic does not yet appear to have fallen under the heavy hand of censorship as anxious

investors and creditors across the country demand money they are owed by the developer.

Some claiming to have been wronged by Evergrande shared invites on Weibo to "rights protection" chat groups and posted updates about joining protests. Meanwhile, photos of a crowd of people in southwest Chengdu holding signs that read "Evergrande Fraud", verified by AFP, were shared widely on the Twitter-like Weibo.

Discussion threads have erupted with hundreds of millions of views and comments alongside photos and videos of the protests, as the Hong Kong-listed developer warned it may not be able to pay its debts. The crisis has prompting panic of a default that could ripple through the world's second-biggest economy. Analysts said allowing the images to remain online could be either due to an inability to clamp down—given the scale of the crisis—or a lack of willingness. The "sheer size" of Evergrande's crisis means it is difficult to suppress—and Beijing might feel that scenes of ugly disputes between investors and company employees can serve as a cau-



SHENZHEN, Guangdong: People gather at the Evergrande headquarters building 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

tionary tale for other corporations, Hong Kong-based politics commentator Willy Lam told AFP.

Small protests against companies and local governments take place frequently in China, with people gathering to express their anger over issues from unrefunded shared bike deposits and forced demolitions of countryside

villas. "Property and land-related protests are actually quite common in China," Adam Ni, co-editor of the China Neican newsletter, told AFP. China's usual response is to "defuse the situation to ensure that the effects of the protests do not grow," he said, which can mean making compromises or arresting protest leaders. —AFP

UK inflation strikes nine-year peak as economy reopens

LONDON: British annual inflation spiked in August to a nine-year peak on the reopening economy, but last year's figure had been skewed by a restaurant discount scheme, official data showed yesterday.

The Consumer Prices Index (CPI) soared to 3.2 percent, the highest level since March 2012, the Office for National Statistics said in a statement. That marked a record acceleration from 2.0 percent in July, but the ONS cautioned that the uplift would be temporary.

Global markets have seesawed this year over concerns that central banks will end COVID support measures to tame inflation, but policymakers insist price hikes would be short-lived. The Bank of England has however warned inflation would strike 4.0 percent—double its target—in the fourth quarter on reopening economies and a global supply crunch that was sparked by the pandemic.

Record rise

"August saw the largest rise in annual inflation month on month since the series was introduced almost a quarter of a century ago," said ONS statistician Jonathan Athow. "However, much of this is likely to be temporary as last year restaurant and cafe prices fell substantially due to the 'Eat Out To Help Out' scheme, while this year prices rose." Inflation in August 2020 had been depressed by the discount



LONDON: Pedestrians are reflected in the window of a building as they walk near Tower Bridge in London yesterday. —AFP

scheme and temporary tax cuts aimed at boosting the COVID-hit economy.

"The vast majority of August's rise was due to comparisons with a weak 2020, with last August having seen both the VAT cut for the hospitality sector and the Eat Out to Help Out scheme," noted EY economist Martin Beck. The ONS added yesterday that manufacturers are experiencing huge cost rises.

Raw materials surged 11 percent in the year to August, up from 10.4 percent in July.

The UK's economic recovery is flattening as a result of the stubborn pandemic, supply chain bottlenecks and the elevated cost of commodities. The economy grew at just 0.1 percent in July compared with 1.0 percent in June, recent data showed.

Economists worry that surging global inflation will

continue to weigh on the world's economic recovery. expectations and put it 0.3 percent above its level in February 2020, the last month of normalcy before the COVID-19 pandemic caused industrial output to contract sharply. While the recovery was a "milestone," Oren Klachkin of Oxford Economics warned the sector was struggling with ongoing supply chain issues, as indicated by a nearly flat increase in motor vehicle production as the sector struggles with shortages of crucial semiconductors.

"Our base case is that rising domestic and external demand keep the industrial sector on a solid growth trajectory, though gains will be capped by enduring supply chain and hiring constraint," Klachkin wrote. Manufacturing rose 0.2 percent last month despite plant shutdowns caused by the hurricane, while mining fell 0.6 percent due to the storm disruptions to oil and gas production, the Fed report said. —AFP

continue to weigh on the world's economic recovery.

Persistent pandemic

In the UK, costs will continue to spike this year because of the "persistent" pandemic, BoE governor Andrew Bailey has warned. "We have had two things going on globally," Bailey stated last week.

"One is an increase in global demand and particularly global demand for goods, and that has led to upward pressure on commodity prices. "The second thing is that this imbalance of goods and services. We have got much stronger demand for goods relative to services and have had for over a year." That was hitting world trade and causing supply-chain problems across the world that have also been compounded by a chronic shortage of semiconductors. —AFP



VANCE, US: In this file photo, an employee works on the doors for a Mercedes-Benz C-Class at the Mercedes-Benz US International factory in Vance, Alabama. —AFP

US production returns to pre-COVID level

WASHINGTON: Production by US factories, mines and utilities in August surpassed the level seen before the pandemic caused an unprecedented collapse, according to Federal Reserve data released yesterday. Industrial production increased 0.4 percent in August, but it could have been 0.3 percentage points higher had it not been for the effects of Hurricane Ida, which caused flooding and destruction in parts of Louisiana and the northeastern United States.

The monthly increase was in line with analysts'

Gold Fest Lucky draw from today at all Grand Hyper branches

KUWAIT: The foremost Hypermarket chain in Kuwait, Grand Hyper for the benefit of customers is bringing in Grand Gold Fest, Lucky draw contest where any customer shopping for KD 5 from 20 outlets of Grand in Kuwait will get chance to win up to 1.5 Kg gold. This much-hyped promotion from Grand Hyper was conducted every year and is well received by customers. Post-COVID, this is for the first time lucky a draw is being conducted, that too in digital format, without any physical coupons as per ministry guidelines.

Any customer who shops for KD 5 and above from any Grand Hyper needs to enter their details on an online link given at the store and register themselves as participants for lucky draw. The prize slabs are even more interesting with bumper prize being 500 grams gold for one winner. Mega prize of 40 grams gold each for five winners and 100 winners each will get 8 grams gold. A total of 106 winners will be chosen which will ensure more participants will get chance to win gold. Grand Gold Fest will be conducted following all COVID protocols in tandem with ministry guidelines. The winners of the contest will be selected under the supervision of government Tijary. This contest is conducted between 16th Sept to 21st November 2021 from 20 participating outlets of Grand. During this period apart from lucky draw, Grand will also be giving customers many other offers and discounts on fresh, food, electronics and garments.

China August retail sales growth slowest in a year

BEIJING: Growth in China's retail sales sank in August to a 12-month low, data showed yesterday, as parts of the country were hit by lockdowns and other containment measures to fight the worst COVID outbreak since its initial spread in 2020. The figures are the latest pointing to a slowdown in the world's number two economy, and observers warned that a fresh flare-up could add to the weakness, adding that a crackdown on private enterprises was also taking a toll.

Retail sales grew 2.5 percent last month, well short of the seven percent forecast and sharply down from the 8.5 percent witnessed in July. The reading was the lowest since August 2020. Industrial production growth was also slightly below expectations and slower than the month before.

The data comes after a string of figures indicating the economic recovery enjoyed last year and at the start of 2021 was petering out. China's services sector contracted in August for the first time since the start of the pandemic while factory activity expanded only marginally as a new domestic coronavirus flare up kicked in.

The summer outbreak was China's largest since the first at the start of last year, forcing authorities to lock down millions and curb travel during the peak tourism period. The tepid growth figures are "largely due to the Delta variant wave and unprecedented tightening measures on the property sector", Ting Lu, at investment bank Nomura, said in a research note, referring to Beijing's moves to tighten restrictions on real estate companies. —AFP

Business

AUB wins 'Best Integrated Corporate Banking Site' award in Kuwait

Global Finance's recognition reflects bank's excellent online corporate services

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank (AUB) has recently won "Best Integrated Corporate Banking Site" Award in Kuwait 2021 from Global Finance Publication. This award reflects the bank's excellent online corporate services. AUB won this award based on certain criteria like strength of strategy to attract and service digital corporate customers, success in getting clients to utilize AUB's digital offerings, growth of digital customers, and user friendly interface to seamless integration with the corporate enterprise resource planning (ERP) system.

AUB was granted this award among entries evaluated by a world-class panel of judges at INFOSYS, a global leader in consulting, technology and outsourcing. Global Finance editors were responsible for the final selection of all winners. Only banks that entered the competition were considered for this award.

Commenting on the award, Hisham Zaghoul, AUB Senior Deputy CEO - Banking Group, said, "It gives me great pleasure to convey sincere congratulations to AUB Corporate Banking for their



Hisham Zaghoul



Ali Al-Naqi

incessant efforts, which had the greatest credit to obtain this recognition by Global Finance. We are also proud to have received a number of prestigious awards in banking services, which we consider as an affirmation of our successful strategy in serving all customer segments."

Zaghoul added: "Receiving this award reflects the Bank's leading position in corporate banking solutions and its ongoing commitment to developing and providing innovative banking products to meet corporate customer needs, pointing that AUB

online corporate banking services provide customers with a full suite of banking services that make their banking experience unique.

Ali Al-Naqi, AGM Cash Management Department at AUB said receiving this award demonstrates the bank's successful and continuous efforts in streamlining corporate financial business by adopting banking solutions in line with today's digital developments, which enables us to provide a rich and secure experience for our valued customers. Al-Naqi added: "AUB managed to provide advanced and innovative electronic services and applications as well as the initiative to offer essential solutions to meet customer developed needs through an integrated user friendly online platform that accommodates several features that make it a safe site for our corporate customers, to manage all their daily banking transactions. AUB has been able to provide its corporate customers with instant and secure access to various services that suit their business requirements, adding that winning this outstanding award reiterates the pivotal role of e-banking services in AUB strategy."



Gulf Bank prioritizes information security in line with 'Diraya'

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank is continuing to spearhead various efforts in support of the Diraya campaign, an awareness campaign initiated by the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Kuwait Banking Association. This month, Gulf Bank is highlighting the importance of keeping one's banking information confidential and safe from hackers. These efforts are part of an ongoing plan to increase financial literacy and cybersecurity.

Gulf Bank is keen to alert its customers to warn customers of hacking and fraud links that may reach them via text, digital messages (including email), or phone calls, as hackers may impersonate bank employees on the phone. Gulf Bank urges customers to avoid responding to these types of messages, as the Bank will never request personal information via email, text messages, or phone calls. By disclosing any personal information through unsecured means, customers may unknowingly be placing their confidential banking data at risk of theft.

Regarding the Diraya campaign, the Assistant General Manager of Information Security at Gulf Bank, May Dashti, said: "At Gulf Bank, we remain in full support of the Diraya campaign due to its vital role in raising awareness on cybersecurity. I would like to take this opportunity to also remind our valued clients that Gulf Bank will never ask for your personal information via email, text message or phone calls, and I recommend that all our clients avoid engaging with these types of messages and calls, and immediately inform the



May Dashti

Bank if they ever receive these types of requests. At Gulf Bank, we have implemented several safeguards to enhance information security. For example, customers are required to input their passwords in order to access the automated service over the phone, and can also use their Face ID technology to access their accounts through the Gulf Bank mobile application without needing to enter their confidential banking information. These measures are in place to make accessing one's banking information simpler and more convenient, while reducing the need to expose one's banking data every single time."

In partnership with the Diraya campaign, Gulf Bank urges customers to follow some tips to protect their banking accounts:

- Fraudulent operations are diverse, and they come through several methods, such as text messages, e-mail, or even phone calls.
- The bank does not request your personal information via email, text messages, or phone calls. Therefore, avoid responding to these messages. They are fraudulent attempts, and their aim is to obtain your banking information to steal your money or steal your identity.
- Handle electronic links with caution. Simply clicking on the link may expose your confidential banking data to theft.
- Do not store any confidential information such as debit card numbers, credit card numbers, or personal identification numbers on a mobile phone.
- Do not write your password on the card or share it with anyone; this also applies to the One Time Password (OTP).
- Log out of the bank's application or website as soon as you finish your transaction.



Burgan Bank's 26 new employees graduate

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank has celebrated the graduation of 26 young bankers, who have successfully completed a one-month induction training program. Organized by the Learning and Talent Development Department, the program provided deep-dive knowledge into the bank's culture and operations, along with the specialized tools and skill sets necessary for the new employees' roles in the bank. The training program, delivered in a mix of live and virtual sessions through the eLearning platform, was designed to prepare the new employees to fill the position of bank tellers across Burgan's branches. The program's series of courses aim at helping the new employees start their career journey in the bank with sufficient and practical knowledge to offer customers high-quality professional services as well as to engage and evolve in the banking industry.

The program included many specialized workshops and trainings focused on selling skills and the key pillars to customer service excellence. The training also covered the practical aspects of the job and introduced the participants to the wide array of the Bank's products and services. A one-week field training in the Bank's branches was included to provide the new staff with the opportunity to build on the acquired theoretical knowledge to get a hands-on experience of everyday banking operations.

Commenting on the program, Ghada El-Kadi, Unit Head of the Learning and Talent Development Department works on providing the trainees with the necessary skills and competencies to facilitate their integration in our unique institutional culture prior to taking on their career journeys. Burgan's culture is characterized by a spirit of positivity, hard work, perseverance and cooperation within the teams. Our goal is to provide the best service to our customers and our community and to activate a supportive environment for our employees, the Bank's most important asset."

El-Kadi added "At Burgan Bank, we always select employees who share the core values of

our corporate culture to ensure harmony among the team and contribute to the bank's overall success. We take pride in our culture and expect our employees to preserve and promote it. Through our training programs, we seek to provide new joiners with the required practical skills, while instilling the ethics and values we embrace to align our employees with the goals and principles that lead to maintaining the Bank's success through productive cooperation. We congratulate the program's graduates for their success, and we are excited to see them take part in Burgan's growth journey and deliver great results."

Burgan Bank keeps reaffirming its commitment to put the development of its employees and their career progression at the top of its priorities through customized learning and development opportunities. Burgan will continue to deliver employee-centric trainings and programs to build the most qualified teams and maintain its reputation as a leading financial institution locally and regionally in line with its strategic objective of developing the national competencies and preparing talented individuals to become the future leaders of the banking industry in Kuwait.

Billions wiped from Macau casino stocks as city eyes review

MACAU: Macau casino operators saw billions wiped off their value yesterday as their shares collapsed after officials in the world's biggest gambling city unveiled plans for a crackdown that would tighten their grip on the already beleaguered industry.

Hong Kong-listed operators Sands China and Wynn Macau both plunged around 30 percent; SJM Holdings and MGM China lost 25 percent while Melco and Galaxy Entertainment both shed around 20 percent. Bloomberg News estimated the combined losses for the six big operators amounted to some \$14 billion.

The sell-off came after the Macau government announced a 45-day public consultation that included a proposal for direct supervision over the gambling industry, which has faced increasing scrutiny from authorities in recent years.

Officials are looking to put government representatives on licensed operators' boards to oversee their operations, and to criminalise under-

ground banking in the industry. The move comes as the government in mainland China embarks on a crackdown on a wide range of industries-including tech and private education firms-as it looks to tighten its grip on the world's number two economy.

President Xi Jinping is also in the midst of a drive targeting the country's uber-rich and calling for "common prosperity".

"The casino issues are a continuation of what's been a pretty big crackdown," said Jason Ader, of New York-based investment manager SpringOwl Asset Management. "There's a debate over whether China is even investable right now. You never like to see increased regulation, increased taxes, restrained movement. That all seems to be the status quo," said Ader, who is also a former member of Las Vegas Sands.

Pandemic woes

The announcement comes as the six licenses permitting companies to



MACAU: This file photo shows visitors taking photos outside the Wynn casino resort with a view of the Grand Lisboa (top center) casino resort building in Macau. Macau casino stocks plunged by more than a quarter yesterday as the city known as China's Las Vegas kicks off a public consultation ahead of an expected tightening of gaming industry regulations. — AFP

run casinos in Macau-the only place in China where casino gambling is allowed-come up for renewal next June, when the companies will have to bid to hold on to them. Macau's casinos usually account for about 80 per-

cent of government revenue and more than half its gross domestic product, with upwards of 82,000 people working in the industry by the end of last year representing almost a fifth of the city's working population. — AFP

Near North Pole, a warning on climate change

NORTH POLE: A massive icebreaker cuts its way through the frozen waters of the Arctic Ocean, clearing a path to the North Pole, all white as far as the eye can see. But even here, the impact of climate change can be felt. Dmitry Lobusov has seen it. For 13 years he has captained the "50 Let Pobedy" ("50 Years of Victory"), part of a growing fleet of icebreakers that Russia is using to assert its power in Arctic waters.

The vast, nuclear-powered ships clear paths through the ice for commercial vessels, helping

Russia to deliver its oil, gas and minerals to the rest of world, and eventually to set up an Arctic shipping route between Asia and Europe that Moscow has touted as a rival to the Suez Canal. Lobusov, a 57-year-old with a grey beard who often has a pipe in hand, stares out from the bridge as the red-and-black ship ploughs forward, so silent you can hear the ice cracking under its hull.

After nearly 30 years at sea, much of it in the Arctic, Lobusov has seen firsthand the changes wrought by global warming. "In the 1990s and early 2000s the ice was more difficult and thicker," says the sailor, his blue uniform immaculate.

"There used to be a lot of perennial ice," he says, referring to ice that forms on the surface of polar oceans and survives for multiple melting seasons. "We hardly see that kind of ice anymore." Perennial ice is thicker and stronger because it

forms over several years and loses salt, Lobusov explains, making it harder for the icebreaker to cut a path. But today, most of the ice cover is formed during the year and quickly melts in the summer.

Scientists say there is no doubt that this is climate change at work. Russia's Rosgidromet meteorological service said in a report in March that the Arctic ice cover is now five to seven times thinner than in the 1980s, and in the summer months the waters are becoming increasingly free of ice.

In September 2020, the ice cover in the Russian Arctic hit a low of 26,000 square kilometers (10,000 square miles) — a record for that time of year—the report said. Russia, a third of which is within the Arctic circle, is warming faster than the global average, it said, with temperatures having risen by half a degree per decade since 1976. — AFP



A hairdresser washes a customer's hair at a beauty salon, in downtown Caracas. — AFP photos



A customer prepares to get a haircut at a hairdresser's, in downtown Caracas.



A hairdresser braids a customer's hair at a beauty salon.

EMBRACING THE AFRO IN REVOLT AGAINST VENEZUELA'S 'BAD HAIR' STEREOTYPE

Two years ago, Victoria Mejias abandoned her slavish pursuit of sleek tresses—a common obsession in Venezuela where hair and race identity are closely intertwined. After a near two-decade struggle with damaging chemical straighteners, she embraced her naturally curly hair and a bold, shoulder-length Afro style and says she feels “divine.” From

tom, some say, of deep-seated racism. Then, she had a change of heart. “I was tired of salons (for straightening treatments), of not having the freedom to let my hair get wet (as it would frizz). “It felt like a form of slavery,” she told AFP. Changing to an Afro style was “like meeting me again. It was the best decision I could have made.”

Today, more than half the population identifies as mixed-race or “mestizo.” Yet, it is widely accepted that the darker your skin, the likelier you are to be poor in Venezuela, and to suffer from prejudice.

‘Not with that hair’

Despite a 2011 law against racial discrimination, the country has a complicated relationship with its cultural identity. Racism is sometimes overt, often subliminal. In Venezuela, “everything that comes from being Black we think of as bad or... as exotic, that is, not the norm,” sociologist Zulima Paredes, who has written about the aesthetics of Afro hair, told AFP. The country that has enjoyed outsized success in the world of beauty pageants, has won the Miss Universe title seven times.

All its winning contestants were fair-skinned and had straight or straightened hair, reflecting the nation's continued pursuit of a “western European” standard of beauty. In 2018, when dark-haired, olive-skinned model Isabella Rodriguez was crowned Miss Venezuela—her tresses also artificially straightened—she was ridiculed online for her modest background and her mixed-race roots. Hair discrimination also has more practical, day-to-day implications. Paredes, who is also of mixed race, said she suffered workplace discrimination over her hair. Once, applying for a job while sporting an afro, “they told me: ‘look, no, with this hair you will not get in here.’”

And the victimization starts young. “You cannot enter school with an Afro hairstyle, you have to tie it up... or straighten it,” under many prevailing dress codes, said hairdresser Gabriela Delgado. Under such indoctrination, she herself used long, straight hair extensions



People eat and drink at the Afro Cafe restaurant.

until four years ago, when she decided to switch to dreadlocks.

Hair ‘cannot be bad’

“There are people who start relaxing their hair as young as six, five,” said Delgado’s colleague Ludizay Gardona, 35. The pair work at Afro Caracas, a salon specializing in black hair styles. “People have not yet shaken off the stereotype that Black people were slaves and not much else. These prejudices are what we are trying to change... We have to become strong,” said Delgado. “This hair has not hurt anyone, it cannot be bad.”

The issue was tackled in the 2013 Venezuelan film “Pelo Malo” about a young boy’s obsession with straightening

his hair, which won the best film award at the San Sebastian Film Festival. Venezuela is not the only country to have struggled with the issue. In 2019, South African Zozibini Tunzi, became the first Black woman with a short, natural haircut to be crowned Miss Universe. “I want to re-assure people that this hair is as beautiful as any other hair,” she said at the time. In July 2019, California became the first US state to ban discrimination based on a person’s natural hair, in a law that stated that hair was a frequent reason for racial discrimination, particularly for Black people. — AFP



A waitress carries dishes to serve customers at the Afro Cafe restaurant, in downtown Caracas.

the age of 12, when her mother started relaxing her hair, “I felt obliged to present myself in a certain way, because straight hair gives you status,” Mejias, now 28, explained at a salon in central Caracas where she was treating herself to a moisturizing treatment.

Mejias said she long felt ashamed of her “pelo malo” (bad hair), as natural Black hair is called in Venezuela—a symp-

Venezuela has a racially diverse population as a result of mixing between indigenous peoples, Spanish conquistadores who arrived in the 15th century and the African slaves they brought from the colonies. The country also received an influx of Europeans escaping the ravages of WWII and people from other Latin American countries fleeing dictatorships and armed conflict over the decades.

Ed Sheeran finds awards shows ‘uncomfortable’

Ed Sheeran finds competitive awards shows have an “uncomfortable atmosphere”. The 30-year-old Grammy-winner - who attended the MTV VMAs last weekend - has admitted there is a lot of “side-eye” going on at major prize-giving ceremonies, including the Grammys, and he can feel the “resentment and hatred” in the air. Appearing on Audacy’s “The Julia Show”, he spilled: “The room is filled with resentment and hatred towards everyone else and it’s

quite an uncomfortable atmosphere. “All the artists are sweet people, but they’re like, surrounded by entourages that want them to win too, so it’s one artist surrounded by ten people and another artist surrounded by ten people and everyone is kind of giving each other the side-eye.” The ‘Shivers’ singer doesn’t like seeing artists not supporting other artists and wanting their peers to “fail”. He added: “It’s nothing to do with MTV or the award show, it’s at all the other awards shows

[too]; Billboards, Grammys ... AMAs ... “It’s just lots of people wanting other people to fail and I don’t like that.” But the ‘Bad Habits’ hitmaker insisted England’s awards show - such as the BRIT Awards - are more light-hearted as everyone is out for a good time. He added: “In England, our award shows are just like, everyone gets drunk and no one really cares who wins or loses, it’s just sort of a good night out. “People get the same feeling as me at those award shows. I’ve spoke to peo-

ple and they’re like, ‘I just felt really depressed afterwards.’ The atmosphere is just not nice ... It’s a really, really horrible atmosphere to be in there. I always walk away feeling sad and I don’t like it.” The flame-haired pop megastar also isn’t a fan of the after-parties. He said: “The after-parties, again ... it’s not just musicians. It’s musicians, all their entourages, then you got influencers and blah blah blah.”



Kim Kardashian West explains Met Gala outfit

Kim Kardashian West has explained how her Met Gala outfit perfectly fit the ‘American Independence’ theme. The 40-year-old star stepped out at the event on Monday night covered completely head to toe in an all-black Balenciaga ensemble which left some social media critics confused as others hailed the unique look. Now, she has taken to Instagram to defend her outfit as she simply wrote: “What’s more American than a T-shirt head to toe?!” The outfit featured a long-sleeve turtleneck bodysuit with an oversized t-shirt dress with a long train, rounding off the look with boots, gloves and a mask over her face and head. Kim arrived for the event alongside Balenciaga’s creative director Demna Gvasalia, who was also covered up in a black hoodie and sweatpants. Although she didn’t arrive with ex-husband Kanye West, his “presence” was still felt due to the pair’s connection. An insider said: “Even though Kanye is not attending tonight, his presence will be felt on the carpet. “It was Kanye who introduced Kim to Demna and was instrumental in the newly formed relationship



between her and Balenciaga.” And it’s said the 44-year-old rapper helped Kim “push creativity and people’s imagination” with her ensemble. The source added: “This look on Kim is like a new subculture and fashion statement. No logo, no face, but everyone knows it’s her. “Kanye gave her the courage to push creativity and people’s imagination through art. It’s the ultimate confidence.” Kim has previously credited Kanye with teaching her how to

be “true to herself”. She explained: “I got to a point - and maybe being in a relationship with Kanye for a decade and someone that absolutely didn’t care about likability factor or what any of perception of him was - as long as he was true to himself, that taught me so much in the best way of just being me and living in the moment.” — Bang Showbiz

Doherty says cancer battle is ‘part of life’

Shannen Doherty has accepted that her cancer battle is “part of life”. The 50-year-old actress has been living with stage four breast cancer since 2019 but insisted she tries not to complain about her illness and is focused on informing people about the disease. Speaking during a virtual panel for her upcoming Lifetime movie ‘List of a Lifetime’, she told reporters: “I feel like I have a responsibility in my more public life, which I separate from my acting life... to talk about cancer and perhaps educate people more and let people know that people with stage four are very much alive and very active.” Shannen, who is married to photographer Kurt Svarienko, added: “My husband says that you would never know that I have cancer. “I never really complain. I don’t really talk about it. It’s part of life at this point.” The star appears in the upcoming movie, which centers on a woman who has been diagnosed with breast cancer. She has described the project as “the first acting

thing I’ve done about cancer” and said of her co-stars: “I didn’t have to give anybody advice because [of director Roxxy Shih] and these beautiful ladies who did such a beautiful job with their own preparation process. “We all showed up and honestly... this was truly an unbelievable pleasure to be a part of, and I was blown away every second that I got to work with these amazing ladies.” Shannen also revealed that she has not made a bucket list in response to her cancer diagnosis as she wants to live for as long as possible. The ‘Beverly Hills, 90210’ star said: “I just think a bucket list is odd in my particular situation because it means that I’m sort of trying to check things off before my time runs out. “I’m very much like there’s no bucket list because I’m going to be the longest-living person with cancer. If I had to say one, it would just be living. That’s the only thing on my list at this point.” — Bang Showbiz



Lifestyle | Features

Japan's streetwear veteran
Nigo takes over at Kenzo

Streetwear pioneer Nigo was named yesterday as the new artistic director of Kenzo, luxury group LVMH announced yesterday. Known for his celebrity collaborations, Nigo takes over from Portuguese designer Felipe Oliveira Baptista, who quit the post in June after just two years. Kenzo was founded in 1970 by Japan's Kenzo Takada, who died from COVID-19 complications in October.

Nigo, real name Tomoaki Nagao, made his name with his label A Bathing Ape, or BAPE, in the 1990s-its marriage of

streetwear and high fashion making it precursor to brands like Supreme. He has partnered with big names like Pharrell Williams, Kanye West, Coca-Cola and Adidas-and last year released a men's collection with Virgil Abloh of Louis Vuitton. In the statement announcing his appointment, Nigo noted the parallels with the founder of Kenzo. "I was born the year that Kenzo Takada opened his first shop in Paris. We both studied at the same school of fashion in Tokyo. In 1993, the year that Kenzo joined the LVMH group, I

began my career in fashion," he said.

"Bringing to life the spirit and savoir-faire of Kenzo Takada to create a new Kenzo is the biggest challenge in my 30-year career," he added. Sidney Toledano, CEO of LVMH's fashion section, welcomed the "arrival of an extremely talented Japanese talent" that will open "a new page in the history of the house". — AFP

This file photo in New York city shows fashion Designer Nigo. — AFP

UK government
raps Nicki Minaj
over vaccine
claims

A coronavirus briefing in Britain took an unexpected turn when the country's buttoned-up chief medical officer and prime minister found themselves talking about Nicki Minaj, vaccine hesitancy and her cousin's friend supposedly swollen testicles. Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his chief medical officer Chris Whitty were drawn into a debate about the global rap superstar after she revealed to her 22.6 million Twitter followers she had not yet been vaccinated.



Being jabbed was a requirement for attendance at this week's glamorous New York fashion event the Met Gala, she said, indicating she was doing her own research on jabs. Minaj then shared a story about a cousin in Trinidad who refused

to be vaccinated because his friend got jabbed, became impotent and got swollen testicles. Whitty, 55, the face of Britain's coronavirus response not previously known for his knowledge of celebrities, did not skip a beat when he was asked about Minaj's comments at a COVID question and answer session on Tuesday.

"There are a number of myths that fly around, some of which are just clearly ridiculous," he told reporters. "Some... are clearly designed just to scare. That happens to be one of them." Instead, he said he was encouraged that most people were ignoring myths and getting jabbed, and hit out anyone knowingly "peddling untruths". "In my view, they should be ashamed," he added.

Classically educated Johnson, 57, who regularly peppers his speeches with Latin, stuttered that he was "not as familiar with the works of Nicki Minaj as I probably should be". Instead, he said he preferred to listen to another woman of the same name, "superstar GP" Nikki Kanani, who has been closely involved in the government's COVID vaccine campaign. The straight-talking Minaj later sent Johnson a voice message, in an English accent, claiming she was born in Britain and went to university with Margaret Thatcher-both untrue. Health Secretary Sajid Javid said yesterday he did not want to give the comments "the oxygen of publicity", and called for public figures to be responsible in their comments. "Reshuffle gossip: Health Secretary Minaj," suggested one Twitter user yesterday, as rumors again swirled that Johnson was about to rearrange his cabinet. "That will enable Cardi B to move to the Treasury and Kardashian to Environment," replied another, referring to reality TV superstar Kim Kardashian. — AFP

BTS issued
diplomatic
passports for
UN session

K-pop sensation BTS have been granted diplomatic passports ahead of the United Nations General Assembly as they embark on their new roles as presidential special envoys, South Korea's presidential office said. The trailblazing septet have reached global superstardom, with their single "Dynamite" entering the Billboard Hot 100 at number one last year, making them the first South Korean act to top the US chart. They are credited with generating billions for the South Korean economy, and last year their label HYBE made a high-profile stock market debut.

Now Seoul is looking to capitalize on the soft power they represent, with President Moon Jae-in appointing them as his special envoys for future generations and culture. "It is a great honor to receive this title," BTS leader RM said at a Blue House ceremony Tuesday to present them with their red-covered diplomatic passports-ordinary South Korean passports are green. Moon told the members

that many foreign leaders he meets break the ice by talking about them. While on official business, they will enjoy privileges such as diplomatic immunity and exemption from airport inspections. As special envoys, the group will deliver a speech during the Sustainable Development Goals Moment on Monday, ahead of the UN General Assembly, and a performance video will be played.

RM previously delivered an English-language speech on self-empowerment entitled "Speak Yourself" to the UNGA in 2018. Many reacted positively to BTS' new role, noting their impact on the South's international standing. "Thanks to BTS, the national image of South Korea has been greatly enhanced," said a commentator on Daum, the South's second-largest web portal. "They have done more work than hundreds of diplomats combined." — AFP



This picture shows diplomatic passports of K-pop sensation BTS members for a UN session as South Korean presidential special envoys at the presidential Blue House in Seoul.



This picture shows South Korean President Moon Jae-in (fourth left) posing with members of K-pop sensation BTS as they receive diplomatic passports for a UN session as presidential special envoys at the presidential Blue House in Seoul. — AFP photos



Pictures of people exiled to Siberia are seen in The Sybir Memorial Museum exhibition during a preview before the official opening, Bialystok. —AFP photos



Exhibits are displayed at The Sybir Memorial Museum exhibition.

'They had nothing':
Polish museum
honors Siberian
deportees

Eighty years on, the emotion is still raw for Elzbieta Smulkowa when she remembers her deportation to Siberia in 1941. "The worst was the hunger, the lack of heating and how it was impossible to help my mother anymore," the 90-year-old told AFP at her home in suburban Warsaw. Smulkowa, her little sister and their mother were forced to leave their hometown of Lviv, then a part of Poland, when it was taken over by the Soviet Union during World War II. Her father, a forest ranger, had been arrested and, unbeknownst to his family, killed by Soviet troops a year earlier.

The history of Soviet deportations is the subject of a new museum opening in Bialystok in northeast Poland on Friday-the anniversary of the Soviet assault on Poland which followed soon after the Nazi German invasion that triggered World War II. The museum traces the history of the hundreds of thousands of Poles deported to Siberia during Tsarist Russia and Soviet times set in the context of the millions who suffered the same fate. It is housed in a former military depot "in the exact spot where deportees left from" during World War II, Wojciech Sleszynski, the museum's director, said at a press preview.

'We had their love'

At a time when the last deportees are passing away, the museum showcases their oral and written accounts as well the simple objects with extraordinary stories that accompanied them. Museum researchers said they had found representatives of around 60 nations and ethnicities among the deportees to Siberia. "The museum gives a Polish perspective because we are in Poland" but it addresses "a universal experience of totalitarianism, suffering and forced migration," Sleszynski said. The Soviet deportations in 1940 and 1941 affected more than 330,000 people in what was then a very multi-ethnic Poland-entire families were taken away, including 130,000 children.

After a six-week journey, Smulkowa's family ended up in the village of Ust-Selga in the middle of the vast taiga forest — 6,000 kilometers (3,700 miles) from their

former home. "There were two Polish families, four Ukrainian ones and six Latvian ones," said Smulkowa, who went on to become a professor of Slavic languages at the University of Warsaw and Poland's first ambassador to independent Belarus in 1992. Smulkowa's mother worked in the fields. "We, the children, had our mothers as protection and we had their love. They had nothing. They had lost their spouses, their homes, everything," Smulkowa said.

'Sky was bluer'

The museum also includes the stories of Polish deportees who helped advance scientific knowledge about Siberia such as the zoologist Benedykt Dybowski or Bronislaw Pilsudski, an anthropologist who documented Siberian tribes. Among the exhibits in the museum is a sewing machine that allowed deportees to make clothes to survive the harsh winters and a violin that a 10-year-old deportee gave to his Soviet guards to allow his family to return to Poland. After the war, the deportees began to return to their country.

When she crossed back into Poland in 1946, Smulkowa remembers thinking "the grass was greener and the sky was bluer". The deportations continued after the war, however. Around 100,000 more people were deported from Poland, including ethnic Germans and Poles from the anti-Nazi resistance. In all of European history "every country has seen instances of deportation," said Sleszynski. "Let's try and talk about it, without mutual accusations but by concentrating on the universal themes and the suffering." — AFP



Elzbieta Smulkowa, who was exiled to Siberia as a child, poses for photo during an AFP interview in her apartment in Warsaw.

'Broadway is
back': New York
celebrates return
of hit shows

Broadway celebrated the return of some of its biggest musicals on Tuesday after an 18-month coronavirus shutdown, a landmark moment in New York's post-pandemic recovery. "Hamilton," "Wicked," "The Lion King" and "Chicago" were all resuming performances, to the delight, and relief, of the industry and theater lovers. "Broadway is back and it's a fun thing for everybody," said Jenni Milanoski who traveled with her daughter from Boston, hoping to see "Hamilton."

They checked into a hotel opposite the Richard Rodgers Theatre, where Hamilton is showing, so Milanoski could get in line for a ticket at 5:30 am (1030 GMT), some 14 hours before the curtains were due to go up. At 10:15 am she learned there had been a cancellation and that she had secured the extra ticket she needed. "I love this show so much. I've seen it 11 times. The energy today is going to be great," Milanoski told AFP. Broadway theaters have been gradually re-opening throughout September but Tuesday heralds the collective return of some of its most popular shows.

September 14 was the date former governor Andrew Cuomo said Broadway would re-open back in May. All audiences are required to be vaccinated, as are performers, backstage crew and theater staff, while spectators must also wear masks throughout the show. Theater fans said

they felt safe returning to indoor performances knowing that everybody was vaccinated despite concerns about the highly infectious Delta variant. "You also don't have to worry about them not wearing masks. They'll be kicked out of the show if they don't," said Milanoski's daughter Maddy, who is 18.

Around the corner at Broadway's ticket booth in Times Square, 65-year-old Angela Mecca agreed, pointing to a badge on her bag that read "fully vaccinated, slightly intoxicated." "I think I'll feel much more comfortable. We have copies of our vaccination cards that we've used to get into a couple of the restaurants here in New York City with no problem, so that's fine," she told AFP.

'We missed it'

Mecca, visiting from Buffalo in upstate New York, was hoping to see "Waitress," which reopened earlier this month. "We try to come every year to catch a couple of plays so that it's opening back up is wonderful. We missed it. There's no excitement like this," she added. Broadway generated around \$33 million in sales per week across 31 shows before COVID-19 swept the Big Apple in March 2020, forcing the abrupt shutdown that left thousands in the industry suddenly without work.

Coronavirus has killed 34,000 people in New York City. The resumption of shows comes with the city still suffering a huge shortfall in tourists, which typically make up two-thirds of audiences. But officials and theaters are confident that New Yorkers, and those who can visit, are desperate to watch live theater again. "This is a big night for New York City's comeback," said Mayor Bill de Blasio. "(Broadway) is in our heart and soul." — AFP



Fans, media and cast members gather outside the Richard Rodgers Theatre where the musical 'Hamilton' is being prepared for opening for the first time since March 2020 when it was closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic in New York City. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features



This photo shows dog owner Carrie Er with her pet white terriers Sasha and Piper (right) at her home in Singapore.



This photo shows dog owner Carrie Er using a mobile phone to film her pet white terriers Sasha and Piper. — AFP photos



Jane Peh, co-founder of the Woof Agency, which specializes in connecting pets with different brands, posing in front of a computer in her office in Singapore.



Photo shows white terriers Sasha and Piper (left) in the home of dog owner Carrie Er in Singapore.



Photo shows dog owner Carrie Er with her pet white terriers Sasha and Piper (right) at her home.



This photo shows dog owner Carrie Er with her white terriers Sasha and Piper (left) at her home in Singapore.

DIGITAL DOGGIES: PET INFLUENCERS ON THE RISE IN SINGAPORE

Two fluffy white terriers wearing neckerchiefs pant quietly as their owner waves a treat and snaps a photo for the dogs' tens of thousands of Instagram followers. They are among a growing number of pet influencers on social media in Singapore, a trend fuelled by a rise in online shopping and pet ownership during the coronavirus pandemic. Sasha and Piper make regular appearances on their "Lomodoggies" Instagram account, often wearing matching accessories and posing for the camera with

their tongues hanging out. The pair have earned thousands of dollars endorsing products ranging from vacuum cleaners to shoes-and are even represented by an agency. Tapping into the pet influencer boom, the company has worked with animals ranging from a cat called Brossy Meowington-with more than 50,000 followers-to a Japanese Spitz called Luna. Sasha and Piper's owner, Carrie Er, stumbled into the business several years ago when she started posting photos of Sasha in various costumes,

playing with toys and on outings. "We just wanted to do a daily blog of her, capturing some precious moments like her beautiful face and her activities," said Er, a marketing manager in her 40s. But the photos proved popular online, and companies started asking if Sasha would endorse their products. Piper, a former show dog, arrived later, completing the duo.

'Can't hate them'
"It's fun-fun for the dogs, fun for me," said Er, as she shoots pictures with her

phone of the dog celebrities. The two pooches now have nearly 24,000 Instagram followers and typically earn about 500 Singapore dollars (\$370), (315 euros) for each marketing deal. Er said she is selective about which products they promote, rejecting offers from some dog food brands she feels don't meet her standards-her own pets enjoy a diet of hand-made meals.

There has been a growing demand for pet influencer endorsements as companies bolstered their online presence dur-

ing the pandemic, according to Jane Peh, co-founder of The Woof Agency that represents Er's terriers. "I think pet influencers generally have an advantage because we just love pets," said Peh, whose company has about 6,000 pet social media profiles in its network. "They are cute-you can't hate them." — AFP



Rich Kelleman, kneels for a portrait with his dog Rumples at Bond Pet Foods.



Rich Kelleman, co-founder and chief executive officer of Bond Pet Foods, feeds a sample of chicken protein to dog Rumples at Bond Pet Foods in Boulder, Colorado. — AFP photos

US startup aims to transform pet food with lab-made chow

Cloudy liquid bubbling in glass tubes is key to a US startup's hopes of remaking the pet food industry by growing nutritional chow in a lab. Most pet food includes animal protein, which requires the slaughter of animals and is ultimately a source of planet-warming gases. Rich Kelleman's Colorado-based Bond Pet Foods, however, is aiming to sidestep both pitfalls by making those same proteins in a biotech process. His inspiration comes in part from his own disgust over the treatment of livestock on its way to the food supply.

He was also shocked when he read a study showing that pets in the US consume as many calories sourced from animals as France's population, which numbers more than 65 million. Livestock's impact on climate change added to his resolve, as raising animals for food is responsible for a whopping 14.5 percent of human-linked greenhouse gas emissions, according to UN data. But vegetables alone aren't necessarily enough nutrition for cats and dogs. Kelleman was convinced by research that if a company could "crack the code" for lab-grown pet food there would be a market for it.

"For dogs and cats, it has to be palatable, but it doesn't have to look like a fully formed steak or breast," Kelleman told AFP during a visit to the startup. "It's not about the mouth feel; the sizzle; the taste, and the texture that have to be so precise for people to embrace it." In development, Kelleman's startup drew blood from

a pedigree chicken, extracted DNA from the sample and inserted it into a microbe. The resulting microbe was added to a fermenter to produce lab-grown animal proteins. "It sounds like a weird, strange process, but it is something that has been around for quite a while," Kelleman said.



This undated and unlocated handout photo shows an Eastern Barred Bandicoot.

Nutty, with a hint of cheese
His dog, Rumples, seems to enjoy it. And an AFP reporter given a sample noticed its nutty flavor that includes notes of parmesan cheese. But the company has many hurdles to cross in its quest to become the new normal in pet food. First is the price, because even environment-loving "dog moms" watch their budgets when it comes to the cost of kibble.

Using fermentation tanks has enabled Bond to cut the cost of protein to \$5 per kilogram (2.2 pounds) from \$100 per kilo-

gram. Chief technology officer Tony Day says the price can be driven even lower. It is expected to take at least two years, though, of tests and evaluation to assure regulators that the kill-free pet food is a safe and viable. Bond is aiming to sell their proteins to pet food makers by the second half of 2023. A crucial question is whether the lab-grown pet food passes the smell test with humans concerned about the well-being of their animal friends.

In a park not far from the startup in the Colorado city Boulder, dog owners were interested but wary. "I'd like to think I could give my dogs real meat protein without harming the planet," Rochelle Loughry said while watching her two Australian Shepherds. "In theory it looks good, but we should know if, in the long term, the benefits are the same as with real meat," said another dog owner Jason Ackermann. Meat in pet food often arouses fierce debate. Greg Okin received raging criticism from both conservatives and animal rights activists for his academic study of pet protein consumption, which helped inspire Kelleman's startup. "I think the fear was that I was telling people kill their cats and dogs, or not feed them, which is not what I was saying at all," said Okin, a professor at the environment institute at the University of California, Los Angeles. "I got a lot of hate." — AFP

Bandicoot species 'back from the brink' on Australian mainland

A small nocturnal marsupial that once roamed the Australian mainland has been brought back from the brink of extinction after a decades-long conservation effort, authorities said yesterday. The Eastern Barred Bandicoot populated the grassy plains of Victoria state's southwest until it was all but obliterated by non-native foxes, feral cats and habitat destruction.

By 1989, there were just 150 animals left in the region, mostly scrounging an existence in rusted-out cars at a rubbish dump. Over the past three decades, multi-million dollar captive breeding and rewilding programs have revived the mainland Australian population to an estimated 1,500 — bumping it off the state's "extinct in the wild" list. "We are excited to announce the change in conservation status for the Eastern Barred Bandicoot from extinct in the wild to endangered-it is an incredible first for Australia," Victoria state Environment Minister Lily D'Ambrosio said. A closely related subspecies can also be found on the southern island of Tasmania, where it is classified as vulnerable.

The announcement is a rare conservation win in Australia, which environmentalists say has the world's worst mammal extinction rate. Amy Coetsee, threatened species biologist at Zoos Victoria, said it offered "hope that with persistence, determination and the support of government, volunteers and communities, we can win

the fight against extinction". Conservation teams created several predator-free sites for the bandicoots-some fenced and others protected by trained dogs-as well as moving animals to fox-free islands. The areas were populated with bandicoots largely bred in captivity by Zoos Victoria,



This undated and unlocated handout photo shows an Eastern Barred Bandicoot.

which is now ending that breeding program on account of the success. Coetsee said the organization was "100 percent confident" that the Eastern Barred Bandicoot was now secure in the wild. There are about 20 known species of bandicoots in Australia and New Guinea, several of which are classified as endangered or extinct. — AFP



This undated and unlocated handout photo shows an Eastern Barred Bandicoot. — AFP photos

Sports

'World class' Lukaku what Chelsea were missing, admits Tuchel

Belgian striker has four goals in four matches since return

LONDON: Chelsea manager Thomas Tuchel said Romelu Lukaku's knack of scoring decisive goals is what the Blues were missing despite winning the Champions League last season. Lukaku enlivened an otherwise flat performance with the only goal to beat Zenit St Petersburg 1-0 on Tuesday to get the Blues' defense of their European crown off to a winning start.

The Belgian striker now has four goals in as many games since returning to the club for a club record £97 million (\$134 million) last month. And his predatory instincts 21 minutes from time papered over the cracks of a disappointing display from Tuchel's men.

"He was the type of guy we were missing," said Tuchel. "It is super hard and super important. You don't find many strikers of that quality. The guys who are there to score regularly for their teams are so important because one goal changes the whole momentum of the match. The performance for Romelu was not easy. We did not create many chances for him, but he does not lose confidence and belief. That's why he's here and why he's a world class striker."

Tuchel urged his players not to rest on their laurels after their surprise run to become European champions last season. The glory of their victory over Manchester City in Porto was hard to shrug off as the German, Edouard Mendy and Jorginho were presented with awards on the pitch before kick-off as UEFA coach, goalkeeper and player of the year respectively.

However, Chelsea did not look like the best team

in Europe as they labored to create chances against the Russian champions. "There are a lot of reasons why we are maybe not on the highest level at the moment," added Tuchel, citing a lack of pre-season for many of his stars involved at Euro 2020 and the Copa America. "I'm happy with how we play because I find us very competitive, and we know how to handle difficulties during matches."

A remarkable run of 23 clean sheets in 36 games under Tuchel has been the bedrock of Chelsea's success since he took charge in January and was again needed to grind out three points. The first half

"You don't find many strikers of that quality"

came and went without the home side even registering a shot on target.

Lukaku showcased his mix of pace, power and precision in front of goal to score his first Stamford Bridge goals for Chelsea against Villa at the weekend. Zenit had kept the former Inter Milan striker quiet for nearly 70 minutes, but all he needed was one teasing cross from Cesar Azpilicueta to get off the mark in the Champions League for his new club



LONDON: Chelsea's German head coach Thomas Tuchel (right) shakes hands with Chelsea's Belgian striker Romelu Lukaku on the pitch after the UEFA Champions League Group H football match between Chelsea and Zenit St Petersburg at Stamford Bridge in London on Tuesday. —AFP

by planting a header past Stanislav Kritsyuk.

Zenit boss Sergei Semak threw on the towering presence of Artem Dzyuba in search of an equalizer and it nearly paid off. But even the six-foot six-

inch (1.97 meter) Russian international couldn't stretch to get a clean enough contact on Sardar Azmoun's cross 10 minutes from time and the ball dribbled wide. —AFP

Juventus forget domestic struggles to crush Malmo

MALMO: Juventus got off to a winning start in the Champions League with a 3-0 cruise past Malmo on Tuesday which the Italians will hope kick-starts their season. Juve came into their opening Group H fixture with just a point from their first three Serie A matches but Malmo were no match for Massimiliano Allegri's side, who swept to victory in Sweden thanks to goals from Alex Sandro, Paulo Dybala and Alvaro Morata.

The thumping win puts Juve on top of the group, level on three points with European champions Chelsea who they face next in Turin in two weeks' time. "Winning matches leads to winning more matches. The other day we lost an important game missing five-six important players, and today we played really well in a match it was important to do well in," Morata told Sky Italia. "We needed to change the dynamic and make the other teams realize that when there are points on the table Juventus are a difficult team to play against."

A one-sided contest was over by half-time in large part thanks to Juve's South American internationals, who missed the 2-1 defeat at Napoli on Saturday due to their late returns from World Cup qualifying duty. Brazil full-back Sandro got the ball rolling with a superb stooping header midway through the first half following a cross from Colombia's Juan

Cuadrado.

Argentina attacker Dybala doubled the away side's lead from the penalty spot just before the break following a Lasse Nielsen foul on Morata, who had huge amounts of joy playing on the shoulder of the hosts' high defensive line.

The Spain forward was rewarded for his hard work almost straight afterwards when a long punt found its way to Adrien Rabiot, whose pass was dummed by Dybala and reached Morata. The 28-year-old had the awareness to control the ball and spot Malmo goalkeeper Ismael Diawara rushing off his line before lifting a delicate finish in off the post. The second half resembled a leisurely training match for Juve, who were rarely troubled by a Malmo side which had already had the stuffing knocked out of them.

Substitute Moise Kean was unlucky to not score the first goal of his return to



MALMO: Juventus' Italian forward Moise Kean (left) fails to score past Malmo FF's Malian goalkeeper Ismael Diawara during the UEFA Champions League group H football match Malmo FF vs Juventus FC in Malmo, Sweden on Tuesday. —AFP

Juve when he strayed just offside before rounding Diawara and slotting home with 20 minutes remaining. Kean had another good chance well saved by

Diawara in the dying moments of a performance which will please Juventus ahead of the visit of in-form AC Milan on Sunday. —AFP

Spurs, Roma provide stardust in Conference League

PARIS: To its detractors it is a third-rate tournament, far from the glamorous elite level of European football, but the inaugural Europa Conference League which kicks off this week has plenty going for it. Tottenham Hotspur and Jose Mourinho's Roma are the star attractions in what is the brand new third tier of continental competition.

That maybe doesn't make it sound great, but beyond them this is an opportunity for clubs from some of the continent's smaller countries to play more matches, earn more money and get more exposure. It is, at heart, a fine idea, even if it may not draw in neutral viewers in their millions, but then again why should it have to?

There is a mixture of famous old names and obscure smaller clubs like Lincoln Red Imps from

Gibraltar, who once defeated Celtic in the first leg of a Champions League qualifier. The creation of the Conference League comes with the second-tier Europa League having been streamlined, slimmed from a bloated 48 teams in the group stage to 32, like in the Champions League.

There are also 32 teams in the Conference League, which offers just a single berth to each of Europe's big five leagues, although there is no Spanish side because would-be representative Villarreal won the Europa League and thereby qualified for the Champions League.

That leaves Spurs, Roma, Union Berlin from Germany and Rennes from France. The Netherlands, meanwhile, has three competing clubs, including former European Cup winners Feyenoord, and the goal is to reach the final on May 25 next year at the compact National Arena in Albania's capital Tirana.

The financial rewards

The financial rewards on offer pale in comparison to the Champions League, with a paltry 235 million-euro (\$278m, £201m) prize pot. In the Champions League the prize pot is two billion



ROME: Roma's coach Jose Mourinho reacts during his team's Italian Serie A football match against Sassuolo at the Olympic stadium in Rome on September 12, 2021. —AFP

euros. If you enter the Champions League in the group phase you are guaranteed a minimum of around 17 million euros, plus prize money per point gained and money from your television market, as well as income from gate receipts.

That figure drops drastically for the Europa League and by the time you get to the Conference League the guaranteed income is only around three

million euros. That is still a lot to some of the clubs taking part and it does increase considerably as the competition goes on — Tottenham, as the top-ranked participating team, could stand to pocket around 20 million euros by going all the way.

That is still admittedly not a huge sum for one of the top 10 richest clubs in the world with income last year of close to 400 million pounds, but maybe Nuno Espirito Santo's team should focus on the possibility of lifting a rare piece of silverware. After all, while a top-four finish in the Premier League must be their priority, Spurs have won nothing but two League Cups in the last 30 years.

Mourinho, who took charge of a club game for the 1000th time last weekend, has won all there is to win — including two Champions Leagues, the UEFA Cup and the Europa League — so is he tempted by the chance to get his hands on this new trophy, or does he not care? "I don't want to lie to you guys and tell you this competition doesn't interest me. It does interest me. I would like to win it," he said this week. Roma begin their campaign at home to Bulgaria's CSKA Sofia, while Spurs will be in France to play Rennes. —AFP

Classifieds

CHANGE OF NAME

I, **PROCARIUS MARIANESAN**, holder of Indian Passport No. T2417987, declare to change my name from PROCARIUS MARIANESAN to PROCARIUS MARIANESON. (C 0852) 16-9-2021

I, **GAFFAR SYED HUSSAIN SHANAWAS**, holder of Indian Passport No. 4650880, declare to change my name from GAFFAR SYED HUSSAIN SHANAWAS to SYED SHANAWAS. (C 648) 15-9-2021

I, **PASUPULETI MUNI KUMAR**, S/o PASUPULETI SUBRAMANYAM, holder of Indian passport no: M2288252, R/o D.No.9/335-3, SRI RAM NAGAR, Rly. 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)

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Man Utd learn Ronaldo's goals alone won't suffice in Champions League

United dealt seventh loss in 11 CL matches under Solskjaer



BERN: Manchester United's Portuguese striker Cristiano Ronaldo (L) and Young Boys' Guinean defender Mohamed Ali Camara (R) fight for the ball during the UEFA Champions League Group F football match between Young Boys and Manchester United at Wankdorf stadium in Bern, on Tuesday. — AFP

BERN: Cristiano Ronaldo has wasted no time in showing how valuable he will be to Manchester United but Tuesday's shock Champions League defeat at the hands of Young Boys in Bern was a reminder that the Old Trafford side have not been a major player at this level for a long time.

Ronaldo got his third goal in two matches since returning to United as the visitors took an early lead at the Wankdorf Stadium, but Aaron Wan-Bissaka's sending-off shortly before the interval was what swung the Group F opener.

Young Boys, the Swiss champions whose most notable performance in the European Cup remains their run to the semi-finals back in 1959, made the most of their extra man as Cameroon's Nicolas Moumi Ngamaleu got a 66th-minute equalizer. USA forward Jordan Siebatcheu then won it deep in injury time after latching onto Jesse Lingard's misjudged back-pass.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's team are now already on the back foot, with Young Boys theoretically the weakest side in a section also featuring Atalanta and Villarreal, who beat United in last season's Europa League final. "You need 10, maybe 12 points. You

need to win your home games and maybe one away. We have lost an opportunity to get three points, but we have two home games next," Solskjaer said. Last season United won their first two matches in a difficult group against Paris Saint-Germain and RB Leipzig, but still ended up finishing third.

Indeed, it is a decade since the Old Trafford club were a genuine force in the Champions League, something they are desperate to put right this season. Since losing to Barcelona in the 2011 final, United have won two knockout ties in the competition, one against Olympiakos and an infamous victory against PSG in the early days of Solskjaer's reign. A club that remains the fourth richest in the world according to Deloitte's most recent Football Money League continues to live on past glories that won them three European Cups.

There has been no Premier League title since

2013 but signing Ronaldo is supposed to get them back to the top and the Portuguese veteran returned to Old Trafford in the belief that United are a better bet than Juventus if he is to win a sixth Champions League medal.

More records

This was the 36-year-old's first Champions League appearance in a United shirt since the 2009 final defeat against Barcelona in Rome. It was another record-setting occasion as he made his 177th appearance in the competition, equaling the all-time mark set by Iker Casillas. His goal that put the visitors in front in the 13th minute was his 135th in the Champions League, edging him 15 ahead of old rival Lionel Messi at the top of the all-time scorers' charts.

There were fans dotted all around the ground in Bern — where West Germany beat Ferenc Puskas's

Hungary in the 1954 World Cup final — in red United shirts with Ronaldo's name and number seven on the back. They saw him score and he also thought he could have had a penalty early in the second half when he went down under pressure from Mohamed Ali Camara. Nothing was given, and Ronaldo went off along with Bruno Fernandes in the 72nd minute, with Nemanja Matic and Jesse Lingard replacing the Portuguese pair.

"The game had gone 70-odd minutes, they had been running a lot, both Saturday and today. The astroturf takes its toll as well, and we wanted Nemanja's experience on the ball, and Jesse's legs," said Solskjaer, who offered a glowing appraisal of his striker. "You can never be surprised by the man. He scored another goal, and he should have had a penalty. He's exceptional but we have to look after him as well and it felt like the right moment to take him off."

It was maybe, in hindsight, a mistake. Solskjaer must hope this defeat turns out to be a mere blip but his record is not encouraging — United have now lost seven of their 11 Champions League matches under the Norwegian. —AFP

“ We have two home games next ”

Lewandowski at the double as Bayern outplay Barca again

BARCELONA: Bayern Munich gave Barcelona a brutal demonstration of how far their opponents have fallen by strolling to a 3-0 win in the Champions League on Tuesday, with Robert Lewandowski scoring twice in a rout at Camp Nou.

Without Lionel Messi for a first European campaign since 2003, Barca were outplayed by Bayern, who might have scored more but in the end settled for three thanks to Thomas Mueller's deflected opener and Lewandowski's double.

When Lewandowski made it two before the hour, the possibility of another humiliation in the mold of last year's 8-2 defeat by the same opponents in Lisbon felt very real. Instead, Bayern delivered perhaps an even louder message about the gulf in class by easing off in the latter stages, as Barca's fans expressed their anger, dismay and finally a sense of resignation. "It is what it is," said Gerard Pique. "We are what we are, that's the reality."

"We could have been better," said Bayern coach Julian Nagelsmann. Barcelona failed to muster a single shot on target,

made fewer passes - once almost unheard of at Camp Nou - and have now conceded 10 goals in their last three European homes.

Sergi Roberto was on the end of the loudest whistles from the home supporters and it was impossible not to wonder if the criticism came in part from disappointment at his lack of progress down the right flank, where Messi once created so much. "They (the whistles) hurt me a lot because I know him, he's a spectacular person," said Pique. "And people need to remember he's not a winger."

Ronald Koeman's own position has come under scrutiny in recent weeks and his 5-3-2 formation, that defies Barcelona's attacking traditions, will not have strengthened his hand. Yet the bottom line here was the lack of quality in the Barcelona line-up - coming after their turbulent summer of sales - which was inferior to Bayern's in every department. "We obviously wanted to compete better but it's what we have," said Koeman. "I can't fault the effort of the players." Mueller has seven goals in six appearances now against the Catalans while

Lewandowski has scored in 18 consecutive matches. Nagelsmann's strong start in charge continues with a sixth consecutive victory - but Bayern will face tougher Champions League opposition than this, perhaps even in Group E, where Benfica and Dynamo Kiev began with a draw.

In true underdog fashion, Barca flew into Bayern early on, eager to impress themselves physically on an opponent they perhaps knew would be technically superior. The crowd were in on it too, cheering as Luuk de Jong outmuscled Alphonso Davies and Sergi Roberto held off Dayot Upamecano.

There was then a hint of a chance when Memphis Depay slid De Jong but he lacked the speed to capitalize and Benjamin Pavard cleared. The early enthusiasm could only sustain Barcelona so long and as the game settled, gradually Bayern took control.

Leroy Sane volleyed at Marc-Andre ter Stegen. Gerard Pique had to make a last-ditch challenge to stop Mueller. But Bayern's authority was set, even if their opening goal owed a lot to fortune, Mueller unleashing from 30 yards and the ball diverting off the back of Eric Garcia, wrongfooting Ter Stegen and creeping inside the post.

Barca wilted before half-time, the atmosphere turning sour as passes went



BARCELONA: Bayern Munich's Polish forward Robert Lewandowski (right) celebrates his goal with Bayern Munich's German forward Thomas Mueller (left) during the UEFA Champions League first round group E football match between Barcelona and Bayern Munich at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona on Tuesday. — AFP

astray and attacks broke down. A renewed push after half-time saw Sergio Busquets drive wide but Bayern came again. Sane hit the right foot of Ter Stegen from eight yards and then Lewandowski made it two, studding the ball into an open goal after the Barca keeper committed to Jamal Musiala's shot that cannoned off the post.

Under threat of another thrashing,

Koeman took off Sergi Roberto and Busquets, to a chorus of whistles from the home fans. The 18-year-old Yusuf Demir and a 17-year-old Gavi came on. Yet Bayern spared Barca a humiliation, waltzing through for one more late on as Lewandowski danced through a sprawl of bodies and fired with five minutes left. For Barca, three felt like a relief. —AFP