

Friday Times

ISSUE NO: 18535

SAFAR 10, 1443 AH | FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2021

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V O L V O



Statement by exiled former MPs rocks opposition camp

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In the aftermath, mountains of debt remain



JUST KIDDIN', SERIOUSLY

By Sahar Moussa

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Many residents who left Kuwait during the pandemic were stranded abroad due to the airport's closure. The reopening of the airport on August 1 to foreign residents felt like the start of a new chapter, an answer to their prayers. But thousands returned to piled up debts, overdue rents and mounting financial woes.

Kuwait lost nearly 200,000 foreign residents since the pandemic started. Many now are returning but are facing a challenging future. Some were laid off from their jobs or lost their businesses and were unable to repay their debts. The financial difficulties also hit Kuwaiti entrepreneurs as well— leading many to close their businesses for good.

Kuwait, just as any other country in the world, is gradually returning to so-called “normal life”. People are celebrating the reopening of entertainment centers and halls, children's play areas, restaurants, cinemas, schools, nurseries and the most important place — the airport. Resuming direct flights with India, Egypt and other countries was the biggest relief for many residents stranded abroad for months, away from their families and jobs. But will the situation be normal for these people who are coming back to face bank loans, accumulated back rent and the possibility of losing their jobs?

While stranded abroad, some residents were obliged to work remotely for their companies in Kuwait unpaid. The companies did not give or send them their salaries — and fearful of losing their jobs and hoping to retain them, they bitterly acquiesced. I know many companies were not able to recoup their losses and had to close their businesses. However, some companies also took advantage of the situation.

The government did announce a slew of measures with the aim of boosting the economy in the wake of COVID-19. Kuwait Banking Association announced a moratorium of up to six months on repayment of bank loans, including waiver of interest and charges for retail clients (citizens and residents) and SMEs (small-to-medium enterprises). They then extended this grace period for another six months, albeit for Kuwaitis only.

This was very helpful for citizens and residents—Kuwait should be thanked and appreciated for this thoughtful initiative. Still, thousands of people lost their jobs, had their salaries cut or were forced to work remotely without being paid. Meanwhile landlords and banks are filing lawsuits against residents who couldn't send money to pay their rent or loans while stranded abroad, and they have been black-listed. This is a similar story for Kuwaitis who lost their businesses and now face mountains of debt.

Maybe we are at the end of this pandemic and back to normalcy, but the financial situation for thousands if not tens of thousands of people in Kuwait is a black hole that will take years to fill.

We should stand side by side with those who are suffering. It is our duty as human beings to help those in need, to feel that we are all part of a community. We should help each other during this global crisis that managed to impact each and every one of us economically, physically and psychologically, or else we will all sink.

PHOTO OF THE DAY



An important part of any society is the preservation of historical spaces, buildings and artifacts. Some of Kuwait's most interesting historical artifacts are newspapers, books, other printed materials and old bank notes. Here is displayed a half dinar note from the late 1960s. — Photo by KUNA

Kuwait ‘few steps away from normal life’, says premier

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Prime Minister His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah said yesterday that “Kuwait is a few steps away from returning to normal life, which mean we increase vaccination rates and abide by health safety precautions.” In a statement to the press on the sidelines of his visit to the new Farwaniya Hospital project, His Highness the

Prime Minister said, “we have a very low numbers of infections, and vaccination rates have reached 70 percent, which is very good according to international statistics.”

“We must renew our gratitude and appreciation to the Kuwaiti medical team that faced the pandemic and reward them not only financially but with recognition of their efforts

also,” he said. “There should be documentation for this historical work, sacrifice of the medical staff, and the martyrs that we had lost during the pandemic, and this the responsibility of Minister of Health Dr Basel Al-Sabah and Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi,” he added. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Prime Minister His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah (second right) and health ministry officials are seen during a tour of the new Farwaniya Hospital project. — KUNA

Kuwait Times

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Local



Uncovering *a passion for sculpture*



Local artist Maitham Abdal talks with KT about his art and inspirations

By Ben Garcia

Maitham Abdal is an artist and sculptor who makes everything around him look stunning. Even his family home in Adan is superbly decorated with simple but elegant designs and colors. One canvas on a wall of his home is a charcoal painting of a lifelike cat, while another painting of a realistic-looking anime character adorns his living room.

"These are my paintings that I love the most, so I display them at home. These are the paintings with which I can demonstrate myself as an artist," Abdal told Kuwait Times.

Abdal graduated with degrees in education and interior design and teaches art to students aged 12 years and older. From interior design and graphic and anime illustrations, he later evolved into sculpture. "In 2012, I found myself search-

ing for something more to do other than painting. I was struck by the works of famous Kuwaiti artist Sami Muhammad, which fascinated me so much that I made a sample sculpture for him, which turned out to be well appreciated by many of my friends and family. I studied his work and found myself sculpturing several anime characters. Now I cannot stop and people call me a sculpture artist," he said.

Local

Abdal hones his skills every day, pursuing his love for art and satisfying his passion. "There are lots of differences between anime and human anatomy sculptures. We need to study human anatomy in detail, but anime is mostly about the picture or image in your head. In sculpture, it's the full 360 degrees and not two sides or one side like in a painting," he told Kuwait Times.



"Also, the challenge in sculpturing is dealing with the tools and materials and manipulating the mold. But everything will get perfect with practice and doing it daily. Remember, there is no academy or institute in Kuwait specialized in sculpturing," Abdal noted. His interest in sculpturing derives from the fact that he can easily communicate with people through his works of art.

"I dedicated my recent work to the Palestinian people. As human beings, we should not remain silent on what is going on

and happening around us. We should send a strong message to the Zionist entity and people around the world on the fate of the Palestinian people, whose bravery extends for many decades," Abdal said. He also spoke about his recent sculpture named 'Spoon of Freedom', which was featured on the front page of Kuwait Times this week. Abdal dedicated this piece to the Palestinian people eager to experience justice and freedom, which he said are the basic rights of every human around the world.



—Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Local



FINDING PARKING IN KUWAIT CITY NOT A WALK IN THE PARK!

Who hasn't needed to go to Kuwait City to process a transaction, handle business or do some shopping? Before going, you check your papers to make sure you have everything ready, leave with enough time beforehand so that you don't arrive late, and fire up your navigation app to find the easiest route and steer your way through traffic. Everything

seems to be going well, right? Think again, because you are probably forgetting about something very important: The herculean task of finding a parking spot.

Whether you work in Kuwait's business district or have an appointment in the morning, brunch time or early afternoon at a company or state department there, finding a place to park your car is a nerve-

racking experience, one that Kuwait City visitors have faced daily for years. Last year's lockdowns and 'work from home' mandates had resolved this problem temporarily, only for it to make a grand return with the easing of restrictions.

Nevertheless, there is some hope, as the pandemic has forced companies and state departments to increase the number

of services offered online, while the government has launched digital platforms to process all kinds of transactions remotely. Until these services are widely adopted, if you have plans to drive to an appointment in Kuwait City, good luck! You're definitely going to need it!

— Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



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Local

Statement by exiled former MPs rocks opposition camp

Former lawmakers criticize missed chance to pass pardon bill

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: A surprising statement issued by former opposition MPs and activists who have been living in self-exile in Turkey yesterday openly criticized certain measures taken by the opposition lawmakers and welcomed calls for a national dialogue under the auspices of His Highness the Amir. The statement is likely to disrupt the opposition camp which has so far been united and maintaining strong and close ties with the self-exiled former MPs.

The statement, signed by five former MPs, including Mussallam Al-Barrak, and four activists particularly criticized the opposition lawmakers for not attending a crucial assembly session held to allow the then new government to take the oath in the assembly.

The opposition lawmakers had boycotted the session in a bid to prevent it from going ahead but the government managed a bare majority and held the session. Following the taking oath ceremony, the assembly rejected a draft law calling for a general pardon on jailed politicians. Had

the opposition been in attendance, the bill would have passed.

The statement also criticized the opposition lawmakers for disrupting sessions while protesting against a decision to protect His Highness the Prime Minister from being questioned. It said



Dialogue must be preceded with understanding on pardon

their tactic effectively protected other ministers against grillings.

The statement said that they have learned that members of the opposition bloc in the assembly have proposed to hold a national dialogue between the government and the assembly under the auspices of His Highness the Amir.

They welcomed the proposal but insisted that any dialogue must be preceded with an understanding on the pardon in order to achieve a wider national reconciliation.

The former MPs and activists left Kuwait for Turkey more than three years ago to escape jail terms issued by the court of cassation which convicted them of storming the National Assembly building following a protest in 2011. Many attempts have been made to secure the return of the former lawmakers but all have reached a deadlock with assembly speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem openly telling them to seek a pardon from His Highness the Amir as the only way.

A leading former MP Faisal Al-Muslim, who is also in Turkey, was the only one who did not sign the statement, saying on Twitter that he was contacted late and that he did not want to criticize opposition lawmakers.

So far, there has been no comment on the statement from any opposition MP. Hours before that, opposition MPs issued a statement in which they reiterated their rejection to participate in the government, insisting that the government had



Former MP Mussallam Al-Barrak

violated the constitution. Ghanem said last week that new initiatives have been made to break the political deadlock in the country without elaborating. He expressed the hope that a breakthrough is expected before the start of the next assembly term in late October. Kuwait has been rocked with a non-stop political crisis since the election of the new assembly last year.



RIYADH: GCC foreign minister, including Kuwait's Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah (second from left), pose for a group photo during their meeting in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia yesterday. — KUNA

Kuwait participates in GCC-Yemen ministers' meeting

RIYADH: Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad

Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah chaired yesterday Kuwait's delegation to a meeting between GCC and Yemeni Foreign Ministers. The meeting was held at the Gulf Cooperation Council's Secretariat. Furthermore, Kuwait's Foreign Minister also chaired his country's delegation to a meeting between GCC and Iraqi foreign ministers. Sheikh Dr Ahmad had earlier chaired a similar meeting of GCC foreign ministers, which discussed boosting political, economic and social cooperation, in addition to regional developments. — KUNA

Foreign Minister receives new envoys' credentials

KUWAIT: Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah received yesterday the credentials of the newly appointed Egyptian Ambassador to Kuwait Osama Shaltout, and newly appointed Ambassador of Djibouti to Kuwait Abdoukader Houssein Omar. Sheikh Dr Ahmad wished the new ambassadors success during their tenures, and hoped that they would pursue means to further progress and bolster relations. — KUNA



Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah receives the credentials of the newly appointed Ambassador of Djibouti to Kuwait Abdoukader Houssein Omar.



KUWAIT: Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah receives the credentials of the newly appointed Egyptian Ambassador to Kuwait Osama Shaltout. — KUNA photos

Local

Kuwait police arrest 118 in Hawally crackdown

Nearly 300 people detained in three campaigns so far



KUWAIT: These handout photos released by the Interior Ministry yesterday show police carrying out a crackdown in Nugra Wednesday night.

KUWAIT: More than 100 people were arrested during a police crackdown in Hawally, in the largest haul since authorities launched campaigns targeting illegal residents around the country earlier this week and which have so far resulted in the arrest of nearly 300 people. The Interior Ministry said in a press statement yesterday that Hawally security department carried out a campaign in Nugra Wednesday night, during which they arrested 118 persons including 93 who failed to produce civil IDs and 12 with expired visas. Among the detainees were also nine fugitives, two people caught with drugs, one drunk person and one crossdresser, the Interior Ministry explained. The detainees were taken to

the proper authorities for further action, it added.



Largest crackdowns since pandemic

The most recent figures increase the number of people who have been arrested during

recent police crackdowns in Kuwait to 286. Police had carried out a campaign in Fahaheel Industrial Area earlier on Wednesday, in which they arrested 64 residency law violators and eight juveniles. On Tuesday, police carried out a similar campaign in Bneid Al-Gar, during which they arrested 96 people.

The recent crackdowns are the largest wide-scale police campaign against illegal residents in Kuwait since authorities had announced amnesty periods during the pandemic, allowing residents without valid visas to either legalize their status or leave the country without paying fines. The first amnesty in April 2020 allowed illegals to leave the country without paying fines and with a

free air ticket. Authorities said around 30,000 expats of various nationalities benefited from the amnesty.

The second amnesty for illegal residents - estimated at 150,000 people - was announced for the month of November 2020, and later extended for two more months, officially ending on January 31, 2021. During that period, the interior ministry asked all residents living in the country on temporary visas, which had been automatically extended during the pandemic until November 30, to legalize their stay in the country by obtaining residency or leave Kuwait before November 30. No official statistics were released for the number of people who had availed the amnesty.

Top Interior Ministry officials discuss traffic

KUWAIT: Senior Interior Ministry officials held a meeting yesterday to discuss an array of topics that focused on maintaining traffic safety and fighting crime. The Interior Ministry's Acting Undersecretary Lt Gen Sheikh Faisal Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah chaired the meeting which also featured Assistant Undersecretary for Traffic and Operations Affairs Maj Gen Jamal Al-Sayegh, Director General of the Najda Police Directorate Maj Gen Abdelaziz Al-Hajiri and several other senior officers. Lt Gen Sheikh Faisal conveyed greetings of Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah and his appreciation of their efforts to keep security, protect public and private property and arresting violators.

Lt Gen Sheikh Faisal said security and traffic campaigns should pay attention to the extent of roaming taxis' compliance with traffic laws and rules.

He said the decision to ban delivery motorcycles on major roads, which comes into effect October 3, helps avoid tragic accidents. He said meanwhile that all efforts must be exerted to remove obstacles and ensure smooth traffic flow and reduce congestion, adding that security and traffic commitment to plans and field presence of officials contribute to solving the traffic problem.

Meanwhile, Lt Gen Sheikh Faisal called for hosting training courses for traffic policemen and "improve their skills in swift action to solve minor accidents and avoid traffic jams." In this regard, Sheikh Faisal Al-Nawaf also said the link mechanism between the traffic officer in the street and the central control room should be upgraded to solve traffic congestions quickly.

Finally, Lt Gen Sheikh Faisal said the traffic problem is escalating due to an increase in the number of vehicles, which in turn is a result of issuing an abundance of driver's licenses. He added that proof of the KD 600 salary requirement for a foreign resident in Kuwait to obtain a license must be presented, while all other conditions must be met.

Riqqa man dead in family dispute: Report

KUWAIT: A citizen fatally shot his brother in Riqqa yesterday due to disputes between them that escalated into the murder, according to preliminary investigations. The victim died upon reaching the hospital, according

to local reports. Meanwhile, the suspect, who is of special needs, turned himself in to police after the shooting, the reports add.

In other news, police battled a blaze reported in a Khaitan house yesterday. The fire erupted in a room inside the three-storey house, and flames spread over an area of 500 square meters, Kuwait Fire Force said in a statement. Firemen successfully put out the fire as no injuries were reported, it added.

Kuwait backs probe into peaceful nature of Iran nuclear program

VIENNA: Kuwait on Wednesday said it was imperative to allow the UN nuclear watchdog to fully probe the nature of Iran's nuclear program, making sure it is for peaceful purposes. Lamenting the lack of progress over the matter, Kuwait's deputy permanent representative to international organizations Abdullah Al-Obaidi said there remains a great deal of uncertainty regarding the nature of Tehran's nuclear program. The Kuwaiti diplomat, amid talks over Iran's nuclear program, expressed his country's concern in the wake of an International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report, which

found traces of uranium at three undeclared nuclear sites in Iran, a matter that still needs a lucid explanation, he said. He urged Tehran to fully cooperate with the UN nuclear watchdog and allow its inspectors greater access to its nuclear plants as part of efforts to break the impasse, saying Kuwait supports the IAEA and its chief Rafael Grossi. Iran has said it would allow the IAEA to service monitor cameras at its nuclear sites after talks between Grossi and the chief of Tehran's atomic energy body, pushing efforts to resuscitate Iran's 2015 nuclear pact with world powers. — KUNA



VIENNA: Kuwait's deputy permanent representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency Abdullah Al-Obaidi speaks during a meeting over Iran's nuclear program. — KUNA

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Biden backs top general on calls to China over Trump mental state

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SYDNEY: A file photo shows French President Emmanuel Macron (second left) and Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull (center) standing on the deck of HMAS Waller, a Collins-class submarine operated by the Royal Australian Navy, at Garden Island in Sydney. — AFP

Australia to get nuke subs in US, UK deal

France slams Australia, US after 'stab in back' on subs

SYDNEY: The United States announced a new alliance with Australia and Britain to strengthen military capabilities in the face of a rising China, with Canberra to get a nuclear submarine fleet and American cruise missiles. President Joe Biden, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and his British counterpart Boris Johnson did not mention China in unveiling their alliance, dubbed AUKUS—but their intent was clear, and their announcement prompted fury in Beijing. China condemned the deal as an “extremely irresponsible” threat to stability in the region.

France yesterday accused Australia of backstabbing and Washington of Donald Trump-era behavior after Canberra scrapped a huge submarines deal with Paris for US-made nuclear subs. “It’s really a stab in the back. We had established a relationship of trust with Australia, this trust has been betrayed,” Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian told France Info radio. “I’m very angry today, and bitter... this is not something allies do to each other,” he said, noting that Australia would now have to explain how it would exit the contract.

Le Drian also said conduct of the administra-

tion of President Joe Biden was reminiscent of his predecessor Trump, who exasperated Europe with unpredictable decision-making. “This unilateral, sudden and unforeseeable decision very much recalls what Mr Trump would do,” Le Drian added, describing what has happened “unacceptable” and “incomprehensible.” France’s Naval Group, partly owned by the state, had been chosen to build 12 conventionally powered submarines for Australia, based on France’s Barracuda nuclear-powered subs in development. The contract was worth around Aus\$50 billion (31 billion euros, \$36.5 billion) when announced in 2016. But Biden and the prime ministers of Australia and Britain announced Wednesday a new defense pact that would see Canberra get a nuclear-powered submarine fleet, a privilege reserved for few American allies.

The agreement also left Paris furious, as Australia scrapped a multi-billion-dollar 2016 deal to purchase conventional submarines from France. “This initiative is about making sure that each of us has a modern capability—the most modern capabilities we need—to manoeuvre and defend against rapidly evolving threats,” Biden said,

speaking in Washington. Morrison said the three nations all respected “freedom” and “the rule of law”, and that the alliance would help ensure security in the region.

The Western allies often reference the rule of law and freedoms when railing against China’s military build-up in the South China Sea.

‘Peace and security’

The first major initiative announced under the new alliance was the fleet of eight state-of-the-art nuclear-powered submarines for Australia. The submarines, said Biden and the other leaders, will not be nuclear-armed, only powered with nuclear reactors. But they will allow Australia’s military to travel, and strike targets, far from its coast.

“(They) are quieter, faster and have longer endurance, which will allow Australia to deploy its future submarines to Indo-Pacific locations for much longer periods of time,” Ashley Townshend, of the United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney, told AFP. In addition to the submarine fleet, a senior Biden administration official said AUKUS would combine forces on

“cyber, AI—particularly applied AI—quantum technologies and some undersea capabilities as well”.

Morrison later announced Australia would also acquire long-range US Tomahawk cruise missiles. A Biden administration official underlined repeatedly how “unique” the decision was, with Britain being the only other country the United States has ever helped to build a nuclear fleet. “This technology is extremely sensitive,” the official said. “We view this as a one-off.” UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson yesterday said Australia’s acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines would “help safeguard the peace and security” in the region.

With China building up its own navy and repeatedly testing decades of US military dominance across Asia, the creation of AUKUS, with its focus on submarines, is “meant to send a message of reassurance and a determination to maintain a strong deterrent stance”, the US official said. Even if not carrying nuclear weapons, the new submarines will allow Australia to “play at a much higher level”, the official said. “This is a fundamental decision, fundamental. It binds Australia... and the United States and Great Britain for generations.” —AFP

International

Somali president withdraws PM's powers in escalating row

'Somalia's factions are playing with fire, all sides need to de-escalate'

MOGADISHU, Somalia: Somalia's president said yesterday he had withdrawn the executive powers of the prime minister, the latest twist in a feud that has plunged the country into a deep political crisis. The move by President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, who is popularly known as Farmajo, came despite efforts by Somali politicians to defuse the escalating tensions with Prime Minister Mohamed Hussein Roble.

"The prime minister has violated the transitional constitution so his executive powers are withdrawn... especially his powers to remove and to appoint officials, until the election is completed," the president's office said in a statement. The two men have locked horns over hirings and firings in Somalia's security agencies in a dispute that has raised fears for the stability of the country as it struggles to hold long-delayed elections and keep an Islamist insurgency at bay. The power struggle became public last week when Roble sacked Somalia's intelligence chief over his handling of a high-profile probe into the disappearance of a young agent.

Farmajo overruled the prime minister, appointing the dumped intelligence official as his national security adviser. The row has threat-

ened to throw an already fragile electoral process into deeper peril, and the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia last week urged both leaders to stop bickering and focus on the elections.

'Playing with fire'

Farmajo's four-year mandate expired in February, but was extended by parliament in April, triggering deadly gun battles in Mogadishu, with some rivals viewing it as a flagrant power grab. Roble cobbled together a new timetable for a vote, but the process has fallen behind, and last week he accused Farmajo of trying to reclaim "election and security responsibilities" from him. On Sunday, Roble sought to reassure UN diplomats about the status of the vote, saying the country was "committed to hold the elections as planned".

Elections in Somalia follow a complex indirect model, whereby state legislatures and clan delegates pick lawmakers for the national parliament, who in turn choose the president. The next phase is scheduled for between October 1 and November 25 with elections for the lower house of parliament, but voting has yet to take place in some states for the upper house as



This combination of file pictures shows Somalia's President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed (left), walks to make his speech during the inauguration ceremony of Djibouti International Free Trade Zone (DIFTZ) in Djibouti and Somalia's Prime Minister Mohamed Hussein Roble (right) attending the closing ceremony after reaching an agreement for the new elections at the National Consultative Council on Elections in Mogadishu. —AFP

previously scheduled. Analysts say the election impasse has distracted from Somalia's larger problems, most notably the violent Al-Shabaab insurgency.

The Al-Qaeda allies were driven out of Mogadishu a decade ago but retain control of swathes of countryside and continue to stage deadly attacks. "Somalia's factions are playing with fire. All sides need to de-escalate," the International Crisis Group said in a report issued

earlier this week.

"International partners should publicly name spoilers, threaten sanctions if they do not change course and prepare targeted measures against those who continue destabilizing behavior," it said. "Both sides need to take a step back from the brink. Rather than constantly finding new issues over which to duel, they should instead focus on bringing the long-overdue elections to completion." —AFP

Lebanon blast judge issues arrest warrant for ex-minister

BEIRUT: The judge leading Lebanon's investigation into last year's devastating Beirut port blast issued an arrest warrant for an ex-minister who failed to appear for questioning yesterday, a judicial source said. "Judge Tareq Bitar issued an arrest warrant in absentia for former public works and transportation minister Youssef Fenianos," the source told AFP. Fenianos, 57, headed the ministry from 2016 to early 2020. His whereabouts are unknown, but he is thought to be in Lebanon. The warrant came a day after more than 140 human rights groups, survivors and relatives of victims called for an international probe into the country's worst peace time disaster, as "Lebanese leaders continue to obstruct, delay, and undermine the domestic investigation".

Hundreds of tons of ammonium nitrate fertilizer exploded at Beirut's port on August 4 last year, killing at least 214 people, injuring thousands, and ravaging entire neighborhoods of the capital. It emerged later that officials had known the highly volatile substance had been left to linger unsafely at the port for years after it was unloaded in 2014.

But progress in the Lebanese investigation has been slow. A court threw out a first judge put in charge of the investigation after he charged former prime minister Hassan Diab and former ministers with "negligence and causing death to hundreds" after all had refused to appear before him. And officials have been working to hamper the probe led by his successor Bitar. Parliament has refused to lift the immunity of three other former ministers who are also lawmakers so the judge could question them. And the former interior minister refused to allow the head of the General Security agency to be interrogated. Political parties across the spectrum, including powerful Shiite movement Hezbollah, have accused Bitar of "politicizing" the probe.

Bitar in August subpoenaed Lebanon's then caretaker premier Diab for interrogation on September 20 after he too failed to show up for questioning, but he has flown to the United States on holiday. Diab's government handed over to a new cabinet earlier this week after more than a year of horse-trading over who would next take the reins of the multi-confessional country. Fenianos' lawyer, Nazih al-Khoury, said the arrest warrant was in "blatant violation of the law".

"We, as a defense team, are studying the options we can resort to in the coming days and that are available to us under the law," he told AFP. Observers fear that Bitar, like his predecessor, will be kicked off the investigation. —AFP

At least 50 killed in Yemen clashes: Military sources

DUBAI: At least 50 rebels and pro-government troops, including a high-ranking officer, have been killed in clashes in Yemen's central province of Al-Bayda, military sources told AFP yesterday. "A colonel and 19 other loyalists were killed in the past 24 hours in fighting with the Houthi insurgents in Al-Bayda district," a government military official said. "Thirty rebels also met their fate in battlefield clashes and air strikes." The Houthis rarely report casualty numbers but the figures were confirmed by other military sources.

The Iran-backed rebels have made advances in Al-Bayda province in recent weeks as they also fight for control of the strategic city of Marib in the north. In February, the Houthis escalated their efforts to seize Marib, the government's last toehold in the north, and the fighting has killed hundreds on both sides. Control of the oil-rich province would strengthen the Houthis' bargaining position in peace talks. The battle for Marib has also raised fears of a humanitarian catastrophe, as many Yemenis have fled to the area to escape fighting in other parts of the country.

The conflict in Yemen flared in 2014 when the Houthis seized the capital Sanaa, prompting Saudi-led intervention to prop up the internationally recognized government the following year. Since then, tens of thousands have been killed and millions pushed to the brink of famine in what the United Nations calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

Swedish diplomat Hans Grundberg, the UN's new envoy for Yemen, arrived in Riyadh on Wednesday to meet with Yemeni and Saudi officials, marking his first trip to the kingdom since taking office earlier this month. Also in the Saudi capital was the US special envoy for Yemen, Tim Lenderking, who met Yemeni Prime Minister Moeen Abdulmalik Saeed. The two men discussed the latest developments, including the displacement of millions of civilians in Yemen as well as the targeting of Saudi Arabia by the Houthi rebels, the prime minister's office said on Twitter. —AFP

International

Bangkok protesters skate for democracy

‘Normal protesters use their voices, we use skateboards’

Earthquake and crime-Haiti sinks deeper into gloom

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti: Haiti sunk deeper into confusion and fear Wednesday, a day after the Port-au-Prince prosecutor was sacked for requesting the indictment of the prime minister on suspicion of involvement in the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse. The country has been rudderless and beset by a worsening humanitarian and political crisis since an armed hit squad killed the president on July 7, a crisis only worsened by a deadly earthquake a month later.

Prime Minister in hot seat

Moïse's last political act was to appoint Ariel Henry as head of government as prime minister. But even before the funeral of the head of state, a standoff had erupted between Henry and his former interim predecessor, Claude Joseph. Amid pressure from various countries, tensions seemed to ease, with politicians in Port-au-Prince unanimously demanding that those responsible for the president's slaying be brought to justice. Henry solemnly pledged to do so. But over the following weeks, the new premier proved incapable of keeping another promise: to create a climate conducive to the organization of fresh elections. Worse, Henry is now suspected of having had telephone exchanges in the hours after the attack with one of the main suspects of the president's assassination. Henry has swept away the accusation without any response, other than dismissing the prosecutor who leveled the accusations against him.

Power vacuum

The abrupt presidential void since July 7 was a final blow for Haitian democracy. Moïse had not held any elections since coming to power in 2017, and as a result Haiti now has only 10 elected officials. Members of parliament left their seats in January 2020, leaving only a third of the Senate as the sole symbolic guarantor of legislative power. But they lacked any ability to legislate or control the actions of a government whose legitimacy was contested. Moïse, criticized by the opposition for authoritarian overreach, also weakened the justice system by not appointing new judges to the higher ranks of the judiciary. In February, after denouncing an attempted coup, the late president illegally forced three judges on the Appeals Court into retirement. Lacking sufficient members to convene, the highest court of justice in the country is now paralyzed.

No referee in sight

With a hollowed-out political class, any interim management of Haiti is now adrift. After dozens of military coups, Haiti demobilized its army in 1995, but it was reconstituted by Moïse in 2015. It still has only about 500 members, mostly engineers more capable of tackling natural disasters than any foreign foes. The ranks of the National Police force may have grown since its foundation in 1995, but it still has fewer than 20,000 officers serving a crime-ravaged country of 10 million, and has been shaken by internal disputes —AFP

BANGKOK: Kickflipping Thai skateboarders are flipping the bird at authorities, joining pro-democracy rallies in Bangkok to vent their anger over a lack of respect and dedicated public space for extreme sports in the kingdom. A youth-led pro-democracy movement kicked off in Thailand in July last year, demanding reforms to the monarchy, a rewrite of the military-scripted constitution and the resignation of Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-cha. A deadly third coronavirus wave and the detention of protest leaders sucked much momentum from the movement this year, but there have been near-daily small-scale rallies since June.

The sluggish rollout of Thailand's vaccination program, and the financial pain from restrictions has heaped political pressure on Prayut's government. During a recent demonstration at the Democracy Monument—a major intersection in Bangkok—groups of skaters slid over metal bars and benches while others scaled the central part of the monument to drape a giant cloth banner with anti-government messages.

Nattakarn Tewart, 17, says he and his fellow skaters are unfairly maligned as troublemakers and deserve greater respect after the sport was included in the recent Tokyo Olympic Games for the first time. “We see skateboarders being shooed away by police and security guards,” he told AFP, adding that building new skateparks would mean fewer collisions with pedestrians in public spaces. “Normal protesters use their voices as a tool against the government but we use skateboards—they are our weapon.”

Fellow skater Thana, 19, is upset about the government's handling of the coronavirus outbreak and says most skateboarders are working-class youngsters whose families have been hit hardest by the pandemic and restrictions. New cases on Wednesday tallied close to 12,000 after hitting a



This photo taken on September 7, 2021 shows a skateboarder boardsliding while carrying a flag that reads, “Prayut Get Out” during an anti-government protest calling for the resignation of Thailand's Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-cha in front of the Democracy Monument in Bangkok. —AFP

peak of 23,000 infections a day last month—but testing rates have also declined. The closure of Bangkok's few dedicated skateparks, as part of restrictions, has also had an impact on the community.

“It's where lost souls come together,” Thana told AFP, adding the hobby had helped many of his friends cope with depression. “It's more than just a sport.” Ice, 18, says the protest allows her friends to express their creativity. “When we skate across the mock-up dead bodies with the face of General Prayut... we want to express our anger and disapproval against the government,” she told AFP. —AFP

Amnesty accuses Egypt of ‘intimidation’ to silence activists

BEIRUT, Lebanon: Amnesty International yesterday accused Egyptian security agencies of “persistent intimidation and harassment” of human rights defenders as a political tactic to silence them. The London-based group interviewed more than 25 people summoned by the feared National Security Agency for its report called “This will only end when you die”. “Activists and human rights defenders said at every summons NSA officers regularly threatened them with arrest and prosecution unless they attended interrogations, and raided the homes of those who failed to appear,” Amnesty said. Most of the 21 men and seven women interviewed described “living in constant fear of being detained by the NSA,” said the group.

“As a result, many are too scared to express their opinions or participate in political activities and some have been driven into exile,” the rights group said. The report details how those interrogated, many of them former political detainees, were routinely subjected to “intrusive questioning”

with threats of torture against them and their families “if they refused to disclose information”. Human rights defenders interviewed in the report said NSA officers conducted “unauthorized examinations of phones and social media accounts”, and the questioning took place without the presence of lawyers.

Egypt's most prominent political prisoner, Alaa Abdel-Fattah, previously told AFP of the strict probation measures he had to observe during a short release between two spells in jail. Amnesty urged President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, a former army chief who took power in 2014 after leading the military overthrow of Islamist president Mohamed Morsi the year before, to “put an end to extrajudicial harassment”. Since taking office, Sisi has overseen a sweeping crackdown on dissent, with rights groups estimating that Egypt holds about 60,000 political prisoners.

“I don't want Egyptians to feel that there are human rights violations in Egypt,” Sisi said late Wednesday on a live call-in program on state TV. He noted that Egypt would open the “largest prison complex” in the country within a few weeks, following “the US model” of providing “humane” care to detainees. Earlier this week, Sisi launched a “national strategy” for human rights while taking aim at international rights groups, accusing them of being unaware of the full spectrum of “challenges facing the country”. —AFP

International

End of 'Merkron': EU's power couple prepares to bow out

'Despite their big differences, their cooperation has worked well'

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron hosts Angela Merkel in Paris for the last time before the German chancellor stands down, which will spell the end of a partnership at the heart of the European Union for the last four years. Merkel is to relinquish power after German elections on September 26, bringing an end to her 16 years in office that has seen her work with four different French leaders starting with Jacques Chirac. Macron, 24 years her junior, has never hidden his admiration for Merkel's longevity, but his sometimes abrasive style and pro-European activism has contrasted with the more cautious approach of his German partner.

In 2019, during a rough patch in ties, Merkel admitted the pair "wrestle with each other" and had "differences in mentality", leading Macron to declare that he believed in "productive confrontation". "They have very different styles," said Alexandre Robinet-Borgomano, an expert on Germany at the French think-tank the Montaigne Institute. "The chancellor is someone who takes her time, is always looking for compromises, whereas the president is a disruptor, who is prepared to make bold statements about problems he feels are being ignored," he said. But in the view of many EU watchers, the two have managed to bridge their gap in age and temperament, forming an ultimately effective version of the fabled "Franco-German" locomotive that drives the 27-nation European Union. "Despite their big differences, their cooperation has worked well," Pawel Tokarski from the German Institute for International and Security Affairs in Berlin told AFP.

Wrangling

During their time together, the "Merkron" tandem managed historic crises from Britain's departure from the European Union, Donald Trump's norm-shredding US presidency, to the COVID-19 pandemic. There were differences and friction along the way—over EU economic policy, Russian gas, Brexit and arms sales—which were thrashed out in

'One of us': Merkel hometown a refuge from wild world

TEMPLIN, Germany: There's a place just 90 minutes' drive from Berlin where Angela Merkel can escape the crucible of her office, see the people who've known her longest and let her hair down. The picturesque town of Templin, population 16,000, is celebrating its 750th birthday this year, one year late due to the coronavirus pandemic. Set in the verdant Uckermark, dotted with glistening lakes hidden in lush pine forests, it's where Merkel grew up and has served as a sanctuary that helped sustain her in 16 crisis-racked years in power.

Macron chose one recent late summer day, just weeks before she retires from political life, to pay tribute to her hometown. "Despite all the state surveillance and the lack of freedom we had," she said, referring to the authoritarian regime of the former GDR. "I have many fond memories of my childhood and my youth here in Templin. "This is where I come from, this is where my roots are and they will always be here," she said to applause from a crowd of about 100 that gathered to welcome her. Merkel was actually born in the bustling port city of Hamburg in 1954 but her pastor father moved the family to communist East Germany when she was still a baby before settling in Templin when she was three. Three years later, the Stalinist state would close the borders and build the Berlin



A combination picture show (from left) German Chancellor Angela Merkel gives a press conference during the handover of this year's final report of the National Standards Control Council and (right) French President Emmanuel Macron delivers a speech during a meeting of the 'U2P', French local businesses union, in Paris. —AFP

regular phone calls and meetings, often ahead of EU summits. "They are very different, but they both have a methodical character and a way of working that is not that far removed, which has created confidence," Europe Minister Clement Beaune, who has witnessed the pair up close since 2017, told AFP. Along with behind-the-scenes wrangling, they also shared moments of genuine public affection, including at the 2018 ceremony to mark 100 years since the armistice that ended World War I, where they held each other in a symbolic embrace. Their last dinner at the Elysee Palace in Paris will likely see them turn their attention to the diplomatic and humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, as well as pressing EU issues such as rising tensions with Poland.

EU success

All Franco-German partnerships in Europe are judged by the stan-

Wall to try to stop a mass exodus of its citizens.

Never really left

Her father, Horst Kasner, ran a Lutheran theological seminary aimed at addressing a chronic lack of clergy in a regime that was officially hostile to religion. Her mother, Herlind, an English instructor, ran up against restrictions on teaching the "language of the enemy" and became a homemaker for the children: Angela, the eldest, Marcus born in 1957 and Irene, seven years younger. They lived in a sprawling house painted green and yellow on the edge of a wood, while running a home for the disabled next door. Both are still standing.

Although she eventually headed off to university, the future chancellor never really broke ties with Templin, returning to visit her family and eventually buying her own modest holiday home nearby. Both her parents, with whom she had a close relationship, are now buried here. On a radiant September afternoon in Templin, which is still ringed by an intact medieval city wall, Merkel inaugurated a new daycare center and planted a lime tree in the local "citizens' garden". The event resembled any other good-natured small town ceremony, with its touch-too-long official speeches and homegrown entertainment.

Patently, music lover Merkel listened to a young girl who did her best to play a passage from Beethoven's 9th Symphony on the accordion. "She's one of us. When she's here, she's completely natural, like us," said local Manuel Wichmann on the town square lined with restored pastel-coloured buildings. Although he said he does not vote for Merkel's conservative CDU party, the 46-year-old teacher values the economic and social stability he said she helped maintain in Germany. —AFP

dards of their illustrious forerunners, from Charles de Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer in the post-war era to Francois Mitterrand and Helmut Kohl in the 1980s. The most significant moment in the Macron-Merkel era came at a grueling EU summit in July last year when the bloc agreed for the first time to borrow money collectively—a major step that Germany had long resisted. Recognizing the damage wrought by COVID-19 on the EU economy, Merkel and Macron were the architects of a deal that will see the EU raise 800 billion euros (\$950 billion) to be spent around the bloc on infrastructure and new technology. After years of frustration in Paris at Merkel either dragging her feet or watering down Macron's proposals for the EU, French officials were jubilant that the pair had succeeded in advancing further than most observers thought possible. "It was the big European moment of the start of this century," commented Robinet-Borgomano. —AFP

Egypt, Sudan back resumed Nile dam talks as UN urges deal

CAIRO, Egypt: Egypt and Sudan have expressed readiness to resume talks with Ethiopia on its controversial Nile dam after the UN Security Council urged the three governments to swiftly reach a binding deal. The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, set to be Africa's largest hydroelectric project when completed, has sparked an almost decade-long diplomatic stand-off between Ethiopia and downstream nations Egypt and Sudan. On Wednesday, the UN Security Council adopted a statement encouraging the three countries to resume negotiations under the auspices of the African Union to swiftly conclude a binding deal.

The Egyptian foreign ministry welcomed the Security Council statement as an "important impetus" for success in renewed talks. Sudan backed the resumption of AU-led talks during a Wednesday visit by a delegation from the Democratic Republic of Congo, the current AU chair. The Sudanese foreign ministry said it wanted changes to the "ineffective method that has characterized previous rounds of negotiation." The DRC delegation, headed by Foreign Minister Christophe Lutundula, is also visiting Egypt and Ethiopia on a tour dedicated to resolving the long-running dispute. —AFP

International

Biden backs top general on calls to China over Trump mental state

Milley holds on to job despite pressure from Republicans

WASHINGTON: Top US General Mark Milley held onto his job Wednesday after President Joe Biden rejected pressure to fire him for alleged “secret” phone calls to China amid concerns about then-president Donald Trump’s mental state. “I have great confidence in General Milley,” Biden said. Republicans demanded Biden dismiss Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, accusing him of undermining civilian control of the military in the calls to his Beijing counterpart last October and January, as Trump refused to accept his election loss.

Milley insisted his calls to Chinese General Li Zuocheng, revealed Tuesday in excerpts from a new book by Washington Post investigative reporters Bob Woodward and Robert Costa, were a normal part of his duties. “His calls with the Chinese and others in October and January were in keeping with these duties and responsibilities conveying reassurance in order to maintain strategic stability,” Joint Chiefs spokesman Colonel Dave Butler said. The book, “Peril,” also says that on January 8, two days after Trump supporters ransacked the US Capitol building, Milley told his staff that if a “rogue” Trump ordered a nuclear strike, that he would have to confirm it before it was carried out. That, too, was normal procedure, Butler insisted.

Army Ranger

It was the four-star general’s latest brush with career death, after repeatedly getting caught up in Trump’s political machinations following his appointment as Joint Chiefs chairman in September 2019. A Princeton and Columbia history scholar, Milley, 63, has spent 41 years in the US Army, first as a Ranger and Green Beret, with four tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. As army chief of staff during 2015–2019, he said his goal was

readying the force for the next conflict. After decades of fighting insurgencies, he said, the military had lost its “muscle memory” for land war, which Milley warned could erupt with North Korea. “Today, a major in the Army knows nothing but fighting terrorists and guerrillas, because he came into the Army after 9/11,” Milley told *The New York Times* in 2016.

Trump and politics

But becoming Joint Chiefs chairman quickly sucked Milley into the chaotic world of Trump politics. Trump had already used the military for his political ends, diverting billions of dollars of Pentagon funding to build an anti-migrant wall on the US Southwest border.

But it was too much when, in the summer of 2020 after Black Lives Matter protests spread across the country, Trump wanted Milley to mobilize troops to confront them. According to *The Wall Street Journal*’s Michael Bender, the two had a shouting match over the issue in the White House Situation Room. Milley then pushed back in June 2020, when Trump lured him and then-defense secretary Mark Esper unknowingly to walk at his side through Lafayette Square in front of the White House in a show of power against peaceful protesters there.

The scene made it appear like the defense chiefs were taking Trump’s side in politics. “I should not have been there,” Milley said shortly afterwards, miffing Trump. Milley further disagreed with Trump’s objections to permitting transgender people in the military, and to confronting racism and political extremism in the ranks.

Afghanistan pullout

He also reportedly disagreed with Trump’s pressure last year for a



WASHINGTON: In this file photo taken on February 04, 2020, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Army General Mark Milley (left) chats with US President Donald Trump after he delivered the State of the Union address at the US Capitol in Washington, DC. —AFP

rapid withdrawal of all troops from Afghanistan. According to the Woodward-Costa book, just after his election loss Trump had two aides draw up a secret order to have all troops out by January 15. Milley was stunned to find out about the order, discovering that no other senior officials knew about it either. He stormed over to the White House. —AFP

Putin’s unpopular party slated for election win

MOSCOW: When polls open today in Russia’s parliamentary elections, few voters would bet against an easy win for the ruling United Russia party, even though it is more unpopular now than ever before. The party was founded by President Vladimir Putin after he came to power in 2000, with the aim of translating his personal appeal into a dominant parliamentary force. But after benefitting from the economic boom in Putin’s early years, it has become a target for Russians’ grievances and is now polling at under 30 percent.

“Everything that is unpopular is associated with United Russia,” said independent political analyst Valery Solovey. Still, it is expected to win.

During a lackluster campaign, the authorities with nearly unlimited resources have gone to lengths to clear obstacles from United Russia’s path to victory. The methods serve a key Kremlin goal, said political scientist Ekaterina Schulmann: “How to make a parliamentary majority out of an electoral minority.”

The authorities in January jailed Alexei Navalny, the Kremlin’s loudest critic who dubbed United Russia “the party of crooks and thieves,” and then dismantled his political offices nationwide. They have also set out to block access online to Navalny’s “Smart Voting” platform, which instructs supporters on which candidates to back to oust United Russia deputies and other Kremlin allies. With many of Navalny’s allies in exile following a crackdown, there will be fewer checks on the Kremlin party’s performance over the three-day electronic vote with limited monitoring. —AFP

Mystery still surrounds death of UN chief after 60 years

PARIS: The mystery of how the hugely courageous UN secretary general Dag Hammarskjöld died 60 years ago has only thickened since his plane crashed in the African bush, killing all on board. Was the Swede, who was posthumously awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, murdered by rebels and mercenaries working in cahoots with Western intelligence agencies and mining companies, or was pilot error to blame?

A long-running investigation by the British newspaper *The Observer* found that London and Washington had much to answer for. And an award-winning 2019 documentary “Cold Case Hammarskjöld” pointed the finger at a Belgian mercenary pilot with links to British intelligence.

Tensions in Congo

The tragedy happened on the night of September 17–18, 1961 as the UN’s DC-6 *Albertina* aircraft took Hammarskjöld and his team to Ndola in what was then the British colony of Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia). He was headed there to negotiate a ceasefire with Moïse Tshombe, leader of the secessionist Katanga state that was seeking to break from the former Belgian Congo after independence that June.

The Cold War was at its height and the dashing and dynamic Hammarskjöld, the youngest person ever to lead the UN, was determined to defend the international body’s independence from Washington and Moscow as well as the old colonial powers. The trip was being closely monitored by the big powers all of whom had an eye on Katanga’s vast mineral riches of copper, cobalt and uranium. Mining consortiums fearing



KINSHASA, DR Congo: In this file photo taken on September 13, 1961 Secretary-General of the United Nations Dag Hammarskjöld (third left) arrives in then Leopoldville (today Kinshasa), welcome by General Joseph Mobutu (left) and Premier Cyrille Adoula (second left), as part of a peace mission in the region. —AFP

Congo’s independence were bankrolling Tshombe’s government which was also backed by Belgian colonists and European mercenaries.

Human error?

Hammarskjöld’s aircraft never arrived at its destination. At dawn calls to neighbouring airports all came back with the same answer: no radio contact had been made with the missing plane. After several hours searching, the debris of the *Albertina* along with 16 bodies, including Hammarskjöld and one sole survivor, were found in a forest about 12 km (7.5 miles) from Ndola airport. Sergeant Harold Julian, an American serving as a UN security officer, was in a critical condition and he died days later, but he said there had been a strong explosion on board, followed by smaller blasts. Rumors of sabotage were quickly denied and the initial investigations pointed to a pilot error as the cause. —AFP

International

French forces kill IS Sahel jihadist leader wanted by US

Sahrawi was 'neutralized' by France's Barkhane force

PARIS: France said yesterday its troops deployed in the Sahel region of Africa had killed the head of Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) extremist group who was wanted for deadly attacks on US soldiers and foreign aid workers. Adnan Abu Walid Al-Sahrawi formed ISGS in 2015 after splitting with Al-Qaeda linked jihadists and pledging allegiance to the Islamic State (IS) group, which at that time controlled swathes of Iraq and Syria.

Sahrawi was "neutralized by French forces," President Emmanuel Macron tweeted early yesterday. "This is another major success in our fight against terrorist groups in the Sahel," Macron said. Defense Minister Florence Parly said Sahrawi died following a strike by France's Barkhane force, which battles jihadists across the arid expanses in the Sahel region of Western Africa.

"It is a decisive blow against this terrorist group," she tweeted. "The attack was carried out a few weeks ago, and today we are certain that it was the Number One of ISGS," Parly told RFI radio later yesterday, without identifying where Sahrawi was killed. Sahrawi was "the one we were looking for, since he was the uncontested, authoritarian leader with no rival" within the jihadist group, she said.

"When you take out a key link in the chain, you disrupt and weaken these terrorist groups," she said, adding that the second- and third-in-command of ISGS had been "neutralized" over the spring and summer.

String of killings

Sahrawi was behind the killing of French aid workers in 2020

and was also wanted by the United States over a deadly 2017 attack on US troops in Niger. The group is also blamed for most of the jihadist attacks in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. The flashpoint "tri-border" area is frequently targeted by ISGS and the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (GSIM) with deadly attacks against civilians and soldiers.

The United States had offered a \$5 million reward for information on the whereabouts of Sahrawi, who was wanted over an October 4, 2017, attack in Niger that killed four US Special Forces and four Niger soldiers.

On August 9, 2020, in Niger, the ISGS head personally ordered the killing of six French aid workers and their Niger guides and drivers. In late 2019, the group carried out a series of large-scale attacks against military bases in Mali and Niger. A former member of Western Sahara's Polisario Front independence movement, Sahrawi joined Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and had also co-led Mujao, a Malian Islamist group responsible for kidnapping Spanish aid workers in Algeria and a group of Algerian diplomats in Mali in 2012.

The French military has killed several high-ranking members of ISGS under its strategy of targeting jihadist leaders since the start of its military intervention in Mali in 2013. In June this year, Macron announced a major scaleback in France's anti-jihadist Barkhane force in the Sahel after more than eight years of military presence in the vast region to refocus on counter-terrorism operations and supporting local forces. "The nation is thinking this evening of all its heroes who died for France in the Sahel in the



PARIS: (Left to right) French Defense Minister Florence Parly and head of the directorate general for external security (DGSE) Bernard Emié give a press conference, yesterday in Paris about the operation by French troops that led to the killing of the head of IS in the Greater Sahara. — AFP

Serval and Barkhane operations, of the bereaved families, of all its wounded," Macron added in another tweet after Sahrawi was killed. "Their sacrifice is not in vain. With our African, European and American partners, we will continue this fight." —AFP

Mexican city becomes 'prison' for migrants

TAPACHULA, Mexico City: Tens of thousands of US-bound migrants stranded in an overcrowded city in southern Mexico are desperate to escape what they say feels like a huge open-air prison. "It's horrible here. You're trapped with no way out," said Fanfant Filmonor, a Haitian who arrived in Tapachula two weeks ago from Brazil, where he spent three years until losing his job.

The migrants need permits so they can avoid being deported and continue their journey, but some have been waiting for months and despair is growing. Mexican authorities have arrested more than 147,000 undocumented migrants already this year—three times more than in the same period of 2020, according to the National Migration Institute. Migrants keep pouring over the border from Guatemala, particularly since US President Joe Biden took office with a promise of a more humane approach to immigration. But many reach a dead end in Tapachula, which rights activist Luis Garcia of the Center for Human Dignification called "the largest immigration prison in the Americas."

'I can't stay'

Filmonor has already traveled through



Migrants queue outside banks to collect money sent by relatives in the city of Tapachula in southern Mexico. —AFP

10 countries to reach Mexico and he is not ready to give up yet. "I can't stay here. I don't have a job or documents. They won't accept me here. No one will be able to stop me," the 30-year-old told AFP. He has a bus ticket to the northern city of Monterrey and plans to try to cross the border if he is not arrested along the way.

The police and military monitor the entrances and exits of Tapachula, located in the state of Chiapas, making it almost impossible for the undocumented foreigners to leave. Migrants crowd the city's main square, the money transfer offices where they collect funds sent by relatives, sidewalks or wherever they can find respite from the suffocating heat. Domingue Paul, a 40-year-old Haitian who arrived a month ago from Chile where he lived for five

years, said he hoped to join a sister living in the United States.

"But if I find a job, I'll stay here," he said. After a catastrophic earthquake killed around 200,000 people in their country in 2010, many Haitians were welcomed by South American nations.

However, finding work and renewing their residence permits became difficult for those migrants who are now chasing the American dream instead. Paul, his partner and two small children are surviving on money sent by his sister while he struggles to get an appointment with the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance. The organization is overwhelmed by a deluge of requests for documents. So far this year it has arranged about 77,559 permits for migrants, compared with 70,400 for all of 2019. —AFP

Nigeria probes claim air strike killed civilians

KANO: Nigeria's air force said yesterday it was investigating reports that civilians were 'erroneously killed' in air strikes on Boko Haram jihadists in northern Yobe state. Residents of Buhari village in Yunusari district near the border with Niger told AFP that 10 people were killed and at least 19 injured during air strikes on Wednesday.

The air force did not confirm or deny the alleged death toll. "Reports reaching (the) Nigerian Air Force Headquarters alleged that some civilians were erroneously killed while others were injured," spokesman Edward Gabkwet said in a statement. According to initial information, he said, the aircraft was "not carrying bombs". But "a board of inquiry has been set up to thoroughly investigate the circumstances of the incident," he said. Several residents said that three fighter jets flew over the village and one of them opened fire. "There was an air strike by a military jet on Buhari village yesterday which left some casualties," Alhaji Bukar Gaji, a local politician said.

"We buried 10 people... and 22 were taken to the general hospital in (nearby) Geidam town," resident Grema Zanna told AFP. Another resident, Masida Kyari, who gave a similar death toll said "three jets flew over the village and one of them opened fire." Nigeria has been fighting a 12-year-old jihadist insurrection in the northeast that has killed more than 40,000 people and displaced nearly two million from their homes. There have been at least two previous incidents of civilians killed in air strikes. Karim Modu, from an anti-jihadist militia in Geidam who was at the hospital on Wednesday, said he saw 19 people with serious injuries including "burns, fissures and fractures". Some with more serious injuries were transferred to a hospital in the state capital Damaturu. The air force said it had dispatched one aircraft to an area along the Nigeria/Niger border on Wednesday, "to respond to the suspected terrorist activities." —AFP

International

UK PM: Australia nuke sub deal will help peace in Indo-Pacific

Johnson seeks to play down Chinese fears

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson yesterday sought to play down Chinese fears that a deal to provide Australia with nuclear-powered US submarines threatened regional stability.

Johnson told parliament the move, part of a new defense alliance between Britain, Australia and the United States, was “not intended to be adversarial”. It “will help to safeguard the peace and security of the Indo-Pacific”, he said, adding that the deal reflected “the close relationship that we have with the United States and with Australia, the shared values that we have and the sheer level of trust”.

Britain in March unveiled plans to pivot its strategic focus towards Asia as part of the government’s Integrated Review of foreign and defense policy. The move follows the country’s full departure from the European Union in January this year, and its efforts to forge closer trade ties with Asian countries. Johnson acknowledged that the region was becoming “the geo-political center of the world”. “If there was ever any question about Global Britain’s tilt towards the Indo-Pacific... then this partnership with Australia and the US provides the answer,” he said.

“It amounts to a new pillar of our strategy, demonstrating Britain’s generational commitment to the security of the Indo-Pacific and showing exactly how we can help one of our oldest friends promote regional stability.”

Johnson, his Australian counterpart Scott Morrison and US President Joe Biden announced the new defence pact—AUKUS—on Wednesday evening. It has been seen as a demonstration of Western concern about China’s growing influence in the region, and the

pace and size of its military expansion.

‘Cold War mentality’

The president of the Beijing-based Center for China and Globalization think-tank, Henry Wang, told BBC radio the new defense alliance was “part of a Cold War mentality”. “I think there’s a question over the purpose of setting up such an alliance in peacetime in the 21st century,” he added. Diplomatic ties between London and Beijing have been strained, notably over concerns about an authoritarian crackdown in Britain’s former colony of Hong Kong.

This week, China’s ambassador to London was banned from speaking to pro-Beijing lawmakers at parliament, after China sanctioned critical British MPs. China has also been angered at British criticism of alleged human rights abuses against Uyghur Muslims in the Xinjiang region.

France called Australia’s move to secure nuclear-powered subs from the United States “a stab in the back” after it abandoned a contract for diesel-powered subs. British Defense Secretary Ben Wallace said London was not out to “antagonize the French” but accepted their frustration.

Wallace told the BBC television: “I understand France’s disappointment... the Australians have taken this decision that they want to make a change. “We didn’t go fishing for that but as a close ally, when the Australians approached us, of course we would consider it. I understand France’s frustration about it.”

Wallace told Sky News separately France remained one of



LONDON: A video grab from footage broadcast by the UK Parliament’s Parliamentary Recording Unit (PRU) shows Britain’s Prime Minister Boris Johnson giving a statement on new defense pact in the House of Commons in London yesterday. —AFP

Britain’s closest military allies, adding: “We have no intention of doing anything to antagonize the French.” “It’s right that the UK, alongside other allies such as Australia stand up for the rules-based system and international law,” he told the BBC. —AFP

Police arrest four over foiled German synagogue attack

BERLIN: German police said yesterday they had arrested four suspects over a foiled attack on a synagogue on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish year. The case revived memories of an attack two years ago outside a synagogue in the eastern German city of Halle, when a neo-Nazi gunman sought to storm the Jewish temple while worshippers were inside marking Yom Kippur.

There was a huge police deployment late Wednesday at the synagogue in the western city of Hagen, which was forced to cancel an event over the threat. “There was a danger of an attack on the synagogue in Hagen,” said Herbert Reul, the interior minister for the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, adding that police forces “likely prevented it”. Investigators were searching sites in the city, said police on Twitter, adding that a 16-year-old Hagen resident figured among four people arrested.

Both Spiegel weekly and Bild daily had reported without quoting sources that a foreign intelligence service had passed on a tip that a 16-year-old Syrian was planning an explosives attack on a synagogue. In the 2019 attack, a bolted door at the synagogue was the only thing that prevented the assailant from carrying out the blood-bath. After failing to gain entry, he shot dead a female passer-by and a man at a kebab shop.

The gunman, Stephan Balliet, was sentenced to life in prison in 2020 over the assault that nearly became the country’s worst anti-Semitic atrocity since World War II. —AFP

Canada’s tight election heads into final stretch

RUSSELL, Canada: Tensions are mounting four days ahead of Canada’s legislative elections as Liberal Prime Minister Justin Trudeau called on citizens to “vote strategically” to block a Conservative surge as he faces a potential defeat at the hands of rookie Tory leader Erin O’Toole. According to polls, the two major parties that have ruled Canada since its 1867 confederation are in a statistical dead heat, each garnering the support of 32 percent of respondents, while the leftist New Democratic Party trails far behind.

If the numbers hold, Canada could see a repeat of the 2019 general election in which Trudeau’s once-mighty juggernaut party was reduced to a minority government. “The fight is escalating between the two political parties,” pollster Jean-Marc Leger told AFP.

And as none of the party leaders “seem to have made an impression on voters, it looks like it will be a vote by elimination rather than a vote based on convictions,” he said. When Trudeau pulled the plug on his government at the beginning of August in order to force snap elections, he was riding high in the polls. Canadians were strongly supportive of his pandemic response, which saw hundreds of billions of dollars doled out to support workers and businesses through the crisis. And the nation’s COVID vaccine rollout was going well, despite initial missteps.

‘Taking Canada back’

It seemed a good time to try to regain a majority in a third term. Trudeau remains Canadians’ top choice for prime minister, but scandals and ethics lapses have tarnished his golden boy image, while his administration is showing signs of wear after six years in office. Calling an election just as the nation emerges from the pandemic has also riled many voters, which opposition leaders have picked up on to smear Trudeau. “There are more people who have a poor opinion of Justin Trudeau today than there were before the campaign,” said Leger.

Looking to break the deadlock, Trudeau has made a last-ditch appeal



RUSSELL, Canada: Canada’s Conservative Party Leader Erin O’Toole (right) shows the party’s platform to a supporter during a campaign stop in Russell, Ontario. —FP

to voters who are considering supporting the New Democratic Party and its leader, Jagmeet Singh, to instead vote Liberal in order to avoid splitting progressives and giving rise to a Tory government. “We are the only ones positioned to stop Erin O’Toole and the Conservatives from taking Canada back,” Trudeau said at a whistlestop in the Atlantic port city of Halifax on Wednesday. He assailed the Tories over their rejection of mandatory vaccines, and on their proposed climate plan, which Trudeau said is far less ambitious than his own. Singh, meanwhile, berated Trudeau for pushing strategic voting, saying “Mr. Trudeau has shown again and again that he is not the progressive option.”

“Don’t be afraid” to vote your conscience, he told Canadians, while challenging Trudeau’s climate record by noting that Canada is the only G7 nation to see its carbon emissions rise over the past six years. Campaigning in vote-rich Quebec province, O’Toole held back no punches on Wednesday. —AFP

International

Friday, September 17, 2021

Duterte will not cooperate with ICC drug war probe

ICC authorizes a full-blown probe into Philippines president's narcotics campaign

MANILA: President Rodrigo Duterte will not cooperate with the International Criminal Court's probe into the Philippines' drug war, his lawyer said yesterday, after its judges found the crackdown could be a crime against humanity. ICC judges authorized Wednesday a full-blown investigation into Duterte's anti-narcotics campaign, which rights groups estimate has killed tens of thousands of people, saying it resembled an illegitimate and systematic attack on civilians.

Duterte "will not cooperate since first of all, the Philippines has left the Rome Statute, so the ICC no longer has jurisdiction over the country", chief presidential legal counsel Salvador Panelo told local radio DZBB.

"The government will not let in any ICC member to collect information and evidence here in the Philippines. They will be barred entry." Duterte pulled Manila out of the Hague-based court after it launched a preliminary probe, but the ICC said it had jurisdiction over crimes committed while the Philippines was still a member.

Rights groups, lawyers and relatives of people killed in the drug war welcomed the ICC decision.

"I'm glad because this might be a way for us to get justice for the deaths of our loved ones," said Corazon Enriquez, who blames Duterte for the killing of her son during a police raid on their home in 2016. "That's what we're hoping for-for that person responsible for the deaths of our children and family members to pay."

Edre Olalia, the president of the National Union of Peoples' Lawyers, said the organization hoped this was "the beginning of the end to impunity" while rights group Karapatan said: "Duterte

and his cohorts should be made accountable for these crimes."

'We have hope'

Duterte was elected in 2016 on a campaign promise to get rid of the Philippines' drug problem, openly ordering police to kill drug suspects if officers' lives were in danger. At least 6,181 people have died in more than 200,000 anti-drug operations conducted since July 2016, according to the latest official data released by the Philippines.

ICC prosecutors in court papers estimate the figure to be between 12,000 and 30,000 dead.

Duterte has repeatedly attacked the world's only permanent war crimes court and vowed not to cooperate with its probe. Presidential spokesman Harry Roque said yesterday Duterte had "no reaction" to the ICC announcement.

"From the start he has said he will die first before he will face foreign judges," Roque told reporters.

"If there are complaints, they have to be adjudged in the Philippines because our courts are functioning, and the ICC court has no jurisdiction." But the country's top judges disagreed, ruling earlier this year that the ICC can prosecute "government actors" for alleged crimes committed before the nation withdrew from the tribunal. The ICC said there was a "reasonable basis" to believe that the crime against humanity of murder had been committed in the crackdown. Its investigation will also cover alleged extra-judicial killings in the southern Davao region between 2011 and 2016, when Duterte was mayor. "If he's guilty, he should be held accountable," said Santos Reario, a barber in the capital Manila.



MANILA: Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte speaks to members of Inter-Agency Task Force.—AFP

"Maybe that's why he's planning to run for vice president—to escape accountability."

Duterte, barred under the constitution from seeking a second term, declared last month he will run for the country's second-highest office next year. Critics said the move was partly driven by fear of criminal charges, though there is debate over whether the vice president enjoys legal immunity.

Police chief Guillermo Eleazar vowed yesterday to continue the "aggressive campaign against illegal drugs", which he said had contributed to a 64 percent drop in "index crime", including robbery and murder, in the past five years.—AFP

South Korea: New kid on the SLBM block

SEOUL: Missile test headlines on the Korean peninsula are almost invariably about the nuclear-armed North, but this week the South fired a submarine-launched ballistic missile of its own as it rapidly scales up its military capabilities.

The successful test puts the South among the elite flotilla of nations with proven SLBM technology, and Seoul is on a multi-billion-dollar drive to develop its defense forces. On the other side of the Demilitarized Zone that splits the peninsula, the North maintains the world's largest standing army and has made rapid progress in its nuclear weapon and ballistic missile programs, earning it multiple international sanctions.

But Seoul's SLBMs shift the strategic balance, enabling it to respond with a surprise second strike even if its land-based forces were destroyed in a conflict. Wednesday's launch took place from the Ahn Chang-ho, a new 3,000-ton missile submarine named after an independence campaigner. Afterwards President Moon Jae-in—who has long pursued engagement with Pyongyang to bring it to the negotiating table—told the vessel's commander: "Activist Ahn Chang-ho remarked in 1921 that 'The only thing we can trust and wish for is our strength'."

South Korea maintains a conscript army to defend it against the North, which invaded in 1950, and this month unveiled a blueprint to raise its defense budget to 70 trillion won (\$60 billion) by 2026, with a focus on developing "cutting-edge advanced technologies". It is adding more Aegis-class destroyers to its navy and building more SLBM submarines, as well as replacing ageing F-4 and F-5 jets with indigenously-de-



TOKYO: Pedestrians walk past a screen displaying a map explaining North Korea's missile launch from the land of the country toward the Sea of Japan during a news broadcast at Akihabara district in Tokyo yesterday.—AFP

signed KF-21 fighters.

The state Agency for Defense Development (ADD) also unveiled a supersonic cruise missile on Wednesday and said it was pursuing a high-powered ballistic missile able to deliver a significantly heavier warhead.

And in July it successfully tested what it called a solid-fuel engine for space rockets, designed to put small satellites into low Earth orbit. Space rockets and military missiles use similar engine technology—a correlation previously exploited by the North when it carried out what it said were satellite launches and others called disguised missile tests. Solid-fuelled missiles are more mobile and quicker to deploy than liquid-fuelled ones.—AFP

UN Council 'concerned' about 'major threat' from N Korea missiles

PARIS: The UN Security Council on Wednesday gathered behind closed doors for an emergency meeting about North Korea's latest ballistic missile test which member states consider a "major threat," the French ambassador said.

In the past, such meetings—this one called by Estonia and France—have often resulted in a joint statement by European members of the Security Council. But France's ambassador to the UN, Nicolas de Riviere, said there was consensus among the group. "We all condemned what happened, the tests," he said. "Everyone is very concerned about this situation," de Riviere told several journalists after the 45-minute meeting.

"This is a major threat to peace and security, it's a clear violation of the Council's resolutions," he added, saying that the missiles had fallen "within Japan's exclusive economic zone." "Of course we need a political dialogue, a political solution, but the precondition is compliance (by) the DPRK with UN Security Council resolutions," de Riviere said, using an acronym for North Korea. "It's a threat to the non-proliferation regime, it's a threat to the world, it's a threat to the neighbors of DPRK: South Korea, Japan," he said. He added that no joint draft statement was expected to come from the Security Council.—AFP

International

Shallow earthquake hits China's Sichuan, three killed, dozens hurt

Tremor triggers second-highest level of emergency response by rescuers

BEIJING: Three people were killed and dozens injured when a shallow earthquake struck southwestern China yesterday, triggering the second-highest level of emergency response by rescuers in Sichuan province.

The quake struck Luxian county before dawn yesterday around 120 kilometers southwest of the sprawling megacity of Chongqing, which along with its surrounding area is home to around 30 million people. Rescue workers rushed to lift people from beneath rubble, moving them out of damaged buildings on stretchers, footage from the Sichuan Fire Brigade showed. Over a thousand houses in Luxian were reduced to rubble and nearly 30,000 others were damaged, Sichuan authorities said.

Local media published images of collapsed ceilings in a hospital as residents milled around in the streets after warnings not to return indoors. The US Geological Survey put the magnitude of the quake at 5.4 but the China Earthquake Networks Centre measured it at magnitude 6.0. Both put it at a shallow depth of 10 kilometers (six miles).

Sichuan authorities said the seismic event left "three dead, three seriously injured and 85 slightly injured". At least 10,000 people have been moved into emergency shelters, according to the county government. Footage from Luxian by state broadcaster CCTV showed workers climbing up ladders in pouring rain to remove hazardous debris hanging off buildings, including half-broken panes of glass.

Students had evacuated their dormitories in the dark earlier yesterday while clutching umbrellas and wearing backpacks, in

another video from the Sichuan Daily.

Power cuts

Authorities downplayed the immediate threat of a larger aftershock. "It is unlikely there will be a larger earthquake in the area in the near future, but aftershocks will continue for some time," Du Bin, deputy chief of the Sichuan Earthquake Administration, told reporters. State-run CGTN shared security camera footage showing TVs and refrigerators shaking on the walls of houses as the quake struck, as ornaments smashed onto floors and cracks ran through buildings.

Bricks were strewn across roads and trees felled in some areas, the images showed. Multiple electricity lines were disrupted and 62,000 households were hit by power cuts after the earthquake, the local government in Sichuan said in a Weibo post. Traffic on highways passing through the area has been rerouted to make way for emergency vehicles and to avoid damaged roads, the local government said.

China is regularly hit by earthquakes, especially in its mountainous western and southwestern regions.

A powerful 7.9-magnitude quake in Sichuan province in 2008 left 87,000 people dead or missing. Among them were thousands of children, killed when poorly constructed school buildings collapsed, but the government failed to release an exact number of dead as the issue took on a political dimension.

Police detained activists who attempted to count the number of children who had died and mark the buildings that collapsed



LUZHOU, China: Residents look out from a tent set up for people displaced by a 5.4 earthquake that killed three and injured a dozen in Luzhou, in China's southwestern Sichuan province yesterday. —AFP

amid suspicions of poor construction. Yesterday's quake comes months after a series of strong earthquakes shook sparsely populated areas in northwest and southwest China in May, killing at least two people and injuring dozens. — AFP

Indonesia court finds president negligent over in landmark case

JAKARTA: In a landmark victory for Indonesian environment campaigners, a court yesterday ordered President Joko Widodo to clean up Jakarta's notorious air pollution, ruling that the leader and other top officials had been negligent in protecting citizens. The capital and its surroundings form a megacity of about 30 million people, which routinely ranks among the most polluted cities in the world.

Experts have warned for years about the threat posed by Jakarta's smog to the health of residents, especially children. A group of 32 activists and citizens impacted by pollution had filed the lawsuit two years ago, accusing Widodo, as well as his ministers for health, home and environment, and the governor of Jakarta, of negligence over the state of the city's environment. The officials were found to have "violated the law", presiding judge Saifuddin Zuhri of the Central Jakarta District Court said, ordering them to tighten environmental regulations and enforcement.

They asked the officials to especially crack down on the pollution generated by vehicles and the coal-fired power plants around Jakarta, including with sanctions for violations. The judges also told authorities to improve air monitoring systems and make pollution data public. The petitioners had not asked the court for any monetary compensation. Ayu Eza Tiara, a lawyer for the plaintiffs, said that the defendants must accept their "defeat" and comply with the ruling.



JAKARTA: This aerial photo taken Wednesday shows motorists commuting on a road in Jakarta. —AFP

There was no immediate response from Widodo or the other officials found negligent by the court.

Outdoor air pollution causes an estimated 4.2 million premature deaths around the world, hitting poor and middle-income countries such as Indonesia hardest, according to the World Health Organization. Indonesian activists say standards have improved in recent years, but are far from what is needed. They have also warned that smog can make the effects of COVID-19 worse, in addition to aggravating asthma and other respiratory problems. Jakarta residents got some respite when pandemic restrictions reduced traffic, but air pollution has slowly returned. —AFP

Former women's empowerment minister to run for Japan PM

TOKYO: Japan's former women's empowerment minister Seiko Noda announced her last-minute run for leadership of the ruling party yesterday, the day before campaigning begins. The winner of the September 29 vote will become prime minister days later and lead the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) into a general election by late November. Noda, 61, has served as internal affairs minister as well as minister for gender equality and women's empowerment, and was at one time hailed as Japan's most likely first female prime minister. But she is seen as a long shot to win, and her late candidature indicates she may have struggled to gather the necessary support from fellow LDP lawmakers.

She joins vaccine chief Taro Kono, moderate Fumio Kishida and divisive right-winger Sanae Takaichi—another rare woman at the top of Japanese politics—in the race. Announcing her candidature at the LDP headquarters in Tokyo, the veteran lawmaker outlined her vision of a more inclusive Japan. "I want to create a conservative politics in which those who could not take centre stage before, such as women, children, the elderly and the disabled, can live comfortably in this society," she said. Noda highlighted her long experience despite her relative lack of political clout, saying she would give details of her manifesto on Friday. "The policies of each candidate are brilliant, but I can hardly find any policies that can encourage vulnerable people, which I have tackled as a politician," she said. "Although I don't have much power, I promise to work hard with my colleagues." — AFP



Seiko Noda

Friday Times

LIFESTYLE

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2021

www.kuwaittimes.net



**Al-Maqar palace...
one of Saudi Arabia's
wonderful tourist sites**

Page 20

A child pose by ice sculptures depicting people collecting water by charity Water Aid to show the fragility of water and the threat posed by climate change in London.—AFP



Al-Maqar palace in the Saudi Asir region is considered a tourist attraction.



Inside view of Al-Maqar palace.



Historic coins displayed inside Al-Maqar palace.

AL-MAQAR PALACE... one of Saudi Arabia's wonderful tourist sites

Al-Maqar palace in the Saudi Asir region is an architectural marvel, built at an altitude of 2,400 meters above sea level. The palace is considered one of the most beautiful tourist sites in Saudi Arabia due to its distinctive location and its architectural style, which is replete with Islamic decorations, columns,

domes, hanging gardens and heritage geometric shapes. Al-Maqar palace contains more than 18,000 artifacts dating back hundreds of years, which highlight the scientific role of the Islamic eras in the Arab Islamic civilization. — KUNA



Old manuscripts of the Holy Quran displayed inside Al-Maqar palace.



Ornaments of gold and silver from the Islamic heritage.



Seabirds starve in stormy 'washing machine' waves

Thousands of seabirds that wash up on Atlantic coasts every year could have been starved to death by cyclones that whip up "washing machine" waves, a new study says, with experts warning the phenomenon could worsen with climate change. Puffins, auks and guillemots—hardy little birds that nest in the Arctic-head south each year to more hospitable but isolated islands off Newfoundland, Iceland or Norway. But many are found washed up on beaches in mass die-offs that scientists now think are caused by violent winter cyclones that prevent them from feeding.

"Imagine winds blowing at 120 kilometers per hour (75 mph), waves 8 meters high (26 ft) and turbulence in the water that disturbs plankton and schools of fish the birds feed on," said David Gremillet of the French CNRS research institute, which coordinated the study published Tuesday in *Current Biology*. "They're caught in a big washing machine," he told AFP. Unable to fly clear of the storms, some of which last days, the birds likely cannot dive into the sea to feed or are perhaps unable to see their prey in the troubled waters. With small reserves of body fat, an auk can die if it goes 48 hours without eating. Gremillet said that scientists had suspected that storms were responsible for killing the birds. "But what we didn't know was where and how," he said.

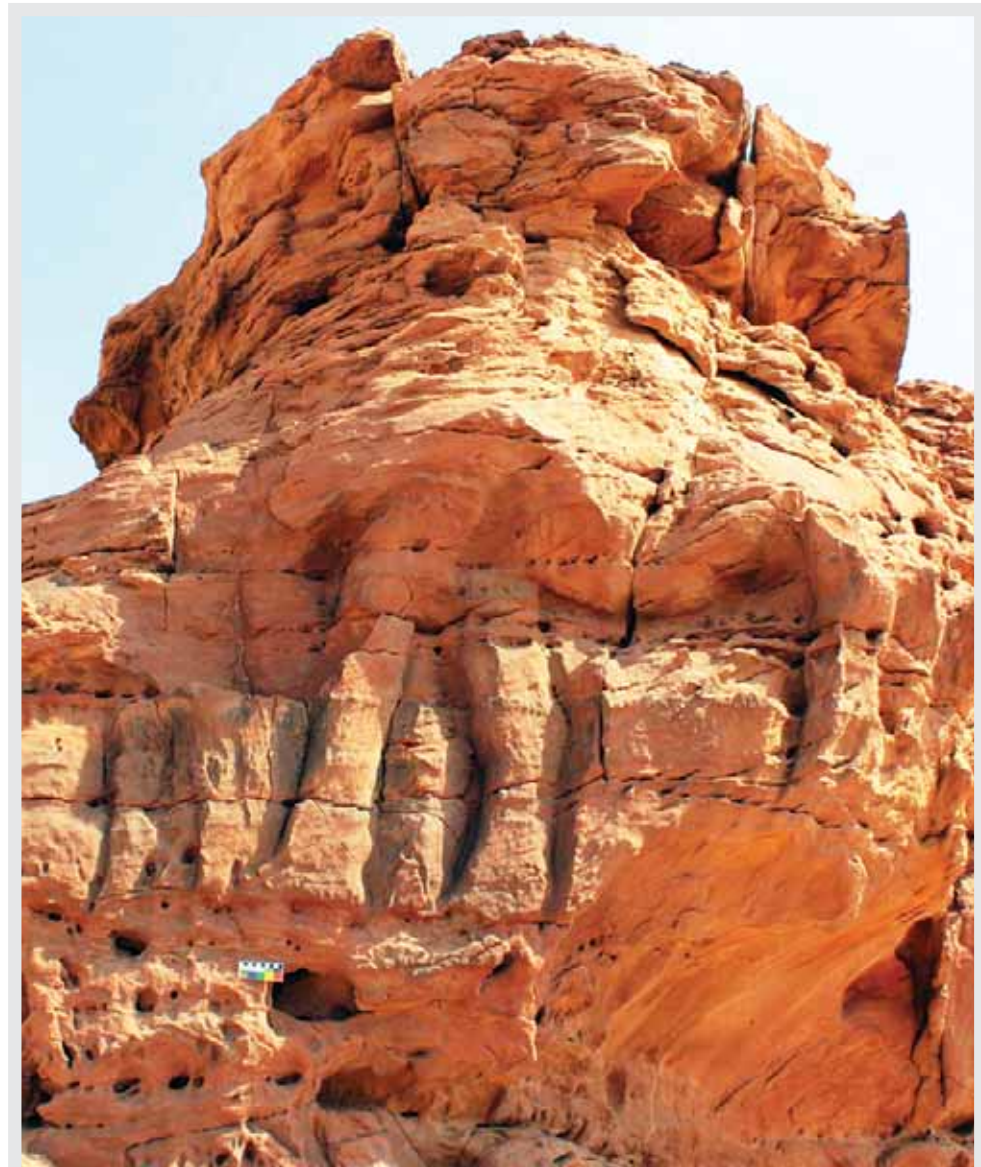
Emaciated

To find out, an international research team decided to track birds from 39 different colonies in the North Atlantic. Focusing on five species, they equipped more than

1,500 puffins, auks, seagulls and two types of guillemots with global location sensors. Clipped to the animals' feet at their various summer nesting sites, the sensors then tracked the birds' winter migration. By looking at about a decade's worth of bird movement data and comparing it to winter weather patterns scientists were able to determine where the birds ran into cyclones. They used models to estimate how much energy the birds were using to fly through the storms and ruled out cold or exhaustion as the killers.

So Gremillet said the most likely explanation remains "that the weather conditions are so horrible that the birds are not able to feed". When tens of thousands of dead puffins and guillemots washed up on French shores in 2014, their bodies were particularly emaciated, said the study's main author Manon Clairbaux of the University of Montpellier. Worldwide populations of these birds have declined by half since the 1970s due to habitat loss, pollution, competition with fishermen and accidental capture among the main threats. And Gremillet said that cyclones, which are expected to increase in "frequency and intensity" with climate change, could become a bigger threat.

Though little can be done to prevent the killer storms, experts say mapping them allows conservationists to push for added protection—like reduced commercial fishing—for habitats in their paths. "It's important to understand the dangers that threaten them," said Clairbaux. — AFP



Desert camel carvings dated to around 7,000 years ago

Life-sized carvings of camels and horses hewn into rock faces in Saudi Arabia could be around 7,000 years old, according to new research that suggests they are significantly older than previously thought. The 21 reliefs, which were only recently discovered, are heavily eroded and were initially estimated in 2018 to be some 2,000 years old based on similarities with artworks found in Petra in Jordan. But the new research by Saudi and European institutions used a variety of different methods, including analyzing tool marks and erosion patterns as well as x-ray technology, and suggests the reliefs are around 7,000 to 8,000 years old.

This would mean that the area of carvings, known as the Camel Site, "is likely home to the oldest surviving large-scale (naturalistic) animal reliefs in the world," the study said. In the era that it was created, the region would have looked very different to the arid landscape of today, with a savannah-like grassland dotted with lakes and trees, where wild camels roamed and were hunted. "We can now link the Camel Site to a period in prehistory when the pastoral populations of northern Arabia created rock art and built large stone structures called mustatils," the authors said in a press release issued by the Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History. — AFP



Clint Eastwood back in the saddle at 91 for 'Cry Macho'

At the age of 91, Clint Eastwood is not just directing but also climbing back in the saddle, and even throwing a punch for his new Western "Cry Macho." The legendary prolific Hollywood star has never shown much interest in retiring and appears on-screen in the movie, out Friday, as a former rodeo champion tasked with one last job. Mike Milo (Eastwood) must travel to Mexico and retrieve his former boss's son Rafo, teaching him to ride horses in the process. "This picture came along about 40 years ago," recalls Eastwood in the film's production notes.



In this file photo Director and actor Clint Eastwood attends the "Richard Jewell" world premiere gala screening during AFI FEST 2019 Presented By Audi at TCL Chinese Theatre. — AFP

"I'm too young for this part, why don't I direct it and we'll get Robert Mitchum?" he told a producer at the time. But with his career now well into its seventh decade, Eastwood decided to take on the role himself—to the delight of long-time collaborator and producer Tim Moore. "The thing that everybody loves to see is Clint in a cowboy hat and on a horse," Moore told the recent CinemaCon gathering in Las Vegas. "He hasn't been on a horse since 'Unforgiven,'" he said, referring to the 1992 Oscar-winning film. "The first day that we filmed the scene of him up on the horse, the crew were just all so excited. It was a special moment." Eastwood, a multiple Oscar-winner born in 1930, first came to global stardom as an actor in seminal Westerns "A Fistful of Dollars," "For a Few Dollars More" and "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly." His output as a director since 1971's "Play Misty for Me" has been prolific and diverse, and he has spoken in interviews of his desire to keep working as long as he finds projects that are "worth studying." While he did announce his retirement from acting after 2008's "Gran Torino," Eastwood returned in front of the camera four years later in "Trouble with the Curve," and again in 2018's "The Mule." —AFP

Elton John delays farewell tour after hip injury



Elton John

'Really alive': France unveils wrapped Arc de Triomphe

President Emmanuel Macron was set to unveil a strange and spectacular sight in Paris yesterday: the entire 50-metre-high Arc de Triomphe wrapped in fabric, fulfilling the long-held dream of late artist Christo. After weeks of preparation, the finishing touches are being put to the transformation of one of France's most iconic monuments ahead of its opening to the public this weekend. At a press conference earlier in the day, Culture Minister Roselyne Bachelot called it "a posthumous testament to an artistic genius" and "a wonderful gift to Parisians, to the French, and to all art-lovers."

The imposing war memorial has been wrapped in 25,000 square meters (270,000 square feet) of silver-blue recyclable polypropylene. It is the signature of Christo, the Bulgarian-born artist who died last year, who had dreamt of sheathing the monument since renting a nearby apartment in the 1960s. Despite completing other major public works during his lifetime, including wrapping the oldest bridge in Paris in 1985 and the German parliament in 1995, the Arc de Triomphe project never materialized before his death. The completion of his vision — and that of his co-designer and wife Jeanne-Claude — has been overseen by his nephew Vladimir Javacheff in coordination with the Pompidou museum and French authorities. "Christo always said the hardest part is get-

Elton John has postponed European and US dates of his "Farewell Yellow Brick Road" tour due to hip surgery, the singer announced yesterday. "At the end of my summer break I fell awkwardly on a hard surface and have been in considerable pain and discomfort in my hip ever since," the 74-year-old star said in a statement. "Despite intensive physio and specialist treatment, the pain has continued to get worse and is leading to increasing difficulties moving," he added. The 'rocket man's' long-running farewell tour began in 2018 but many of the original 300 dates were delayed due to the pandemic. His scheduled appearances for late 2021 have now been rescheduled for the following year.

John announced this month that he had completed an album, "The Lockdown

ting the permissions," Javacheff told reporters with a smile.

"When you realize that this is really alive, for me and for my team, when you realise this fragility, this beauty, it is quite amazing." Protective barriers will be removed on Saturday, allowing the public to get up close to the transformed monument. The wrapping will then stay in place until October 3. —AFP



A photograph shows the Arc de Triomphe, in Paris, wrapped in silver-blue fabric as it was designed by the late artist Christo. — AFP

Sessions", with collaborations including Gorillaz and Miley Cyrus, to be released in October. He said he will still perform on September 25 as part of the mammoth series of Global Citizen gigs happening around the world. "After this I will be having the operation to ensure the tour can get back on the road in January of 2022 in New Orleans," he said. "It breaks my heart to keep you waiting any longer. I completely feel your frustrations after the year we've had. I promise you this—the shows will return to the road next year and I will make sure they are more than worth the wait." Currently, John's last shows are scheduled for Auckland, New Zealand in early 2023. — AFP



White House offers Minaj phone call after viral vaccine claims

The White House has offered to arrange a phone call between Nicki Minaj and one of its doctors, multiple US outlets reported, after the rapper sparked widespread derision over claims a cousin's friend had become impotent after receiving a Covid-19 vaccine. Minaj on Wednesday claimed she had been invited to the White House in the wake of her viral tweets about an unnamed acquaintance in her native Trinidad and Tobago—an invitation she said she accepted.

But a White House official told multiple US outlets that Minaj had only been offered an educational phone call. "As we have with others, we offered a call with Nicki Minaj and one of our doctors to answer questions she has about the safety and effectiveness of the vaccine," the official said. The Grammy-nominated rapper sparked a media storm Monday when she said she had skipped New York's star-studded Met Gala this week due to its requirement that attendees be vaccinated, saying she would only get the jab once she had "done enough research." —AFP



This photo shows a room with musical instruments at the Afghanistan National Institute of Music in Kabul. — AFP photos



Photo shows Taleban fighters standing in a room where instruments are kept at the Afghanistan National Institute of Music in Kabul.

Afghan musicians mourn abandoned instruments after Taleban takeover

Viola player Bahar was practicing at her music college in the Afghan capital, when news broke that the Taleban had reached the city. Terrified of a return to the days when music was forbidden and women were banned from education, she and her classmates rushed home, abandoning their beloved instruments. “We all ran away. We saved ourselves, leaving the instruments at the institute,” Bahar tells AFP, using a false name to protect her identity for fear of reprisal. “I felt like I had lost a family member.” The Taleban, who banned music outright during their brutal and oppressive rule from 1996 to 2001, swept back into power on August 15.

They have promised a more moderate brand of rule this time though they have made clear that they will run Afghanistan within the restrictive limits of their interpretation of sharia law. After racing home from the Afghanistan National Institute of Music (ANIM), Bahar was devastated to learn that Taleban militants had occupied the campus, turning its classrooms into dormitories. “I feel like I am no longer living. Physically, I am alive, but the Taleban have taken away my soul,” she says, breaking down in tears.

Abandoned instruments

Bahar was introduced to the college when she was 12 years old, and she says the viola quickly became her “best friend”. “Music is food for the soul,” she says, adding that she has performed in India, Sweden, the United Kingdom and Azerbaijan. “I feel extremely peaceful when I play the viola, especially when we play together in the girls’ orchestra,” she adds.

During a visit by AFP to the college, no music can be heard in its corridors—all that can be heard is the chatter and squabbling of

Taleban soldiers. Armed guards cradle Kalashnikovs in the courtyard, shaded by trees with swirling treble clefs spray-painted on to their trunks. A mural depicting a burst of multi-coloured musical symbols stand out against the giant armored door and a nearby guard post. A Taleban guard shows AFP a



This photo shows a member of the Taleban showing a piano at the Afghanistan National Institute of Music in Kabul.

storeroom full of intact musical instruments that were left behind, after reports that everything had been trashed. The caretaker says the group’s leaders had ordered him to protect the instruments.

Trumpets, saxophones and flutes are stacked on shelves, opposite violins and violas in cases, while dozens of Afghan tabla drums occupy another storage unit. Propped up on a bespoke rack in the centre of the storeroom are about a dozen traditional instruments: Lute-like tambours and single-stringed

rubabs. Abandoned practice rooms are each furnished with a keyboard or piano. A workshop remains in the same state as when it was hurriedly vacated in mid-August—violins are lined up waiting for new strings, a cello lays mid-repair and tools are scattered around an electric keyboard.

He has performed with some of Afghanistan’s top music stars, but he now worries for his family’s safety. “It’s natural that if you were involved in music in Afghanistan you would be afraid. Sooner or later the Taleban will come after musicians,” says Awa, also using a pseudonym to protect his identity.



Photo shows a room to play piano at the Afghanistan National Institute of Music in Kabul.

A secret guitar

Speaking to AFP in Kabul, 28-year-old guitarist Awa says his room used to be stacked with musical instruments. But fearing the Taleban, he has now destroyed almost all traces of his musical career—except for one favorite guitar that he has hidden away. The Kabul University graduate and tutor at the ANIM has stopped posting to his YouTube channel where he used to upload lessons, and no longer replies to comments on his social media accounts.

“Since they arrived, life has been hell. We had big dreams, but now our ambitions don’t exist anymore.” ANIM’s founder Ahmad Sarmast, who now lives in Australia, says he fears for the future of Afghan music. Since the takeover, he has written to the Taleban’s leaders to plead for access to music—especially for children. “I hope they will allow us to continue to do our work for the best interests of the Afghan people,” he says. — AFP

Lifestyle | Feature



Vegetable gardens are seen on the roofs of vehicles of a taxi rental garage firm, whose cars are currently out of service due to the downturn in business as a result of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, in Bangkok. — AFP photos

Bangkok 'taxi graveyard' comes to life with mini-gardens

A mass graveyard for Bangkok's flamboyantly coloured cabs left idle and decaying by coronavirus curbs is coming to life with mini vegetable gardens and frog ponds set up to help feed out-of-work drivers. In an open-air parking lot in the west of the Thai capital, green shoots fed by monsoon rains sprout from the roofs and bonnets of row upon row of pink and orange taxis. Tiny green-brown frogs squat croaking in the tropical heat on makeshift ponds fashioned out of old tires, tucked in among the 200 or so abandoned cars.

The site is owned by Ratchapruk Taxi Garage, which has seen most of its drivers quit Bangkok for their home villages because fares have dried up following lockdown restrictions. "This is our last option," Thapakorn Assawalertkun, one of the company owners, told AFP, saying many of the vehicles still had large loans outstanding on them. "We figured we'd grow

vegetables and farm frogs on the roofs of these taxis." Thailand imposed tough restrictions to deal with a deadly spike in COVID cases in recent months, including a night-time curfew.

Tourists, normally a mainstay of the Bangkok taxi trade, have dwindled to almost none because of draconian rules on entering the kingdom. The eggplants, chillies, cucumbers, courgettes and basil grown on the cars-along with the frogs-will help feed the out-of-work drivers and employees. And if crops are good, they plan to sell any surplus at local markets. "Growing vegetables on top of the roofs won't damage the taxis since most of them have already been damaged beyond repair. The engines are broken, tires are flat. There's nothing that could be done," Thapakorn said. — AFP



Staff members of a taxi rental garage plant vegetables on the roof of one of the firm's vehicles.



Staff members of a taxi rental garage plant vegetables.



Frogs sit in a tire within a makeshift farm on the bonnet of a taxi.



A staff member of a taxi rental garage plants vegetables.



Staff members of a taxi rental garage plant vegetables.



Plants are grown on the bonnet of one of a taxi rental garage's.



This picture shows Chinese food kitchen owner and chef Park Chan-chul cooking a meal before it is delivered to a customer, at the 5Km Kitchen, a business set up in March this year to rent out kitchen spaces for food companies that only do deliveries in Seoul.



Employees from Taiwan company Just Kitchen, a network of "ghost kitchens" that make delivery-only food, preparing to bake bread for takeaway meals at one of their locations in Taipei.



A GrabFood delivery driver collecting takeaway orders from a cloud kitchen for Thai restaurants under the iBerry Group in Bangkok. — AFP photos

'Ghost kitchens' boom in Asia as pandemic sparks huge demand

In an industrial unit on the outskirts of Taipei chefs are plating meals that will never be served in a restaurant: Welcome to the world of "ghost kitchens". Even before the pandemic sent an earthquake through the global restaurant trade, the "Amazonification" of commercial kitchens was well underway, but coronavirus lockdowns and restrictions have fuelled explosive growth in Asia. The recent boom in food delivery apps meant customers were already used to having restaurant quality meals quickly delivered to their homes. To meet that demand a growing number of restaurants set up delivery only kitchens—also known as "cloud kitchens"—or rented space in ones.

year, he said. Regional delivery giants like Singapore-based Grab and Indonesia's GoJek have also jumped on the trend. Grab opened 20 new cloud kitchens in Southeast Asia last year, up from 42 before the pandemic.

The global ghost kitchen industry is expected to grow more than 12 percent each year to be worth some \$139.37 billion by 2028, according to a report by Researchandmarkets.com. Asia Pacific, home to 4.3 billion people, already accounts for some 60 percent of the international market. For many in the region's densely populated cities, where living space is at a premium, eating daily from cheap restaurants or food stalls is more affordable and viable than cooking at home.

Culinary gold rush

Research group Euromonitor estimates there are some 7,500 cloud kitchens now operating in China and 3,500 in India—compared to 1,500 for the United States and 750 for Britain. Third generation Thai restaurateur Natalie Phanphensophon had to pivot her family's 45-strong restaurant empire into takeaway only for much of the last year because of the pandemic. Her family own the popular Mango Tree and Coca chains, many located in now empty shopping malls where rents are high. Earlier this year they opened their first cloud kitchen on the outskirts of Bangkok, with plans for two more. "Our goal is to ensure everyone on our boat can sail through this together," the 35-year-old explained.

Cloud kitchens, she said, are less lucrative than restaurants because people don't order as many dishes compared to dining out. But their operating costs are far lower. iBerry Group, which operates restaurants and ice

cream shops mostly in shopping malls in Thailand, also set up a delivery only hub. "Having a cloud kitchen is basically an oxygen mask for us during COVID-19," said brand manager Thitanun Taveebhol. While conglomerates and chains have moved into delivery only operations, mom-and-pop cloud kitchens are also opening. After recently retiring from Air India, Nirjash Roy Chowdhury, sunk his savings into setting up a cloud kitchen in Mumbai.

His six employees were from the hotel trade which has been ravaged by the pandemic. "They didn't have anything to eat. If I can give somebody bread and butter by

doing this, then there's nothing like it," the 61-year-old added.

'Food speaks for itself'

Chowdhury estimates it will take six months to break even but is confident there is long term potential. "I think this cloud kitchen culture is here to stay," he predicted. Experts say that's a safe bet. Nailul Huda, an analyst at the Jakarta-based think-tank Institute for Development of Economics and Finance, says lower operating costs and the ordering habits of tech-savvy younger generations will ensure continued growth. "People will keep ordering food even after the pandemic and I think that the ghost kitchen... has the potential to keep growing rapidly even after it's over," he said.

Just Kitchen's Chen says the pandemic has changed the way people order food direct to their door. "Once you do it, you become so used to it, the convenience is hard to get away from... We are very positive of the outlook." At a time when so much of the catering industry was devastated, ghost kitchens have kept chefs, delivery drivers and wholesalers in business.

But they have unavoidably added to the mountain of plastic already being produced. One recent study in Bangkok found plastic waste has nearly doubled during the pandemic, some of it because of food delivery services. Food writer Leslie Tay says while ghost kitchens have "taken away the personality or the soul of the food to a certain extent", there is space for them to thrive alongside dine-in restaurants. "At the end of the day, I think the food speaks for itself... if your food is good, people will start talking about it." — AFP



A chef slices up a pizza at the DR Chef Fusion cloud kitchen facility in Mumbai.

Then the pandemic struck, ending dining out for billions. "It really drove the whole industry into sort of hyper growth, so that really helped us," Jason Chen, the chief executive officer of Just Kitchen, told AFP. JustKitchen started operating Taiwan's first ghost kitchen early last year—now it runs 17 across the island, as well as one in Hong Kong and is aiming to expand into the Philippines and Singapore by the end of this



This photo shows Jason Chen, chief executive officer of Taiwan's Just Kitchen, a network of ghost kitchens that make delivery-only food, posing at the company's headquarters in Taipei. — AFP

Lifestyle | Feature



Visitors walk at Pantai Cenang in Langkawi, as the Malaysian holiday island reopens to domestic tourists following closures due to restrictions to halt the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus.



A mother makes bubbles to attract her children at Pantai Cenang in Langkawi.

Malaysian holiday island opens as tourism restarts

Visitors flocked to the Malaysian island of Langkawi yesterday as it became the country's first holiday hotspot to reopen after a coronavirus lockdown that has hammered the vital tourism industry. Restrictions on local travel had been in place for months and international borders remain largely closed as Malaysia battles its worst COVID-19 wave. But with the outbreak gradually easing, Langkawi, one of tropical Malaysia's premier holiday destinations, has been chosen for a pilot project to reopen the sector to domestic tourists.

The island began welcoming visitors yes-

terday, with water cannons firing over the first plane to land at its airport. "We're very excited because we haven't been anywhere since February 2020," Andrea Manason, an Australian woman based in Kuala Lumpur travelling with her family of six, told AFP. "It's real exciting for us to be here, and to actually have the kids leave the house." Under the initiative, hotels and businesses have been allowed to reopen while activities on the island's palm-fringed beaches are resuming. Tourists must be fully vaccinated to visit and have to take a virus test before departure. Alexander Isaac, head of a yacht charter firm,

said he was delighted at the reopening as the island's tourism sector had been "badly impacted" by virus curbs.

"We can't afford any more lockdowns... We need to reopen the economy and get people working again." The island off Malaysia's northwest coast has long been popular with domestic and overseas visitors, although for now foreign tourists are still barred from the country. Langkawi welcomed around 3.9 million visitors in 2019, with the number falling dramatically since the pandemic began. If the island's "tourism bubble" is a success, then other holiday destinations

are expected to reopen soon. Neighboring Thailand has reopened several islands, including Phuket, to vaccinated foreign tourists.

Malaysia imposed a nationwide lockdown in June as the highly contagious Delta variant sparked a surge in infections, and has now logged more than two million cases and over 22,000 deaths. But authorities have started easing curbs in recent weeks as the outbreak slows and the vaccine rollout picks up speed, with over half the population now fully inoculated. — AFP



Local residents play with bubbles at Pantai Cenang in Langkawi.



A chef cooks at the Ritz-Carlton hotel in Langkawi.



A worker prepares a dining table at the Ritz-Carlton hotel in Langkawi.

Lifestyle | Features



A housekeeping worker cleans a bathtub at the Ritz-Carlton hotel in Langkawi.



A housekeeping worker sanitizes a bathroom at the Ritz-Carlton hotel.

Retired passenger jet perched on Bali cliff to lure tourists

A retired Boeing passenger jet has been hauled to the top of a seaside cliff in Bali to lure tourists to Indonesia's coronavirus-hit holiday island. More than a dozen workers used cranes to assemble parts of a Boeing 737 on a cliff near the Nyang Nyang beach this week. Felix Demin, the plane's new owner, is planning to convert the aircraft into tourist accommodation and expects it will become a popular photography spot. Demin said he hoped the attraction would help revive the area's tourism sector, which has been badly hit since Indonesian borders were closed to international tourists in 2019 because of the pandemic.

The Russian entrepreneur and Bali resident told AFP the disassembled plane was about to be sold as scrap metal to China when he pur-

chased it. It took a week to transport the plane's parts to the cliff after securing necessary access permits, he added. Demin said the project offered hope for a revival of tourism in Bali, but some social media users expressed worry that it would spoil the seaside view. Authorities in Bali relaxed some restrictions this week after the island saw a surge of new infections and deaths due to COVID-19 in July and August.

Bali used to attract millions of foreign visitors annually, and is rolling out an aggressive vaccination plan to try and revive tourism, which is critical to its economy. No date has been confirmed by the Indonesian authorities for a potential reopening of the country's borders to tourists. — AFP



These pictures show retired Boeing aircraft placed on a seaside cliff to lure tourists and be turned into a villa near Nyang-Nyang beach in Uluwatu Badung Regency, on Indonesia resort island of Bali.

— AFP photos

Kids Page

Word Search

Summer

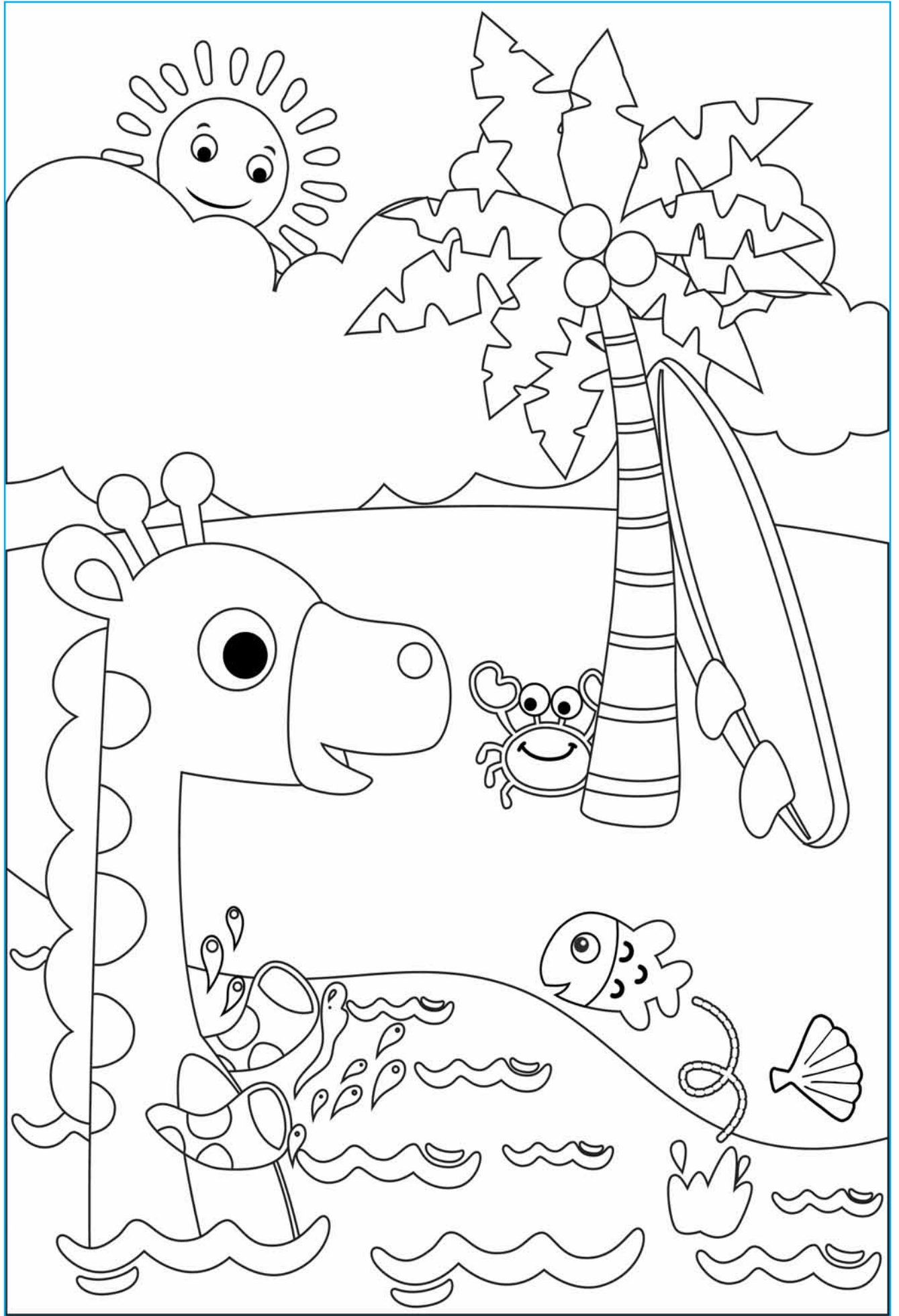
K S A N D A L S F M U K T Q
 X U T I T X H O T L K W R N
 V N C C A M P F I R E I A S
 P G P E M P N E Z P C K V D
 R L R C B Q P S K H A T E H
 N A J R M E S C M U B R L A
 A S Y E A N L S H E L L K J
 P S P A W L I C A J F C S K
 O E I M A C A M P I N G U F
 O S C B D U R O J Y X O N H
 L F N J L X N B D M F B O K
 Y L I A A T V A C A T I O N
 N M C Z K B E A C H T D N E
 G Y L R D I S B M P K A S G

- | | | | |
|--------|----------|----------|------------|
| TRAVEL | SUN | CAMPING | HOT |
| POOL | PICNIC | SANDALS | SUNGLASSES |
| HAT | BALL | PARK | ICE CREAM |
| BEACH | VACATION | CAMPFIRE | SHELL |

Kids Mazes



Color It



Find the objects



Find 15 objects in the picture



Word Scramble

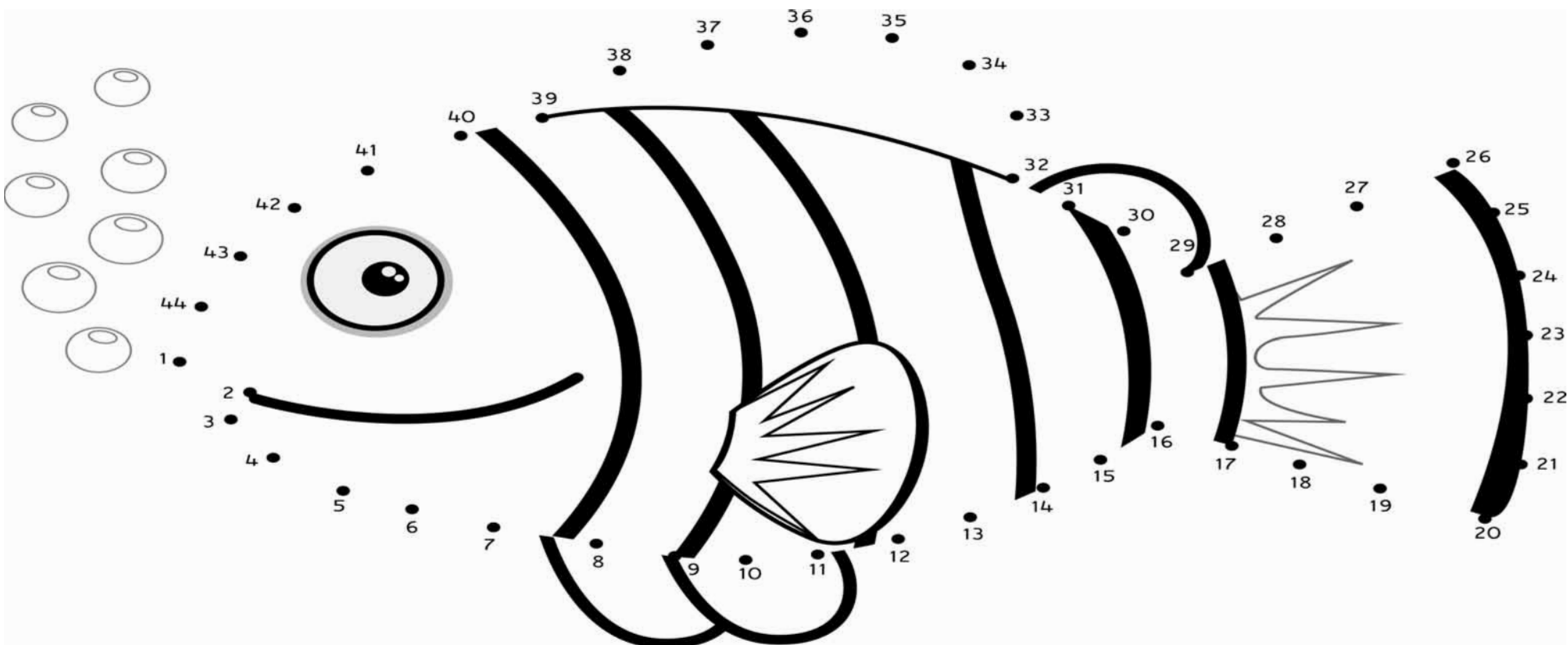


Football Word Scramble

DIRECTIONS: Unscramble the letters to form American football vocabulary terms. Watch out! A few have more than one word in the term.

1. GURAD _____
2. ULHDED _____
3. GREENT _____
4. ILETMHAF _____
5. UNPT _____
6. NALICBEKRE _____
7. AUACRETQBKR _____
8. WODN _____
9. ECORS _____
10. IVDER _____
11. DAOHNF _____
12. TLACKE _____
13. UMLFBE _____
14. CKSA _____
15. ODNZEE _____
16. OPCINNIRTEET _____
17. FAIGEODLL _____
18. IKKOCFC _____
19. ITHTNDGE _____
20. SPAS _____

Join the dots



Business

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2021

32 Bangladesh's trans entrepreneurs create safe work spaces for them



33 Kinshasa in frozen chicken battle



34 Bumpy road as ageing Japan bets on self-driving cars



INGLEWOOD, US: People wear face masks as they wait in line to attend a job fair for employment with SoFi Stadium and Los Angeles International Airport employees, at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, California. —AFP

US unemployment filings move upward

Retail sales rebound 0.7% in August despite falling car sales

WASHINGTON: More US workers made new claims for unemployment benefits last week, according to government data released yesterday, though the metric of labor market health is expected to resume falling. There were 332,000 initial jobless claims, seasonally adjusted, filed in the week ended September 11, above analysts' forecasts and 20,000 more than the week prior, the Labor Department reported.

Another 28,456 people, not seasonally adjusted, applied for benefits under Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA), a lapsed program that allowed freelance workers to claim aid. Rubeela Farooqi of High Frequency Economics predicted claims would resume their downward trajectory after government

pandemic aid programs expired earlier this month, but that does not mean people are necessarily going back to work especially given the rising cases of the Delta variant of COVID-19.

"For the labor market, the health backdrop remains a key risk, especially if it continues to impact school reopenings and disrupts business operations," she wrote in an analysis. New weekly jobless claims have dropped dramatically from their level when the pandemic began and sent them surging into the millions as Americans lost their jobs in droves.

However, more than 12.1 million people were still receiving government aid under all programs as of the week ended August 28, the latest for which data is available. That

total will likely drop significantly after September 6, when the government's pandemic unemployment benefits including PUA expired. More than 9.3 million people were on those programs as of the last week of August, the report said.

US retail sales posted a surprise 0.7 percent rebound in August despite another sharp drop in car sales, the government reported yesterday. The increase, taking sales to \$618.7 billion, defied expectations for another drop, after the indicator measuring consumer demand fell 1.8 percent in July.

Car sales fell 3.9 percent, but if vehicles are excluded, overall retail sales jumped 1.8 percent, according to the Commerce Department. Auto prices surged as the US economy began

to reopen from the pandemic closures and Americans resumed traveling, causing strong demand from rental car companies that was exacerbated by a semiconductor shortage which slowed auto production lines.

But with rental companies having restored their fleets, car sales have slowed. Sales at appliance and electronics stores fell 3.1 percent, while restaurants and bars managed flat sales, the report said, despite concerns over rising cases of the Delta variant of COVID-19.

Furniture stores saw a 3.7 percent jump, and grocery stores posted a 1.8 percent increase. Meanwhile, online sellers bounced back with a 5.3 percent gain, more than making up for the 4.6 percent drop in July, the report said. —AFP

PREMIER MARKET WEEKLY TECHNICAL BULLETIN

WEEK ENDED ON 16 SEPTEMBER 2021

No.	Ticker	Sector	Price Movement & Performance											Valuation Multiples *			
			Open Price	Close Price	Week High	Week Low	Range	Volume	WTD Change	WTD %	YTD %	Support Level	Resistance Level	P/E	P/B	Yield	Beta
101	National Bank of Kuwait	Banking	938	960	960	935	25	31,542,582	22	2.35%	14.29%	940	965	23.3	2.07	2.0%	1.27
102	Gulf Bank	Banking	238	237	240	237	3	46,580,846	-1	-0.42%	8.22%	237	242	21.5	1.12	2.0%	1.13
106	Kuwait International Bank	Banking	224	222	225	222	3	28,469,574	-2	-0.89%	6.73%	222	228	NM	0.97	0.0%	1.01
107	Burgan Bank	Banking	231	229	234	229	5	8,859,239	-3	-1.29%	7.51%	225	0.234	18.1	0.93	2.1%	1.05
108	Kuwait Finance House	Banking	825	830	830	823	7	24,313,971	5	0.61%	22.60%	820	830	36.2	3.74	1.1%	1.41
109	Boubyan Bank	Banking	780	781	781	771	10	3,490,136	0	0.00%	37.50%	773	781	64.1	4.58	0.0%	1.05
204	National Investments	Financial Services	197	195	203	192	11	15,090,750	-2	-1.02%	44.44%	195	198	7.0	0.90	5.1%	1.24
205	Kuwait Projects	Financial Services	155	154	159	154	5	6,615,425	-2	-1.28%	-3.14%	153	159	NM	1.49	3.2%	0.59
252	Al Imtiaz Investment	Financial Services	127	133	133	125	8	58,912,435	6	4.72%	18.75%	129	134	NM	0.81	0.0%	0.98
401	Kuwait Real Estate	Real Estate	145	146	148	143	5	40,485,909	0	0.00%	33.94%	142	147	28.3	1.07	0.0%	0.97
413	Mabaneer	Real Estate	781	799	799	779	20	1,860,490	14	1.78%	21.61%	785	799	20.1	1.87	0.7%	1.11
501	National Industries	Financial Services	235	237	238	234	4	41,476,269	2	0.85%	34.66%	235	239	6.1	0.88	0.0%	1.44
505	Gulf Cable	Industrials	816	815	819	808	11	410,664	-1	-0.12%	7.95%	806	818	30.5	0.92	6.1%	0.93
514	Boubyan Petrochemical	Basic Materials	877	864	877	861	16	964,092	-13	-1.48%	35.00%	860	877	24.6	2.03	6.2%	0.72
526	Al Qurain	Basic Materials	378	379	379	374	5	499,182	5	1.34%	12.13%	374	382	30.4	1.00	4.0%	0.75
603	Agility	Industrials	992	989	994	987	7	9,150,061	-3	-0.30%	46.30%	981	999	28.8	1.88	0.9%	1.49
605	Zain	Telecommunications	601	601	601	597	4	12,444,467	3	0.50%	-0.83%	597	602	13.9	2.25	5.5%	1.36
623	Human Soft Holding	Industrials	3,340	3,330	3,385	3,321	64	760,727	-20	-0.60%	-12.35%	3315	3350	6.1	3.84	12.0%	0.49
642	ALAFCO	Industrials	237	233	237	232	5	5,349,104	-3	-1.27%	7.87%	232	237	NM	0.75	0.0%	0.86
818	Ahli United Bank	Banking	270	276	278	268	10	42,389,180	6	2.22%	21.59%	269	278	20.5	2.21	1.3%	1.13
821	Warba Bank	Banking	261	259	264	259	5	9,736,969	-2	-0.77%	9.75%	257	262	15.4	2.06	0.0%	0.99
823	Mezzan Holding	Consumer Staples	605	616	618	603	15	2,246,857	14	2.33%	1.32%	601	618	19.5	1.76	2.8%	0.44
824	Integrated Holding	Industrials	381	381	386	375	11	11,791,745	5	1.33%	4.10%	375	385	NM	1.59	0.0%	0.48
826	Shamal Az-Zour	Utilities	237	236	239	234	5	4,143,956	-2	-0.84%	-14.80%	233	243	20.4	4.94	5.1%	0.68
827	Boursa Kuwait	Financial Services	1,815	1,868	1,870	1,810	60	1,316,803	53	2.92%	69.82%	1833	1870	13.4	7.13	2.1%	0.75

* As of end of week closing

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Business

Bangladesh's trans entrepreneurs create safe work spaces for them

Government implements new laws to help trans people

DHAKA: Simran Snigdha was begging when a chance encounter helped get her off Bangladesh's streets and realize her artistic dreams—one of a growing number of trans people securing formal employment as the government boosts support for the marginalized community.

The conservative Muslim-majority country's roughly 1.5 million transgender people have long faced discrimination and violence. Kicked out from homes and communities, cut off from education, and shunned by many employers, they often turn to begging, the sex trade, or crime. "I didn't get the opportunity—I had to extort people... and did prostitution," Snigdha told AFP at a garment factory in Bangladesh's capital Dhaka.

But in recent years the government has implemented new laws, such as tax breaks for firms hiring transgender people, helping pave the way for their integration into society. Snigdha now works for a firm owned and run by another transgender woman, while pursuing her dreams of being a painter.

"I can now pursue my favorite work," the 32-year-old said as she painted. While she has found safety, Snigdha said there were scores more transgender artists in need of help. "I pray they don't go back to begging even for another day."

Working on the streets

Like many of her peers, Snigdha fled her rural home in central Bangladesh for a transgender commune in Dhaka at 15 after facing abuse and rejection. She lived under the protection of a "guruma"—a politically and socially connected transgender person who grants some economic security, but who can force residents into the sex trade, extortion, or prevent them from getting an education.

Snigdha's life changed in 2019 when she peered into a car win-

dow at a road crossing. Staring back was transgender factory owner Siddik Bhuyan Synthia—who asked her to join the business.

"In the past... bullying (of transgender people) was the order," Synthia said.

"But [the] majority of the society are now our well-wishers." "The trans workers in my factory are very ordinary people. They don't want to go to the dark businesses," the 38-year-old said.

"They prefer to have a social life just like any of us." And under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina a growing tolerance for the rights of sexual minorities has seen a raft of new laws.

In 2013, transgender people were officially identified as a separate gender, and in 2018 they were allowed to register to vote as a third gender. The government has also unveiled affirmative action schemes and a series of benefits. As a result, several transgender-owned and run businesses—mostly beauty salons, but also small factories—have started popping up across Dhaka in the last few years.

Prove them wrong

Such firms were "unthinkable even a few years back," Shale Ahmed, executive director of sexual minorities charity Bondhu, said. Apon Akhter is one of those changing that expectation.

At her garment factory in Dhaka, she employs only transgender people. "When I started... people mocked me saying transgender people won't be able to do productive work," the 32-year-old guruma said. "They said we belong to the streets. I promised myself I'd prove them wrong."

While Akhter acknowledges that her 25 employees' salaries are not high, they are still studying—knocking down another barrier that the trans community faces. "Once you are out of homes, you end



DHAKA: In this picture taken on June 24, 2021, a transgender person works at Bhuyan Fashion garment factory owned by Siddik Bhuyan Synthia, a transgender in Dhaka. —AFP

up without education. And lack of education means there is no way a company can employ you in a high-paying job," explained Rafid Saumik from charity TransEnd.

Akhter said many of her employees came to her after suffering and barely surviving for years, and her factory gives them a chance to pursue their educations. "I strongly want them to see the light they've been looking for in life," she said. "Because we only have each other." —AFP

DoorDash sues to stop New York data-sharing measure

NEW YORK: DoorDash on Wednesday sued New York City over a measure requiring it and meal delivery rivals to share customer data with restaurants.

DoorDash contended that the bill yet to be signed into law by the mayor of the city opens the door for names, addresses, telephone numbers and email addresses to be misused or poorly guarded by eateries. "This bill threatens the safety and privacy of New York City consumers," DoorDash said in a post.

"We remain committed to fighting on their behalf to keep this harmful, first-of-its-kind legislation from taking effect." Backers of the legislation say it is meant to help restaurants that have suffered due to the pandemic better connect with customers who use meal delivery services.

Privacy and digital rights advocates including the Electronic Frontier Foundation oppose the idea of laws prying user data from "sharing economy" businesses such as meal-delivery services that have gotten between real-world restaurants and their customers. "These policies would make it so that sharing data with one company means that data will automatically end up in the hands of several downstream parties," the EFF said in a blog post. —AFP

KFH: SWIFT payment controls service offers multiple features

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) said that the recently launched SWIFT payment controls service offers multiple features according to the highest quality and safety standards. The new service enables the bank to real-time monitor, alert and block sent payments with independent daily reporting. It also focuses on outgoing payments by helping in mitigating fraudulent attacks by detecting and preventing high-risk payments and supporting recovery.

In addition, the new service has many benefits and features, including stopping high-risk payments in real-time, 'in-flight' monitoring of outgoing payments, intelligent technology that learns behavioral patterns over time and supports continuous and secure improvement as well as being a SWIFT-hosted service with zero footprint and instant switch-on. The SWIFT Payment Controls service, easily tailored by users, offers powerful but simple to use pre-built reports covering both sent and received payments, allowing managing blocked payments, mitigating fraud risk and building a safer, more secure future and improving payment speed, transparency and reliability with alert coverage of key payment messages MT103, MT202 and MT202COV.

Along with offering integrated package of digital banking services, KFH has recently launched digital signature service in personal financing products through KFH mobile app or desktop

from anywhere without having to visit the branch, Live FX Pricing, instant cross-border payments service at KFH-Turkey using Ripple's technology and digital Wallet service through smart mobiles and watches which provides advanced and smart digital payment methods according to highly developed security standards in cooperation with Samsung, Fitbit and Garmin.

In addition, KFH branches offer a variety of interactive banking services such as establishing "Murabaha" financing transactions, requesting credit and prepaid cards, updating data and phone numbers, activating bank cards, opening deposits and accounts, instant cheque printing, receiving gold biscuits (10 grams), opening (gold, savings, Al-Rabeh, electron) accounts, online gold purchase and sell, cardless withdrawals using QR code through mobile, or by using Civil ID or phone number, in addition to many other financing and banking services.

As part of enhancing collaboration with FinTech companies, KFH has recently signed an agreement with Aion Digital, a digital-first banking platform, to transform all functions of Retail and Corporate Banking services at the bank, and an agreement with ProgressSoft, a leading payment solutions provider, to launch an electronic forms solution which fully transforms traditional banking forms into electronic, secured and automatically validated forms.

Moreover, KFH offers "SWIFT GPI" service to track banking transfers electronically through KFHOnline service on the website and the mobile App (IOS and Android), and through ecorp.kfhonline.com.

KFH continues its leadership in providing the best e- services and products according to the highest quality, safety and promptness standards by focusing on data and cyber security in line with KFH's digital transformation strategy and maintaining its excellence in enhancing customer experience.

Business

Kinshasa in frozen chicken battle

Govt wants to slash poultry prices, but importers, wholesalers refuse to play ball

KINSHASA: Frozen chicken, deemed more convenient and cheaper than fresh poultry that needs to be killed and plucked, is hugely popular in Kinshasa where residents have grown dependent on it. So much so that it is at the heart of a battle between the Congolese government, which has promised to slash the prices of basic necessities including frozen goods, and importers and wholesalers, who refuse to play ball.

The result? Prices have actually increased as the murky, corrupt sector's players continue their dubious trading practices. At a frozen goods stall in the capital's sprawling Gambela market, Sandra has had to forgo her usual 10-kg (22-pound) box of frozen chicken. It "used to be 42,000 Congolese francs (\$21), now it's 56,000 (\$28)," said the mother of three, who declined to give her family name. That's too expensive for her, so she resorts to buying frozen sausages and fries instead.

Lack of local produce

Kinshasa has been dependent on imported frozen food for years—there just isn't enough local produce to sustain this bustling, 12-million-strong city. The larger-scale agro-industry, meanwhile, has never taken off, beset by corruption.

In June, faced with a population struggling to make ends meet in a faltering economy made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic, the government announced it would slash the prices of frozen goods as well as domestic air fares. It ordered importers to halve the price of 10-kg boxes of frozen chicken.

Frozen shad and pork chops were also targeted, albeit with a smaller price cut. Authorities claim importers are charging too

much for these goods, deliberately underestimating their value to pay lower customs taxes, and then selling them to wholesalers at a real or inflated value.

The wholesalers themselves then hoard the goods or slow down their sales to local shops, squeezing the supply of frozen produce on the market and causing prices to rise, authorities say. At Gambela market, asked why she buys frozen goods imported from countries as far away as Brazil, Belgium, Argentina, the United States and China, sometimes stored in dubious conditions, Sandra responds it is just more convenient than buying live chicken. And usually, it's cheaper.

Government intervention

"Reducing the price of frozen food is a good decision", says Hugues, manager of the frozen foods store "The Resurrection". But he says that in practice, it's just not happening.

"The importers are Lebanese, Indian... they control the market," he says. "The wholesalers don't want to lower the prices (and) we can't do it either." Refusing to take responsibility for the blockage, frozen goods stores went on strike for two days earlier this month. But the system is corrupt and lacks transparency, making change difficult.

"Everyone is aware of what is going on," says one importer, asking to remain anonymous. The market, he adds, is huge—worth hundreds of thousands of dollars a day. After weeks of gridlock, the government has said it will take matters into its own hands and "flood" the market with frozen goods. The economy ministry said it plans to buy the produce directly from exporters and dis-



KINSHASA: Freshly roasted chickens are ready to be sold on the streets of Kinshasa. —AFP

tribute it to stores, cutting out the importers and wholesalers altogether. "So that products don't go out of stock and consumers are not penalised," it said.

But Michel Bisa Kibul, a politics and governance professor, said the government's approach was all wrong. They should be "concerned about getting good local produce," and supporting DR Congo's agro-industry instead of wanting to flood the market "with cheap frozen goods", he said. —AFP

First Iranian fuel deliveries reach Lebanon

BEIRUT: Dozens of tanker trucks carrying Iranian fuel arranged by militant group Hezbollah arrived in shortage-hit Lebanon yesterday, an AFP correspondent reported. As they entered from Syria through an illegal crossing in the eastern region of Hermel, the trucks were greeted by Hezbollah supporters waving the group's yellow flag and ululating women tossing rice and rose petals.

Hassan Nasrallah, the Iranian-backed group's leader, had promised in August he would bring fuel from Iran to alleviate the rationing that is sowing chaos across the country. Lebanon defaulted on its debt last year and can no longer afford to import key goods, including petrol and diesel to power generators. A first Iranian ship reached the Syrian port of Baniyas earlier this week. The cargo was offloaded there and trucked to Lebanon, the first of several planned deliveries.

A total of 80 trucks carrying four million liters (more than one million gallons) of petrol entered Lebanon yesterday and were expected to fill the tanks of Al-Amana, a fuel distribution company which is owned by Hezbollah and has been under US sanctions since February 2020.

"This is humanitarian aid that will meet the needs of the population," said Jawad, a



BEIRUT: Lebanese celebrate with flags as tankers carrying Iranian fuel arrive from Syria at Al-Ain in Hermel in east Lebanon's Bekaa Valley yesterday. —AFP

50-year-old Hermel resident who was among the crowd gathered to welcome the convoy. Hezbollah "is not replacing the state, it's a temporary measure until the state can deliver its duties," he said.

Nasrallah's announcement last month was a boon for the Tehran-backed movement and prompted several other fuel supply schemes via other regional powers to be announced. A government lineup that had been over a year in the works was finally announced last week. The main priority of Prime Minister Najib Mikati's

cabinet will be to guarantee petrol and electricity supplies and curb other shortages that are crippling the country.

The amount of Iranian petrol being delivered can only meet a small part of the demand in Lebanon, where motorists spend hours—sometimes days—in queues to fill up. The country of six million is experiencing its worst ever financial crisis, with a currency that has lost 90 percent of its value, people's savings trapped in banks and qualified labor emigrating in droves. —AFP

Kenyans voice fury over fuel price hike

NAIROBI: Kenyans voiced fury yesterday at a jump in fuel prices, which threaten to pile on the misery for a population already suffering economic hardship because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Fuel prices are now at record levels after the country's energy regulator this week put an end to subsidies on petrol, diesel and kerosene that were introduced earlier this year to ease anger over the surging cost of living. The East African economic powerhouse has suffered huge job losses as gross domestic product shrank last year for the first time in three decades, with Covid-19 battering usually strong sectors like tourism. The scrapping of the subsidies, which took effect on Wednesday, increased the price of petrol in Nairobi by about six percent to a maximum of almost 135 shillings (about \$1.2 or 1.0 euro) a liter. And the cost is set to rise further with the introduction of a near five percent excise duty on fuel from October 1.

"The increase in fuel is just ridiculous, it shows that the government is not in touch with the reality on the ground, how do they want us to survive," said James Mwangi, 42, a second-hand car dealer in Nairobi. "Any increase in fuel prices means an increase in many other things."

Mercilyne Njeri, 35, who works at a 5-star hotel in Nairobi, says she is already trying to survive on 60 percent of her usual salary. "The government is not realistic, you cannot increase fuel prices at a time we are suffering from tough economic times brought about by Covid-19 challenges."

The Consumers Federation of Kenya (Cofek) warned of a huge hit on the economy—"high cost of production, surge in food prices, transport and overall, a higher cost of living". "The foreign direct investments as well as consumer purchasing power will be driven south for a struggling economy reeling under the Covid-19 pandemic," it said in a statement Wednesday. Kenyan consumers pay several taxes on fuel, which account for the vast bulk of the price charged by pump operators. —AFP

Business

Bumpy road as ageing Japan bets on self-driving cars

Accident at Paralympics illustrates challenges ahead

YOKOHAMA: With an ageing population in need of transport, Japan is betting on autonomous cars, but an accident involving a self-driving showcase at the Paralympics illustrates the challenges ahead. Japan is far from the only place with autonomous vehicles on the roads, but its government has set acceleration of the technology as a key priority.

Last year, it became the first country in the world to allow a vehicle capable of taking full control in certain situations to operate on public roads. The Honda car has “Level 3” autonomy, meaning it can take certain decisions alone, though a driver has to be ready to take the wheel in emergencies.

The government has changed the law to pave the way for increasingly advanced autonomous vehicles, and the ministry of economy, trade and industry (METI) has plans for 40 autonomous taxi test sites nationwide by 2025. It’s a policy driven by a serious problem: Japan’s population is the oldest in the world, and the country is plagued by persistent labor shortages. “In the cargo and transport sectors, drivers have become older and the shortage of human resources has become serious,” a recent METI report said. It also warned of “terrible traffic accidents caused by elderly drivers making operational errors”.

With demand clear, local automakers have

lined up to develop technologies. Top-selling Toyota plans to run its e-Palette self-driving buses along dedicated roads in the smart city it is building at the foot of Mount Fuji. The buses ran in the athletes’ village during the Tokyo 2020 Games, but the project was briefly suspended after a vehicle hit and lightly injured a visually impaired Paralympian. The bus had detected the man and stopped, but an operator on board overrode the system. For Christopher Richter, head of Japan research at brokerage CLSA and an automotive specialist, the incident demonstrates how far the sector has to go.

“People said autonomous is ready for these kinds of controlled communities,” but even there “it failed”, he said.

‘Complicated areas’

For rural Japan, autonomous vehicles “will become a necessity”, Richter added. “I can see why it’s a priority for the government, for car-makers... (but) big-scale autonomous driving is probably not coming in our decade.” Japan’s automakers admit the time horizon is a complex proposition at this stage.

When Nissan launched tests of its “Easy Ride” self-driving taxis in 2018, it said it expected them to be commercially available from the early 2020s. But Kazuhiro Doi, the com-



YOKOHAMA: A Nissan Motor autonomous vehicle during a press preview for a field operation test of Easy Ride at the Minato Mirai business district in Yokohama. — AFP

pany’s global vice president in charge of research, is more circumspect now. “Social acceptance (of autonomous cars) is not high enough,” he told AFP. “Very few people have experience with autonomous driving. Without having expe-

rience, I think it’s very hard to accept it, because it’s too new.” This month, the Easy Ride taxis are in their third round of tests on public roads in Yokohama outside Tokyo, albeit in a limited area designated for the purpose. —AFP

New Zealand posts strong Q2 growth

WELLINGTON: New Zealand’s economy surged 2.8 percent in the second quarter, official data showed yesterday, although analysts said the country’s latest COVID-19 lockdown had likely stalled momentum.

The growth figure for the April-June period was more than double market forecasts, partly boosted by the opening of a short-lived travel bubble with neighboring Australia. The latest figure follows growth of 1.4 percent in the previous quarter, revised down from 1.6 percent, Statistics New Zealand said.

On an annual basis, the economy grew more than 17 percent in the 12 months to the end of June, including a one-off 13.9 percent boost in the July-September quarter after New Zealand lifted its initial lockdown. Kiwibank chief economist Jarrod Kerr said the opening of a quarantine-free travel bubble between Australia and New Zealand helped “supercharge” some sectors of the economy.

“Fewer COVID restrictions and the trans-Tasman travel bubble opening provided a boost to transport and retail activity,” he said. The bubble opened in April but shut in July as Australia struggled with numerous outbreaks of the highly transmissible Delta variant. The prospects of its reopening soon appear remote as New Zealand battles its own Delta outbreak, which emerged in the country’s largest city Auckland in mid-August.

Kerr said the outbreak—which prompted a three-week national lockdown that is still being enforced in Auckland—meant the strong growth recorded in the second quarter was already “old news”. —AFP

Conglomerate Tata Group bids for ailing Air India

NEW DELHI: India’s tea-to-steel conglomerate Tata Group confirmed it has submitted a bid to buy debt-crippled national carrier Air India, which it owned decades ago before the airline was nationalized. The Indian government has sought to sell its entire stake in the ailing company, setting a deadline for bids for Wednesday after failing previously to secure any interest for a majority share.

“We have put in a bid,” a Tata Group spokesperson told AFP late Wednesday, without giving any further details. Tata already has investments in airlines AirAsia India and Vistara.

The founder of Indian budget carrier SpiceJet, Ajay Singh, also submitted a bid in a personal capacity, The Times of India reported. SpiceJet did not respond to an AFP request for comment.

The secretary of the government’s investment and public asset management department, Tuhin Kanta Pandey, confirmed bids had been received. “Process now moves to concluding stage,” he tweeted Wednesday. Tata Group in 1932 pioneered commercial air travel in India with Tata Airlines.

Once known affectionately as the “Maharaja of the skies”, the airline was later taken over by the government and rebranded Air India.

But it has been hemorrhaging money for more than a decade, incurring billions of dollars in debt and losing mar-



ket share to low-cost rivals in one of the world’s fastest-growing, but highly competitive, airline markets. Apart from Air India, the government also plans to raise billions of dollars through the privatisation of Bharat Petroleum and a share sale of a major insurer.

In August, New Delhi said it was seeking to lease state-owned assets to the private sector to raise six trillion rupees (\$81 billion) to repair public finances battered by the pandemic and fund new infrastructure. —AFP

Kuwait Times Classifieds

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Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Hot with light to moderate freshening at times north westerly wind with speed of 12 - 45 km/h with a chance for rising dust over open areas.

BY NIGHT: Rather hot with light to moderate north westerly wind with speed of 12 - 35 km/h.

WEATHER WARNING			No Current Warnings	
STATION	MAX EXP	MIN REC	SFC. CHART 16/09/2021 0000 UTC	
KUWAIT CITY	41 °C	31 °C		
KUWAIT AIRPORT	42 °C	31 °C		
ABDALY	42 °C	25 °C		
JAHRA	43 °C	30 °C		
SALMIYAH	40 °C	31 °C		
AHMADI	38 °C	32 °C		
WAFRA	41 °C	29 °C		
SALMY	39 °C	23 °C		
JAL ALIYAH	41 °C	26 °C		

4 DAYS FORECAST						
DAY	DATE	WEATHER	Temperatures		Wind Direction	Wind Speed
			MAX.	MIN.		
Friday	09/17	Hot with a chance for rising dust	43 °C	31 °C	NW	20 - 50 km/h
Saturday	09/18	Hot	44 °C	33 °C	NW	12 - 45 km/h
Sunday	09/19	Hot	43 °C	33 °C	NW	12 - 40 km/h
Monday	09/20	Hot with a chance for rising dust	42 °C	32 °C	NW	15 - 50 km/h

PRAYER TIMES	
Fajr	04:13
Sunrise	05:33
Zuhr	11:43
Asr	15:13
Sunset	17:53
Isha	19:10

RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT	
MAX. Temp.	42 °C
MIN. Temp.	31 °C
MAX. RH	27 %
MIN. RH	07 %
MAX. Wind	N 50 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.	0 mm

All times are local time unless otherwise stated. U.P.O.

Airlines

Kuwait Airways	171	Air India EXPRESS	22438185/4
Jazeera Airways	177	Sri Lanka Airlines	22424444
Turkish Airlines	1884918	Egypt Air	22421578
FlyDubai	22414400	Swiss Air	22421516
Qatar Airways	22423888	Saudia	22426306
KLM	22425747	Middle East Airlines	22423073
Royal Jordanian	22418064/5/6	Lufthansa	22422493
British Airways	22425635	PIA	22421044
Air France	22430224	Bangladesh Airlines	22452977/8
Emirates	22921555	Oman Air	22958787
Air India	22456700	Turkish Airlines	22453820/1

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I, PROCARIUS MARIANESAN, holder of Indian Passport No. T2417987, declare to change my name from PROCARIUS MARIANESAN to PROCARIUS MARIANESON. (C0852) 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. (C648) 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. (C647) 14-9-2021

Hospitals

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

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381
Ayoun Al-Qibla	22451082
Mirqab	22456536
Sharq	22465401
Salmiya	25746401

Sports

US gymnasts slam FBI, sports officials over Nassar abuse

WASHINGTON: Olympic champion Simone Biles and other top American gymnasts excoriated US sports officials and the FBI in powerful Senate testimony on Wednesday for failing to act promptly on complaints about Larry Nassar, the former team doctor convicted of serial sexual abuse.

"We have been failed and we deserve answers," said the 24-year-old Biles, a seven-time Olympic medalist and the most decorated gymnast in world championships history. "To be clear, I blame Larry Nassar but I also blame an entire system that enabled and perpetrated his abuse," she told an emotional hearing of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Nassar, 58, was sentenced to life in prison in 2018 after pleading guilty to sexually assaulting women and girls while working as a team doctor at USA Gymnastics and Michigan State University (MSU). USA Gymnastics reported Nassar to the FBI in July 2015, but he continued to work at MSU and sexually abused at least 70 more women until a newspaper exposed him in September 2016.

Biles and the three other gymnasts — McKayla Maroney, Aly Raisman and Maggie Nichols — testified that they were let down by the FBI, the leadership of USA Gymnastics and the US Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC).

"We suffered and continue to suffer because no one at the FBI, USAG or USOPC did what was necessary to protect us," said Biles, who had to halt her testimony at several points to compose herself and wipe away tears.

Maroney, who won a team gold medal at

the 2012 London Olympics, said she reported the abuse by Nassar in a three-hour telephone interview with a Federal Bureau of Investigation agent in 2015 but it was "minimized and disregarded."

"Not only did the FBI not report my abuse," Maroney said, "but when they eventually documented my report 17 months later, they made entirely false claims about what I said."

"They allowed a child molester to go free for more than a year," the 25-year-old Maroney said. "They had legal, legitimate evidence of child abuse and did nothing."

'On a silver platter'

Hundreds of women — including Olympians and collegiate athletes — have accused Nassar of sexually abusing them over the course of his more than two-decade career in sports medicine.

The Justice Department's Inspector General published a scathing report in July about the mishandling of the accusations against Nassar by the FBI's field office in Indianapolis, where USA Gymnastics has its headquarters. FBI agents failed to take the allegations seriously and investigate them right away, the report said.

Biles, Maroney, Raisman and Nichols were invited to testify before the Senate committee under oath about the "FBI's dereliction of duty in the Nassar case."

Raisman, former captain of the Olympic gold medal-winning 2012 and 2016 US teams, said stopping Nassar's abuse should have been a priority for the FBI but it took over 14 months for



WASHINGTON: US Olympic gymnasts (from left) Simone Biles, McKayla Maroney, Aly Raisman and Maggie Nichols, arrive to testify during a Senate Judiciary hearing about the Inspector General's report on the FBI handling of the Larry Nassar investigation of sexual abuse of Olympic gymnasts, in Capitol Hill on Wednesday in Washington, DC. — AFP

the bureau to contact her. Raisman said the delay was "like serving innocent children up to a pedophile on a silver platter."

Nichols, who won a gold medal at the 2015 World Artistic Gymnastics Championships, said she reported Nassar's abuse to USA Gymnastics leadership in 2015. "I am haunted by the fact that even after I reported my abuse so many women and girls had to suffer at the hands of Larry Nassar," she said.

"USA Gymnastics and the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee have all betrayed me and those who were abused by Larry Nassar," the 24-year-old Nichols said. FBI Director Christopher Wray also testified before the Senate panel but in a separate session.

Wray apologized to the gymnasts and others abused by Nassar for the FBI's mishandling of the investigation. "In no planet is what happened in this case acceptable," he said. — AFP

Kohli to quit as India's T20 captain after World Cup

NEW DELHI: Star batsman Virat Kohli announced yesterday that he will give up the India Twenty20 captaincy after the World Cup that starts next month. "I feel I need to give myself space to be fully ready to lead the Indian team in Test and ODI cricket," said Kohli, whose leadership has been the subject of mounting speculation in recent months.

"I've decided to step down as the T20 captain after this T20 World Cup in Dubai in October," he added in a Twitter post. The 32-year-old, who became limited-overs captain after M.S. Dhoni stepped aside in 2017, has faced pressure over his failure to win India either the World Cup, Champions Trophy or T20 World Cup.

But Jay Shah, secretary of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), had backed Kohli this week to continue. "I have given everything to the team during my time as T20 captain and I will continue to do so for the T20 team as a batsman moving forward," said Kohli.

"Of course, arriving at the decision took a lot of time," he explained, adding that he had consulted with India coach Ravi Shastri and opening batsman Rohit



SOUTHAMPTON: In this file photo taken on June 22, 2021, India's Virat Kohli reacts as he walks back to the pavilion at the end of New Zealand's innings on the fifth day of the ICC World Test Championship Final between New Zealand and India at the Ageas Bowl in Southampton, southwest England. — AFP

Sharma. He also said he had informed Shah, BCCI President Sourav Ganguly and the national selectors of his decision.

Indian media have reported that Sharma could take over as limited-overs captain and that the change had been discussed by the BCCI. Kohli is set to lead his Indian Premier League side Royal Challengers Bangalore in the T20 tournament which resumes Sunday in the UAE after a four-month pandemic suspension. — AFP

Kuwait tennis team loses in Davis Cup

AMMAN: Kuwait's national tennis team lost yesterday to Hong Kong with two sets to one in Davis Cup in the Asia/Oceania Group III, hosted by Jordan. Kuwait's team of Essa Qabazard and Bader Al-Abdullah will face Malaysia in the second round today for the second place in Pool A, which includes Kuwait, Hong Kong and Malaysia. Pool B has Vietnam, Pacific Oceania and Qatar, meanwhile, Pool C includes Syria, Sri Lanka and Jordan. Three pools of three teams are contesting the round-robin stage of the event. The top two teams in each pool will play in a playoff, with the three winners earning promotion to contest the 2022 World Group II Playoffs. The bottom team in each pool will be relegated to Asia/Oceania Group IV. — AFP



AMMAN: Kuwait's national tennis team members Essa Qabazard and Bader Al-Abdullah play against Hong Kong in the Davis Cup yesterday. — AFP

Rodrygo punishes wasteful Inter with late winner for Real Madrid

MILAN: Rodrygo sank wasteful Inter Milan with the last-gasp winner in a 1-0 triumph at the San Siro which gives Real Madrid the perfect start to their Champions League campaign. Italian champions Inter are trying to make the competition's knockout rounds for the first time since 2011/12 but they were punished for letting a series of opportunities slip by before Brazilian Rodrygo's beautifully struck goal in the final minute of the Group D clash.

It was a harsh result for Inter against Carlo Ancelotti's Madrid, who up to that point had shown little of the attacking verve which has brought them 13 goals in four La Liga games so far this season. "We deserved much more from the game, but if you don't score goals you're not going to win games," said Edin Dzeko to Amazon. "We deserved more, we played really well against a great team, and we had the chances to win the game... It's a real shame as you can't lose a game like that."

Chances go begging

Madrid however are not top of the group as that honour goes to Sheriff Tiraspol, who downed Shakhtar Donetsk 2-0 in a dream start to life in the Champions League. "This was the toughest game of the group," Ancelotti told Amazon. "Inter kept up a tremendous rhythm in the first half, while we managed to control the game better after the break. "However, I was pleased with the team being able to defend deep. That's a good sign as a team that knows how to get through tough periods is a good one."

Inter dominated the early exchanges and should have been at least one goal ahead midway through the first half after getting at a Madrid defense which had conceded six goals in their opening four La Liga matches.

First, Lautaro Martinez managed to work space for a close-range shot in the sixth minute which was directed straight at Thibaut Courtois, and three minutes later Edin Dzeko drew the best out of the Belgian. The Bosnia forward managed to break the offside trap following a slick passing move but couldn't direct his shot past the onrushing Courtois, and Milan Skriniar headed a presentable chance wide at the following corner.

In the 19th minute Martinez wasted Inter's biggest opportunity of the half, heading straight at Courtois after finding himself completely unmarked by the penalty spot when Ivan Perisic's pinpoint cross arrived. And they were lucky to not be punished for their wastefulness by Eder Militao 20 minutes later when the Brazilian somehow headed wide from a corner from point-blank range.

Marcel Brozovic then fired just wide from the edge of the penalty area before Dzeko became the latest Inter player who couldn't find a way past Courtois when he hit another great chance straight at the 29-year-old. Madrid came out on the front foot after the break, but it was again Inter who had the first real chance through Dzeko, whose header was batted away, and then Skriniar, who couldn't quite force home the opener on the rebound.



MILAN: Real Madrid's Brazilian forward Rodrygo celebrates after opening the scoring during the UEFA Champions League Group D football match between Inter Milan and Real Madrid on Wednesday at the San Siro stadium in Milan. —AFP

The away side then came back into the game and forced a save from Samir Handanovic just before the hour mark through Dani Carvajal. They pushed Inter back but struggled to get past their well-organized back three until substitute Rodrygo silenced the rowdy Inter crowd with his late winner. —AFP

Haller scores four on Champions League debut in Ajax romp



LISBON: Ajax's Ivorian forward Sebastien Haller scores a goal during the UEFA Champions League first round Group C football match between Sporting CP and Ajax at the Jose Alvalade stadium in Lisbon on Wednesday. —AFP

LISBON: Ajax Amsterdam's Ivory Coast striker Sebastien Haller marked his Champions League debut with four goals in a 5-1 romp at Sporting Lisbon on Wednesday. Haller, who moved from West Ham for 22.5 million euros in January after netting 14 times in 54 outings for the Londoners, scored in the second, ninth, 53rd and 63rd minutes.

The 27-year-old has been in a rich vein of form recently having also scored twice in nine minutes to give the Ivory Coast a 2-1 World Cup qualifying win over Cameroon last week. "I still don't believe it. It's kind of a dream. I couldn't expect more than this. I am just happy and trying to enjoy tonight," said Haller. It

was a remarkable performance by Haller who missed out on playing in the Europa League last season after Ajax forgot to register him following the player's switch from West Ham.

"I just tried to be not too emotional because being so young and playing these kind of games it's a dream, so I was just focused on doing my job, focusing on the other team, tactically, physically and today I thank to my team-mates for all this," Haller told uefa.com.

Steven Berghuis added the other goal for the four-time European champions with Paulinho grabbing a consolation for the Portuguese side in the Group C clash. —AFP

Bellingham inspires Dortmund to win at Besiktas

ISTANBUL: England midfielder Jude Bellingham shone with a goal, then an assist and a kiss for Erling Haaland as Borussia Dortmund kicked off their Champions League campaign with a 2-1 win at Besiktas. Bellingham silenced the boisterous crowd in Istanbul with the opening goal and then unpicked the home defense to serve up a simple tap-in for Haaland to claim his 21st goal in his 17th Champions League game.

It stayed 2-0 until Javi Montero headed in a consolation goal for Besiktas deep in added time. "It's a brilliant atmosphere and a pleasure to play in front of these fans," Bellingham told DAZN, "but the most important thing was to put in that performance and get the win. It was end to end, a bit like basketball, but we were just more clinical."

Haaland was full of praise for Bellingham, who planted a kiss on his team-mate's cheek during his post-match interview. "He's amazing, he's 18, three years younger than me - it's crazy," said Haaland. The towering striker underlined his reputation as a prolific scorer, taking his tally to 14 goals in 10 games this season for Dortmund and Norway. "It was a really hard game, the pitch wasn't good, but we fought and did good, so I am happy with the win," said Haaland.

"I love the Champions League and, I mean, I am a goal-scorer, that's my job," Haaland added when asked about his Champions League record. Haaland and Bellingham bumped chests to celebrate the second goal, but the club reportedly faces a fight to keep both young stars past this season with Europe's elite tracking the pair. —AFP

Sports

Liverpool spoil Milan's Champions League return in five-goal thriller

LIVERPOOL: Jordan Henderson's stunning strike ensured Liverpool came from behind to beat AC Milan once more with a pulsating 3-2 victory at Anfield to get their Champions League campaign off to a winning start.

The Reds famously came from 3-0 down to beat the Italian giants on penalties in the 2005 Champions League final in Istanbul, but should have made far easier work of disposing of Stefano Pioli's men on their return to top level European football.

Seven-time winners Milan were playing their first Champions League match for seven years and were given a rude awakening to the step up in class but for a two-minute spell before half-time that threatened to take the game away from Liverpool.

Fikayo Tomori's early own goal was scant reward for the home side's early dominance as Mike Maignan saved Mohamed Salah's penalty. But goals from Ante Rebic and Brahim Diaz turned the game on its head completely against the run of play.

Salah levelled the scores once more before Henderson's thunderous finish proved a deserving winner 21 minutes from time. "It was a brilliant game," said Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp. "Very exciting, very entertaining with 10-15 minutes where we lost the plot."

A 0-0 draw between Atletico Madrid and Porto means Liverpool end the night on top of Group B and Klopp underlined the importance of a winning start in such a tough section. "Milan came from pot four in this group, that's

the quality in this group," added the German. "We need each point in this group to get through." Liverpool's pressure paid in a blistering start when Trent Alexander-Arnold burst into the box from right-back and his shot was turned into his own net by Tomori. But Salah could not keep his long scoring streak from the penalty spot going on 14 minutes after Andy Robertson's shot was handled inside the area by Ismael Bennacer. The Egyptian had scored 17 consecutive penalties for Liverpool dating back to 2017, but Mike Maignan parried his powerful effort and Henderson's follow-up on the rebound. The visitors appeared to be missing the presence offered by the injured Zlatan Ibrahimovic up front.

However, Anfield was stunned as the Milan attack suddenly clicked just before the break. Rebic slotted home Rafael Leao's through ball to level. The Croatian then turned provider two minutes later for Alexis Saelemaekers and when his effort was blocked on the line by Robertson, Diaz followed in to tap into an unguarded net.

"We let them back into the game and walk in at half-time thinking 'how have we let this happen?'" Robertson said. "When you play in this tournament it is against good teams. We need to be smarter. It's really tough but we managed to come out second half, play our football and enjoy it again."

Liverpool's three goals in Istanbul 16 years ago came in six minutes and Milan nearly exacted revenge with the same feat either side of the break only for Simon Kjaer's strike to be



LIVERPOOL: Liverpool's Portuguese striker Diogo Jota (center) heads towards goal during the UEFA Champions League 1st round Group B football match between Liverpool and AC Milan at Anfield in Liverpool, northwest England on Wednesday. —AFP

ruled out for offside. A pulsating game had another momentum swing moments later when Divock Origi's lofted pass played in Salah to prod home from close range.

Roared on by the first Anfield crowd for a European night since March 2019, Liverpool found their second wind and a winner. A corner was

only partially cleared to Henderson on the edge of the box and the England midfielder smashed the ball first time low past Maignan. "We are not quite there yet," said Pioli. "Liverpool are on a very high level, but we will use this game to make sure we can develop even further and gain experience in this competition." —AFP

'Morbid' reception for Griezmann as Atletico given scare

MADRID: Antoine Griezmann was whistled by Atletico Madrid fans on his return to the Wanda Metropolitano on Wednesday as his team were fortunate to escape with a 0-0 draw with Porto in the Champions League.

Griezmann was left out of the starting line-up by Diego Simeone and was then whistled by a large section of Atleti fans when he came on in the second half. Many were also eager to show their support for the Frenchman, who has re-signed on loan from Barcelona.

Simeone defended the striker after the game. "Some people want to be morbid and make a drama out of bringing back an extraordinary player like Griezmann," he said. "Hopefully he gets better and he responds to all the people who are criticizing him."

Atletico were lucky to take a point from a compelling but cagey contest in Group B after Porto's Mehdi Taremi capitalised on a poor back-pass from Renan Lodi late on, only for the goal to be ruled out for the slightest of handballs.

Taremi bundled the ball past Jan Oblak and as he toppled over the Atletico goalkeeper his hand feathered the ball as it was rolling into the net, making it a foul according to the latest laws. "Luckily there is VAR," said Oblak. "It seemed strange to me how the ball bounced off his body."

Porto could also feel aggrieved with an injury-time red card for Chancel Mbemba, who obstructed Griezmann as the 30-year-old was breaking down the right but still far from goal. With the penultimate kick of the game, Luis Suarez curled the free-kick over.

Atletico finished strong but a draw was a fair result and does little damage to either's chances of advancing to the last 16. Liverpool are the early pace-setters in the group after they beat AC Milan. "Porto were very good," Oblak said. "Creativity and chances were lacking but these are tough games against teams that close up and play on the counter attack so it's never easy."

Griezmann return divides

Griezmann made his second debut for Atletico last weekend when he played 58 rather underwhelming minutes against Espanyol in La Liga. But this was his first appearance in front of the home fans since his return from Barcelona, where he failed to live up to expectations after eventually agreeing to a 120-million-euro move in 2019.

Griezmann livened up the latter stages and there was enough applause to go with the whistles to suggest he can quickly earn back the fans' affections again. The first half was tight with hardly a chance for either team. Suarez was slid through by Thomas Lemar but the shot was saved. Jesus Corona skipped past Yannick Carrasco and crossed but Taremi poked wide.

Geoffrey Kondogbia made a brilliant last-ditch challenge on Zaidu Sanusi and then Lemar went off injured, replaced in midfield by summer signing Rodrigo de Paul. Porto were the stronger side after half-time and Otavio almost scored a fluke, his looping cross beating everyone except the back post. Sime-



MADRID: FC Porto's Iranian forward Mehdi Taremi (left) hands the ball during the UEFA Champions League first round Group B football match between Atletico Madrid and Porto at the Wanda Metropolitano stadium in Madrid on Wednesday. —AFP

one reacted by making three more substitutes, as Griezmann, Angel Correa and Lodi were all introduced, with Felix, Koke and Mario Hermoso going off.

The crowd seemed split on Griezmann, with the whistlers jeering his errors while those eager to applaud backed him as he began to drive Atletico forward. But Porto thought they had the winner when Taremi latched onto Lodi's disastrous backpass and finished past Oblak with five minutes left. VAR spotted the slightest of touches and Atletico survived. —AFP

Sports

Messi makes first start but PSG held by Club Brugge in Champions League

PARIS: Lionel Messi finally made his first start for Paris Saint-Germain on Wednesday, but the disjointed French giants had to settle for a 1-1 draw with Club Brugge in Belgium to begin their Champions League campaign. Ander Herrera gave PSG an early lead at the Jan Breydel Stadium only for Hans Vanaken to equalize for the home side, who were excellent and thoroughly deserved their point.

Messi — who had played just 24 minutes as a substitute prior to this game — is still looking for his first goal for his new club although he hit the bar in the first half and tested Brugge goalkeeper Simon Mignolet after the break before picking up a yellow card for a foul on Mats Rits.

However, it was not a convincing performance from the Parisians as coach Mauricio Pochettino lined up his star attacking trio of Messi, Neymar and Kylian Mbappe together for the first time. “We need time for them to get to know each other,” insisted Pochettino of his front three.

Mbappe came off hurt in the second half and PSG, despite building a team with the aim of winning the Champions League, have already complicated their chances just of making it out of a difficult Group A. They next host Manchester City, the team that eliminated them in last season’s semi-finals and who began their campaign with a remarkable 6-3 victory against RB Leipzig on Wednesday.

“I am pleased with the effort. It wasn’t a great evening for us but we need to stay calm and keep working,” said Pochettino. “The most important thing is to get the necessary time. We will try to do better.”

Grealish stars as Man City hit Leipzig for six

MANCHESTER: Jack Grealish scored a superb first Champions League goal as Manchester City survived Christopher Nkunku’s hat-trick to beat RB Leipzig 6-3 in a pulsating Group A opener on Wednesday. Grealish admits the lure of playing on the Champions League stage convinced him to leave his boyhood club Aston Villa to join City in a club record £100 million (\$138 million) move in the close-season.

The England winger made the most of his first taste of the tournament’s bright lights with a brilliant solo effort in the second half at the Etihad Stadium. Grealish also set up City’s first goal for Nathan Ake with a pin-point corner.

While City were snubbed by Cristiano Ronaldo when the Portugal superstar opted to join Manchester United, Pep Guardiola believes Grealish is more than ample compensation and this influential display underlined why.

“I loved it. The past few weeks, I couldn’t wait for this game,” Grealish said. “I’ve actually

Club Brugge were seen as the likely whipping boys when the draw was made but the Belgian champions are a well-run club with a proud history — European Cup runners-up in 1978 — and some excellent players.

‘More motivation’

For all the talk of Messi, Neymar and Mbappe — already christened the ‘MNM’ — for much of this game the most impressive attackers were in the blue and black stripes of the home side. Captain Vanaken got their goal, while giant young striker Charles De Ketelaere was a constant threat and Dutchman Noa Lang regularly got in behind Achraf Hakimi on the PSG right.

“We showed we have guts. Real guts,” said Brugge coach Philippe Clement. “My players played a historic game. I am extremely proud. We have proven that physically we are very strong. I think we just had more motivation.”

Pochettino can point to the absences of Angel di Maria and Idrissa Gana Gueye due to suspension as well as the injured Marco Verratti but his team will need to do much better in their coming European outings.

Yet their evening had started so well, with Mbappe turning Clinton Mata inside out before sending in a low ball from the left for the arriving Herrera to sweep home in the 15th minute. Forget the superstar strikers, that was the Spanish midfielder’s fourth goal in PSG’s last four games.

However, the home side were back level before the half-hour mark as Eduard Sobol got in behind Hakimi and cut the ball back for the unmarked Vanaken to finish. Moments later Messi cracked a curling strike off the crossbar but



BRUGES: Paris Saint-Germain’s French forward Kylian Mbappe (center) fights for the ball with Club Brugge’s French defender Stanley Nsoki (left) and Angolan defender Clinton Mata during the UEFA Champions League Group A football match between Club Brugge and Paris Saint-Germain at Jan Breydel Stadium in Bruges, on Wednesday. — AFP

Keylor Navas — preferred to Gianluigi Donnarumma in the away goal — was kept busy saving from a Vanaken free-kick and tipping over a De Ketelaere shot.

Pochettino had to make changes at half-time,

replacing midfield duo Leandro Paredes and Georginio Wijnaldum with Danilo Pereira and Julian Draxler. Mbappe then had to hobble off with a worrying ankle knock just six minutes into the second half. — AFP



MANCHESTER: Manchester City’s English midfielder Jack Grealish celebrates scoring his team’s fourth goal in front of the home supporters during the UEFA Champions League 1st round Group A football match between Manchester City and RB Leipzig at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester, northwest England, on Wednesday. —AFP

played in the Champions League now and it was amazing — the music and everything — and the game just topped it all off. When I’m in that position, running into the area I’d back myself one-on-one against anyone and it paid off. It was a great night.”

Nordi Mukiele’s own goal had doubled City’s

lead before Nkunku got one back on a memorable personal evening for the French winger. Riyad Mahrez’s penalty made it 3-1 and Nkunku netted again before Grealish’s moment of magic.

Nkunku’s third was followed by Joao Cancelo’s rocket and a red card for Leipzig’s former City defender Angelino. Gabriel Jesus rounded

off the goal-spree as City celebrated Guardiola’s 300th game in charge in fitting style.

There was more good news for Guardiola as Kevin De Bruyne impressed in his first game back from the ankle injury which had sidelined him since August 15. Guardiola insists that last season’s Champions League final defeat against Chelsea will serve as the “motor” driving City’s challenge this term and they wasted little time seizing pole position in Group A.

“Leipzig never give up. They play all or nothing,” Guardiola said. “We scored a few minutes after they scored and it helped us a lot.” Leipzig boss Jesse Marsch added: “Whenever we got any momentum, City came up with a response. There were too many individual errors. We weren’t good enough against this kind of opponent.”

City were ahead in the 16th minute as Grealish’s corner found Ake and he rose highest for a powerful header that Peter Gulacsi tipped onto the crossbar, only to see it bounce down over the goal-line. City doubled their lead thanks to Mukiele’s comical blunder in the 28th minute.

De Bruyne tenaciously eluded three Leipzig players and curled a sublime cross towards Grealish that the panicked Mukiele diverted into his own net as he tried to head back to Gulacsi. Nkunku punished sloppy defending to give the visitors hope in the 42nd minute. — AFP



Messi restricted in PSG draw as Man City, Liverpool win thrillers

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