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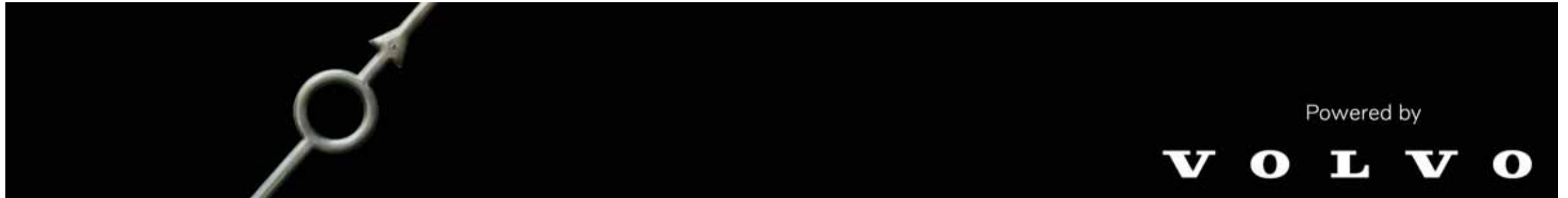
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TEC unveils new strategy to boost tourism in Kuwait

11 anchor projects to be redeveloped after KD 250m capital increase



KUWAIT: Chief Executive Officer of Touristic Enterprises Company Abdulwahab Al-Marzouq addresses a press conference at the Kuwait Towers yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The Touristic Enterprises Company (TEC) yesterday unveiled its latest strategy to usher in a "new golden age of tourism" in Kuwait. During a press conference held at the Kuwait Towers, redevelopment plans for 11 projects were announced following the approval of a KD 250 million capital increase by the Kuwait Investment Authority.

Chief Executive Officer of TEC Abdulwahab Al-Marzouq and members of the leadership team revealed the company's new strategy to become a world-class provider of leisure and entertainment experiences in Kuwait. Speaking at the press conference, Marzouq outlined the company's path forward to revive the golden era of tourism in Kuwait and become one of the leading developers and operators of family entertainment experiences in the region.

"This is the most ambitious transformation in the company's 40+ year history, which lays out concrete plans for the redevelopment of 11 anchor projects. Today, we are setting the course for a new era for the recreational and leisure sector in Kuwait. As part of the new strategy, we will pursue calculated growth and expansion; modernize, redevelop and reposition existing facilities; and diversify our assets to offer new

world-class experiences to everyone in Kuwait," Marzouq said.

"The new strategy is both ambitious and achievable, backed by concrete plans and an approved capital increase of KD 250 million by the Kuwait Investment Authority. Through the provision of immersive experiences, fit for the new age, TEC aims to play a leading role in enabling the tourism ecosystem in Kuwait and serve as a role model for the country's public sector transformation. This is also in line with the 2035 vision with a focus on human capital development and economic diversification," he added.

TEC revealed redevelopment plans for 11 key facilities across five verticals - park and family entertainment, hospitality, recreational clubs, highway rest areas and waterfront marinas. More specifically, TEC unveiled plans for the redevelopment of three key projects to be executed in the first phase - Nuwaiseeb rest area, Ras Al-Ardh Club and Messilah Beach.

TEC also unveiled plans for the redevelopment of its other facilities as part of the second phase, including Shaab Park, South Sabahiya Park, Salmiya Yacht Club, Abdaly rest area, Salmi rest area, Egaila Beach, Khairan Resort and the Touristic Park.

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Biden says US not seeking 'Cold War' as he vows to lead



NEW YORK: US President Joe Biden addresses the 76th Session of the UN General Assembly yesterday. — AFP

NEW YORK: President Joe Biden told the world yesterday the United States is not seeking a new Cold War with China as he vowed to pivot from post-9/11 conflicts and take a global leadership role on crises from climate to COVID. Addressing the UN General Assembly for the first time as president, Biden promised to work to advance democracy and alliances, despite friction with Europe over France's loss of a mega-contract.

The Biden administration has identified a rising and authoritarian China as the paramount challenge of the 21st century, but in his United Nations debut he made clear he was not trying to sow divisions. "We are not seeking a new Cold War or a world divided into rigid blocs," Biden said. "The United States is ready to work with any nation that steps up and pursues peaceful resolution to share challenges even if we have intense disagreement in other areas."

Biden did not mention China by name, other than voicing alarm about human rights in Xinjiang, where experts say more than one million people from the Uyghur and other mostly Muslim populations are incarcerated. Biden declared himself to be the first US president in 20 years not to be running a war after his controversial pullout of troops from Afghanistan, where the Taliban swiftly took over.

Instead, America is "opening a new era of relentless diplomacy" in which military power must be the "tool of last resort". "The mission must be clear and achievable, undertaken with informed consent of the

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Trudeau meets supporters after narrow win

MONTREAL: A beaming Justin Trudeau posed for selfies and bumped elbows with supporters in a Montreal subway station early yesterday, hours after the Canadian prime minister narrowly won a third term in a snap election. "It is I who thank you," Trudeau told a cheering crowd of commuters, who surrounded the prime minister on their way to work and school.

Clad in jeans, sneakers, a blue shirt

and wearing a black face mask, Trudeau mingled with his constituents in a subway corridor between two escalators, slipping a few words in French to some and in English to others. "I come from Afghanistan and I am really proud to have been welcomed in your country," a woman in a pink and grey sweater told Trudeau, putting her hand to her heart in a gesture of gratitude.

Soon after, another young woman approached Trudeau and called out to him, "I am counting on you to act for the sake of the environment!" Then, a father slipped next to the prime minister with his three children. One of them, a boy, bumped elbows with Trudeau before giving him a hug.

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MONTREAL: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is seen during a meet and greet with constituents at the Jarry Metro station yesterday. — AFP

Sudan foils coup attempt linked to Bashir regime

KHARTOUM: Sudan's fragile transitional government said it foiled an attempted coup yesterday involving military officers and civilians linked to the ousted regime of longtime autocrat Omar Al-Bashir. Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok said the coup attempt was the "latest manifestation of the national crisis", referring to deep divisions during Sudan's

move to democracy.

In a televised speech, he said the plotters had "made extensive preparations, which were showcased in the security breakdown in cities... blocking of national roads, closure of ports and persistent instigation against the civilian government". Information Minister Hamza Baloul said later the coup attempt had been thwarted. "Order has been restored and the leaders of the attempted coup, both military and civilian, have been arrested," he said. "Authorities are pursuing supporters of the defunct regime" who took part.

The military said "most" of those involved had been apprehended, including 11 officers.

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KHARTOUM: Sudan's Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok chairs a cabinet meeting in the capital yesterday. — AFP

Egypt ex-junta ruler Tantawi dies aged 85

CAIRO: Egypt's Mohammed Hussein Tantawi, who headed the military junta that ruled after president Hosni Mubarak's ouster in the Arab Spring protests, has died at age 85, the government said yesterday. After his stint as Egypt's de facto leader, he was soon sacked by the country's first freely elected president, the Islamist Mohamed Morsi, and spent his remaining years largely out of public view.

A veteran of Egypt's wars, Tantawi had long served as Mubarak's defense minister and as chair-

man of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. He became the acting head of state after an 18-day popular uprising ended Mubarak's rule in early 2011. President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi paid tribute yesterday to Tantawi as one of "Egypt's most loyal sons" who had served the nation for more than half a century and run it "during a very critical time".

Sisi also absolved Tantawi of responsibility for killings while the military was in power, including of protesters in downtown Cairo and a Port Said sports stadium, saying: "I swear... this man is innocent of any blood (spilled) during that period." Sisi, who has repeatedly credited Tantawi with his political career, declared a period of national mourning without specifying how many days. The Egyptian Football Association scrapped any celebrations in a domestic Super Cup match yesterday.

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Mohammed Hussein Tantawi

Local

EU actively involved in efforts to advance peace in Middle East

Ambassador Tudor speaks on EU's role on 'Int'l Day of Peace'

KUWAIT: The European Union's Ambassador to Kuwait and Qatar Cristian Tudor spoke in an interview with Kuwait Times on an array of topics highlighting the EU's role in promoting peace around the world, with a special focus on the Middle East. The following are excerpts from the interview, which was conducted on the occasion of the 'International Day of Peace'.

Question: Why is the EU referred to as the most important peace project in the world?

Tudor: The preservation of peace is the very reason the European Union was born in 1950, after the devastation of two world wars. Since then, the EU has maintained peace for over 70 years. This brought prosperity, stability and better living standards for EU citizens.

The EU has played an important role in transforming Europe from a continent of war to a continent of peace and prosperity. The ability of the EU to bring peace and stability make the EU an attractive project for more European countries to join. What started as a project of six countries is now a union of 27 EU member states. The EU was awarded the 'Nobel Peace Prize in 2012' in recognition of the EU's efforts to advance the causes of peace, reconciliation, democracy, and human rights - not only in

Europe, but also across the globe.

Question: How is the EU promoting peace in the world?

Tudor: The EU is a global player, working with the international community to promote global peace and security, and defend fundamental rights



EU fully supports Kuwait's mediation efforts

and international law. Our commitment to peace is also reflected in our active role in promoting multilateralism and rules-based order at the world level, for instance in the framework of the UN system. The EU has been and will continue to be the best ally of multilateralism and its institutions, because the world we live in is interconnected and we need to shape global responses to global challenges.

The EU aims to integrate the pursuit of peace

in its external actions in areas such as trade, development, enlargement and neighborhood policies, its common foreign and security policy, and political and diplomatic relations with third countries and multilateral institutions. The EU has established a reputation as a soft power organization guided by a normative vision and as an effective actor for peace and democracy.

The EU is a unique actor in integrating civilian and military means to advance peace worldwide. The EU has various initiatives in the security field in the MENA and Gulf region in particular. The EU currently has 17 civilian and military missions and operations in countries outside the EU, including those in the Middle East.

Question: What is the EU doing to promote peace in the region?

Tudor: The EU is actively involved in efforts to advance peace and stability in the Middle East by using a variety of civilian and military instruments. When it comes to civilian means the EU and its member states are for instance leading donors of international aid to the Palestinians and those affected by the conflict in Syria.

Another example of the EU efforts to promote peace in the region is the European Union Naval Force Mediterranean operation. This is EU

Common Security and Defense Policy Operation in the Mediterranean focused on the implementation of the United Nations arms embargo on Libya.

EU contributes also to stability of Iraq, where it has an EU Advisory Mission that advises the Iraqi authorities on their implementation of civilian security sector reform.

The EU has a Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process whose mandate is to provide an active contribution to the final settlement of the Middle East conflict.

The EU and Kuwait share a common interest in bringing more stability to the region through peaceful means. The EU has been fully supporting Kuwait's mediation efforts with regard to the Gulf rift that brought the dispute to the end. Peace should be not taken for granted and we all should work towards this common goal.



EU Ambassador Cristian Tudor

Egypt ex-junta ruler Tantawi...

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The US embassy in Cairo as well as the European Union's delegation and the Arab League offered their condolences, along with Gulf allies Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.

Tantawi was laid to rest later in a military funeral led by Sisi and attended by top military brass, ministers and Coptic Christian Pope Tawadros II. Soldiers marched carrying commemorative floral wreaths at the ceremony as a 21-gun salute sounded and a band played nationalistic songs. Like all Egyptian leaders from the overthrow of the monarchy in 1952 to the 2012 election of Morsi, Tantawi came from the ranks of the military.

Born in 1935, and of Nubian origin, Tantawi began his career as an infantryman in 1956. He served during the 1956 Suez Crisis, and in the 1967 and 1973 Middle East wars against the Zionist entity. After taking charge of the country, his ruling council quickly said Egypt would stay "committed" to its regional and international treaties, implicitly confirming its landmark 1979 peace treaty with the Zionist entity would remain intact.

He served as Egypt's minister of defense and mil-

itary production for 21 years and became the army chief in 1995. Despite being a close associate of Mubarak, Tantawi relented to public pressure and put the ex-president on trial on charges of inciting the killing of hundreds of protesters during the 2011 uprising. Tantawi was often perceived as a possible presidential candidate after Mubarak's ouster, but his age, public opinion at the time and his reported ill health counted against him.

A March 2008 US diplomatic cable published on activist website WikiLeaks described Tantawi as "charming and courtly" but also "aged and change-resistant". "He and Mubarak are focused on regime stability and maintaining the status quo through the end of their time," the cable warned. The army was widely praised for allowing anti-Mubarak protests during the uprising, and the junta vowed to pave the way "to an elected civil authority to build a free democratic state".

But the joy of millions of demonstrators soon turned into anger, accusing the military of dragging its feet in launching democratic reforms. Morsi, less than two months after his election as Egypt's leader in June 2012, sacked Tantawi and, fatefully, replaced him with then military intelligence chief, Sisi. Sisi went on to topple Morsi after street protests against the Islamist's single year of divisive rule, and himself became president in 2014. After his sacking, Tantawi largely kept a low profile, although he was seen attending the inauguration of the "new Suez Canal" in 2015. — AFP

condemned any attempt "to undermine the democratic political transition".

Sudan has had a long history of coups, including since Bashir's ouster, but those were small scale and immediately foiled. Officials have often blamed them Bashir's Islamist supporters of being behind them. Bashir, a one-time general, came to power on the back of an Islamist-backed military coup in 1989. Since his ouster, the ex-president has been jailed in Khartoum awaiting trial over the coup that brought him to power.

He is also wanted by the International Criminal Court on charges of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide for his prosecution of a deadly scorched-earth campaign against ethnic minority rebels in Darfur. During a visit to Khartoum last month, ICC prosecutor Karim Khan signed a cooperation deal with the transitional authorities that marked another step towards Bashir facing trial in The Hague.

In an address to troops yesterday, powerful paramilitary commander Mohamed Hamdan Daglo said: "We will not allow a coup to take place. "We want real democratic transition through free and fair elections, not like in the past," said the commander, widely known as Hemeti. Under an Aug 2019 power-sharing deal, Sudan is ruled by a transitional government composed of both civilian and military representatives, and tasked with overseeing a return to full civilian rule.

The deal originally provided for the formation of a legislative assembly during a three-year transition, but that period was reset when Sudan signed the peace deal with rebel groups last October. Sudan remains plagued by chronic economic problems as well as deep divisions among the various factions steering the transition. — AFP

human capital development, job creation and growing tourism demand. They will be developed around a financially sustainable business model following rigorous planning and financial viability studies.

The new strategy is centered around a new people- and customer-centric approach as the company seeks to strengthen collaboration and stakeholder engagement to foster win-win partnerships, change perceptions and rebuild trust. Guided by a performance-driven culture, TEC unveiled its new values of pride, people centricity, inclusiveness, innovation, creativity and respect for the local culture.

TEC currently operates the following 13 facilities: Kuwait Towers, Khairan Resort, Messilah Beach, Egaila Beach, the seafont, Shaab Sea Club, Ras Al-Ardh Sea Club, Yacht Club, Fahaaheel Sea Club, Green Island, Touristic Park, Swimming Pool Complex and Cable Park.

Trudeau meets supporters after...

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Greeting constituents in the metro after election day has become a tradition for Trudeau, something he did after his first victory in 2015 and then in 2019. "I am very happy with the way he managed COVID," said Giugetta Iovino. She added that she is "happy to know that it is he who will get us out of there."

But Omar Bencheikh, a 24-year-old immigrant from Morocco, is disappointed and believes the new government won't last more than two years. "For me, the Liberals have not succeeded in their bet because Canada is divided," he said. In his victory speech Monday night, Trudeau promised to lead Canadians "into the brighter days ahead". While thanking his supporters, he also vowed to work for all Canadians. "Because no matter how you voted ... I hear you, I hear you when you say we can only move forward if no one is left behind," he said.

Trudeau called the snap polls last month, hoping to parlay a smooth COVID-19 vaccine rollout - among the best in the world - into a new mandate to steer the nation's pandemic exit and pass his agenda without opposition support. After a bumpy five weeks of campaigning, the one-time golden boy of Canadian politics was able to cling on to power - but emerged weakened.

The Liberals have won or were leading in 158 seats, far short of the 170 needed for a majority, while the opposition Conservatives were heading for 119, according to preliminary results from Elections Canada, with the new parliament set to look little different to the outgoing one.

At 49, Trudeau had faced tougher political bouts and still came out unscathed. After six years in power, however, his administration is showing signs of fatigue, and it was an uphill battle for him to convince Canadians to stick with his Liberals after falling short of high expectations set in his 2015 landslide win.

Entering the final stretch of the contest, Liberals and Conservatives - the two main political parties that have ruled Canada since its 1867 confederation - were virtually tied, with about 31 percent support each in public opinion polls, and four smaller fac-

Biden says US not seeking 'Cold War'...

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American people and whenever possible in partnership with our allies," Biden said from the UN rostrum where previous US presidents, notably including George W Bush, have pushed for military action.

Opening the General Assembly, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned of growing divisions between the United States and China and urged dialogue. "I fear our world is creeping towards two different sets of economic, trade, financial and technology rules, two divergent approaches in the development of artificial intelligence - and ultimately two different military and geopolitical strategies," Guterres said. "This is a recipe for trouble. It would be far less predictable than the Cold War."

The UN General Assembly is meeting in person for the first time in two years but at limited capacity and with pandemic precautions. The measures include replacing the microphone after each speaker - likely welcome news for the 78-year-old Biden who spoke after Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, who defied guidance only to attend if vaccinated. Biden has called a virtual summit today on defeating the pandemic and teased that he will announce "additional commitments."

"We seek to advance the fight against COVID-19 and hold ourselves accountable around specific tar-

tions nipping at their heels. Pollster Tim Powers predicted a Liberal minority win. "But is that a win for him?" he said, noting that Trudeau had hoped for more than just a plurality of seats.

"In the end, this election was ultimately for nothing," University of Winnipeg politics professor Felix Mathieu told AFP, pointing to the projected seat count for each party as being similar to the split in the last parliament, with most incumbents re-elected.

In a concession speech, Conservative leader Erin O'Toole, 48, recalled Trudeau having pulled the plug on the last minority parliament he said was "unworkable". "But tonight Canadians did not give Mr Trudeau the majority mandate he wanted," he said. "In fact, the Canadians sent him back with another minority at the cost of 600 million dollars (US\$470 million) and deeper divisions in our great country."

Meanwhile, in Vancouver New Democratic Party leader Jagmeet Singh congratulated Trudeau and vowed to keep fighting on climate change and a range of social issues. "I want you to know our fight for you will continue," said Singh, whose party is looking at 25 seats.

The campaign saw the contenders spar over climate actions, indigenous reconciliation, affordable housing, mandatory COVID-19 inoculations and vaccine passports. At rallies, Trudeau was dogged by what he described as "anti-vaxxer mobs", including one that threw stones at him. O'Toole, meanwhile, was knocked for his backing of Alberta and two other Tory-led provinces' loosening of public health restrictions too soon, with Covid outbreaks now forcing their overwhelmed hospitals to fly patients across Canada for care.

He also fumbled over gun control and was warned by Beijing, according to Chinese state media, that his proposed hard line on China - Canada's second-largest trading partner, with whom relations have soured over its detention of two Canadians - would "invite counterstrikes". Overall, commented Max Cameron, a politics professor at the University of British Columbia, "this hasn't been a polarizing election. There's actually a lot of clustering around the middle."

O'Toole, a relative unknown who became Tory leader only last year, had tracked his party to the political center, forcing the Liberals to compete for votes on the left with the New Democrats and Greens, as well as the separatist Bloc Quebecois. The Conservatives, however, also saw their support clawed by former foreign minister Maxime Bernier's far-right People's Party. — AFP

gets on three key challenges: saving lives now, vaccinating the world, and building back better," Biden said. He also said Washington would double financing on climate change - a key element in reaching an ambitious new accord in November at a UN conference in Glasgow as temperatures and severe weather rise dangerously. The United Nations says there is a \$20 billion shortfall in the \$100 billion fund that developed countries promised to mobilize annually from 2020-2025 for helping poorer nations adapt to climate change.

Biden will end a busy diplomatic week with an unprecedented four-way summit at the White House with the leaders of Australia, India and Japan - the so-called "Quad" widely seen as a united front against China. But Biden's efforts to shore up alliances have faced one sudden and strong hurdle: France. Paris recalled its ambassador to Washington in fury after Australia canceled a multibillion-dollar contract for French conventional submarines in favor of US nuclear versions as part of a new alliance announced with Washington and London.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian has said he will not meet one-on-one in New York with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, and has described Biden's diplomatic style as "brutality". The White House appears confident it can calm the spat, with Biden set to speak by telephone to French President Emmanuel Macron, who is not attending UNGA due to COVID precautions.

But German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, who openly rejoiced in Biden's defeat of Donald Trump, voiced solidarity with France and called the submarine decision "disappointing". "I was never under any illusion that we wouldn't have problems with the new American president," he told reporters. — AFP

Sudan foils coup attempt linked...

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"The army regained control over the sites that perpetrators sought to seize," it said. "Searches and investigations are still ongoing for others involved."

Sudan's army commander and head of the sovereign council Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan visited the military camp in south Khartoum where the coup attempt reportedly began. "Had it succeeded, the attempt could have had devastating consequences on the unity of the army, security forces, and the country," he said. State television had aired patriotic songs and urged people to "confront" the coup attempt.

In Khartoum, traffic flowed smoothly, including around the army headquarters, where protesters staged a months-long sit-in that eventually led to Bashir's overthrow in a palace coup by the army in 2019. Anti-coup demonstrations broke out in several cities. At Port Sudan in the east, protesters raised Sudanese flags and chanted "No to military rule" and "No to coup", eyewitness Mohamed Hassan said. Students took to the streets and shouted similar slogans in the eastern city of Gedaref, another eyewitness, Amal Hussein, told AFP.

Britain, Norway and the US voiced "strong support" for Sudan's government. "The Troika... rejects any attempts to derail or disrupt the Sudanese people's efforts to establish a democratic, peaceful, and prosperous future," they said in a statement. The UN

TEC unveils new strategy to boost...

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Marzouq assured prices of tickets to the new facilities will be affordable for everyone. "We are not only focusing on making profits, but we also aim to provide the people of Kuwait with new modern leisure and entertainment activities. We have already started executing some of the projects that will be completed a few months from now," he pointed out.

The new projects will positively contribute to Kuwait's socioeconomic development through

Local

Kuwait Amir's Representative, Qatar Amir discuss bilateral ties

Prime Minister takes part in Turkish UN mission inauguration



NEW YORK: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim Al-Thani. —KUNA photos



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah speaks with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan during the inauguration of the Turkish UN mission.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets Comorian President Othman Ghazali.



Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah chairs the ministerial meeting of the Arab League, held on the sidelines of the 76th session of the UN General Assembly.

NEW YORK: Representative of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah discussed bilateral ties with Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim Al-Thani on the sidelines of the 76th session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA). During the meeting held Monday evening, both sides reviewed the consolidated relations between the two countries and issues of common concern on the assembly's agenda, in addition to their point of view on the regional and international level.

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled conveyed to Sheikh Tamim greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and their wishes of further progress and prosperity to Qatar's leadership, government and people. The meeting was attended by Kuwaiti Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, Kuwait's

Permanent Representative at the UN Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi and the official delegation accompanying His Highness the premier.

Turkish mission

Meanwhile, His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-



Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled meets Comorian President

Khaled took part in a ceremony of inaugurating Turkey's permanent mission to the UN in New York. The ceremony was held under the patronage and

presence of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. His Highness the Prime Minister expressed happiness over partaking in this ceremony that embodies deep-rooted ties between Turkey and Kuwait and their peoples, wishing Turkey further progress and prosperity. The ceremony was attended by UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, heads of state and delegations of countries partaking in the 76th session of the UN General Assembly.

Furthermore, His Highness the Prime Minister met on Monday Comorian President Othman Ghazali. During the meeting, bilateral relations and means of enhancing and developing them, as well as issues of common concern were discussed. Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad and Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Otaibi attended the meeting, which was held on the sidelines of the 76th session of the UN General Assembly in New York.

Joint Arab action

In other news, Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh

Dr Ahmad Al-Sabah said a ministerial meeting of the Arab League, hosted by Kuwait's permanent mission to the UN, reviewed issues related to joint Arab action and challenges, especially the Palestinian cause. In a statement to the press on the sidelines of the meeting held Monday evening, Sheikh Dr Ahmad said the meeting is to follow up on the last Foreign Ministers' meeting and to prepare for the 76th session of the high-level UN General Assembly.

Other topics related to challenges the Arab region is going through, especially the crisis in Yemen, as well as the situations in Syria and Libya were discussed, he added. All participants in this meeting commended the role of Tunisia which represents the Arab countries in the Security Council whose membership will end by the end of this year, then UAE will assume UNSC non-permanent membership for two years, he pointed out. There was consensus among all heads of delegations of Arab countries over a host of issues, he said. — KUNA

Kuwait Foreign Minister visits UAE, Tunisia's UN missions

NEW YORK: Kuwait's Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah on Monday visited Tunisia and UAE's permanent missions on the sidelines of the 76th session of the UN General Assembly. The Kuwaiti minister was received by UAE's Minister of State for International Cooperation Reem Al Hashimy, Sheikh Ahmad congratulated again the UAE on its non-permanent membership at the UN Security Council for 2022-2023 term, wishing it all success in its mission that will begin next January. The Emirati minister appreciated Kuwait's fruitful cooperation to facilitate the UAE's mission during its non-permanent membership. She praised Kuwait's pioneering role and firm stances on various issues on both regional and international levels.

Furthermore, Sheikh Dr Ahmad visited the Tunisian permanent mission to the UN on the sidelines of the 76th session. He voiced Kuwait's appreciation to efforts made by Tunisia, which represents



NEW YORK: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah visits the UAE mission on the sidelines of the 76th session of the UN General Assembly. — KUNA photos

the Arabs, at the UNSC and its defense of Arab and Islamic issues during the 2020-2021 non-permanent membership. The Kuwaiti top diplomat met his Tunisian counterpart Othman Jerandi who valued Kuwait's unwavering position and efforts during the 2018-2019 UNSC non-permanent membership. The Tunisian minister thanked Kuwait for its aid that helped his country deal with the repercussions of the coronavirus and extinguishing wildfires.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Dr Ahmad met with the Algerian Minister of Foreign Affairs and the National Community Abroad Ramtane Lamamra.

During the meeting, they discussed the ongoing bilateral relation, in addition to latest regional and international developments. Moreover, the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister also met with Maltese Foreign Minister Evarist Bartolo, where they signed a work-plan of the first session of Kuwaiti-Maltese mutual committee, in addition to discussing a number of issues of mutual concern. Furthermore, the two meetings were held on the sidelines of the 78th session of the UN General Assembly in New York.

In the meantime, Sheikh Dr Ahmad met with Somalia's Foreign Minister Mohammad Abdulrazaq. The two top diplomats discussed bilateral relations and issues of common concern. He held similar talks during meetings with Nicaragua's Foreign Minister Denis Moncada, Mauritania's Foreign Minister Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, Cypriot Foreign Minister Nikos Christodoulides, and Yemeni Foreign Minister Ahmad bin Mubarak.

Sheikh Dr Ahmad had met earlier with the president of the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Abdullah Shahid on the sidelines of the session in New York. During the meeting, the Kuwaiti foreign minister reiterated his congratulations to Shahid on having been elected UNGA president, wishing him the best of luck in his new duty. He expressed Kuwait's support to UNGA activities, wishing continuing close cooperation between the State of Kuwait and the UN, including all its specialized agencies. Shahid meanwhile reviewed the UN's programs during his presidency of the 76th session, especially those related to sustainable development, the promotion of human rights principles, eradication of poverty, education support and climate change. — KUNA



Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets his Tunisian counterpart Othman Jerandi.



Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets his Algerian counterpart Ramtane Lamamra.



Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and Maltese Foreign Minister Evarist Bartolo pose for a picture after signing a work-plan of the first session of Kuwaiti-Maltese mutual committee.

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News in brief

Several arrests in Shuwaikh crackdown

KUWAIT: The Capital security department carried out a campaign in Industrial Shuwaikh to crack down on law violators, the Interior Ministry said yesterday. During the campaign, police arrested eight residents who did not have IDs, 15 with expired residency permits, four wanted persons and one crossdresser. A vehicle was also impounded during the operation.

Kuwaitis' travel spending up 66%

KUWAIT: Kuwaitis' spending on travel jumped by 66 percent in the first quarter of 2021 compared to the fourth quarter of 2020, according to a recent report. Spending has reached nearly KD 591 million by the end of the first quarter of this year, compared to around KD 356 million by the end of the fourth quarter of last year, Central Bank statistics show.

GCC deplores Houthi provocations

JEDDAH: The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) yesterday strongly condemned an attempt by Yemen's Iran-allied Houthi group to fire three drones laden with explosives towards the southern Saudi city of Khamis Mushait. The Saudi-led coalition had intercepted and destroyed the drones before reaching their target, state-run SPA news agency cited the bloc's chief Youssef Al-Othaimeen as saying. The GCC deplores the Houthis' "terrorist actions" and backs all measures Riyadh takes to protect its stability and the security of its people, he added.

Kuwait restaurant sector suffers from manpower shortage

KUWAIT: The restaurant and hotel sector is suffering from a severe shortage of specialized workers and delivery drivers, as the door to bringing in new labor from abroad remains shut for most of the services sectors. A government report revealed a drop in the number of workers in lodging and food services between March 2020 and March 2021 - a total of 8,641 workers.

Head of the Restaurants Union Fahad Al-Arbash told Al-Qabas Arabic daily that restaurant owners

are unable to operate as the ban on bringing in labor from abroad remains in place, along with a dearth of experienced specialized workers such as chefs, bakers and confectioners, and this has negatively affected work.

Jaber Al-Shareef, owner of a delivery company, said the ban on bringing in labor from abroad, coupled with a shortage of manpower locally, has contributed to an increase in wages and transfers between companies due to competition and monetary incentives.

ACK-funded project wins IMEFM best paper award

KUWAIT: A research paper funded by the Australian College of Kuwait (ACK) titled 'Financial Inclusion and Bank Stability - Comparative Evidence between Islamic and Non-Islamic Banks' won the prestigious International Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Finance and Management (IMEFM) Best Paper Award during the 23rd Malaysian Finance Association International Conference

2021 (MFAIC 2021).

The paper's principal investigator is Dr Sadeq Damrah, Assistant Professor at the Mathematics and Physics department at ACK, and among the co-investigators was Dr Ahmed Bani Mustafa, Head of the Mathematics and Physics Department at ACK. Noting, the MFAIC 2021 conference took place virtually while Dr Damrah represented the study, giving a talk about the research and its findings. The International Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Finance and Management, which is a leading Q2 journal that publishes quality and in-depth



Dr Sadeq Damrah

analysis on current issues within Islamic and Middle Eastern finance and management awarded the Best Paper Award to the project.

The paper focused on financial inclusion in Kuwait applying advanced statistical methods to the banking and financial sectors. From his end, Dr Bani Mustafa described the results of the research as very valuable and noted that its findings can assist in better implementation of various facets of the financial and banking system in Kuwait.

Commenting on the achievement, Dr Damrah said: "I would like to thank ACK for their continuous support for academic research done by its professors, and we hope to use our research findings to come up with recommendations that will help Kuwait and its economy."

Ooredoo embraces young Kuwaiti talents

KUWAIT: The pandemic has swept across the world in 2020 and continued for a year and a half, leaving havoc in its wake. More than any event in memory, the pandemic has been a global event. On every continent, households have felt its devastation - joblessness and lockdowns, infirmity and death. In addition, an abiding, relentless fear.

This has posed some challenges to Kuwaiti youth job seekers, especially with the negative impact on many sectors in the country during the lockdowns or permanent cessation that some private sector's companies suffered from. They could not continue providing their services or products to their customers during that period. This resulted in a huge loss, rationing of expenses, or even the elimination of some jobs, and eventually laying off a number of employees. The telecom sector was one of those sectors in the country that was affected by the consequences of the pandemic.

Long-term strategy

However, despite all that, Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, and thanks to its efficient crisis management's long-term strategy, managed to set the perfect example in how to control the crisis and took the initiative to support the national economy and society as a whole in recovering from the consequences of the pandemic. Ooredoo Kuwait aimed at two important goals: supporting employees, raising their efficiency, refining their talents and qualifying them to occupy leadership positions in the company. The second and most important goal is to open the door to employment for Kuwaiti youth to apply



to several positions in the company.

Hiring despite the pandemic

These goals were the main pillar on which the company relied on: following its strategy, which focuses on encouraging Kuwaiti youth. During the pandemic, Ooredoo emphasized on its role and social responsibility in recruiting and investing in young national talents. At a time when some private sector companies laid off a number of their employees and stopped employment, Ooredoo Kuwait was keen to hire about 40 young Kuwaiti talents during 2020 and throughout the beginning of 2021.

Different academic disciplines

These young talents came from various scientific academic backgrounds, which included: Petroleum Engineering, Accounting, Finance, Marketing, Computer Sciences, Computer Engineering, English Language and Literature, Business Administration, Public Relations, Information Systems and Economics. This reflects the company's successful plans towards human capital management; it also demonstrates the company's appreciation of the fresh-graduates; those

who have the right skillsets and capabilities for growth to be in the telecommunications sector. Ooredoo provided those young nationals with the tailor-made training courses; refined their talents and qualified them to be ready for the workplace.

Youth in leadership positions

The company has taken upon itself the responsibility of attracting, maintaining and encouraging national talents and developing their skills in light of the accelerating pace of digital transformation and technological change that the world is witnessing - especially in the telecommunications sector. The percentage of Kuwaiti youth employment increased by 67 percent in 2021 compared to 2019, and the percentage of Kuwaiti youth employment in leadership positions increased by 64 percent in 2021 compared to 2019. The company was also keen to prepare and equip young Kuwaiti leaders within the company, taking into account the importance of consolidating their growth and development process on a sustainable basis, which positively affects the company's performance and thus providing the best services to customers.

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A picture taken yesterday from the Kuwait Towers shows a view of Al-Hamra Tower (center) in Kuwait City, the tallest skyscraper in Kuwait. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (To have your picture featured in the Kuwait Times' 'Photo of the Day' section, please send your high resolution, horizontal, unedited photos to local@kuwaittimes.com, along with the full name and Instagram account, in addition to a description showing the picture's location and date taken)

Back pain affects 70% people in Kuwait: Doctor

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Interventional radiology, pain treatment and spine consultant Dr Waleed Al-Hajji said back pain is widespread in Kuwait and may affect 70 percent of people. He indicated that disc injuries are no longer limited to the elderly as before, as they now occur in youth and juveniles. Moreover, he noted that the increase in such cases is due to obesity and lack of exercising.

Dr Hajji said most people who are suffering from disc conditions will have their nerves affected; a condition known as sciatica. Its symptoms include pain that spreads to the legs, feeling like

electricity or numbness in the foot, and muscle cramps that increase while standing or sitting for long periods, and sometimes while walking if the patient is overweight.

Dr Hajji warned against the modern lifestyle, laziness and lack of practicing various sports, as well as obesity, because all these factors are considered among the main causes of disc cases. He said scientific development in the field of treating spinal problems contributed to discovering new techniques that led to a major revolution in the medical field and medical equipment used for treatment.

Furthermore, Dr Hajji noted that modern technologies in the field of spinal conditions made it possible for 90 percent of disc cases to not need surgical intervention, keeping the scalpel away. "We previously used to treat these cases surgically, and although the procedures were giving good results, we now have technologies that do not require surgeries. These are done very rarely, as most pains can be treated without surgeries or via keyhole openings, and the patient can leave hospital the



Dr Waleed Al-Hajji

same day," Dr Hajji said.

Finally, Dr Hajji said it is possible to avoid complications resulting from traditional surgeries, which may lead to infection, bleeding and damage to muscles and tendons, as well as damaging tissue that may reach the spinal canal and nerves.

Successful investment

In this regard, CEO of Ooredoo Kuwait, Abdulaziz Yaqoub Al-Babtain said: "Kuwaiti youth - especially during the pandemic and up to this day - are looking for the right support. Providing those with job opportunities and creating the most appropriate environment for creative youth energies, is one of our main objectives in Ooredoo Kuwait today. Kuwaiti Youth have proven that they are capable of taking responsibility and participating in the development process. It has become imperative for us to provide them with jobs and professions in the telecom sector; one which is witnessing significant dynamic changes that require creative youthful minds like those, of whom we are so proud of."

Babtain emphasized on the fact that: "We, at Ooredoo Kuwait, have achieved 100 percent of new appointments of Kuwaiti talents in leadership positions. This percentage came as a solid evidence of the success of our effective strategy, which aims to encourage and support youth. We also were keen on training and equipping these Kuwaiti employees according to specific plans and programs to assume leadership positions and to enable them to carry out their tasks to the fullest. We made sure to develop advanced training programs to improve the capabilities and skills of our Kuwaiti employees in various fields, which will contribute to building professional national leaders. We have also achieved 100 percent of the leadership positions recruitment placement for Kuwaitis, especially in dynamic and essential departments in the company."

Babtain concluded by saying: "At Ooredoo, we believe that investing in youth contributes to achieving sustainable development for the country and creating a sustainable competitive advantage for the company, so we are always keen to encourage them, adopt their ambitions, qualify and train them to work across all the departments at the company."

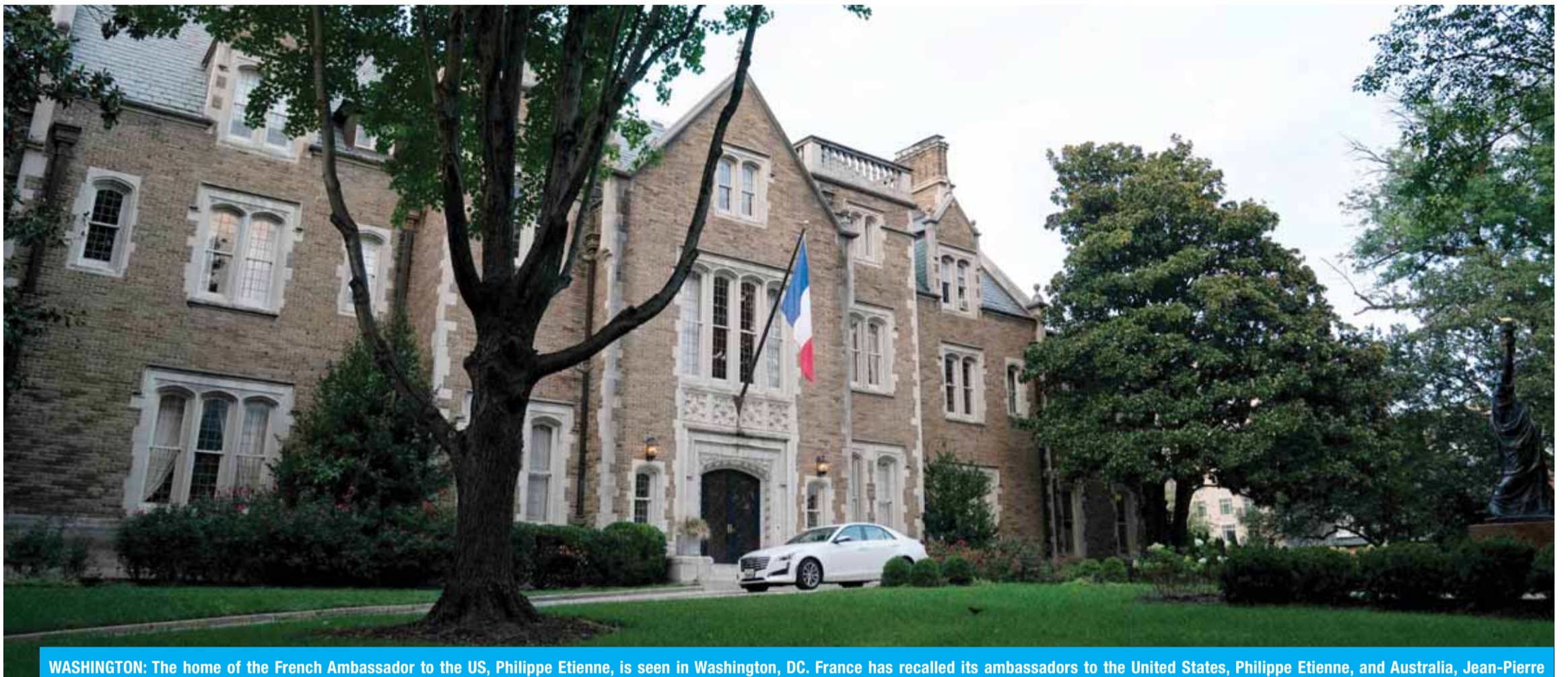


Melbourne police battle anti-vaccine protesters

Russia 'responsible' for killing Litvinenko, Rights court rules

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WASHINGTON: The home of the French Ambassador to the US, Philippe Etienne, is seen in Washington, DC. France has recalled its ambassadors to the United States, Philippe Etienne, and Australia, Jean-Pierre Thebaud, for consultations in a ferocious row over the scrapping of a submarine contract. — AFP

Submarine row is 'wake-up call'

France wins EU backing in sub row with US

BRUSSELS: The US and Australian decision to strip France of a submarine supply contract is a stark reminder the EU must bolster its capacity to act independently, French and German ministers said yesterday. "It is once again a wake-up call for all of us in the European Union to ask ourselves how we can strengthen our sovereignty, how we can present a united front even on issues relevant to foreign and security policy," Germany's minister for European affairs Michael Roth said, arriving at ministerial talks in Brussels.

The show of solidarity from Germany and the EU's top officials was welcomed by France, which said the breakdown of trust with Washington strengthened the case for Europe to set its own strategic course. France's minister for European affairs Clement Beaugnot called the row "a European issue" not simply a French one, and that Paris expected support from EU partners. "I don't think France is overreacting and I don't think France should overreact. But when a situation is worrying, is serious, I think it's also our responsibility to state it very clearly," he said.

France is furious that the United States, Australia and Britain worked behind its back to negotiate their AUKUS defense pact and replace Canberra's

multi-billion-dollar order of French submarines with US ones. The European Commission said it was considering whether the diplomatic storm would affect a gathering of a new EU-US Trade and Technology Council in Pittsburgh on September 29 to discuss ways to cooperate on trade and regulating big tech. "We are analyzing the impact that the



France fumes over AUKUS defense pact

AUKUS announcement would have on this date," European Commission spokesman Eric Mamer said.

France's minister for trade Franck Riester has not yet decided whether on travelling to Pittsburgh, a source close to him told AFP. He was not formally part of the EU negotiating team, which is made up of European Commission officials. An EU diplomat

said France had "floated" the idea of delaying the TTC meeting, though they face opposition from the Baltic republics, which border Russia and set great store in the NATO alliance.

'Irritated' France

The European Commission, which handles trade policy for the EU's 27 member states, already said on Monday it was looking into delaying negotiations with Australia on Canberra's three-year bid to secure an EU trade deal. Subodhas Prankevicius, the Lithuanian deputy minister for European Affairs, told reporters that overcoming the mistrust would be in the interests of both Europe and the US and that his government "would be the last ... standing in defense of transatlantic unity".

Sweden's EU minister Hans Dahlgren also expressed reserve, saying he understood French irritation but his country wanted more detail on what happened over the submarine deal. "I don't think we should restructure the EU's trade policy because of this," he said. The creation of an EU-US tech council was agreed at a summit in June. Washington was expected to use it to seek deeper support from the Europeans on curbing the ambitions of emerging superpower China. — AFP

Shock in Germany after cashier shot dead in mask row

FRANKFURT: Germany reacted with shock and outrage yesterday after a 20-year-old petrol station worker was shot dead by a customer angry about being asked to put on a mask while buying beer. The killing on Saturday evening in the western town of Idar-Oberstein is believed to be the first in Germany linked to the government's coronavirus rules. The row started when the cashier, a student, told the customer to put on a face mask, as required in all German shops. After a brief argument, the man left.

The suspect then returned about an hour and a half later, this time wearing a mask. But as he brought his six-pack of beer to the till, he took off the mask and another discussion ensued. "The perpetrator then pulled out a revolver and shot him straight in the head," prosecutor Kai Fuhrmann told reporters on Monday. The suspect, a 49-year-old German man, walked to a police station the following day to turn himself in. He was arrested and has confessed to the murder.

He told police he felt "cornered" by the coronavirus measures, which he perceived as an "ever-growing infringement on his rights" and he had seen "no other way out", Fuhrmann said. Idar-Oberstein mayor Frank Fruehauf called it "an unfathomable, terrible act", and residents have laid flowers and candles outside the petrol station. The murder comes just days before Germans head to the polls for a general election on September 26 that will see Chancellor Angela Merkel bow out after 16 years.

Finance Minister Olaf Scholz from the centre-left Social Democrats, the current frontrunner to succeed Merkel, said he was "shocked" by the murder of someone who only wanted "to protect himself and others". "As a society, we must resolutely stand up to hatred," he tweeted. Annalena Baerbock, the Green party's candidate for the chancellery, said she was "shaken" by the murder and "very concerned" about growing radicalization in the anti-mask community. Paul Ziemiak, general secretary of Merkel's CDU party, said the victim was "practically executed" in an act that showed "an inconceivable level of radicalization".

'Growing aggressiveness'

The Tagesspiegel newspaper said far-right chat groups on Telegram were applauding the murder, with one user writing "Here we go!!!" while others posted thumbs-up emojis. Germany has seen repeated protests from anti-mask demonstrators throughout the pandemic, some of them attracting tens of thousands of people.

The "Querdenker" (Lateral Thinkers) movement has emerged as the loudest voice against the government's coronavirus curbs and regulations. Its marches have drawn a wide mix of people, including vaccine sceptics, neo-Nazis and members of Germany's far-right AfD party. Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said the "hatred and incitement" of Querdenker "divides our community and kills people". "They have no place in our society," he wrote on Twitter. — AFP

Timeline: Sudan since the fall of Omar Bashir

KHARTOUM: A failed coup is reported in Sudan, which has gone through a fragile transition since the overthrow of the autocratic Omar Al-Bashir two years ago. Here is a recap of events since the military dictator was toppled.

2019: Bashir rule ends

On April 11, 2019, four months after mass protests sparked by a hike in bread prices spiral into wider demands for reforms, Sudan's army remove Bashir from power. He is replaced with a transitional military government. Thousands camp in front of army headquarters demanding civilian rule. Talks between the generals and protest leaders break down.

Bloody crackdown

Armed men move in on the protest camp on June 3 and dozens are killed in a days-long crackdown. A feared paramilitary group that sprang from the notorious Janjaweed militia, accused of war crimes in the 2003 Darfur conflict, is blamed for the violence.

Power-sharing

After the African Union intervenes, civilian and military factions agree to share power before a transition to civilian rule. On August 17, a "constitutional declaration" is signed. In October, the government and rebel groups who had fought Bashir's iron-fisted rule for decades agree a "permanent ceasefire" in the country's three war zones.

Bashir convicted

On December 14, Bashir is ordered to be detained for two years after he

is convicted of corruption.

The autocrat has long been wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague to face charges of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity in the 2003 Darfur conflict in which 300,000 people died. A Khartoum prosecutor rejects extradition as not "necessary".

2020: Spreading unrest

On March 9, 2020 Sudan's premier Abdalla Hamdok survives an assassination attempt which many see as a bid to derail the transition. Inflation skyrockets in April to 99 percent and keeps rising as food prices soar after borders are closed to tackle the coronavirus. The economic crisis deepens in Sudan, already weakened by decades of US sanctions and mismanagement under Bashir. On June 30, street demonstrations reiterate demands for justice for people killed under Bashir and during the protests of recent years. The international community pledges \$1.8 billion to help lift Sudan out of crisis.

Bashir tried for coup

On July 21, 2020, Bashir goes on trial in Khartoum for the 1989 coup that brought him to power. The government devalues the currency in a bid to curb black market activity as it struggles with an "economic emergency".

Peace deal

In October, Sudan signs a landmark peace deal with an alliance of rebel groups. Two key rebel groups refuse to sign and key tribes in Sudan's east also oppose it, saying it is not representative of them. Also in



KHARTOUM: Cars drive past pedestrians along the Nile Street adjacent to the Blue Nile river in Sudan's capital Khartoum yesterday. — AFP

October, Sudan agrees to normalize ties with Israel. This is seen as a quid pro quo move before the US removes Sudan from its State Sponsors of Terrorism list in December.

Tension with Ethiopia

In November 2020, conflict breaks out in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region, sending tens of thousands of refugees into Sudan. The fighting rekindles a decades-old dispute between Sudan and Ethiopia over the fertile border region of al-Fashaga. Khartoum sends troops to secure the area. The two countries are already at odds over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, which sparked a major regional dispute over Nile river water that also involves Egypt. In August 2021, Ethiopia says it has thwarted an attack on the dam by armed groups "trained and armed by Sudan", a claim Khartoum denies as baseless.

2021: Fragile government

Sudan in February announces a new cabinet including seven ministers from ex-rebel groups. In June, Hamdok warns of fractures within the

civilian alliance which spearheaded the anti-Bashir protests. He also points to worrying splits within the main security blocs.

Bashir to be handed over

On August 11, Sudan's cabinet says it has agreed to hand Bashir over to the ICC. The decision however awaits ratification by the civilian-military sovereign council.

Economic mire

Sudan embarks on tough economic reforms backed by the International Monetary Fund to qualify for debt relief. In February, it launches a managed float of the Sudanese pound, and in June it scraps subsidies on petrol and diesel. The measures are seen by many Sudanese as harsh and spark sporadic protests.

Failed coup

Khartoum announces a failed coup attempt by civilian and military plotters linked to Bashir's ousted regime. Hamdok says the attempt highlights the crisis gripping Sudan and the urgent need for reforms in the security sector. — AFP

International

Russia 'responsible' for killing Litvinenko, Rights court rules

Litvinenko died after drinking tea laced with radioactive isotope

STRASBOURG: Europe's top rights court yesterday ruled that Russia was responsible for the 2006 killing in London of the dissident former agent Alexander Litvinenko, a verdict swiftly rejected by Moscow. Litvinenko died after drinking tea laced with the radioactive isotope Polonium 210 at a London hotel, in a case that has weighed on relations between Britain and Russia ever since.

Before dying, Litvinenko issued a message blaming Russian President Vladimir Putin for the poisoning, and opponents have seen the killing as one of the first in a line of Kremlin-backed assassination plots against dissidents. "Russia was responsible for the assassination of Alexander Litvinenko in the UK," said the Strasbourg-based The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR).

But in Moscow, Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov rejected the claim. "There are still no results of this investigation, so making statements like these is at least unfounded... We are not prepared to accept this decision," he said. Responding to a complaint brought by Litvinenko's widow Marina, the ECHR said it had established "beyond reasonable doubt" that the assassination had been carried out by Russians Andrei Lugovoi and Dmitry Kovtun. The pair had travelled to the British capital with the aim of killing him, the court found.

"The planned and complex operation involving the procurement of a rare deadly poison, the travel arrangements for the pair, and repeated and sustained attempts to administer the poison indicated

that Mr Litvinenko had been the target," it said. Lugovoi, now a Russian MP, and businessman Kovtun were identified by British police as prime suspects after they both met Litvinenko at a central London hotel. But attempts to extradite them have failed and they have both rejected the charges, with Lugovoi also claiming parliamentary immunity.

'Imputable to Russia'

The court said there was a "strong prima facie" case that Lugovoi and Kovtun "had been acting on the direction or control of the Russian authorities".



Moscow rejects court's verdict

Russia had not attempted to show in the case that the pair acted as part of a "rogue operation" and had also failed to rebut accusations of state involvement. As a result, the court said it had decided the assassination was "imputable to Russia".

The Litvinenko killing was followed by the attempted poisoning of former double agent Sergei

Skripal in Britain in 2018 and opposition leader Alexei Navalny in Siberia in 2020 that the West blamed on Russia. The Kremlin denies the charges. British police said yesterday there was now enough evidence to charge a third Russian man in the attempted poisoning of Skripal with the nerve agent Novichok. A British public inquiry in 2016 concluded that Putin had "probably approved" Litvinenko's killing, which it said was likely to have been directed by the Russian security service FSB.

ECHR also ruled Russia failed to provide requested material and dismissed the Russian government's objection to the use of the UK public inquiry report as evidence. The court, part of the Council of Europe where Russia is one of the 47 members, ordered Moscow to pay 100,000 euros (\$117,000) in non-pecuniary damages to his widow and 22,500 euros in costs. Litvinenko, a former FSB lieutenant-colonel, fled to the UK in 2000 as he faced criminal charges in Russia after blowing the whistle on an alleged FSB plot to assassinate Boris Berezovsky, a tycoon and Kremlin insider.

Berezovsky also moved to the UK and died in unclear circumstances in 2013. Litvinenko claimed the FSB were also involved in deadly bombings of Russian apartment blocks in 1999 - after which Putin launched a second Chechen war - and in a Moscow theatre siege by Chechen rebels in 2002. His wife told the UK's public inquiry Litvinenko was working for Britain's MI6 foreign intelligence service at the time of his death. — AFP



STRASBOURG: This file photo shows Alexander Litvinenko, a former Russian intelligence agent, posing for a photograph outside the House of Commons following a press conference in London. — AFP

Trudeau: Liberal star tarnished in election fight

OTTAWA: Justin Trudeau believed his adept response to the pandemic would help him handily win re-election as prime minister, and he did Monday, but his gamble to try to gain an absolute majority didn't pay off. The first-born son of the late prime minister Pierre Trudeau had swept to power in a landslide in 2015, with a mop of dark curly hair and confident swagger, jumping into crowds to take selfies with adoring young fans. Six years later, at 49, he faced a barrage of criticism on the campaign trail, and even threats.

After doling out hundreds of billions of dollars in COVID aid to workers and businesses, Trudeau triggered the snap election seeking to regain the majority in parliament he'd lost in 2019. But on the hustings he found himself in a horse race with rookie Conservative leader Erin O'Toole, going from Canada's "golden boy to veteran pugilist throwing whatever punches necessary to stay in the ring," according to pollster Tim Powers.

Trudeau managed to squeak in a win by convincing voters to stay the course at this pivotal juncture in the pandemic that has seen new outbreaks led by the Delta variant. University of Winnipeg politics professor Felix Mathieu, however, said Trudeau could now face a challenge for the leadership of his party "because he lost his bet" for a majority government. Also, he told AFP, "It remains to be seen how long his minority government will last." It is Canada's fifth minority government since 2004, each having lasted no more than two years.

Missed high expectations

The world watched with interest, even admiration, as Trudeau proclaimed in 2015 after almost a decade of Tory rule: "Canada is back!" "Why can't he be our president?" shouted a Rolling Stone magazine cover from the United States featuring Trudeau. Now, fatigue with his administration is palpable. Past scandals re-emerged, including his firing of Canada's first indigenous attorney general for accusing Trudeau of meddling in the bribery prosecution of engineering giant SNC-Lavalin. Combined with missed high expectations, these plunged the Liberal leader's popularity. At rallies, he was dogged by protesters he described as "anti-vaxxer mobs," some of whom threw stones at the prime minister.

There was also pushback over the timing of Trudeau's call for an election, only two years after the last vote and just as the nation emerged from pandemic lockdowns. Addressing the backlash, Trudeau said this election was the most important since World War II. He highlighted "stark" policy differences between his party and their rivals on mandatory vaccinations, child care and the environment, and emphasized the need for a new mandate to steer Canada's pandemic exit.

But he was unable to rekindle the spark of his 2015 campaign, which had not been seen in Canadian politics since the "Trudeaumania" that hailed his father's entry into politics a half century earlier. "The enthusiasm and excitement that greeted Trudeau's 2015 victory has vanished," said University of British Columbia politics professor Max Cameron. "Whether it's climate change or reconciliation with indigenous peoples, for example, Trudeau has been less transformational than I think many people had hoped," he explained. — AFP

Firefighters race to protect sequoias in California fires

LOS ANGELES: Hundreds of firefighters were battling to protect several groves of giant sequoias in the United States on Monday, warning the enormous ancient trees were at risk from out-of-control blazes. A number of separate fires were converging on the California woodland that is home to the huge trees, highlighting the terrifying power of wildfires to consume everything in their path. Incident commanders said the Windy Fire, which has already charred 25,000 acres has burned into the remote Peyrone Sequoia Grove and the Red Hill Grove.

"We don't know that those are destroyed," Windy fire incident spokeswoman Amanda Munsey said, according to the Los Angeles Times. "But the fire has completely sur-

rounded those two groves." In nearby Long Meadow Grove, the blaze had spread to the vulnerable top of at least one of the trees. "It was running toward multiple trees and (firefighters) were able to get it out, but it did get into the crown of one of the sequoias." Wildfires that spread to the tops of trees - especially very tall trees - can move quickly through the forest, as the tops of the trees explode, showering embers over a large area below them.

Further north, the KNP Complex fire continued to threaten the renowned Giant Forest, home to General Sherman, the world's biggest tree by volume, and standing at 275 feet. General Sherman, which is estimated by the National Parks Service to be 2,200 years old, was wrapped in fireproof foil blankets last week. Incident commanders said they believed they could protect the tree from the 24,000-acre blaze, which was sparked by lightning just over a week ago.

They point to meticulous forest management over the last few decades, including prescribed burns that deplete available fuels, and slow the progress of fires. California and



PONDEROSA: Flames spread up a tree as the Windy fire burns along the Trail of 100 Giants in the Sequoia National Forest, near Ponderosa, California. — AFP

other parts of the western United States are laboring under a years-long drought that has left swathes of the region's magnificent forests tinder dry. Scientists say human activity,

including the unchecked burning of fossil fuels, is warming the planet and changing weather patterns, making wildfires hotter, more intense and more destructive. — AFP

What Merkel, the belated feminist, did for women

FRANKFURT: As Germany's first female chancellor, Angela Merkel smashed the glass ceiling and became a leading player in global politics. But only now, at the end of her 16 years in office, has she declared herself a feminist - too little too late for some in Germany. In 2017, Merkel was at a rare loss for words when she was asked if she was a feminist, and dodged the question.

But earlier this month, during a joint interview with Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Merkel was less coy. "I am a feminist," she said. Merkel, who is bowing out of politics after Germany's September 26 election, admitted she had been "shy" about the label but said her thinking on the issue had evolved. "Essentially, it's about the fact that men and women are equal," the 67-year-old said.

Ines Kappert, head of the Gunda Werner Institute for Feminism and Gender Democracy in Berlin, called Merkel's belated realization "a slap in the face" for women. "She had 16 years to listen to feminists and

improve the situation of women in Germany and she decided not to," Kappert said. While Merkel's career "deserves respect", Kappert said the chancellor failed to make structural changes for women in German society. Germany's gender pay gap remains among the highest in the European Union and stood at 19 percent in 2019, not least because many German women work part-time.

Eye roll

Merkel's conservative CDU-CSU bloc has resisted a long-standing feminist plea to reform Germany's tax system for married couples, which makes it less attractive for the lower-earning spouse, usually the woman, to work full-time. Merkel's cabinet only last year agreed to a mandatory quota for women on management boards, a reform spearheaded by her coalition partner, the centre-left Social Democrats (SPD).

A law on gender wage transparency was meanwhile passed after much conservative foot-dragging. And there



BERLIN: German Chancellor Angela Merkel (left) welcomes Holocaust survivor Margot Friedlaender on stage during the Margot Friedlaender Prize 2021 award ceremony to honor young commitment against anti-Semitism, in Berlin. — AFP

are now fewer female lawmakers in the Bundestag lower house of parliament than earlier in the Merkel era, falling from a peak of around 36 percent in 2013 to 31 percent today. "Merkel discovered feminism late in her tenure," said Sudha David-Wilp, deputy director of the German Marshall Fund think tank in Berlin. "Perhaps she didn't notice being one of the few women on

the global stage all these years since she had her nose to the grindstone working out one crisis after another." The no-nonsense chancellor is famed for holding her own against the likes of Vladimir Putin, Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Donald Trump - only the occasional eye roll hinting at exasperation with macho posturing or mansplaining attempts. — AFP

Military crackdown puts squeeze on bandit gangs

KANO: Nigeria's military campaign against criminal gangs in the northwest is pushing them into neighboring regions as a result of a telecom shutdown and a squeeze on fuel and food supplies, local residents and officials said. Hundreds of troops backed by fighter jets began the offensive in early September in Zamfara State against gunmen responsible for a surge in mass abductions and attacks in the northwest.

The offensive and official telecoms blackout in Zamfara is the largest recent operation against the gangs, known locally as bandits, who for years have

looted villages and kidnapped for ransom. Zamfara and other states also imposed a raft of restrictions including a ban on sales of petrol in jerry cans and limits on cattle movement and on the opening hours of local markets as a way to curtail supplies to bandits.

But as pressure builds in Zamfara, residents of villages in neighboring Katsina and Kaduna states reported an influx of gunmen fleeing Zamfara into their communities, raising fears of attacks. Fleeing bandits have set up illegal checkpoints along highways in Katsina State near the border with Zamfara, robbing haulage trucks of food and siphoning fuel from vehicles, according to locals. "In the last few days we have witnessed increased presence of armed bandits on motorcycles in our area," said Ashiru Bawa, a resident in Kankara district. "The food and fuel cut is seriously affecting them."

Local newspapers reported Zamfara bandits have been running out of food supplies and even asking for food as ransom from families of hostages

instead of the cash they usually demand. Authorities in Katsina have also cut telecom signals in about half of its 34 districts on the border with Zamfara. Sokoto State followed on Sunday, cutting mobile service in some areas. The telecoms blackout is aimed at disrupting communications between bandits and their informants to help keep army movements secret.

But the shutdown also makes it difficult for residents to alert security personnel, said Bawa, who travelled to the state capital Katsina, 120 kilometers away, to make calls. The bandits have not harmed motorists but fear is mounting that they could start attacks once they "regain their strength", Bawa said. Nigeria has launched military campaigns against bandits in the northwest before and even sought amnesty deals to coax them to abandon hideouts deep in the region's vast forests. But most of those operations and peace deals have failed or only temporarily halted criminal gangs. — AFP

International

Anti-vaccine protesters and Melbourne police face off

Violent protest against mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations

MELBOURNE: Melbourne riot police used pepper spray, foam baton rounds and rubber ball grenades to disperse a violent protest against mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations for construction workers yesterday. More than 1,000 demonstrators wearing work boots and hi-vis jackets rampaged through the centre of Australia's second-largest city, lighting flares, throwing bottles, attacking police cars and chanting their opposition to vaccines and lockdown restrictions.

Melbourne has been in strict lockdown for seven weeks, as the city struggles to curb an outbreak of the fast-spreading Delta variant. Several clusters have been linked to construction sites, where COVID containment measures are said to be lax. In response, authorities have introduced ever-tougher restrictions, closing work site tea rooms, announcing mandatory vaccination for laborers and, most recently, closing almost all construction sites for two weeks.

For hours protesters opposing the measures confronted police, ignoring loudspeaker calls to leave and a final caution that "no further warnings will be given". Victoria state chief police commissioner Shane Patton said about 500 officers were responding to the "challenging" situation and had deployed pepper spray, foam baton rounds and rubber ball grenades. "These crowd control equipment munitions were necessary, and they are necessary, because we can't allow this type of conduct to go on," he said.

"We will stop this protest. And we will then step back and investigate and hold those to account who need to be held to account." At least three police officers had sustained injuries while more than 40 people had been arrested, Patton added. Brandishing "Trump" banners and chanting "you serve us", protesters

briefly occupied a bridge on one of the city's main thoroughfares and sang a popular 1990s power rock ballad.

A number of journalists were assaulted, including one television reporter who was hit on the head with a can live on air, shortly after another incident in which he was doused with urine. Union leaders denounced the protests, saying the issue had been hijacked by anti-vaccine activists and what former Labor party leader Bill Shorten called "man-baby



City struggling to curb an outbreak

Nazis". On social media forums that regularly feature anti-vaccine conspiracies, followers were urged to attend, "bring friends" and "wear work gear".

Building tension

This was the second such protest in as many days. On Monday, more than 100 construction workers in high-visibility vests brawled and smashed union office windows in the centre of Melbourne. That prompted the authorities to announce the temporary closure of construction sites, leaving tens of thousands of people out of work. "We've been clear: If



MELBOURNE: A demonstrator is handled as police officers disperse a protest against COVID-19 regulations in Melbourne yesterday. — AFP

you don't follow the rules, we won't hesitate to take action," said state minister for industrial relations Tim Pallas, announcing the shutdown. "We put the industry on notice just a week ago, we have seen appalling behavior on site and on our streets, and now we're acting decisively and without hesitation," he said.

Local construction union boss John Setka denounced the protesters, whom he said were hurting the entire workforce. "Those drunken fascist un-

Australian morons are the reason construction workers will be sitting at home and not getting paid for the next two weeks," he said. The state of Victoria recorded 603 new COVID cases in the past 24 hours. Australia's two largest cities, Melbourne and Sydney, are currently in lockdown, as they race to vaccinate 80 percent of the population. That target would trigger gradual reopening, but remains at least a month away for most areas. — AFP

The top challenges facing Lebanon's new government

BEIRUT: Lebanon's new government, approved by parliament after more than a year of political deadlock, has its work cut out as it seeks to rescue the country from its worst-ever economic meltdown. Fuel and medicines are in short supply, power blackouts last most of the day, more than three out of four people have been plunged below the poverty line, and many of those who can are leaving the country. Here is a look at the most pressing issues for Prime Minister Najib Mikati and his 24-member cabinet, and at the biggest hurdles ahead.

What are the top priorities?

The new government, approved Monday by parliament, desperately needs to lift Lebanon out of what the World Bank has called one of the world's worst economic crises since the 1850s. The Lebanese pound has lost almost 90 percent of its value against the dollar on the black market, inflation has soared and people's savings are trapped in banks. With foreign currency reserves plummeting, the cash-strapped state has been struggling to maintain subsidies on basic goods. Petrol and medicine have become scarce and the state barely provides two hours of electricity a day.

What are the biggest hurdles?

The international community has demanded sweeping reforms and a forensic audit of the country's central bank before any financial assistance is disbursed. The previous government in 2020 announced



BEIRUT: Lebanese lawmakers meet during a parliament session in Beirut. — AFP

"The first priority for the government really will be to stem the collapse," said Maha Yahya, director of the Carnegie Middle East Center. Subsidies need to be lifted and a social safety net put in place to ease the blow on the most vulnerable, she said. To do this, analysts have said, the cabinet will need to relaunch talks with the International Monetary Fund to unlock billions of dollars in financial aid. Lebanon, after defaulting on its debt in March 2020 for the first time in history, started talks with the IMF, but these quickly hit a wall amid bickering over who should bear the brunt of the losses.

a rescue roadmap that included electricity sector reform, restructuring of the banking sector and lifting the official dollar peg. But these steps have yet to be implemented. As for the central bank audit, it too has stalled, with the central bank claiming it could not provide the auditing firm with some of the required documents because of banking secrecy rules.

Finance expert Mike Azar said that reforming the commercial banking sector and central bank, as well as restructuring the public sector, would be key for any deal with the IMF. "There isn't anything you can do short of these two major restructurings," he said. But the traditional ruling class that has dominated politics in Lebanon since the 1975-1990 civil war was likely to be reluctant. "Restructuring the public sector has an impact on the political parties, as it is the main financing source" for their patronage system, he said. "How would they accept that?" — AFP

Myanmar shutdown marks grim year for web freedom

PARIS: Internet users in a record number of countries have faced arrest and physical attacks for their posts over the past year, a report said yesterday, painting a grim picture of digital freedoms in 2021. The annual "Freedom on the Net" report said internet shutdowns in Myanmar and Belarus had proved particular low points as online rights declined globally for the 11th year in a row.

Compiled by US think-tank Freedom House, the survey gives countries a score out of 100 for the level of internet freedom enjoyed by citizens, including the extent to which they face restrictions on the content they can access. Other factors include whether pro-government trolls seek to manipulate online debates. "This year, users faced physical attacks in retribution for their online activities in 41 countries," the report said, a "record high" since the tracking start-

ed 11 years ago.

Examples included a Bangladeshi student hospitalized after a beating for alleged "anti-government activities" on social media, and a Mexican journalist assassinated after posting a Facebook video accusing a gang of murder. The report also found that people had been arrested or convicted for their online activities in 56 out of the 70 countries covered by the report - a record 80 percent. They included two Egyptian influencers jailed in June for sharing TikTok videos that encouraged women to pursue careers on social media platforms.

Internet blackouts

Myanmar was singled out for heavy criticism in the report after a military junta seized power in February and shut down the internet, blocked social media and forced tech companies to hand over personal



MAGWE, Myanmar: Photo shows the remains of burnt houses in Namg Kar village in Magwe region's Gangaw township, as fighting continues between the Myanmar military and protesters against the military coup. — AFP

data. Internet shutdowns were similarly used to cut communications ahead of Uganda's elections in January and after a disputed Belarus election in August last year.

In total, at least 20 countries blocked people's internet access between June 2020 and May 2021, the period covered by the survey.

But it wasn't all bad news, with Gambia among countries praised for continuing its trend of greater online freedom since dictator Yahya Jammeh was ousted in 2017. Iceland topped the ranking, followed by Estonia and Costa Rica, the world's first country to declare internet access a human right. — AFP

Why Africa is struggling to get the jabs?

JOHANNESBURG: Vaccines were promoted as a silver bullet to end the pandemic, the path to finally beating COVID-19. But in Africa, they remain scarce, with access hampered by hoarding, export bans and empty promises. Nearly six billion vaccine doses have been administered globally, but only two percent of those have been in Africa. Experts hope that a

meeting on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly this week will address gaping vaccine inequalities that are leaving many countries in Africa behind. So why has Africa found itself at the bottom of the vaccination curve?

What's the current state of play?

Africa has largely been spared the high infections and death rates that COVID-19 has wrought in many Western nations, though Delta-variant outbreaks have seen some of the numbers creep up. Home to 1.3 billion people, the continent has reported nearly 8.2 million infections and 206,000 deaths. In Europe, by com-

parison, 1.2 million people have died from the virus. But the continent badly lags on vaccine rates too. Just 3.6 percent of Africa's eligible population has been inoculated - compared with an average of more than 60 percent in Europe and Britain. Access has been a major hindrance.

African countries can get their hands on vaccines by purchasing them directly from manufacturers, or via donations. One main avenue for getting donated shots is through Covax, an international vaccine-sharing scheme for lower-income nations. The African Union also buys vaccines for its members under the African Vaccine Acquisition Task Team

(AVATT). But Covax and AVATT have both been hit by restrictions by vaccine-producing nations — India, for example, which blocked exports of AstraZeneca as it was facing a deadly wave of the virus earlier this year.

Manufacturers have also prioritized bilateral deals with individual countries, leaving African nations at the end of the queue. That means many African nations are increasingly reliant on donations from wealthy countries - but often only if they have surplus to give away. Around 57 million vaccine doses have been donated to Africa by governments and private firms, about three-quarters of the total 77.5 million pledged, according to UNICEF. — AFP

News in brief

'Some wanted me dead': Pope

ROME: Pope Francis joked that "some people wanted me dead" and cardinals were already preparing to replace him after his colon surgery this summer, according to a media report yesterday. The 84-year-old pontiff made the comments during a meeting with fellow Jesuits in Bratislava on September 12, according to Jesuit journal La Civiltà Cattolica. Asked by one of those present how he was, Francis replied: "Still alive, even though some people wanted me dead. I know there were even meetings between prelates who thought the pope's condition was more serious than what was said. They were preparing for the conclave. Ah well!" When a pope dies or retires, cardinals meet in a secret conclave to elect his replacement from among their peers. — AFP

Farmers, herders battle; 27 killed

N'DJAMENA: At least 27 people were killed in weekend fighting between sedentary farmers and nomadic herders in eastern Chad, a poor Sahel country where such clashes are frequent, the justice minister said. The clashes took place Sunday in the villages of Kidji-Mina and Tiyo, around 40 kilometers from Chad's second largest city Abeche, itself some 700 kilometers northeast of the capital N'Djamena. "Traditional leaders sold land (to herders) in 2017... but the indigenous farmers, the Ouaddaiens, contest this sale," the minister, Mahamat Ahmat Alhobo, told AFP by telephone. "They're fighting over an area of 25 square kilometers," added the minister, who is in Abeche at the head of a government delegation seeking to "calm the situation". — AFP

Two jihadist commanders killed

BEIRUT: Drone strikes Monday killed two jihadist commanders close to Al-Qaeda in the Idlib region of northwest Syria, a war monitor said. The raids were carried out by the US-led international coalition battling jihadists in Syria and Iraq, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. The US military acknowledged killing an Al-Qaeda official, shortly after the coalition told AFP it had not carried out any strikes in Idlib province on Monday. "US forces conducted a kinetic counter-terrorism strike near Idlib, Syria, today, on a senior Al-Qaeda leader," a US Central Command (CENTCOM) spokeswoman, Lieutenant Josie Lynne Lenny, said in a statement. — AFP

Myanmar's Suu Kyi goes on trial

YANGON: Myanmar's junta has put ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi on trial for incitement, her lawyer said yesterday, the latest in a list of charges that could see her jailed for decades. Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy were deposed by the military in a February coup that sparked a mass uprising and a brutal junta crackdown on dissent. The Nobel laureate, 76, has been under house arrest ever since, with meetings with her lawyers and court appearances her only link to the outside world. She pleaded not guilty to charges of incitement, her lawyer Khin Maung Zaw said, adding she "seemed to be in good health," a week after she skipped a separate hearing because she felt unwell. — AFP

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Business

Airline sector relieved over US decision to lift travel ban

Pandemic deals a body blow to global travel industry

PARIS: The United States' decision to lift restrictions on incoming travellers vaccinated against COVID-19 was met with a sigh of a relief by the global airline sector, which has been dealt a body blow by the pandemic. With transatlantic flights traditionally among the most lucrative for Europe's biggest airlines, the Monday announcement was "formidable news" for a sector that has hemorrhaged tens of billions of euros over the past 18 months. Air France-KLM chief Benjamin Smith told AFP.



Benjamin Smith

For most of Europe's flag carriers—such as Air France, British Airways and Lufthansa—the restrictions on long-haul routes across the Atlantic were particularly hard to swallow. Air France-KLM, for example, generates 40 percent of its sales from its North Atlantic services, and for Germany's Lufthansa, the proportion is 50 percent.

"Today's news... marks an historic moment," said British Airways chief Sean Doyle. "Our customers should now feel that the world is reopening to them and they can book their trips with confidence."

US airlines such as United, Delta and American are much more domestically orientated and less dependent on international services, which account for 25-30 per-

cent of revenues. But they, too, welcomed the news. "Today's announcement marks a positive step in our nation's recovery," said the head of the industry association Airlines for America, Nicholas Calio.

Sister organization Airlines for Europe tweeted that it similarly "applauds the decision", which would "give a much-needed boost to trans-Atlantic traffic & #tourism and will reunite families and friends".

The International Air Transport Association, or IATA, which has 290 member airlines accounting for 82 percent of global air travel, described it as "a major step forward". "This is excellent news for families and loved ones... It's good for the millions of livelihoods in the US that depend on global tourism. And it will boost the economic recovery by enabling some key business travel markets," IATA director general Willie Walsh said.

IATA has been calling for months now for travel restrictions to be "guided by the science" and take into account travellers' vaccination status.

Later than expected

Europe's airlines had been hoping for transatlantic routes to be reopened in time for the key summer holiday season. But while Europe reopened its internal borders, Washington remained cautious. And transatlantic traffic this year was less than half than the levels recorded in 2019.

The US decision was "actually a little later than we expected given what we know about how effective the vaccines are. We expected it in the summertime," said Colin Scarola, an analyst at CFRA Research.

But even if European airlines are now ready to restart the engines of more aircraft heading across the Atlantic, recovery will still be slow, warned George Dimitroff, an analyst at air transport data specialist Ascend by Cirium. "We would not expect to see an increase in airline schedules right away, apart from the busiest routes," he said.



WASHINGTON: In this file photo, passengers walk under a departure display in the Lufthansa terminal at the "Franz-Josef-Strauss" airport in Munich, southern Germany amid the pandemic. — AFP

"There may be additional capacity added around the year-end holiday period, but the more significant improvements are likely to come in March 2022 when airlines gear up for their summer schedules," he said. Burkett Huey, an analyst at Morningstar, pointed out that "if you don't fill an aircraft at 75-80 percent, the trip won't be profitable. You need travellers from both sides."

Dimitroff said he expected "business travel to start to pick up in the fourth quarter of this year... as European

business travellers will be able to visit US clients and suppliers." But analyst Scarola was more cautious. "While it is definitely a step in the right direction, it really does not improve the uncertainty around the two key things that are going to be needed for international travel recovery: how is the pandemic going to play out in the coming months... and will a big piece of business travel be missing because of the virtual meeting tools that are now available?" — AFP



HERAT: In this picture taken on Sept 19, 2021, Abdul Latif Yousufzai, a trader, speaks in the office of Herat Chamber of Commerce. — AFP

Afghan merchants fear for future amid rise of costs

KABUL: Merchants in the historic Afghan trading city of Herat fear for their future after being hit by Taliban tax collection and a backlog for goods to clear customs. The country's third-biggest city is a strategic hub along the ancient Silk Road—with nearby borders to Iran and Turkmenistan—and is a key generator of revenue for the country.

Although the Taliban blame rampant corruption by the previous government for a rise in costs for importers, businessmen in Herat say they face going under if the hardline Islamists do not lower taxes.

"I'm feeling really hopeless," merchant Faghri Ahmad told AFP. Since the Taliban stormed to power in mid-August, food prices have gone up, the cost of fuel has risen and there are fewer opportunities to make money. Afghanistan's central bank has access to only a fraction of its usual financing, and is cut off from the international banking system and its own foreign currency reserves.

It means cash is in short supply and banks are enforcing a weekly withdrawal limit of \$200 per person. "First when the Taliban came, the people were very happy because we saw that security was coming, but unfortunately now the price for everything has gone up and people aren't able to afford things," said Ahmad, who imports food into the western city from Iran.

'Tough work'

Ahmad was one of about 40 Herat business leaders at a rowdy Herat city Chamber of Commerce meeting this week, complaining of taxes and a backlog of 3,000 trucks waiting to be processed.

Customs officials were long accused of taking bribes from traders, pocketing the cash instead of collecting revenue for state coffers. Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told a press conference Tuesday

that the Taliban hadn't raised taxes, but were rather collecting them properly for the first time. "The system under the previous government had a lot of problems with corruption, but it was OK," said Abdul Latif Yousufzai, who trades in food and cleaning products.

"Under this (Taliban) system we do not have any problems with corruption but the taxes have been raised, and we cannot pay that much. I'm really not hopeful for the future."

At Herat's customs clearance center this week, workers unloaded plastic bottle tops, plates, salt cakes and long-life cream cheese from trucks into warehouses in the midday heat. The laborers told AFP that since the Taliban took control of the facility, their already-meagre wages have gone down, and sometimes they don't know if they will be paid at all. Mir Allam, 70, sat with a group of fellow workers in the shade next to a truck after a shift.

"We did tough work but we got less money," he said, revealing to AFP he had just been paid about \$1.25 for unloading a 20-ton lorry with six others. Another grey-bearded worker, who did not want to give his name, said that under the previous system he was paid immediately after unloading a truck.

"Now, when we have finished the work, it's not clear if they will pay us or not."

'Some problems'

Younes Qazizadeh, head of the Herat Chamber of Commerce, said he was working with the merchants and the Taliban to reach a resolution, adding he believed business should never be related to any political system or regime. "When any new regime comes to a country there will be some problems," he said. "People came here to speak their voices and they are lobbying the Taliban government to bring changes for the trade of Afghanistan," he said.

"We also hope that these changes will come and it's going to be much better." Herat's deputy governor agreed there had been "some problems with the taxes", but that a solution was being worked on. "We wrote down the requests of some of those traders and we sent them to the finance ministry," said Shir Ahmad Mohajer. "They are going to send a delegation to Herat to listen to the traders, and we are going to act." —AFP

OECD lowers global, US economic growth forecasts

PARIS: The OECD warned yesterday of an "uneven" global economic recovery as it lowered its 2021 growth forecasts for the world and the United States while raising the outlook for Europe. The world economy has bounced back this year on the back of stimulus measures, the roll-out of effective COVID vaccines and the resumption of many economic activities, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) said. But the Paris-based organization voiced concerns about lower vaccination rates in poorer countries.

"The recovery remains very uneven, with strikingly different outcomes across countries," the OECD said in its interim economic outlook. Global gross domestic product has surpassed its pre-pandemic level following last year's COVID-induced recession.

Global output is now expected to expand by 5.7 percent this year, down 0.1 percentage points from the organization's previous forecast in May. But the outlook for 2022 has slightly improved, with 4.5 percent growth now expected, up by 0.1 points. "Output and employment gaps remain in many countries, particularly in emerging-market and developing economies where vaccination rates are low," the report said. The OECD lowered its growth outlook for the United States, from 6.9 to 6.0 percent this year. The US Congressional Budget Office has forecast

6.7 percent growth for the world's top economy. The Delta variant hit the US economy harder in the second quarter "but it is picking up again very strongly," the OECD's chief economist, Laurence Boone, said at a news conference.

The OECD's eurozone forecast was raised by one point to 5.3 percent, though the outlook varied within the single-currency bloc, with higher growth now expected in France, Italy and Spain while Germany was not performing as well. The growth prospects of Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, South Africa, South Korea and Turkey have also improved, while those of Australia, Britain, Japan and Russia were lowered. The forecast for China, the world's second biggest economy and a driver of global growth, remained unchanged at 8.5 percent.

'Sizeable uncertainty'

The impact of the Delta variant of the coronavirus has "so far been relatively mild" in countries with high vaccination rates, but it has lowered the momentum elsewhere and added pressures to global supply chains and costs, the OECD said. "Sizeable uncertainty remains," the report said, warning that slow progress in vaccination drives and the spread of virus mutations would lead to a weaker recovery and larger job losses.

"What worries us even more is that many emerging markets with the exception of China are still far behind advanced ones for vaccination program levels," Boone said. "The situation is even worse in low income countries." Earlier this month, United Nations chief Antonio Guterres expressed disappointment that vaccine-manufacturing nations have been unable to ramp up production toward the goal of vaccinating some 70 percent of the world population by the first half of 2022. —AFP



NEW YORK: People walk on a street in New York City. The OECD warned yesterday of an "uneven" global economic recovery as it lowered its 2021 growth forecasts for the world and the United States while raising the outlook for Europe.

US homebuilding accelerates as firms close supply gap

NEW YORK: US homebuilding accelerated last month, according to government data yesterday, as construction firms looked to feed the supply-starved real estate market. Housing projects started last month rose 3.9 percent from July to more than 1.6 million, seasonally adjusted, the Commerce Department reported, which was above analysts' forecasts.

The United States is seeing a real estate boom as low borrowing rates and the upheavals of the COVID-19 pandemic push people to move, causing a supply

shortage that has driven prices up and spurred homebuilding. Multi-unit buildings saw a big increase as construction started rose 21.6 percent in August, but single-family home projects fell 2.8 percent, according to the data. The fall in house construction is indicative that the real estate boom may be running out of steam, said Ian Shepherdson of Pantheon Macroeconomics, who predicted the indicator would cool soon.

"The flight to the burbs which triggered the boom in home sales, prices and construction activity is over, though mortgage demand has nudged back up in the past two months," he wrote in an analysis. Construction differed wildly across the country. The Northeast rocketed 167.2 percent and the Midwest and South posted gains, while the West slumped 21.1 percent. Permits, a volatile indicator of housing in the pipeline, climbed six percent last month to more than 1.7 million seasonally adjusted, according to the data. —AFP

Business

Cyber 'farming' to boost income in economically-crippled Venezuela

Non-fungible tokens are one-of-a-kind digital collectibles



CARACAS: Zacary Egea, a former member of the Bolivarian National Police, shows his mobile while checking the status of his plant while playing the Plant Vs Undead video game in the Cuarcuao neighborhood in the Libertador municipality of Caracas. — AFP

CARACAS: Zacary Egea works two jobs as a motorcycle taxi driver and courier in economically crippled Venezuela. In his downtime, the 32-year-old plays an online game to earn extra money by amassing so-called non-fungible tokens, or NFTs. Egea is one of many Venezuelans to have turned to NFT gaming to augment their income as the country confronts its eighth year of recession and fourth of hyperinflation.

NFTs are one-of-a-kind digital collectibles, each with a certificate of authenticity created by the same blockchain technology that underlies cryptocurrency. It cannot be forged or otherwise manipulated.

Egea plays the game Plant vs Undead, in which plants "grown" in an online garden battle zombie-like monsters. Players invest time in "watering" and otherwise caring for their plants-purchased with cryptocurrency. Each plant is an NFT that can be sold for real-world money.

The former policeman made an initial investment of \$300 earned through his more traditional jobs. "What do I want to achieve with this? To save up for a house for my family," said Egea, who shares an apartment with his mother in a poor Caracas suburb.

"It is a long-term project," he said. Sunflower and

cabbages. Before starting, Egea opened a digital "wallet" with which to transfer his gains into real money. He spent some money on upgrading his computer, then bought a digital sunflower and some cabbages for \$80. These he will farm until he can sell them to buy a digital tree, which, when mature, will be worth as much as \$2,000. In a notepad, Egea keeps a meticulous record of his farming activities and NFT price movements. "At 6:00 am, I get up for the game. During work hours, while waiting (for a client), I water the plants, check that there aren't any crows" to eat them, he explained.

One night, he said, he awoke in a panic that his plants had died. "I got up and connected (to the gaming site), but everything was fine," he laughed.

Enough to support a family

Plants vs Undead is currently the 18th most-visited website in Venezuela, according to Amazon's Alexa index. In 35th place is Axie Infinity, another NFT game that works on a similar principle but requires a higher initial investment of about \$1,000. "These gaming platforms in which participants can earn money have become, in hyperinflationary countries such as

Venezuela, options for generating additional income... (by) playing for an hour, three, four a day," said Venezuelan economist Aaron Olmos. In this alternative economy, NFTs tend to start off at a relatively affordable price that grows at an attractive rate as more and more people get involved, he said, but warned the price can also drop and investments be lost.

One form of gaming that has gained in popularity is an investor paying someone else, often a teenager, to play on their behalf, generating income for a fee. Axie Infinity, for example, can yield \$400 or \$500 a month for the hired player, enough "to support a family," said Yerson Rivero, a crypto-investor and NFT gamer. In Venezuela, the minimum wage for public service is \$2.5 per month and the average salary about \$50, while a basket of basic groceries for a family of five costs about \$220.

Rivero and a group of friends "farm" out of a tiny office in the back of a mechanical workshop, where they water virtual plants day in, day out. "Cryptocurrency is the future," said Jesus Almerida, one of the group. "I've decided that as soon as I have enough capital, I will... create a crypto wallet for each of my children... to pay for their university." — AFP

UK 'confident' of fixing carbon dioxide shortage

LONDON: Britain is "confident" that it will fix a shortage of captured carbon dioxide gas that has sparked renewed food supply concerns, Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng said yesterday. Two UK fertilizer plants accounting for up to 60 percent of Britain's CO2 supply-which is vital for the food industry-shut last week due to spiking natural gas costs.

Kwarteng told British media that he has held urgent talks with CF Industries Holdings, which runs the biggest of the two facilities.

The CO2 shortage has triggered warnings of further pressure on food supplies, which are already hit by insufficient numbers of lorry drivers. "We're definitely looking at trying to secure carbon dioxide supply," Kwarteng told Sky News yesterday. "I hope we have a very clear plan to get CO2 production going again. I'm very confident and hopeful that we can sort it out by the end of the week." CO2 is used in abattoirs to stun animals before they are killed for their meat. It is also used to carbonate beer and soda, while frozen CO2 or dry ice keeps food fresh during transit. CF Industries boss Tony Will flew back into Britain on Sunday to hold urgent talks with the government.

"He said the problem he had was that the natural gas price is much higher than the ammonia which he sells," Kwarteng added. "So essentially what happened last week was that the plant downed tools."

"And I said of course we've got to manufacture this CO2. And that's what we're talking about this week." Speaking to BBC radio, Kwarteng said he would examine "every solution" to restart CO2 production. Asked if Britain would subsidize CF Industries, he

replied that the government was "looking at different ways in which we can provide support".

The government had insisted Monday that Britain would avoid a winter gas supply emergency, as soaring gas prices also threaten domestic energy providers and household bills-and the broader manufacturing sector. British Steel told AFP on Tuesday that it would maintain normal output but urged intervention both from the government and energy regulator Ofgem. "Power prices are spiraling out of control and represent one of the biggest challenges facing our business," said a spokesman.

"We are maintaining production at normal levels but huge extra costs like these cannot simply be absorbed or ignored. The UK government and Ofgem must act now."

Borrowing

UK government borrowing fell in August but remains elevated due to costly COVID support measures, official data showed yesterday. Public sector net borrowing, the state's preferred measure of the deficit, slid to £20.5 billion (\$28 billion, 24 billion euros) last month, the Office for National Statistics said. That was however the second highest level for the month since records began, after £26 billion in August last year.

The government's finances have been plagued by emergency COVID-19 measures, in particular a furlough scheme which paid the bulk of private sector wages for millions of UK workers but ends later this month. The ONS also revealed yesterday that the annual deficit had ballooned by more than expected. Emergency pandemic support pushed borrowing to £325.1 billion in the financial year to March, up from the prior estimate of £298 billion. The revised figure was equivalent to 15.5 percent of gross domestic product. That was the highest level since the end of World War II in 1945, when it stood at 22.4 percent.

The ONS added that this revision was due to write-offs of state-backed emergency loans during the pandemic. —AFP

US Democrats unveil plans to suspend debt limit

WASHINGTON: Democratic congressional leaders on Monday unveiled plans to suspend the nation's borrowing limit, following a White House warning of "economic catastrophe" unless that ceiling is raised. The legislation also would fund the government through the end of the year after the current budget lapses on September 30. But the fate of the plan is unclear since Republicans have vowed to withhold support for raising the debt ceiling, which is needed to fund spending already approved by lawmakers, including the massive rescue packages rolled out during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The American people expect our Republican colleagues to live up to their responsibilities and make good on the debts they proudly helped incur," Democratic Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said in a joint statement. They warned that "a reckless Republican-forced default could plunge the country into a recession."

Democrats have the majority in both houses of Congress, but the slim margin in the Senate means they will need some Republican support to push it through, since a single Senator can block any legislation that has less than 60 votes. The measure would suspend the debt limit through December 2022 — after the midterm congressional elections.

It also would keep the government running through the end of the year while legislators continue to debate two massive spending bills—an eight-year, \$1.2 trillion infrastructure package and a 10-year, \$3.5 trillion package with a host of social programs, largely paid for by rolling back tax cuts.

Schumer and Pelosi said the measure unveiled Monday would avoid "an unnecessary government shutdown," and called it "must-pass legislation." It will also include funds for disaster relief and Afghan evacuee resettlement, with the White House asking for \$20 billion for hurricane and wildfire aid and \$6 billion for tens of thousands of Afghan refugees. "We look forward to passing this crucial legislation with bipartisan support through both chambers and sending to the president's desk in the coming weeks," they said. But Republican Senate leader Mitch McConnell once again said Democrats should go it alone.

"They just want bipartisan cover so they can pivot as fast as possible to ramming through an historically reckless taxing and spending spree on a pure party-line vote," he said on Twitter. That is a stark contrast from his position in 2019, when Republican Donald Trump was president and McConnell argued that failing to raise the borrowing cap "would be a disaster."

'Shame, shame'

Schumer called McConnell's current stance "crass,



WASHINGTON: In this file photo, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen speaks during the daily press briefing in the Brady Briefing Room of the White House in Washington, DC. — AFP

craven." "Shame, shame on the Republican Leader," he said in comments on the Senate floor. After pushing for tax cuts, pandemic spending and previous increases in the debt ceiling "what Republicans are doing is nothing short of a dine-and-dash of historic proportions." US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has warned that without an increase the government will run out of cash to fund operations and pay its debts sometime in October.

Failing to raise the debt limit "would produce widespread economic catastrophe" and "compound the damage of the continuing public health emergency," she said in a column Monday in The Wall Street Journal. The debt ceiling has been raised about 80 times since the 1960s, but the issue has frequently been a political football in polarized Washington, with Republicans engaging in brinkmanship multiple times during the administration of Democrat Barack Obama.

In the aftermath of that conflict in 2011, the United States lost its coveted "AAA" debt rating from Standard and Poor's. That sent shock waves through the markets.

But under Trump, Democrats supported Republican efforts to suspend the debt limit for two years. The ceiling was reinstated on August 1 with debt at \$28.4 trillion, and the Treasury is already shuffling government funds around to continuing paying the bills.

Extraordinary measures

Yellen, who had a phone call with McConnell last week, said even waiting until the last minute could cause a cascade of financial disasters including rising borrowing rates and 50 million seniors missing their government payments. The Bookings Institution said the 2011 debt limit showdown raised Treasury borrowing costs by \$1.3 billion, and in the 2013 impasse-when Congress waited until the last minute to raise the debt ceiling-investors dumped Treasury securities, and "those effects ripple throughout financial markets."

Treasury already has begun taking what it calls extraordinary measures to keep from breaching the cap on borrowing, but the steps will become increasingly stringent as the drop dead date approaches. These include not investing in savings plans and retirement funds for government employees. — AFP



LONDON: (Left to right) Britain's Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng, Britain's Home Secretary Priti Patel, Britain's Housing Secretary Michael Gove, Britain's Justice Secretary and deputy Prime Minister Dominic Raab and Britain's Foreign Secretary Liz Truss attend the first post-reshuffle cabinet meeting in Downing street, central London. —AFP

German climate group takes BMW, Daimler to court

FRANKFURT: A German environmental group yesterday said it was suing car giants BMW and Daimler to force them to reduce emissions faster, following recent court victories for climate activists.

The NGO Environmental Action Germany (DUH) submitted applications to courts in Stuttgart and Munich on Monday evening, arguing the carmakers need to set themselves more ambitious climate goals, including ending the sale of fossil-fuel cars by 2030. While the manufacturers have announced plans to transition away from petrol and diesel vehicles, the plaintiffs argue their strategies are insufficient to meet global targets.

The companies were "torpedoing climate protection and the Paris agreement with highly polluting vehicles," DUH vice-president Barbara Metz said in a statement. In early September, DUH and Greenpeace sent letters to the two carmakers, as well as

Volkswagen and gas company Wintershall asking them to commit to more ambitious targets for reducing carbon emissions.

BMW and Mercedes-Benz maker Daimler declined to sign up to the climate organizations' proposals, according to DUH. Volkswagen has until the end of October to respond to Greenpeace.

Daimler said in a statement yesterday that it has "clearly accepted the targets in the Paris climate agreement and the need for decarbonization in the auto industry."

The case is the first of its kind in Germany and bases itself on a landmark verdict by German's constitutional court in April. In a surprise ruling, the court found that Germany's plans to curb CO2 emissions were insufficient to meet the targets of the Paris climate agreement and placed an unfair burden on future generations. Chancellor Angela Merkel's government responded by bringing forward its date for carbon neutrality by five years to 2045, and raised its 2030 target for greenhouse gas reductions.

The decision implied there is a "basic right to climate protection," DUH lawyer Remo Klinger said in a statement. In a separate action, DUH also supported legal action against five German states earlier this month over their alleged failure to legislate appropriately in response to climate change. —AFP

Evergrande-driven rout ends, global stocks rebound

NEW YORK: US and European equities rebounded yesterday after fears over the possible collapse of Chinese property giant Evergrande sparked a rout across global markets. The Dow Jones Industrial Average, the tech-heavy Nasdaq and the S&P 500 were all around 0.4 percent higher in early trading as Wall Street opened.

In Europe, London stocks advanced 1.1 percent, while Frankfurt and Paris each won 1.4 percent in afternoon trading. Major European markets had fallen between around one and two percent Monday, similar to drops seen on Wall Street. The picture was mixed in Asia yesterday, with Hong Kong closing up 0.5 percent, while Tokyo slumped 2.2 percent and Shanghai was closed for a Chinese public holiday. "The early contention is that yesterday's reported angst that a debt default by China's Evergrande could trigger systemic risk has been tempered," said Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare. "Helping in this regard are many pundits suggesting Evergrande is not a 'Lehman moment' and reports that Evergrande's Chairman said the property developer plans to fulfil its responsibilities," O'Hare said, referring to the collapse of the Wall Street giant firm during the 2008 financial crisis.

Evergrande founder Xu Jiayin said in a letter to staff that he "firmly believes Evergrande will be able to

step out of the darkest moment soon." On the corporate front, shares in Universal Music, the world's biggest label with a lineup of megastars from The Beatles to Taylor Swift, surged on its stock market debut, giving the company a valuation exceeding \$50 billion. ThinkMarkets analyst Fawad Razaqada said sentiment also improved after Washington announced that it will lift COVID travel bans on all air passengers in November if they are fully vaccinated and undergo testing and contact tracing.

The news boosted the travel sector. "The better mood is a reflection of optimism about travel returning to some form of normalcy after the United States announced it will allow fully vaccinated people to travel to the US," Razaqada said. Markets are also juggling an expected tightening of US monetary policy, rising COVID infections, a slowing global recovery, elevated inflation and a brewing energy crunch.

The OECD yesterday warned of an "uneven" global economic recovery as it lowered its 2021 growth forecasts for the world and the United States while raising the outlook for Europe. In Asia trading, Hong Kong-listed real estate firms-which took the brunt of the selling on Monday, tanking more than 10 percent-out gains. But Evergrande, which has fallen more than 80 percent this year alone, ended further in negative territory. Attention is on what happens next in the Evergrande saga, with the firm-wallowing in debts of more than \$300 billion-due to pay interest to bondholders on two notes tomorrow. Focus this week is also on the Fed's latest policy meeting, with observers predicting it will set out its timetable for tapering the vast bond-buying monetary easing program that has been a key driver of a global recovery for more than a year. —AFP

Business

Crunch time for Evergrande, but no 'Lehman moment'

Worried investors fear replay of the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers

HONG KONG: With the future of Evergrande hanging in the balance, global markets have plunged on fears that one of China's biggest developers could collapse and cause a contagion throughout the world's number two economy and beyond. Talk of a "Lehman moment" has rung loud this week as worried investors try to ascertain whether the crisis could be a replay of the bankruptcy of Wall Street titan Lehman Brothers during the 2008 global financial crisis.

While predominantly a developer, Evergrande—which employs 200,000 people, has a presence in more than 280 cities and claims to indirectly generate 3.8 million Chinese jobs—has been on a buying spree for more than a decade. In that time it has bought Guangzhou FC and turned it into a highly successful club, set up the popular Evergrande Spring mineral water and opened amusement parks it boasted were "bigger" than Disney's. It also has an electric car unit as well as investments in tourism, digital operations, insurance, and health.

So, what's the problem?

Well, that spending spree was paid for by founder Xu Jiayin's gargantuan borrowing. The firm is now in the hole for more than \$300 billion—equivalent to two percent of China's GDP—and it is having trouble paying that back. The debt pile became a major issue last year when the government, as part of a drive to address a worrying debt mountain accumulated by property firms, began to unveil a series of measures aimed at reining in their borrowing.

This has severely curtailed its ability to finish properties and sell them to repay its debts.

Banks have already given up expectations of repayment for loans made to the firm, but on Thursday it is due to make payments on two bonds. It is not expected to meet those either, and while it has 30 days grace it is widely forecast to default.

What happens then?

All eyes are on the government. The property sector is a crucial engine of the Chinese economy—estimated to account for around a quarter of GDP—and has played a key role in the post-pandemic recovery. Any bankruptcy of such a major company would have major repercussions. But, as a private company, Beijing might feel less compulsion to stop Evergrande hitting the buffers and could force it to file for bankruptcy, to use it as a warning that no firm is too big to fail and they cannot rely on the state to bail them out.

However, most experts agree the state will not want to see Chinese homebuyers left out of pocket. Larry Ong from SinoInsider said the "best-case scenario" is that authorities "find a way to keep Evergrande from declaring bankruptcy, give the company's creditors a glimmer of hope that they will walk away from the debacle with at least something, and avert the triggering of greater social unrest".

Then there is the prospect of a restructuring with local authorities taking control of parts of the firm, while corporate investment divisions are allowed to go out of business.

But that would be a huge undertaking. "I think it's more of a quiet rescue, because they also do not want to explicitly say: hey, I'm here to inject X amount of billions into your books to actually rescue you," said Kelvin Wong of CMC Markets.

"They do not want to actually create another moral hazard to the market, to say... 'go on, continue your business as usual of property development, at the end of the day, we will still rescue you'."

Notably, the group has hired experts including Houlihan Lokey—which advised on the restructuring of Lehman Brothers after its collapse in September 2008.



HONG KONG: In this file photo shows signage on the China Evergrande Centre in Hong Kong. — AFP

Is this a 'Lehman moment'?

Apparently not. Lehman Brothers was a Wall Street behemoth, one of the so-called Big Five investment banks. However, drowning under huge losses linked to sub-prime mortgages, US authorities allowed the firm to go under. A banking crisis ensued and markets were pummeled, while millions of jobs were lost and lives ruined.

But analysts say conditions are different here. "I do not think it will be at that kind of level, because I do not see any kind of a securities product that's been kind of securitized off from Evergrande's books

itself" said CMC's Wong. "So what we could see right now is more of a negative feedback loop impact, a sentiment impact that actually spills over to the rest of the world."

Ratings agency S&P said in a report this week that officials would likely step in, but only if they thought the crisis could cause widespread risks. "We believe Beijing would only be compelled to step in if there is a far-reaching contagion causing multiple major developers to fail and posing systemic risks to the economy," it said. "Evergrande failing alone would unlikely result in such a scenario." —AFP

Evergrande founder offers staff assurances: Media

BEIJING: The chairman of indebted Chinese housing giant Evergrande has told staff he believes the group will "step out of the darkest moment soon", state media reported yesterday, as Asian stock markets panic over fears the conglomerate will default. The embattled developer has been struggling to appease angry homebuyers and investors as it sways on the brink of collapse with debts exceeding \$300 billion.

Xu Jiayin, who founded the company in 1996, told staff in a letter to mark mid-autumn festival that he "firmly believes Evergrande will be able to step out of the darkest moment soon", reported the state-run Securities Times. He went on to say Evergrande would increase the full resumption of work and production, ensure the delivery of buildings, and "hand over a responsible answer to home buyers, investors, partners and financial institutions". He also thanked staff for their hard work in the letter, as China celebrates a two-day public holiday.

It came as fears of contagion saw Hong Kong and Tokyo stocks tumble in morning trading, with other property firms in the firing line. The Evergrande crisis has even triggered rare protests outside the company's offices in China by investors and suppliers demanding their money—some of whom claim they are owed as much as \$1 million.

The company admitted earlier this month that it was under "tremendous pressure" and may not be able to meet its liabilities. —AFP

UK bus operators plan merger as COVID hits demand

LONDON: British bus operator National Express, whose operations stretch as far afield as North America, and rival Stagecoach announced merger plans yesterday, with the pandemic-hit firms looking to slash costs. Under a proposed all-share deal, National Express would own 75 percent of the new group and Stagecoach the remainder, the pair said in a statement.

"The boards of National Express and Stagecoach believe that the potential combination would be a strategically compelling proposition with significant growth and cost synergies, as well as delivering strong value creation for both sets of shareholders," it added. National Express said it has identified pre-tax cost synergies of at least £35 million (\$48 million, 41 million euros).

National Express has bus and coach networks across the UK and runs services abroad, including school buses in North America. It operates also a rail franchise in Germany, while UK-focused Stagecoach is one of Britain's largest bus and coach operators.

Susannah Streeter, senior investment and markets analyst at Hargreaves Lansdown, said "it comes as little surprise that rivals National Express and Stagecoach are... considering getting together to try and shoulder the recovery". —AFP

Macron and Modi vow to 'act jointly' after subs dispute

PARIS: President Emmanuel Macron and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday vowed to "act jointly" in the Indo-Pacific region, as a row intensified with Australia and the US over a ditched submarine contract. Macron's telephone talks with Modi were timed conspicuously as French anger appears undiminished after Australia pulled out of a submarine contract in favor of US submarines as part of an alliance with Washington and the UK.

US officials have said US President Joe Biden is seeking a phone call with Macron in the coming days to ease tensions but this has yet to materialize, with Macron taking the unprecedented step of recalling France's ambassadors to Australia and the United States.

The French presidency said both leaders agreed they would "act jointly in an open and inclusive Indo-Pacific area". Macron assured Modi of France's continued "commitment to the strengthening of India's strategic autonomy, including its industry and technology base, as part of a close relationship based on trust and mutual respect". The statement from Macron's office said France and India's shared approach would be aimed at promoting "regional stability and the rule of law, while ruling out any form of hegemony".

Horizon Holdings marks its 45th anniversary

DUBAI: Horizon Holdings completes 45 years as a vanguard of iconic marketing and communication services in the Middle East & North Africa region. Founded in September 1976, the company started as a single brand agency that grew into a marketing powerhouse with a regional footprint that spans from Dubai to the Maghreb. Horizon Holdings is today the parent and home to multinational award-winning agencies: Horizon FCB MENA, BPN MENA, Golin MENA, Blue Barracuda, and Fuel Content.

A creative story that started with Foote, Cone &

Russian e-retail giant Wildberries defends new pay policy

MOSCOW: Russian e-commerce giant Wildberries yesterday defended its decision to pay employees of pickup points based on their speed, a policy that triggered discontent among workers.

The company owned by Russia's richest woman Tatyana Bakalchuk is one of the largest online marketplaces in the country and has enjoyed success across the former USSR.

In a petition last week, Wildberries employees said the new payment system resulted in workers losing wages and announced the start of workers-to-rule action, meaning they will do no more than the minimum required by their contract until their demands are met. The petition, which has gathered around 33,000 signatures so far, said the introduction of a new payment system over the summer resulted in workers losing up to 40,000 rubles (\$550) of their monthly wage.

In a statement yesterday, Wildberries denied that

The new three-way strategic alliance, AUKUS, is widely seen as seeking to counter the rising power of China in the area. Paris has in the last years sought to tighten ties with India: In 2016 the two sides signed a multi-billion dollar deal for 36 French Rafale fighter jets for New Delhi.

While the agreement is under investigation in France for kickback allegations, it is viewed as a commercial and diplomatic success for Paris.

Indian media have in recent days speculated that Australia's cancellation of the submarine deal could spark French-Indian talks about a submarines agreement of their own, possibly involving a transfer of technology.

During a September 2020 visit to New Delhi French Defence Minister Florence Parly discussed the idea that the Rafale deal could lead to sales of other weaponry, including submarines, according to a French defense ministry source. "The Indian air force is completely satisfied with these planes, and that means we are well-placed for the future," the source said. Possible coming arms sales, apart from the submarines, discussed in New Delhi included helicopters, ammunition and fighter jet turbines, the source said.

'Clarification, not 'reconciliation'

France called it a "stab in the back" after learning the US had secretly led talks about the new strategic alliance and struck the deal for the delivery of American nuclear-powered submarines to Australia. Australia informed France only hours before pulling

Belding back in 1979 through a relationship that transformed the FCB brand into Adweek's Global Agency of the Year and Cannes Lions Winner 2020-21 Network of the Year, under the leadership of FCB global CEO, Carter Murray.

Rafic Saadeh, Chairman & CEO, Horizon Holdings, said: "Starting with FCB, our genesis was with an innovative heart, and a courageous soul. What started as a vision in 1976 is now celebrated as a legacy. At this 45-year mark, I am proud to say that we've built a company where our people feel at home and our clients feel cared. To our



Rafic Saadeh

its employees had gone on strike. "All our pickup points were and are operating," a spokeswoman told AFP. Wildberries confirmed that it had introduced a new pay policy that takes into account the number of items processed by employees of pickup points.

The company added that because the contribution of each employee is now taken into account "more carefully", about 90 percent of workers in August received a higher income.

The income of the remaining 10 percent decreased "because their speed of work was lower", Wildberries said. On Saturday, the petition was updated to say that management had ordered "additional payments" to employees.

However, it said there was still "discontent" over the new pay rules, which were described as "unachievable". A Wildberries employee involved in the campaign said on Tuesday that the strike had been put on hold pending a response from management.

The employee, who insisted on anonymity, told AFP that the action had taken place in 30 cities and that 90 percent of employees were "dissatisfied" with the rules.

Wildberries said it is "in dialogue" with its employees to explain how the new policy can be



PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron, delivers a speech during a collective award ceremony at the Elysee Palace, in Paris. — AFP

out of the submarines deal, according to the French government. As the crisis unfolded Biden requested an urgent conversation with Macron, for which the French have still not announced a date.

Once it happens, Macron will demand "clarifications" from Biden, his political advisor Stephane Sejourne said yesterday, warning that nobody should expect "a reconciliation talk". He said the way that the French-Australian deal was cancelled brought up many questions "including about the concept of what it means to be an ally of the Americans". — AFP

teams, clients, partners, and the industry at large - thank you for being our driving force, and I am excited for the next 45!"

Recognized widely as an iconic communications group from and for the MENA region, Horizon Holdings agencies are the catalysts behind countless award-winning campaigns, winning regional and global recognitions, though most important delivering work that becomes an economic multiplier for our clients' business. Mazen Jawad, President Horizon Holdings, said: "It's a unique moment to reflect on the success of our brands, thank our brave people and honor our commitment to our partners. In an era and a region where the winds of change are stronger than ever, we're present as a driving force always transforming and adjusting our sails to navigate towards the right direction and see victory on the Horizon. As we say at Horizon FCB the best part of a brand story is NeverFinished!"



MOSCOW: Wildberries, owned by Russia's richest woman Tatyana Bakalchuk, is one of the largest online marketplaces in the country and has enjoyed success across the former USSR.

used to increase their income. The group added that "as part of the transition period" workers will be receiving extra payments. In Russia, the online giant has tens of thousands of employees.

Wildberries was founded in 2004 by Bakalchuk, who was then on maternity leave, together with her IT technician husband Vladislav. This year Forbes named Bakalchuk, 45, the richest woman in Russia with estimated wealth of over \$13 billion. — AFP

Lifestyle | Features



Members of the South Korean boy band BTS arrive at the UN General Assembly 76th session General Debate at United Nations Headquarters, in New York. — AFP photos



Members of the South Korean boy band BTS wear facemasks before they take turns speaking at the SDG Moment event.



Jimin listens as JHope of the South Korean boy band BTS speaks at the SDG Moment event.

BTS dance through UN to promote youth solutions for planet

It wasn't exactly the screaming audience BTS is accustomed to but the Korean pop sensations had another sort of world stage Monday as they addressed the United Nations. The seven-member boy band, clad in subdued dark suits, said they hoped to rally young people to look at how to work toward the Sustainable Development Goals-UN benchmarks on which the world has fallen increasingly behind. With Covid restrictions in force, BTS spoke before a largely empty

General Assembly call, with delegates in the front rows listening in silence other than occasionally snapping a picture by phone. After their remarks, the pop stars put on a pre-recorded video of their track "Permission to Dance" as they showed their moves throughout the General Assembly and on the world body's lawn facing the East River. BTS members told the UN session that they were "heartbroken" to cancel their latest tour because of

the pandemic and that they had asked other young people to share perspectives on being the "Covid lost generation," with life disrupted since early 2020. "There were times during the past two years when I too felt bewildered and troubled but still we hear people cry out, 'let's live on, let's make the best of this moment,'" singer Jin said as he recounted responses from young people. "We can't stand still in taking on new challenges when we're in the ideal time of our lives."

The pop stars said that they had been vaccinated against Covid and also noted that young people were "searching for answers" on how to fight climate change. BTS was introduced by South Korean President Moon Jae-in who has given the pop stars diplomatic passports, the latest effort by Seoul to seize on the global popularity of K-pop. The Sustainable Development Goals include eradicating extreme poverty around the world by 2030. But the United Nations says the Covid cri-

sis has set the effort back by years, with well more than 100 million people thrown back into poverty and hunger-in addition to the more than 4.5 million people who have died. "It would be easy to lose hope. But we are not hopeless or helpless," Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told the session. "We have a path to recovery if we choose to take it." — AFP

Prosecution rests case in R Kelly sex trafficking trial

Following five weeks of graphic testimony including searing personal accounts of sexual, physical and emotional abuse, prosecutors seeking to convict R Kelly of racketeering and sex trafficking rested their case Monday. The singer who reigned over the 1990s and early 2000s has for decades faced accusations of sexual misconduct but was only tried once on child pornography charges, proceedings that saw him acquitted.

In a court in Brooklyn, New York, federal attorneys called 45 witnesses, including 11 accusers-nine women and two men-in their bid to cast Kelly as the ringleader of a criminal organization that enabled his predation of women and children for nearly 30 years. Six of those called to the stand said they were underage when Kelly initiated sexual encounters with them. The charges center around six women: Jerhonda, Stephanie, Faith, Sonja and a woman who testified under a pseudonym, along with Aaliyah, the R&B singer who died in a plane crash in 2001 but who Kelly illegally married when she was 15. More than a month of testimony included harrowing descriptions of women saying they were raped, beaten, drugged, imprisoned and sometimes denied food or access to bathrooms.



In this file photo Singer R Kelly appears during a hearing at the Leighton Criminal Courthouse in Chicago, Illinois. — AFP

One woman saying when she was a teenager he forced her to get an abortion. Several said Kelly gave them herpes without warning them he had contracted the sexually transmitted infection. The artist born Robert Sylvester Kelly faces one count of racketeering and eight violations of the Mann Act, an anti-sex trafficking law banning transporting people across state lines for the purpose of sex. He denies all charges. In addition to his Brooklyn trial, Kelly faces prosecutions in three more jurisdictions, including in Illinois federal court on child pornography and obstruction counts. In cross-examination, defense lawyers aimed to spear witnesses' credibility, holding that relationships were consensual, even loving at times, and attempting to paint the women as scorned lovers or super fans who grew jealous or angry when their relationships with Kelly ended.

On Monday Kelly's lawyers began their defense, calling the first two of an expected six witnesses. The musician is not expected to testify. The first man said he knew Kelly on and off for some 15 years, and dismissed the accusations that Kelly abused women, alluding to the musician's "chivalry." An aspiring musician who was never on the artist's payroll, Dhanai Ramanan said he was in Kelly's orbit "to observe and to learn and to become." The second defense witness is Larry Hood, a former Chicago police officer and childhood friend of Kelly's who also did security for him. — AFP



A woman looks at movie advertisements at a cinema in Hong Kong.

Iron curtain falls on Hong Kong cinema as censors demand cuts

Once renowned for world-class cinema, Hong Kong's film industry was already struggling before the latest hurdle-Chinese mainland-style censorship as authorities take their purge of dissent into the cultural sphere. Filmmaker Mok Kwan-ling's heart sank when the email from the government censors dropped. In June, authorities announced all films would now be scrutinized for "national security" breaches. Mok's was the first known to have fallen foul of these rules. For months, she had been putting together her debut, a 27-minute drama inspired by the many young couples she encountered during huge democracy protests two years ago.

It tells the story of a young woman meeting her boyfriend's parents after he is arrested for taking part in the protests. The boyfriend's mother is opposed to the movement, his father sympathetic. The Cantonese title "Zap UK" (literally "clean up the house") is a reference to how friends and family would often remove any incriminating items once a loved one was arrested. But Mok said Hong Kong's film censors were not happy with what was submitted and ordered her to make 14 cuts. Among the changes they demanded was removing a line from the father saying their son was a first aid volunteer who was "only out there to save the people" as well as deleting a scene where the same character, a truck driver, charges protesters a discounted fare. The censors also demanded the film be renamed and carry a warning that it showed criminal offenses. "I thought the story was rather balanced by presenting voices of two sides," Mok told AFP. "It turned out that one particular side is not allowed to be heard." Mok felt the cuts would leave her film "devoid of essence and sense" so she put it aside for now. "My film happened to be the first but it won't be the last," she warned. Hong Kong's Film Censorship Authority told AFP it "does not comment on individual cases".

Golden era dulled

In the 1980s and 1990s, Hong Kong was known as "The Hollywood of the Far East", with a cast of globally recognized stars like Chow Yun-fat and auteurs such as Wong Kar-wai. The golden age of Cantonese cinema has long been eclipsed by the rise of mainland Chinese and South Korean films. But the city maintained a vibrant indie scene, shielded by free speech protections that allowed directors to tackle subjects that would be untouchable on the authoritarian mainland. Those days are now over. China is rapidly remoulding Hong Kong in its own image after the democracy protests, and films are just the latest in a long list of targets. On top of the new scrutiny rules, a law making its way through the legislature will expand censorship to films previously given clearance as well as tighten the punishment for breaches.

Kiwi Chow was one of five directors who contributed short stories for "Ten Years". The 2015 film painted a dystopian portrait of what Hong Kong might look like in a decade with Beijing stifling freedoms and the city's Cantonese culture. As well as being prescient, "Ten Years" was a commercial hit and won best film at the city's annual awards. But it is unlikely that a production like that could now be made-or even shown. "They are trying to clamp down on our memory and imagination," Chow told AFP.



Film director Kiwi Chow poses for a photo in the Kowloon district in Hong Kong. — AFP photos

Pop star blacklisted

Chow's latest project "Revolution of Our Times" is a 2.5-hour-long documentary on the 2019 protests. Organizers secretly added it to the Cannes Festival lineup earlier this summer-only once the mainland Chinese films had been shown. But Chow said he has given up any hope of showing it in Hong Kong. "If it is dangerous and risky for filmmakers to touch upon social issues... then I could only screen it outside Hong Kong," Chow said.

To protect himself, he said, he has sold the copyright and disposed of all locally held footage. The production team, collaborators and financial backers have chosen to remain anonymous. Still, some investors and actors have backed out of his non-political productions and a recent screening of a romance he made was raided by police. Fear of angering Beijing has long fuelled self-censorship in Hong Kong's arts, but mainland-style blacklisting of those who speak out is now also happening.

Earlier this month, pro-democracy pop star Denise Ho was forced to cancel her concert after the venue pulled out citing "public security" concerns just days before her performance. But Chow predicts censorship will do little to change Hong Kongers' desire for a greater say in how their city is run and smacks of weakness. "The more that is banned in the name of national security, the less secure the state will be," he said. — AFP

Harvey Weinstein denies sex crime charges in Los Angeles



In this file photo Harvey Weinstein arrives at a Manhattan court house for the second day of his trial in New York City. — AFP

Disgraced Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein denied a raft of charges when he appeared in a Los Angeles court on Monday. The former movie power player pleaded not guilty to counts involving alleged abuse of five women. Weinstein, the producer of smash hits including "Pulp Fiction" and "Shakespeare in Love", is already serving a lengthy jail term in New York for rape. The Los Angeles charges include sexual battery by restraint, forcible rape and forcible oral copulation against women in Beverly Hills between 2004 and 2010. The 69-year-old faces an additional 140 years behind bars if convicted on all counts.

Widespread sexual abuse and harassment allegations against Weinstein exploded in 2017, triggering the global #MeToo movement. In total, nearly 90 women including Angelina Jolie, Gwyneth Paltrow and Salma Hayek have accused Weinstein of harassment or assault. Weinstein has said all his sexual encounters were consensual Weinstein, who is in custody, is due back in court on October 25. — AFP

Five things to know from London Fashion Week

London Fashion Week closed with a flourish yesterday, the first major return to live runway shows in the British capital in 18 months following the coronavirus pandemic. Here are five points that stood out from the London spring/summer 2022 collections:

they dress, as the world is re-emerging," he added. For anyone wanting to party after spending the winter months inside, look no further than Canadian Mark Fast's neon, figure-hugging outfits. Apple green and fuchsia were a stand-out choice of colors for many designers.

Back to normal... sort of

February's edition was held online and a few in-person shows took place last September, but this time, audiences were back with a vengeance, without social distancing requirements or mask mandates. Guests, however, had to show proof of vaccination or a negative test for COVID-19. Some designers eager to return to the traditional format went all out. South Korea-born designer Rejina Pyo took over the swimming pool at London's Olympic Park.

Back to childhood

The return to childhood inspired several designers, such as Britain's Molly Goddard and Saul Nash. Nash, 28, featured young men gravitating to a London bus stop-a nod to his teenage years in Hackney, in the northeast of the British capital. The sportswear ace reimagined that stable of schoolboy uniforms-the short-sleeve shirt-with breathable fabric inserts and a zip. Goddard, known for her airy tulle dresses, reimagined the outfits she wore as a child in adult proportions. "I was eight months pregnant when I started designing this collection and imagined the clothes my child would wear," she said. "I was fixated on smocked dresses, tracksuit bottoms and ballet pumps."

Ecological awareness

The fashion and textile industry is the third most polluting sector in the world, accounting for some five percent of global greenhouse emissions. Prompted by environmental movements such as Extinction Rebellion, many designers are changing their practices. Rather than ordering new materials, Canadian Edeline Lee told AFP she used fabrics from past collections as she worked on it during lockdown. "I felt like it would be wrong to order fabrics for the new collection-no one was even going out-so we decided to use all the fabric that was leftover in the studio," she said, "That's how I ended up with 53 colors."

Osman Yousefzade used TENCEL Luxe, a thread made from sustainably sourced wood pulp, as an alternative to silk. At the British Library, Phoebe English, whose collections are made entirely in England, also presented works made with recovered textiles and using natural dyes. "Now we think very differently about what we use to make the clothes that we make. And we do that because of the huge environmental cost that the fashion industry has," she said. — AFP

Emerging talents

Two major brands, Burberry and Victoria Beckham, were absent, allowing emerging talents to take centre stage. Among several alumni of London's prestigious Central Saint Martins fashion school was Albanian designer Nensi Dojaka, 27, in her first solo show. She showcased glamorous creations, some transparent, and others in graphic detail. The Fashion East "talent incubator" was also an opportunity to discover the stars of tomorrow, such as Chet Lo, and his giant yellow picot shoulder bags.

Optimism and vitality

French designer Roland Mouret said he wanted to reflect the changes in society since the lifting of lockdown restrictions, celebrating "an optimism" in the season's silhouettes, prints and colors. "The collection is rooted in an understanding of the new ways (women) live their lives and how



A barber attends a customer at his shop in Herat.



24-year-old Nader Shah attends a customer at his barbershop in Herat.



A barber waits for customers at his shop in Herat.

Barbers suffer under Taliban rule as Afghans shun fashion

Quiffs, mohawks, and crew cuts were hairstyles Nader Shah was accustomed to styling for image-conscious young men in Afghanistan's third-biggest city of Herat. But since the Taliban swept to power in mid-August, Afghans have little cash to spare and fear being punished for sporting short or fashionable cuts. "Before, people came and asked for different hairstyles, but it's simply not like that anymore," 24-year-old Shah said at his barber's shop, with mirrors covering every wall. "Now they are heartbroken."

During the Taliban's first stint in power from 1996 to 2001, the hardliners banned flamboyant hairstyles and insisted men grow beards. After they were ousted, being clean-shaven was often considered a sign of modernity, including in the relatively cosmopolitan western city of Herat. "Now people come here and they only ask for simple cuts," Shah said. "They also don't shave their beards, so it's a problem now."



24-year-old Nader Shah attends a customer at his barbershop in Herat.

The barber, who has been in the business for 15 years after starting as a young apprentice, said the downturn has caused his daily earnings to plummet from \$15 to

between \$5 and \$7. In the next neighborhood, Mohammad Yousefi, 32, said he has had to dramatically lower his prices from \$6 a cut to just \$1 — to keep his

shop running. "Because of the Taliban situation, customers have less income and they pay us less," he said. Yousefi said that after the Islamist hardliners took control of the country, "suddenly people like to make themselves look like the Taliban". "It's not like the Taliban are fashionable, but people don't shave their beards because the Taliban will stop and ask them about it," he said. "They say it's not in sharia law, and that men should have beards and long hair."

Fleeing clients

At 36-year-old Ali Reza's barber shop, pink spotlights shone down on customers and shelves were crammed with hairspray cans, gels, mousses, cologne and face masks. The barber deftly chopped his scissors over a customer's beard as waiting clients discussed Afghan politics. His two apprentices—Reza's 11-year-old nephew Sobhan and Mohsan, 14 —

watched his every move, tidying away brushes, combs and electric clippers, and helping unwrap razor blades. Reza completed the experience with a flourish, drumming his fingers over the customer's head, massaging his temples and eyebrows, before scrunching the unsuspecting client's ears for several seconds.

"In the past, young people would come every one or two weeks to cut their hair or beards, and they were happy," Reza told AFP, adding many of his clients had fled. "Those young people who are still here are not interested in cutting their hair or beards anymore because the economy is really poor," he said. Since the Taliban takeover, Afghans say job opportunities have dried up. "Before my income was excellent, and now it's not," he said. — AFP

Sahara camel race glory brings boy jockey big dreams for his future



Riders with their camels wait at the starting line of the camel race, during the Cure Salee, the annual festival for nomadic people, in Ingall, northern Niger. — AFP photos

Ten-year-old Moussa will bask in the glory of the weekend camel race in Niger for a long time. Little higher than his victorious charger's knees, the boy fairly flew across the desert to snatch first prize in one of the most prestigious events of the Sahara. The competition drew racing camels from across Niger and further afield to the oasis town of Ingall, the country's traditional gateway to the Sahara and scene of the annual Cure Salee gathering of Tuareg and Wodaabe nomads. But it was Moussa—more used to long, hot days tending his father's cattle in the desert—who won Saturday's big race. Moussa does not go to school but has been riding camels, cantankerous beasts that roar, snort and spit foul-smelling bile at their enemies, since he was three years old. At seven, he says, he began venturing out solo. "I used to be afraid to ride camels alone," he says.

Now one meter (three foot three inch-

es) tall, Moussa is dreaming of a golden future in which he will have "plenty of camels" and above all "will win other races". The race is a highlight of the three-day nomad festival, when far-flung herders lead their cattle from up to 400 kilometers (250 miles) away, converging on three springs of water rich in mineral salts that give the gathering its name.

Music and marriages

The celebration comes after the rains in mid-September, with music and ritual dances, courtship and weddings and vaccinations for beasts and their masters, bringing relief from the nomads' increasingly hard lives—marginalized and trapped in a region riven by jihadist violence. For this brief respite, people prefer not to talk about their troubles but to just have fun. "There is football in Europe, here we have camel racing," says Khamid Ekwel, a renowned owner of racing camels.

So at dawn on Saturday, hundreds of herders pushed against the barriers of the stadium—a track of five kilometers (three miles) in the desert marked out by stones painted white—to watch the race over two laps. Dozens of pick-ups are strategically parked to give spectators standing on their roofs the best view. Others have brought their camels—around two meters at the shoulder—to gain a little height. Everyone waits under the sun rising in a blue sky, betting on the 25 animals in the race. The camels soon arrive and are placed behind a green rope stretched across the starting line. The jockeys are young—for the lighter they are, the faster the beasts will go.

Lahsanne Abdallah Najim, a race official and himself owner of one of the favorites, is stressed: he must ensure an orderly start, but at the same time wants his animal to win. The big moment is here. Najim gets into his pick-up, signals to about 15 people to climb in the back, read-

justs his scarf on his nose, then clamps down his brakes while waiting for the white flag. The flag drops. The camels head off at a gallop. The spectators shout. Najim's vehicle and a dozen others roar off, kicking up a sandstorm. Soon, we can't see much, the animals are already far ahead.

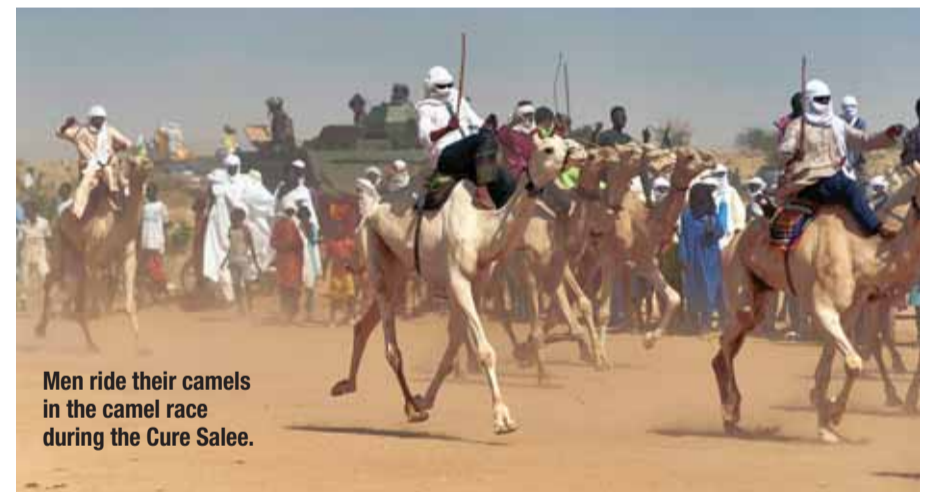
'A winning camel'

In his car, Najim smiles: "There are some who choose speed now, but they will be last in the end. It's on the second lap that you need to accelerate." After the first five kilometers, four camels are neck and neck and Najim's animal is one. Under his scarf he recites passages from the Quran. Motorcycles and pick-ups spin on the track and their drivers scream but the jockeys pay them no heed. Their only aim is to coax their camels to go ever faster in the final sprint to the finish. "It was a terrible final sprint," Najim says. "Even more terrible for me because I'm

fourth." The four frontrunners are soon brought in front of the platform where Nigerien President Mohamed Bazoum is installed. Little Moussa is grinning broadly after his victory on a camel named Mahokat ("the madman"). Mahokat's coach, Mohamed Ali, is happy but not surprised. Before the race, he had predicted: "This camel is a winning camel. This very day, inshallah." Such prized camels may live in the depths of the desert but they are known across the region: regularly winning races. Their owners are rich, but say they are not looking for money. "There are prizes of course, but they are not what interest us. It is to win," Hassan Mohamed, owner of a large stable, says with a smile. "We are looking for pleasure and glory alone." — AFP



A nomadic man poses next to his camel dressed for a parade during the Cure Salee.



Men ride their camels in the camel race during the Cure Salee.



Spectators watch the camel race, during the Cure Salee, the annual festival for nomadic people, in Ingall, northern Niger.



Finalists of the camel race wait to be awarded during the Cure Salee.



Young men ride their camels during the Cure Salee.

Lifestyle | Features



Kamel Abdul Jalil inaugurates the art exhibition in the presence of Sibi George, Abdul Rasoul Salman and Joice Sibi. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Kamel Abdul Jalil tours the exhibition hall.



Kamel Abdul Jalil honored by Sibi George.

ART EXHIBITION SHOWCASES INDIA'S TIMELESS HERITAGE

Indian artist Joice Sibi's paintings on display at Kuwait Art Association hall

By Sajeev K Peter

An 11-day-long art exhibition titled 'Glimpses of Timeless India' by Indian artist Joice Sibi Thampuran was inaugurated at Kuwait Art Association hall on Monday. The exhibition, showcasing India's rich and vibrant cultural heritage, was jointly inaugurated by Kamel Abdul Jalil, Secretary General, National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL), and Sibi George, Indian Ambassador to Kuwait, in the presence of Abdul Rasoul Salman, President of the Kuwait Arts Association and the artist Joice Sibi. Several Kuwaiti and Indian dignitaries, ambassadors, art-lovers and media persons were also present.

Organized by the Kuwait Art Association in cooperation with the Indian Embassy, the exhibition is part of ongoing celebrations marking 60 years of dynamic Kuwait-India relations. The exhibition is open to visitors from 5 pm to 9 pm daily until Sept 30, 2021. A cultural festival is also being held alongside the exhibition.

Abdul Jalil, in his address, spoke about the historically close Kuwait-India bilateral ties and the role of culture in driving this relationship forward. Salman emphasized the excellent cooperation between the artists of India and Kuwait and the potential to further strengthen this with frequent exchanges between the two countries.

In his address, the Indian ambassador highlighted the significance of the milestone year 2021, which is witnessing the 60th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Kuwait and the 75th anniversary of the independence of India.

Eloquent art

A selection of 37 paintings by Joice Sibi is on display at the exhibition, reflecting the rich and diverse cultural traditions of India. Executed in painstaking detail, Joice's art is both eloquent and evocative of the diverse tradition of Indian aesthetics.

"I have traveled all across India. What influences me the most is my country's rich and vibrant cultural heritage. As an artist, I also draw inspiration from our continuous civilization, which I see as 'Timeless India,'" Joice Sibi, who is the spouse of Indian Ambassador Sibi George, told Kuwait Times prior to the inauguration of the exhibition. Conceptualizing India's timeless art on canvas, Joice seems to add a hidden dimension to each of her paintings.

"I have been painting for 15 years. During this time, I have learned many new art forms through which I can express India's civilization and tradition. Today, painting is part and parcel of my life. Every painting for me is like a newborn child. I



Indian artist Joice Sibi Thampuran

nurture it. I live in it. Every painting sends a message to the person viewing it. It should have a story to tell - each painting tells a story. I would call it my 'nostalgism'. It reminds me of my motherland. I paint to express my feelings, my nostalgia and my imagination. This is my story," Joice said.

An avid traveler, Joice finds travelling to be a source of both joy and learning. In her early twenties, Joice travelled almost all over India, discovering the amazing land. According to her, every part of India has something unique to offer an artist. "Every journey one undertakes in that land is one of timeless celebration," she said.

Diplomatic journey

Then began her diplomatic journey that took her to several countries and civilizations. Everywhere she went, she became

part of art groups and institutes, from Montgomery College in Maryland to Mahe- Mehr Art Institute in Tehran. "As the spouse of a diplomat, I have had the opportunity to travel and visit many art museums across the world. An artist finds inspiration in the works of other artists. My extensive study of the greats - Vincent Van Gogh, Paul Cezanne, Paul Gauguin, Claude Monet, Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso - has guided me through my journey of portraying the splendor of India. These masters offer their experience through different artistic techniques that they have mastered. I have learned from their work and I have attempted to imbibe their techniques. Over the course of the years, I developed a love for both the modern and the abstract," she elaborated.

She has displayed her works at prominent art galleries in Washington, Riyadh, Tehran, Geneva and New Delhi. "Egyptian art has impacted my thinking. The natural paintings in the Valley of Kings in Luxor look fresh even after 3,000 years," she said, recalling her stay in Egypt, the land of Pharaohs, Christian and Islamic Art.

"Iran was a different experience. A journey through Qatar and Saudi Arabia and rest of the Gulf made me understand the lives and values of Indians and the huge resident community who toil day in and day out there. My artistic journey continued through Switzerland, Paris and the

Vatican. The Louvre and the many museums of Paris including the little village of Van Gogh continue to inspire me," she said.

Having been exposed to multiple styles of art through her artistic and intellectual journey, Joice's style is both inspired and intuitively original. "As a student of art in the US, I learned a lot of art forms and techniques that have inspired the work that I do. My paintings have adopted the styles of romanticism, realism, impressionism, cubism, symbolism, modernism, post-modernism, et al. The list is endless. I do not want to be put in any particularism. Now I can add a new school of art specific to me - Nostalgism," she quipped.

Many of her works like, 'Journey - The Village', 'The Snake Charmer', 'Diversity - The Lady with Bangles' and 'Nostalgia - The Houseboat' speak for themselves, defining the cultural traditions and values of the communities they represent. Talking about her dream projects, she said they include a series on: 'Mother', 'Journey', 'Serenity', 'The Epic', 'Nostalgia', 'Diversity', 'Seasons', etc. "A lot of thought goes into the mind of an artist before it appears on the canvas," she concluded.



Sexual harassment trial set for Belgian art star Jan Fabre



Belgian art star Jan Fabre

Belgian choreographer Jan Fabre, one of Europe's most celebrated and controversial artists, will face trial next year on charges of sexual harassment and indecent assault, a court ruled yesterday. The criminal tribunal in the city of Antwerp said the case would be heard over two days on 25 March and 1 April 2022. The 62-year-old choreographer, visual artist and theatre director-known for his provocative performances-faces up to five years in jail over allegations of "violence, harassment or sexual harassment" against 12 employees, and one count of indecent assault.

The case stems from complaints by 20 dancers from his company who in 2018 alleged suffering years of humiliation and sexual harassment in an open letter that thrust the #metoo movement into the highest spheres of Europe's avant garde. The former employees described a toxic work environment where sexual acts became an exchange for performance time and where "humiliation was our daily bread". Among other accusations, they said that Jan Fabre invited artists to his home under the pretext of preparing performances, but would then attempt a "sexual approach".—AFP

Picasso family hands over artworks to pay French tax

One of Picasso's daughters has given eight of his artworks and a book of drawings to the French state in lieu of inheritance tax at a ceremony on Monday. Six paintings and two statues by the Spanish master were handed over to the state-run Picasso Museum in Paris by his daughter Maya Ruiz-Picasso, his daughter by French model Marie-Therese Walter. They include "The child with the lollipop sitting under a chair", likely featuring Maya as a child, and representing a fearful world

on the eve of World War II, according to grandson Olivier Widmaier Picasso.

He was at a press conference at the museum alongside Culture Minister Roselyne Bachelot, who called the donation "one of the most important of recent decades". The works were heirlooms for his children, and include a statue in a Polynesian style of a type the artist kept as totems in his workshop. The oldest work is dated to 1895 — a traditional portrait of his father, "Don Jose Ruiz", also a painter. The most recent is "Head of a Man", a cubist portrait from summer 1971, two years before his death at the age of 91. They will be on show at the Picasso Museum, which has the largest collection of his works in the world, from April 2022. The value of the works was not given for reasons of tax secrecy, as the donation allows 86-year-old Ruiz-Picasso to pay off her inheritance tax in kind. — AFP



A painting by Spanish painter Pablo Picasso "Enfant a la sucette assis sous une chaise" at the Picasso Museum in Paris. — AFP

Sports

Pakistan 'used and binned' by England over cancelled tour

ECB cites 'increasing concerns about travelling to the region'

LONDON: Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Ramiz Raja said yesterday he felt "used and then binned" after England cancelled a white-ball tour for their men's and women's teams next month. The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) cited "increasing concerns about travelling to the region" just days after New Zealand also pulled out of a tour to Pakistan over security concerns.

However, the ECB statement highlighted player



New Zealand also pull out

welfare as the key consideration with many feeling the strain of operating in bubbles to prevent the spread of coronavirus cases over the past two years. The first trip by the England men's side to Pakistan since 2005 and first ever for the women's team was due to see Rawalpindi host men's and women's Twenty20 double-headers on October 13 and 14.

Heather Knight's women's team were then due to play three one-day internationals (ODIs) in the same city. Reaction to the withdrawal in Pakistan has been furious. Pakistan travelled to England last year at a time when COVID-19 infection rates in Britain were among the highest in the world for a three-match Test and T20 series that saved the ECB millions in television rights deals.

"It's the feeling of being used and then binned. That's the feeling I have right now," Raja told reporters. "A little bit of hand-holding, a little bit of caring was needed after the New Zealand pull out and we didn't get that from England which is so frustrating. We've been going out of our way to meet the international demands, being such a responsible member of the cricketing fraternity, and in return we get a response from ECB saying the players were spooked by New Zealand's withdrawal. What does that mean?"

Toyota claims another victory with double podium in Greece

ATHENS: The GAZOO Racing (GR) World Rally Team celebrated another spectacular result recently when Kalle Rovanpera claimed his second FIA World Rally Championship (WRC) victory in the No 69 Toyota Yaris WRC after conquering the legendary Acropolis Rally in Greece. Sebastien Ogier completed a double podium finish in the No 1 Toyota Yaris WRC, strengthening both his and the team's leads in the championship standings.

Rovanpera produced an incredible stage win during the final day's opening test, finishing 14.1s faster than anyone else. He went on to seal the victory in the No. 69 Toyota Yaris WRC with the fastest time in the Power Stage. Rovanpera and Ogier formed part of a



RAWALPINDI: Paramilitary soldiers stand guard outside the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium in Rawalpindi after New Zealand postponed a series of one-day international (ODI) cricket matches against Pakistan over security concerns. — AFP

'One feels humiliated'

New Zealand officials refused to give details of the security threat that forced them to abruptly cancel their matches. A deadly 2009 attack on the Sri Lanka team bus in Lahore saw Pakistan become a no-go destination for international teams. In 2012 and 2015 Pakistan hosted England in the UAE, which has staged most of their "home" games since the attack. A rapid improvement in security in recent years has led to the return of international cricket, with Zimbabwe, Sri Lanka, the West Indies, South Africa and Bangladesh touring in the past six years.

The series was supposed to be part of the preparation for England's men ahead of next month's T20 World Cup in the United Arab Emirates and Oman. But many of their star players would now be free to play in the latter stages of the lucrative Indian Premier League, also being hosted in the UAE, should their

sides reach the knockout phase. "It's a fantastic dichotomy isn't it," added Raja. "You are quoting fatigue and mental tension and players being spooked and a hour-and-a-half flight from here before a World Cup they are quite happy to be caged in a bubble environment and carry on with the tournament. One feels slighted, one feels humiliated because withdrawal doesn't have an answer."

The ECB's decision has also been met with fierce criticism at home. "English cricket, the governing body and players, had a chance to do the right thing this week," former England Test captain Michael Atherton wrote in The Times. "They had a chance to repay a debt, uphold their honor and side with a cricketing nation that has undergone the kind of challenges others cannot even begin to contemplate. Instead, citing a mealy-mouthed statement, they did the wrong thing." — AFP

Burkina's Iron Biby powerlifts into the record books

OUAGADOUGOU: Iron Biby, fresh from setting a new log lift record in Scotland - 229 kilos (504 pounds) - received a hero's welcome as he returned home to the West African state of Burkina Faso. Fans crowded at the airport late on Monday waving banners reading "You are the pride of the entire nation" and "Bravo champion", to greet the 29-year-old, 180-kilo powerlifter.

In Saturday's Giants Live World Tour Finals competition in Glasgow, Iron Biby's 229 kilo exploit was just one kilo over the previous record - but that was one set by Zydrunas Savickas of Lithuania 16 years ago. Iron Biby launched into a trademark cartwheel after lifting the massive log clear of his head to add another record to his world strongman tally. A video of the feat on Instagram clocked up more than 116,000 likes.

"It's a big deal for me, because I have been trying to beat this world record since 2018," Iron Biby said with a broad smile, standing next to Burkina's Sport Minister Dominique Nana. Fan Taleb Kangamba told AFP: "Thanks to him, people know of Burkina Faso and our flag is flying even in parts where you would never expect it. And also thanks to him, the name of Burkina Faso and his name are in the Guinness Book of Records." Iron Biby, whose real name is Cheick Ahmed Al-Hassan Sanou, started weightlifting in 2009 at age 17 in Canada, where he and his older brother went to high school.

He became the world log lift champion in 2018, a title he retained the following year. In addition to the log lift record, he holds the Guinness World Record for most overhead presses in one minute - of a person. And in July, he broke the world "axle press" record at the 2021 Strongman Classic in London's Royal Albert Hall. And not content with breaking the long-held log lift record, Biby said he plans to do better still. "I'm going to take this record to another level so that it's very hard to break it," he said. — AFP



BOBO-DIOULASSO: Cheick Ahmed Al-Hassan Sanou aka Iron Biby prepares to lift 505 kg as he works out at his home of Bobo-Dioulasso, second biggest city of Burkina Faso. — AFP

Koepka-DeChambeau feud 'non-issue' says US Ryder Cup captain

KOHLER: Brooks Koepka's feud with teammate Bryson DeChambeau won't be an issue at the 43rd Ryder Cup, US captain Steve Stricker insisted Monday. But don't expect the major champions to be paired when the Americans face holders Europe in the biennial team golf showdown that starts Friday at Whistling Straits, postponed from last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It's a non-issue, really, for me and the team," Stricker said of the spat. "I've had conversations with them both. They have assured me it's not going to be an issue. I have no worries whatsoever. "We had great conversation, great talks. So I'm not seeing it as an issue at all and they are completely on board. "Will we pair them together? I don't think so at this point. Could always happen. But probably not."

The feud began at the PGA Championship in May and expanded over social media, with taunts of "Brooksy" being shouted to DeChambeau at tournaments. Koepka's injured left wrist and comments to Golf Digest about how the Cup is "hectic" and "a bit odd" also caused some concerns, but Stricker says the four-time major winner's health and attitude are both fine. "He tells me everything is 100% and everything is ready and raring to go," Stricker said of the wrist

top-three separated by just 3.9 seconds at the conclusion of the second day. Rovanpera and his co-driver Jonne Halttunen enjoyed a storming start to day three in which they won all four stages in the opening loop, allowing them to build a lead of more than half a minute going into the fourth and final day.

Elfyn Evans came in second during the Power Stage, while Ogier finished third, gaining more points for the team. Ogier and co-driver Julien Ingrassia earned a valuable podium finish, securing third place in the No 1 Toyota Yaris WRC. Ogier now leads the drivers' standings by 44 points with just three rounds remaining. Thanks to the team's fifth double podium result of the year and the bonus points from the Power Stage, Toyota has now increased its Manufacturers' Championship lead to 57 points.

Rally Finland will be run for the first time in over two years from October 1-3. The GR team, which has its headquarters close to the service park in Jyväskylä, has won the three previous editions of its 'home' rally. However, the autumn date could bring different conditions and characteristics to an event known for high speeds and big jumps.

injury. "From what I understand, he's fully healed and ready for everything."

Stricker has also spoken to Koepka about his Ryder Cup comments, which had former US captain Paul Azinger saying Koepka should step aside for someone who cared more for the event. "I've had experiences with Brooks over many of these teams," Stricker said. "The conversations I've had with him and what I have personally seen in the team room does not jive up to what I was reading in those articles."

"I'm not worried about Brooks. He assures me he's healthy. He assures me that he is 100% all-in on this team and whatever he needs to do for this team to become the winner at the end of the week."

The fact talks are needed at this stage is something of a worry, with Stricker also planning to advise his players to stay off social media. "We are going to pay attention to that and we are going to talk about it," Stricker said. "They have been good, and knock-on-wood they won't say anything they shouldn't say. "We don't have any mandates... but they will be smart about it. They do this on a daily basis and they know they need to be careful and cautious on what they put out there." Stricker disputes a long-held notion that Europe has found success through superior team spirit, with European squads winning nine of the past 12 Ryder Cups, including the most recent in France in 2018. "That's a misconception amongst our team," he said. "When you're getting beat, it's hard to look like you're bonded and they have done a really good job of beating us. "But I've been part of plenty of these team rooms where the chemistry inside is nothing but great.—AFP

News in brief

Nott Forest hire Cooper

LONDON: English Championship club Nottingham Forest appointed former Swansea boss Steve Cooper as their new manager yesterday. The two-time European champions sacked ex-Newcastle and Brighton manager Chris Hughton last week and sit bottom of English football's second tier after picking up only four points from their opening eight matches. Cooper, 41, guided Swansea to the Championship play-offs in his last two seasons going closest to taking them up when they lost 2-0 to Brentford in May's play-off final at Wembley. Cooper's first match in charge of Forest will be against Millwall at Nottingham's City Ground on Saturday. Forest ended a seven-match winless run when they defeated Huddersfield 2-0 under interim head coach Steven Reid in their last game. — AFP

First female referee

LONDON: Rugby's English Premiership will have its first female referee on Saturday when Sara Cox takes charge of reigning champions Harlequins' clash with Worcester at London's Twickenham Stoop stadium. Cox became the world's first professional female rugby referee in 2016 after receiving a central contract from England's Rugby Football Union (RFU). She became the first female assistant referee in Premiership history in August 2020 when she officiated a fixture between Bath and Wasps. Cox was also the first woman to referee a match in the domestic Premiership Rugby Cup knockout competition in 2018. She took charge of the women's rugby sevens Olympic gold medal match between New Zealand and France in Tokyo in July and has officiated at two Women's Rugby World Cups. — AFP

Sorare valued at \$4.3b

PARIS: French gaming startup Sorare, which offers users the chance to collect and trade virtual football stickers, said yesterday it had raised a record \$680 million (580 million euros) from investors, valuing the group at \$4.3 billion. The amount of money raised in a single private fundraising round beat previous records and makes the three-year-old group the most valuable startup in France. The Sorare game, which uses blockchain technology, enables users to buy and sell images of football players whose value fluctuates according to their performances on the pitch. The game is a mix of old-fashioned football sticker collecting, online football manager games, and stock market trading. It counts star professional players Gerard Pique, Rio Ferdinand, Antoine Griezmann and Cesar Azpilicueta as small shareholders, but its new investors are mostly specialized venture capital funds such as Atomico or Bessemer Ventures. — AFP

Ski jumper retires

VIENNA: Austria's former serial World Cup-winning ski jump star Gregor Schlierenzauer announced his retirement yesterday. "It has been a unique and emotionally intense journey and this journey now continues in a new direction," the 31-year-old wrote on his blog. Schlierenzauer hangs up his skis with an impressive array of silverware - 53 World Cup victories, four Olympic medals, and the winner of the prestigious Four Hills tournament in 2012 and 2013. "As I look back now, I see an emotional journey, where I was able to push boundaries but also have been shown my own limits," he wrote in his farewell letter to his fans. In 2016 he took time out from the sport, battling a loss of confidence and injury. He returned a year later but never managed to scale the heights of his earlier success. — AFP

Taleban sack CEO of Afghan cricket board

KABUL: The Taleban have sacked the head of Afghanistan's cricket board, replacing him with a member of the feared Haqqani network, responsible for some of the worst attacks in the country's history. Hamid Shinwari posted on his Facebook page on Monday that he has been removed on the orders of senior Haqqani officials, a branch of the Taleban. "Anas Haqqani visited the cricket board and told me very clearly that my job as the (chief) executive officer was over," Shinwari wrote on his Facebook page. Anas Haqqani is a senior Taleban official and the younger brother of Afghanistan's new interior minister Sirajuddin Haqqani.

Shinwari's post, seen by AFP, was later not visible, with the page apparently deactivated. In the Pashto language post, Shinwari said he had asked for a formal order but did not receive it. "I was elected to the Cricket Board's executive section after a transparent process, but I did not understand the reason for my dismissal," Shinwari said. He was later replaced by Naseebullah Haqqani, also known as Naseeb Khan, a close ally of the Haqqani network, said a source at the cricket board who did not want to be named.—AFP

Sports

Allegri says Juve's match at Spezia a 'relegation six-pointer'

Napoli continue perfect start at Udinese to move top of Serie A

MILAN: Massimiliano Allegri said yesterday that Juventus' visit to Spezia was a relegation battle as his team head into their fifth league match of the season without a win and in the Serie A drop zone. Juve's 1-1 home draw with AC Milan on Sunday night left them 18th with just two points, some 10 away from league leaders Napoli, and a livid Allegri was filmed storming down the Allianz Stadium tunnel shouting "and they want to play for Juventus" about his players.

They travel to Spezia today two points behind their hosts and looking to get their season going before the visit of European champions Chelsea next week. "Looking at the table right now Spezia v Juventus is a relegation six-pointer... we need to be realistic, we can't talk about our goals as it stands," Allegri told reporters.

The 54-year-old described his post-match outburst as "normal" after another disappointing display from Juve who fell back after taking an early lead against Milan and could have even lost the match, repeating a pattern of second-half collapses.

"After the break against Milan the same thing happened, we made mistakes when there was no pressure," said Allegri, back at Juve this season after winning five straight league titles there between 2015 and 2019. "There's no point talking about the past, this is a different Juventus team."

Allegri added that Italy forward Federico Chiesa would make his second league start of the season, while Matthijs de Ligt would definitely start in defense after revealing Giorgio Chiellini has a fever.

Perfect start

Napoli moved top of Serie A on Monday thanks to a 4-0 stroll at Udinese which made sure they

maintained their 100 percent start to the season. Goals from Victor Osimhen, Amir Rrahmani, Kalidou Koulibaly and Hirving Lozano earned Luciano Spalletti's side an impressive win at the Dacia Arena which gives them a perfect 12 points from four games, two points ahead of Inter Milan and AC Milan, who sit second and third respectively.

Roma are a further point back alongside Fiorentina as Napoli remain the only team to win all of their matches so far this term in Italy's top flight. Udinese lost for the first time this season sit seventh,



Juve 18th with two points

level on seven points with Lazio, Atalanta and Bologna as Napoli gave off early signs of being title contenders.

"It doesn't mean anything. We know we played very well at a difficult ground. We've got to keep our feet on the ground and keep working. It's not easy coming all the way to Udine and winning 4-0," said Insigne to DAZN. "If we look at the numbers now we'll get slack and we won't continue the way we're going."

Osimhen followed up on his dramatic brace in Thursday's 2-2 Europa League draw at Leicester City by opening the scoring in the 24th minute with

said Koeman. "We did what we had to do. We tried to win another way. We don't have players one-on-one or with speed. We're talking... I'm not going to say more because it seems I have to argue about everything."

Koeman 'calm'

Koeman insisted on Sunday he was "calm" and not fearing for his future as Barcelona coach but an already-strained relationship with club president Joan Laporta will be pushed to breaking point if results, and performances, do not improve.

There were 85 seconds on the clock when Domingos Duarte headed Granada in front. Sergio Escudero was quickest to his cleared corner and he beat Sergio Busquets twice, once to the ball and then again to the line where he fed Duarte, who nipped in front of Frenkie de Jong at the back post.

Barca tried to exert some control, but they never really stretched Granada, who could have doubled their lead when Jorge Molina volleyed over a cross from the lively Darwin Machis. Sergi Roberto cushioned a shot against the crossbar to begin a late surge of pressure at the end of the first half, which also saw Araujo go close with two headers in quick succession.

Luuk de Jong came on for Sergi Roberto at half-time, indicating a more direct approach was coming but Granada were not uncomfortable. Depay hooked over from a de Jong ball in before Oscar Mingueza's delivery grazed the top of the crossbar.

As Barcelona grew more desperate, they became more predictable too, as more and more crosses were slung into the box in the hope someone might



TURIN: Juventus' head coach Massimiliano Allegri reacts during the Italian Serie A football match between Juventus and AC Milan at the Juventus stadium in Turin, on Sunday. — AFP

his first Serie A goal of the campaign, poking home from near the goalline after Lorenzo Insigne had deftly lobbed Udinese goalkeeper Marco Silvestri.

Fabian Ruiz then struck the post six minutes later and was key to the goal which put Napoli two ahead. Receiving the ball from Insigne at a free-kick, Ruiz floated a delicate pass over the top of the Udinese defense for Koulibaly, who pushed the ball across goal for Rrahmani to nod home.

Koulibaly scored the late winner against Juventus last time out and put Napoli three up six minutes after the break with a missile of a shot from the excellent Ruiz's lay-off. From then on it was all Napoli and Lozano put the cherry on the cake in the 84th minute with a lovely finish following an exchange of passes with Mario Rui. Napoli are back in action on Thursday at Sampdoria as a midweek round of fixtures rolls around. — AFP

Koeman defends direct approach after Barca held by Granada

MADRID: Ronald Koeman defended his direct tactics after being accused of betraying Barcelona's attacking traditions in a 1-1 draw at home to Granada on Monday. Koeman brought Gerard Pique off the bench at Camp Nou to play up front alongside Luuk de Jong, with Ronald Araujo, another central defender, also thrown into the attack as Barca sent in 54 crosses in search of an equalizer.

Araujo finally headed home in injury-time after Domingos Duarte had given Granada an early lead but the whistles at the end from the Barcelona fans indicated a point was not nearly enough. "We changed our style a little bit," Koeman said. "The spaces were out wide, not in the middle. We went with Pique, De Jong and Araujo and from one of those crosses we got the draw."

Koeman's position was already fragile after last week's 3-0 drubbing at home to Bayern Munich in the Champions League, a game in which his team failed to muster a single shot on target. After the latest disappointment against Granada, it was put to him that supporters were even angrier about Barcelona's style than the result.

"If you see the list of players, what do you do? Play tiki-taki? Tiki-taki when there are no spaces?"



LONDON: Chelsea's defender Marcos Alonso (right) and striker Romelu Lukaku embrace on the pitch after the UEFA Champions League Group H football match between Chelsea and Zenit St Petersburg at Stamford Bridge in London on September 14, 2021. — AFP

Chelsea's Alonso to stop taking the knee

LONDON: Chelsea defender Marcos Alonso will no longer take the knee as a sign of protest against racism because the Spain left-back believes the gesture is "losing a bit of strength." Alonso will instead point to an anti-racism badge on his shirt before kick-off.

Former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick started the trend of taking the knee to protest against police brutality and racial inequality. Premier League clubs first began to perform the gesture when the 2019/20 season recommenced after a three-month stoppage due to the coronavirus pandemic in the wake of protests over the murder of George Floyd at the hands of a police officer in the United States.

England's preparations for Euro 2020 were affected by some of their own supporters booing the act in pre-tournament friendlies against Romania and Austria. Any sign of protest was drowned out by support as the Three Lions progressed to their first major tournament final for 55 years. However, three black

England players, Marcus Rashford, Jadon Sancho and Bukayo Saka, were still racially abused online after missing penalties against Italy in the final.

"I am fully against racism and I'm against every type of discrimination, and I just prefer to put my finger to the badge where it says no to racism, like they do in some other sports and football in other countries," said Alonso. "It's my way to do it, I think it's another way. And maybe I think it's losing a bit of strength the other way, so I just prefer to do it this way and to show I am fully supportive of fighting against racism."

Crystal Palace forward Wilfried Zaha became the first Premier League player to decide against taking the knee back in March. Zaha explained the reasoning for his decision was the gesture has "become a part of the pre-match routine" and done little to curb racist abuse. Alonso said he has not discussed the issue with his teammates.

"We haven't talked about it," added the 30-year-old. "We are in the changing room and we are like a family. I have a very good relationship with everyone. I love everyone and up to now we haven't talked about it. I don't think there is a need to, but, of course, if I have to speak to anyone, I will say the same thing I just told you and I don't think there will be any problems." — AFP



BARCELONA: Barcelona's coach Ronald Koeman reacts during the Spanish League football match between Barcelona and Granada at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona on Sunday. — AFP

capitalize. De Jong should have scored with 11 minutes left but headed over from five yards.

Araujo was booked after a skirmish with Granada's defenders and then, with the adrenaline still pumping, he grabbed an equalizer for Barca, keeping the ball alive in the box and then dashing forward to meet Gavi's chipped ball in. Barca chased a second, with Araujo sprinting down the right and trying to find Pique in the middle. Granada took a deserved point. — AFP

Neville impressed with Beckham son debut

MIAMI: Inter Miami coach Phil Neville believes David Beckham's son Romeo has the potential to forge a career in professional football following his debut in Florida. Romeo Beckham played in his first professional game on Sunday after starting for Inter Miami's sister team Fort Lauderdale CF.

The 19-year-old played 79 minutes in a 2-2 draw with South Georgia Tormenta FC and impressed Inter Miami boss Neville despite having only 19 touches in the match. "I thought he did really well," said Neville on Monday. "I think the measure of his performance was that he was only planned to play 45 minutes, and he played nearly 80 minutes because he is a boy that is hungry."

"He has got a lot of pressure and expectations on his shoulders, but what he has got is he has got his feet firmly on the ground. He knows he has got a lot of development to do, and he has got all the right attributes, character, determination, good person, to have a really good opportunity of making it in professional football."

Romeo joined Fort Lauderdale CF's roster earlier this month in a low-key move that was made without an official announcement. He had been training with the team and occasionally Inter Miami prior to that. Neville said that former Manchester United and England team-mate David Beckham had instructed him to take a tough line on his son.

"The first thing that David said to me was, 'You have got to be harder on him than anyone else,'" said Neville. "He has got to work harder than anyone else to get into that team because there will be questions, there will be expectations on his shoulders."

Neville's own son Harvey has also played for Fort Lauderdale this season, making 15 appearances. "He knows when he is in this football club he is no different than any other player, and it is the same with Romeo," Neville said. — AFP

Challenger Usyk 'jumping in at the deep end', says Joshua

LONDON: British world heavyweight champion Anthony Joshua praised Oleksandr Usyk for being bold in challenging him for his belts after just two bouts at the weight. Joshua is set to face World Boxing Organization (WBO) mandatory challenger Usyk in London on Saturday, with a crowd of some 60,000 expected at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium, the home of the Premier League club.

Joshua, whose World Boxing Association (WBA) and International Boxing Federation (IBF) titles are also on the line, compared Usyk's lack of experience to boxing legend Evander Holyfield's before tackling a heavyweight championship fight. Usyk — who moved up to heavyweight in 2018 after being undisputed cruiserweight world champion — beat Chazz Witherspoon in 2019 before easing to a points win last November over veteran Derek Chisora.

"When (Evander) Holyfield came up to heavyweight I think he had six fights at heavyweight before he fought for the championship belt," said Joshua. "Usyk's fought two heavyweights. He's jumping in at the deep end early on. But good luck to him — he must believe in himself. He wants to be at the top end early. It's better to swim deep — get in there and get on with it — rather than tread water. You could still end up drowning anyway. You could still get caught in a current and drown. You might as well jump in the deep end and try to survive."

Joshua, at 31 three years younger than his fellow 2012 Olympic champion, is likely to weigh in on Friday a stone heavier than Usyk. "I've been doing a lot of sparring to be honest, which is also physical: pushing, shoving, defending," said Joshua. "I've been doing heavy bag work so maybe I'm just shedding a lot of the weight."

Joshua needs to beat Usyk to keep alive the bout that most boxing fans want to see above all else — the all-British clash with fellow world heavyweight champion Tyson Fury. That is also dependent on World Boxing Council (WBC) champion Fury successfully coming through a third bout with American Deontay Wilder in October.

However, although Joshua will be favored to see off Usyk he says the bout will not be won on who is physically more impressive but who wins the battle of the minds. "Advantages physically is one thing but it doesn't make the world's tallest man the heavyweight champion of the world," said Joshua.

"You have to have the mental capacity to do what you do. He's coming to the ring confident, and so am I. In boxing, you have to be aggressive and beat that confidence out of your opponent. It's easy to watch on YouTube and watch from the outside but until you're in front of someone it's then a completely different ballgame. This is heavyweight boxing and I'm the heavyweight champion of the world. I don't play games. I'm here to win." — AFP

Messi ruled out of midweek action

Pochettino says injury scare real reason behind 'controversial' substitution



PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain's Argentinian forward Lionel Messi (left) reacts as he leaves the pitch past PSG's Argentinian head coach Mauricio Pochettino during the French L1 football match between Paris-Saint Germain and Lyon at The Parc des Princes Stadium in Paris on Sunday. — AFP

PARIS: Lionel Messi will miss Paris Saint-Germain's game away to Metz today due to a knee injury which coach Mauricio Pochettino has said was the real reason behind his surprise decision to take the six-time Ballon d'Or winner off against Lyon at the weekend. The Argentine star underwent an MRI yesterday after taking a knock to his left knee during Sunday's 2-1 win. Results showed signs of bone bruising, the club said in a statement.

Messi was replaced by Achraf Hakimi, a full-back, after 76 minutes against Lyon, on his first home appearance as a PSG player since arriving from Barcelona. The 34-year-old appeared to reject Pochettino's hand as he walked past his coach towards the Paris bench but the former Tottenham Hotspur boss later defended his decision to take Messi off without mentioning the injury.

Yesterday he admitted that Messi's fitness was the reason he made the change with the scores level at the time. "On the touchline we are always observ-

ing the players, seeing what is happening during the match, and we saw that Leo was looking at his knee," Pochettino told reporters. "We are pleased with the way he played. He played very well in the first half, and the only thing missing was a goal."

"He played for 76 minutes and with all the information we had we decided to take him off," added Pochettino, who said he accepted that substituting a player of Messi's status might surprise observers. "Of course I understand the situation and I accept it as it is."

'Best thing for him'

"It is not a surprise for me, but the priority is

always the well-being of the player and in this case we thought it was the best thing for him to take him off. All great champions always want to be on the pitch and that is understandable."



MRI shows signs of bone bruising

who are winless and prop up the division, although Pochettino may heavily rotate his squad.

PSG are at home to Montpellier at the weekend, when it remains to be seen if Messi will return. They

then host Manchester City in the Champions League next Tuesday, September 28.

"We have a squad of 35 players. They all deserve to play but there are not enough places," admitted Pochettino. The Argentine manager has also come in for criticism for the way his all-star team played against Lyon and in last week's 1-1 draw at Club Brugge in the Champions League.

Those were the first two matches in which Messi, Neymar and Kylian Mbappe had all played together, but Pochettino says he needs time to get his ideas across. "In general, in the past, in normal times, you had six or seven weeks in pre-season, lots of friendly matches to work on things. Now we need to try things as we go along, during games. It is not a situation we like much but we have to get used to it."

There is a full round of games in France today with Marseille aiming to continue their unbeaten start away at Angers. — AFP

Jones scores four TDs, loses father's ashes in endzone

LOS ANGELES: Aaron Jones scored four touchdowns in the Green Bay Packers' 35-17 win over the Detroit Lions on Sunday, but all he could think about was a family necklace he lost in the endzone at Lambeau Field.

The running back said the necklace was fitted with an ornament in the shape of a football, and inside he had placed the ashes of his father, who died of COVID-19 in April. "He was really on my heart," Jones said on the field after the game. "I scored and it fell off in the endzone so I have to go look for it... We have to find it."

"He would be happy," he added. "He would be like if you lose it anywhere then lose it in the endzone." Alvin Jones Sr attended all his son's home games, and would watch the Packers warm up from the endzone. Jones always made time for his dad, trotting over to where he was watching to share a quick heart-felt moment before the kick-off.

Monday's win over the Lions was the first time the Packers played a regular-season game in front of a packed Lambeau Field crowd since the coronavirus pandemic hit. Jones scored three of his touchdowns on passes from quar-

terback Aaron Rodgers, who rebounded from a subpar performance in week one's embarrassing loss to New Orleans. Jones also rushed for a fourth score.

The loss to the Saints snapped Green Bay's string of six straight season-opening victories, but the win over the Lions extended their home-opener win streak to nine. Rodgers was criticized for his play in the week-one loss, but was obviously pleased with his bounceback performance. "I just think people just like to say a lot of bullsh*t. It is nice to come back in here after a game like that," Rodgers told reporters after the game. Jones rushed 17 times for 67 yards and caught six passes for 48 yards for Green Bay, who seized control in the second half, scoring touchdowns on their first three possessions.

Reigning NFL MVP Rodgers completed 22 of 27 passes for 255 yards and four scores. He hooked up with Robert Tonyan on a 22-yard scoring play in the third quarter that gave Green Bay a 21-17 lead they would never relinquish.

Rodgers and Jones teamed up for a four-yard touchdown pass at the 3:45 mark of the first quarter. The duo connected again with just under two min-



GREEN BAY: Aaron Jones #33 of the Green Bay Packers does the Lambeau Leap to celebrate his third touchdown of the night against the Detroit Lions during the second half at Lambeau Field on Sunday. — AFP

utes left in the second quarter on a one-yard score. Rodgers hooked up with Jones with seven seconds left in the third quarter for an 11-yard touchdown pass.

Jones also scored on a one-yard run at 12:42 of the fourth. It was Jones' sec-

ond career four-touchdown game and he became Green Bay's first running back with three touchdown catches since 1942 when Andy Uram did it against the Chicago Cardinals.

"We got the ball to our playmakers. Like this guy," Rodgers said pointing to

Jones. "He's such a special human. He's been through a lot. When you watch the film, it's just different with 33 back there. He's a great guy to have on your team."

Asked what advice his father would have for him now, Jones' said: "He would say be humble, be proud." — AFP