

5 Israel-UAE deal ‘a killer’ for two-state solution



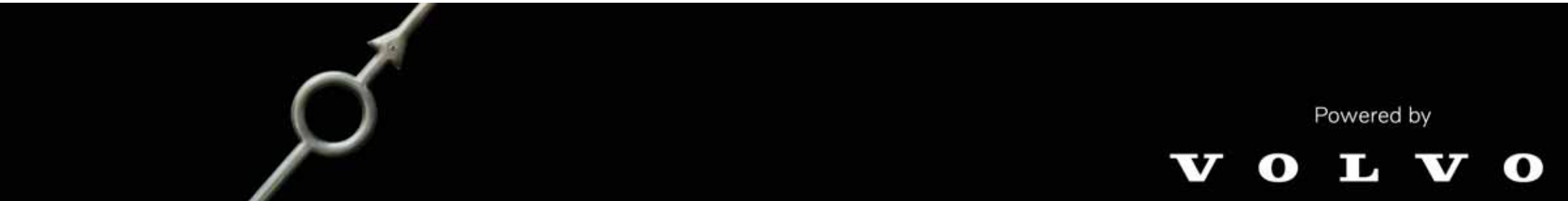
8 Japan economic plunge wipes out Abe era gains



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16 ‘In a daze’ Hamilton sweeps to record-breaking win in Spain



# No work permits for expats over 60; no visa extensions

## Financial panel rejects government law to borrow up to \$20bn

**By B Izzak**

**KUWAIT:** The Public Manpower Authority said yesterday it will stop issuing work permits for expats aged 60 years and above and who do not hold a university degree from Jan 1, 2021, while the interior ministry is not likely to extend the validity of residencies and visas beyond Aug 31. The decision is expected to impact tens of thousands of expats who

work in the private sector and who must obtain work permits to be able to renew their residencies in the country.

The move appears to be part of the government's plan to force some 360,000 expats to leave the country in the short term. The plan projects that 150,000 of them will be expats above 60. The decision applies to expats who hold a higher secondary certificate or lower, according to the Public Manpower Authority.

The interior ministry had allowed expats inside and outside the country to renew their residencies online and also stay outside the country for as long as 12 months instead of the usual six months without getting their residencies cancelled. This facility is due to expire on Aug 31, and according to local media, the interior ministry is unlikely to extend the service.

Meanwhile, the National Assembly's financial and economic affairs committee

yesterday rejected a government-sponsored draft law seeking to allow the government to borrow up to KD 20 billion to meet a growing budget deficit due to the sharp drop in oil revenues. Head of the panel MP Safa Al-Hashem said the committee was not convinced by the government's reasons to borrow, adding the government team failed to present a clear program of reforms.

She said the government could not con-

vince where and how the money will be spent over the next 10 years. But Hashem said the committee approved another law stipulating to stop the 10 percent deduction in favor of the future generations fund in case there is a deficit in the budget. According to a law, 10 percent of revenues must be deducted every year in favor of the future generations fund regardless if the budget is in surplus or shortfall. The law aims at reducing the budget deficit.

### News in brief

**UAE rejects Iran ‘threats’**

**DUBAI:** The UAE on Sunday summoned Iran's charge d'affaires in Abu Dhabi to protest “threats” by the Islamic republic's president over the Emirati decision to normalize ties with Israel, state media reported. This came a day after Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said the UAE's decision to normalize ties was a “big mistake” and warned “against opening the path of Israel to the region”. — AFP

**Saudi women hired at mosques**

**RIYADH:** Saudi Arabia has appointed 10 women in senior roles at Islam's two holiest sites, authorities said Sunday. The women were appointed in the two holy mosques in Makkah and Madinah across various departments, including administrative and technical, according to statement released by the general presidency for the affairs of the two holy mosques. — AFP

**Pak army chief visits Saudi**

**RIYADH:** Pakistani army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa arrived in Saudi Arabia yesterday amid a row between the two countries. Saudi Arabia gave Pakistan a \$3 billion loan and \$3.2 billion oil credit facility to help its balance of payments crisis in late 2018. But irked by Islamabad demands for Riyadh to convene a high-level meeting to highlight India's alleged human rights violations in Kashmir, Saudi Arabia has forced Pakistan to pay back \$1 billion prematurely and is demanding another \$1 billion of the loan. — Reuters

**11 Yemen soldiers killed**

**DUBAI:** Eleven Yemeni government troops, including a senior officer, were killed in a rebel missile attack and clashes to the northeast and east of Sanaa, military and medical sources said yesterday. General Mohammed Ali-Roqn, commander of the army's 122 brigade, along with eight other soldiers were killed in battle in Al-Jawf province Sunday while trying to reclaim positions lost months ago, the sources said. The rebels also suffered casualties, the military source added without elaborating. —AFP

**Lebanon mulls lockdown**

**BEIRUT:** Lebanon must shut down for two weeks after a surge in coronavirus infections, the caretaker health minister said yesterday, as the country reels from the massive Beirut port blast. “We declare today a state of general alert and we need a brave decision to close (the country) for two weeks,” Hamad Hassan told Voice of Lebanon radio. Lebanon on Sunday registered a record 439 new infections and six more deaths from the virus in 24 hours.— Reuters

## India virus deaths hit 50,000

**NEW DELHI:** India's official coronavirus death toll soared past 50,000 yesterday as the pandemic rages through smaller cities and rural areas where health care is feeble and stigmatization rife. Many experts say the real numbers may be far higher due to low testing rates and because deaths are often not properly recorded in the vast and impoverished nation of 1.3 billion people.

India last week overtook Britain

with the world's fourth-highest number of fatalities, behind the United States, Brazil and Mexico, and as of yesterday had recorded 50,921 deaths, according to the health ministry. With some of the world's biggest megacities and slums, India is already the third-most infected nation behind the US and Brazil with 2.65 million infections.

Despite the rising death toll, the health ministry said on Sunday that India's virus mortality rate of 1.92 percent was “one of the lowest globally”. “Successful implementation of testing aggressively, tracking comprehensively and treating efficiently through a plethora of measures have contributed to the existing high level of recoveries,” the ministry said.

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## Bahrain woman charged after damaging idols

**MANAMA:** A woman in Bahrain seen smashing statues of the Hindu deity Ganesha in a video published online has been charged with intentional damage and publically insulting a religious symbol. The police said on Sunday that the 54-year-old woman was summoned after the video on social media showed her “intentionally

damaging a shop... and breaking religious idols” in the Juffair area in the capital Manama, according to the interior ministry.

Shortly after, the public prosecution issued a statement saying the woman had admitted to breaking the statues and was charged with multiple counts of criminal damage and of insulting a religious symbol. She will be tried in court, it added. The video shows two women in a shop, standing near a display of the statues. One of them is seen grabbing statues and smashing them on the ground. “This is a Muslim country, correct?” one

**Continued on Page 2**



MUMBAI: A health worker collects a swab sample from a resident to test for COVID-19 at a screening camp yesterday. — AFP



Video grab shows a woman breaking idols at a store in Bahrain.

## Parkour piques interest in Doha urban jungle

**DOHA:** Three friends perform synchronized backflips off a dry stone fountain near one of Doha's top luxury hotels, an unusual sight in the normally staid Gulf city. As the sun sets over the Qatari capital's mishmash of skyscrapers, the parkour enthusiasts hurl themselves off walls and walkways, surrounded by palm trees as they listen to hip-hop. “Compared to Lebanon, where there is a big community and lots of parkour gyms, here it's more like (individual) people,” said Lebanese Hamzar Mekkaoui, 26, a parkour athlete sporting a neat beard.

Parkour, an extreme sport also known as free-running that originated in France in the 1990s, involves getting around urban obstacles with a fast-paced mix of jumping, vaulting, running and rolling. It has found a small but committed following in Qatar, despite evening temperatures that hover around 40 degrees Celsius in summer and over-zealous security guards unfamiliar with the sport.

Mekkaoui's Tunisian friend Achref Bejaoui, 25, complained that “if you step on even the grass here, the security will ask you to leave”. “But I think now they get to know us because we keep coming here, so they start feeling we are playing safe,” Bejaoui said in



DOHA: Hamzar Mekkaoui (right), Achref Bejaoui (left) and a friend perform parkour on Aug 11, 2020. — AFP

English, wearing a white T-shirt emblazoned with the word “Savage”. Another Doha-based enthusiast, 25-year-old Yousef Mughrabi, said he has had a flurry of interest in parkour from fitness fanatics unwilling to go

to gyms, which re-opened in the capital at the end of last month after closures due to the novel coronavirus pandemic.

**Continued on Page 2**



Local

# As salons reopen, shops complain of shortages in safety equipment

## Business hit by short list of services after five-month break

By Nawara Fattahova

**KUWAIT:** According to a Cabinet decision, barber-shops and gyms are finally allowed to reopen today. As salons and spas only had five days to get ready for the reopening, many of them have faced difficulties in getting all the necessary tools to meet the conditions of health authorities.

Fatma, owner of a beauty salon in Sabah Al-Salem, complained about the shortage of the required safety equipment. "Due to the new requirements by the government, we have to get facemasks, gloves and temperature scanners. All supplying companies that I contacted said they are out of stock. I had to then search in pharmacies, but I hardly found a pharmacy selling them, while prices hiked



### Staff shortage at some salons

from KD 9 up to KD 32 for the same machine. This shortage in the market was mainly caused by the high demand from thousands of salons that are get-

ting ready to open," she told Kuwait Times.

But Fatma still feels lucky. "I'm happy that all my staff are still here in Kuwait and didn't leave the country, so they are ready to start working on Tuesday. I know a friend who also owns a salon, who is facing a shortage of staff as half of her employees left. During the first three months, I was paying their salaries, but then I couldn't as I didn't have any resources, so I was just paying them pocket money and for groceries. Thank God we survived," she added.

The limits on services that can be provided is very difficult for salon owners. "Unfortunately, we will be limited in our services to only hair and nail services. All other services are banned, which is hard for our business that was closed for over five months," rued Fatma.

Hala, a receptionist at a salon in Salmiya, said they

have already received reservations. "I'm happy to be finally back to work, but on the other hand I'm disappointed that many of our customers are demanding home services, saying they are afraid to come to the salon, while in fact the salon is safer as we are following all safety precautions. Also, home service is illegal, so we can't provide it," she pointed out.

Sami from a men's spa in Hawally said that they haven't received any bookings yet, but they opened on Sunday to prepare the spa for customers for Tuesday. "Maybe customers only have our landline number and think we are still closed, so nobody called. Unfortunately, we won't be providing most of our services and will be limited to only manicures and pedicures. Customers will only be let in based on previous appointments," he noted.

## Limited passenger traffic since Kuwait airport reopening

By Nawara Fattahova

**KUWAIT:** Since Kuwait International Airport resumed operations of commercial flights, 11,879 passengers arrived to Kuwait on 238 flights from various countries between August 1 and August

15, while 23,006 passengers departed Kuwait on 266 flights in the same period. For the sake of comparison, official statistics reveal that Kuwait airport had registered around 1.7 million passenger traffic at the airport in August 2019, and a total of 11,209 flights in the same period.

Date	Departures		Arrivals	
	Flights	Passengers	Flights	Passengers
1	19	1695	18	976
2	12	1165	12	503
3	8	926	9	621
4	6	664	6	334
5	12	1169	12	633
6	16	1397	14	966
7	13	1166	14	939
8	19	1374	18	1177
9	16	1620	16	708
10	14	1131	15	640
11	13	1312	14	809
12	20	2376	17	536
13	23	2134	24	1063
14	21	2548	22	901
15	26	2329	25	1073
Total	238	23006	266	11879

## Commerce ministry says 99 percent of staff Kuwaitis

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Ministry of Commerce and Industry announced Sunday that the growth of job rate for Kuwaitis in the ministry has hit 99 percent since it adopted the 'Kuwaitization' policy in 2017, with the total number of employees reaching 3,093. The percentage of Kuwaiti employees in the legal sector in the ministry reached 100 percent, relying

on the importance of the nationals' expertise, said a ministry statement. The legal sector is witnessing a new methodology of work that depends on continuous cooperation with the Fatwa and Legislation Department on cases instituted by and against the ministry and in order to preserve its rights and protect public funds, it added. It pointed out that the ministry praised the efforts of Kuwaiti consultants and researchers who have succeeded in proving their competence. The policy of replacing foreign workers with Kuwaiti employees came out according to the instructions made by the Minister of Commerce and Industry and in coordination with the Civil Service Commission in this regard, the ministry noted. — KUNA

## stc promotes employees' skillset development

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced the launch of an integrated package of specialized educational and training courses through LinkedIn Learning.

The online courses offered through LinkedIn's learning portal by the company fall within stc's framework to enhance employee efficiency through skills development programs that are designed to broaden their technical capabilities and strengthen their core competencies, an initiative led by Aisha Al-Duaij, General Manager of the Talent Management unit at stc.

Through advanced digital platforms such as LinkedIn Learning, stc continued to implement its sustainable learning environment, elevating the level of knowledge and expertise possessed by its existing skilled workforce. This step comes as a key pillar in the company's internal training program, equipping employees with the tools they need to perform their tasks competently. stc highly values its employees and it is only through them that the company can achieve its strategic vision of offering the most advanced telecom solutions in the world.

stc emphasized in a statement that its e-channels have become one of the most prominent training and education platforms due to the current challenges associated with social distancing. Given that, stc forged ahead with its relentless pursuit in offering its employees with career and technical pro-

grams in line with the company's vision for digital transformation.

On this occasion, engineer Ahmed Hamad Al-Hammad, Chief Human Resources Officer at stc said, "The ongoing training programs offered by stc reflect the level of commitment and dedication the Company holds towards empowering its workforce. We are proud to continue providing our employees with online courses to develop their skillset using globally recognized e-learning platforms, despite COVID-19 related challenges and social distancing requirements. We believe that this aspect of our corporate culture engenders employee loyalty and marks stc as the preferred destination for those looking to start a career in the telecom sector."

Hammad added that participating in such career-oriented initiatives comes as an added benefit for both employees and the local economy, two key segments associated with stc's human resources strategy. He also stressed, "We will spare no effort in ensuring that our employees have access to the proper resources they need to grow their skillset and achieve operational efficiency for the company."

On a related note, through its ongoing participation in career fairs and in-house internship programs, stc continues to organize and sponsor various initiatives that attract and empower talented individuals. These platforms allow the company to meet aspiring candidates who possess the right characteristics that will assist stc in achieving future growth.

It is worth mentioning that LinkedIn Learning is an educational platform that offers more than 5,000 online courses, some of which provide an attendance certificate upon completing the course. Employees using the e-learning platform can monitor their progress in each session through the administration page. They can also set daily or weekly targets to achieve to complete their program efficiently. Group programs can also be enabled, allowing members from various sectors to be informed about training programs that can achieve a shared objective, as well as suggestions for alternative programs that can reap added benefits within each field.

## One dead, two injured in Shuhada fire



By Meshaal Al-Enezi

**KUWAIT:** A woman died and two others were injured in a fire reported in a Shuhada area apartment on Sunday. Subhan and Mishref firemen responded to the scene and found out that the apart-

ment had already been engulfed in flames by the time they arrived. Rescuers managed to evacuate the three women, but one of them (Asian) died on the scene while the two others (African) were rushed to hospital, one of them in critical condition. An investigation was opened to find out the cause of the fire.

## Parkour piques interest in Doha...

Continued from Page 1

Mughrabi said that as Qatar's economy slowed down and workplaces closed to stem the spread of the virus, he found he could offer lessons for the first time. "I've found many people want to do parkour," the Jordanian said as his young proteges practiced their jumps and flips. Its outdoor setting has also attracted interest in Qatar, where some four percent of the 2.75 million population have had the virus since the pandemic began.

Gyms are limited to half capacity and masks must be worn while moving around inside the

facilities. But face coverings are not mandatory for outdoor exercise, which is booming. "Coronavirus did not stop us," said Moussa Al-Moussa, one of Mughrabi's students. "We continued to exercise, but I had to stop for two months to finish high school exams this year, and then I returned," the 18-year-old Syrian said.

Parkour has thousands of loyal followers and practitioners around the world, but it remains rare in Qatar. Conservative attitudes towards exercising in public in the Gulf country mean practicing the sport can be tricky. Despite this, Mughrabi was called on to compete for Qatar in a regional competition held in Doha in 2015, and said sporting officials told him they wanted to organize a permanent national team. "You cannot go to parkour school, there's no certificate" here, he said. "This is why I wanted to train people and build a little community." — AFP

## India virus deaths hit...

Continued from Page 1

According to tracking website Worldometer, the United States, with 170,000 deaths, has a death rate of 3.11 percent while Brazil, with almost 110,000 fatalities, sees 3.22 percent of those who test positive die. According to the Indian health ministry, the US "crossed 50,000 deaths in 23 days, Brazil in 95 days and Mexico in 141 days. India took 156 days to reach this national figure."

Possible reasons that have been suggested include India's relatively young population, its climate and greater exposure to pathogens that cause tuberculosis than elsewhere. But experts say India's testing rates per million inhabitants are far lower than other countries, and that too few deaths are properly recorded - even in normal times.

"(A) couple of studies have indicated that... only one in four deaths is certified and a cause of death is established," Lalit Kant, former head of epidemiology and communicable diseases at the Indian Council of Medical Research, told AFP. In addition, many of the tests being done - up to 30 percent nationally -are the less reliable rapid antigen tests

## Bahrain woman charged after...

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...woman is heard saying to a man in the shop. "Let us see who will worship these statues. Call the cops," the other says.

The incident sparked widespread condemnation on social media. Khalid Al-Khalifa, advisor to the king of Bahrain and former foreign minister, said the woman's actions were unacceptable. "Breaking of religious symbols is not the nature of the people of Bahrain. It is a crime... of hatred and is rejected," he tweeted. "Here, all religions, sects and people coexist." Hundreds of thousands of mostly Asian workers of different religions live in the small Muslim country. — AFP



## Local

# Using public transport today? Don't forget to wear gloves and facemasks

## Two-meter distance between passengers in all public buses

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Public buses return to the road today after a five-month absence, as transportation companies finished preparations to resume operations while observing health guidelines to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). In this regard, the Kuwait Public Transport Company (KPTC) released guidelines for passengers to be followed in buses operated by all public transportation companies, which include observance of a two-meter-distance between passengers. According to Osama, an official at the KPTC headquarters in Mirqab who did not want to give his full name as he is not the official spokesperson of the company, the most important point in the guidelines is wearing gloves and masks.

"Since passengers are expected to interact with drivers, they are reminded to wear gloves and facemasks. They also have to observe physical distancing. Passengers without cards or passes will have to pay the fare to drivers, and in order for them to be safe, they need to wear gloves and facemasks so that the virus will not be transmitted

Stay home if you have a fever

to the passengers or the drivers," he said. KPTC has come up with a slogan 'Together We Can Go Back to Public Transport Safely' that is plastered at its stations and bus stops. Some stickers pasted at the main depot in Mirqab remind passengers on ways to be safe while using public transportation. The stickers also remind passengers that in case they are sick or have high fever, they must not use public transportation and stay at home instead. They also seek the cooperation of all passengers to not underestimate this pandemic.

"Avoiding shaking hands and covering the mouth when coughing and sneezing are just a few reminders to everyone. We all know what to do - this is just to reassure passengers that we are doing our best too," Osama pointed out.

Kuwait halted all public transport on March 12. The following weeks witnessed a gradual suspension and closure of services and sectors including taxi services on March 26, until the government decided to impose a full lockdown on May 10. The measures by the government are taken in accordance with WHO protocols and recommendations to stop the spread of the coronavirus.



KUWAIT: An example of one of the stickers to be placed in KPTC buses, explaining health guidelines passengers have to follow.

## Taxi owners protest 'one passenger' rule

KUWAIT: Around 70 citizens - owners of roaming taxi companies who have been badly affected by the decision to ban taxis from serving more than one passenger at a time - held a sit-in outside the Interior Ministry's headquarters in Subhan in protest against the decision and demanding scrapping it as it has caused considerable losses, Al-Rai reported yesterday.

The protesters pointed out that the losses include paying fines in hundreds of cases they are facing because of the 'unjust' decision, in addition to financial obligations including rent, installments and other expenses. Protesters also warned that the decision would lead to shutting down 300 taxi companies owned by small entrepreneurs facing threats of imprisonment if the decision remains effective.

Abdul Aziz Al-Mutairi, one of the protesters, urged the interior minister to cancel the decision, and wondered about the reason for exempting model 2013

taxis from the decision. "Many taxi drivers have parked their taxis outside taxi companies and bought their own private cars to start using them as taxis, leaving us owners to face the unknown and imprisonment," he said.

"It is impossible to put this decision into practice and be unable to serve a family or a woman accompanied by children. This will put us out of business," said Adel Buzobar; another taxi company owner, urging MoI to come up with quick solutions for the problem and save licensed taxi operators from competition with cabbies using private cars, which is illegal.

### New teachers

In other news, well-informed educational sources told Al-Rai that Ministry of Education's (MoE) administrative sector had referred 35-40 new applications by teachers to the ministry's coordination unit to schedule job interviews for them, noting that 99.9 percent of the applicants will be accepted and that new graduates (who graduated within less than a year) would be exempted from the interviews.

The sources also stressed that the new teachers' contracts and salaries will remain unchanged, and that in its letter to the administrative sector, the public education sector had not determined the number of teachers needed for the new

academic year. Noting that a maximum of 120 teachers used to apply locally, the sources predicted that MoE will not be able to hire enough teachers in certain subjects through local applications, especially after the new Civil Service Commission (CSC) law that conditions that applicants' degree must match the professions in their work permits, which excluded a large segment of expats.

Further, the sources stressed that the available job vacancies offered by CSC to MoE is only 780, while the ministry needs 1,000 teachers in certain specialties. "The annual resignations and the problem of teachers stranded abroad will surely cause shortages by the beginning of the next school year," the sources predicted. In another educational concern, sources told Al-Rai that MoE amended the grading system for grade 12 students in the supplementary session of the academic year 2019-2020 by reducing weekly assessment grades from 20 to 15 marks - 5 for attendance, 5 for interaction and participation and 5 for assignments. The sources explained that the total weekly assessment marks will be 75, leaving 25 allocated for a report or paper students submit in the final (sixth) week instead of the final exam. "Success prospects will be high and no students are expected to fail," the sources stressed.

## Verdicts issued in Interior Ministry hospitality case

KUWAIT: The criminal court on Sunday passed a number of sentences of imprisonment, fines and reclaiming millions of Kuwaiti dinars against the accused in the 'Interior Ministry hospitality case'. The total value of the sums to be reclaimed is KD 311 million, local dailies reported yesterday.

According to the list of verdicts Al-Qabas published yesterday, the court sentenced Brig Adel Al-Hashash and Ayman Al-Sayyed Salamah to 30 years imprisonment each, Waleed Al-Sane and Abdullah Al-Hammadi to 17 years in jail each, Abdullah Al-Meshari and Hamad Al-Tuwaijri to 15 years each and Sheikh Ahmad Al-Khalifa and two others to two years in jail or bail to suspend the verdicts' execution. The court also sentenced Iqbal Al-Khalifan, Nouruddine Al-Katatni, Mohammed Tariq Al-Kazmi, Ghusoon Al-Khaled, Ali Munir, Abdullah Harouni, Mohammed Ballout, Hassan Abbas and

Radwan Mohammed to 10 years in jail each, while Ahmad Abdulaziz and Osama Saleh were each sentenced to seven years in prison. The court acquitted defendants Mohammed Ali, Salah Al-Uqbi, Mohammad Ali Al-Kazmi and Ahmad Al-Khaled.

The sentences also included reclaiming sums the accused had usurped from Interior Ministry hospitality expenses, fining them and confiscating sums used in money laundering operations and properties they bought using these sums. In addition, Al-Rai reported that the court ordered dismissing Adel Al-Hashash, Iqbal Al-Khalifan, Waleed Al-Sane, Abdullah Al-Hammadi and Nouruddine Al-Katatni from public service as well as deporting expats Nouruddine Al-Katatni, Ahmed Abdul Aziz Mohammed, Ali Munir Haddad, Abdullah Ibrahim Harouni, Mohammed Kamal Ballout, Osama Saleh Moola, Ayman Al-Sayyed Salamah, Hassan Abbas Ismail and Radwan Mohammed Yousef after doing their time.

## Police, medical staff assaulted

KUWAIT: A Kuwaiti and a Saudi were arrested at Adan Hospital for assaulting a receptionist, two policemen stationed at the hospital, an Egyptian doctor and a patient while under the effect of drugs, said security sources. Case papers indicate that the assailants started assaulting the receptionist without any provocation, and when the two policemen tried to stop them, they also assaulted and insulted them, before they barged into the doctor's office and beat him. "You will treat us whether you like it or not!" they told the doctor. The assailants also assaulted and insulted another patient who tried to calm them down and stop them. A backup force was dispatched to the hospital that managed to detain the suspects. A case was filed and the suspects were referred to relevant authorities pending legal action against them.

### Smuggling foiled

Air cargo custom teams foiled an attempt to smuggle 23 gm of marijuana via three parcels arriving from Switzerland and Britain, and arrested the recipient. Customs sources said all three parcels were addressed to the same recipient, and after examining them, 8 gm of marijuana were found in the one package arriving from Switzerland, while 11 gm and 4 gm were found in parcels arriving from Britain. "Standard procedures were taken to coordinate with customs and drug control detectives to arrest the suspect," the sources said.

### Vehicles destroyed

Firemen are currently investigating a fire that destroyed seven vehicles parked outside a building in Farwaniya, said security sources, noting that on receiving reports about the fire, firemen rushed to the scene and managed to control the fire without any casualties. Further investigations are still ongoing.

— Translated by Kuwait Times from Al-Rai

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## Local

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## Up to 34,459 KU students use remote learning

**KUWAIT:** Acting deputy rector of Kuwait University for academic services Dr Abdullah Al-Motaw'e said a total of 34,459 students have joined the remote learning system since the start of the academic year 2019-2020. "Those students represent more than 96 percent of the overall number of students who were enrolled for the new system amid the outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19)," he told reporters late Sunday. "The 1,744 members of the KU teaching staff joined training courses on distance education at a rate of five courses each," Dr Motaw'e noted, citing a study on the turnout for the new system. The study showed that the teaching staff are well-prepared for activation of the virtual classes of the various subjects of this year's curricula. The activated virtual classes represent 98 percent of overall classes, he said, noting that the KU administration was working on the problems relating to the remaining percentage. —KUNA

## Kuwait Navy carries out live ammunition drill

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait naval forces announced conducting a drill with live ammunition yesterday and today, from 8 am to 6 pm, warning seagoers to abstain from approaching the location of the mock battle. The Kuwaiti Army said in a statement that the shooting range stretches from east of Boubyan Island to northeast of Failaka Island, adjacent to Boybyan Island to the south reaching Ras Al-Qaid at a depth of 11 nautical miles toward the southeast. The shooting range is close to Failaka Island and stretches to Oheh Island at a depth of 15 nautical miles toward the northeast. —KUNA

## Zain launches 'Zain Health' remote patient monitoring platform in Kuwait

Allows healthcare providers to remotely monitor patients using smart medical devices

**KUWAIT:** Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, announced the launch of Zain Health, a digital healthcare platform for corporate customers. The platform allows doctors, nurses, and other healthcare providers to remotely monitor patients using a number of smart medical devices, which contributes to facilitating the efficiency of the healthcare system during the COVID-19 pandemic over Zain's superfast and nationwide network.

Zain launched this platform as part of its comprehensive strategy to empower the country's various sectors into digital transformation, especially the healthcare sector which the country heavily relies on during the COVID-19 pandemic. Zain is keen on making its tech capabilities available to offer the most advanced services and solutions as per the highest international standards to facilitate the efficiency of the healthcare system during the current situation and protect patients while abiding by distancing guidelines.

Zain Health is a result of the collaboration between Zain and NXX, Zain Group's smart city arm, and is essentially a Remote Patient Monitoring System (RPM). The platform offers many integrated

remote solutions that allow patients and their healthcare providers to communicate via a web portal and a smartphone app for iOS and Android operating systems. Zain Health is integrated with many smart medical devices and wearables that are able to read the patient's vitals, allowing their doctor to continuously monitor their condition, inform them of any important changes, create medical reports, and more.

## Supporting healthcare system during pandemic

The platform features many unique solutions for communication between patients and their healthcare providers, including patient surveys, Electronic Health/Medical Record (EHR/EMR) integration, connected smart medical devices and wearables over Internet of Things (IoT) technology, integrated smart coaching,

secured multi-media messaging, e-screening and health risk assessments, chronic disease management, personalized medicine, pre/post-surgery coaching, remote monitoring, and more.

Zain Health was designed to be fully integrated with many smart medical and healthcare devices that are FDA/CE approved. The devices include wearables, smart scales, blood pressure monitors, glucometers, pulse oximeters, thermometers, and more.



Zain strongly believes in the crucial role played by private sector organizations in supporting social and economic sustainability projects, especially during health crises. Springing from its growing commitment towards practicing its social responsibility, the company is committed to printing a positive print through all its activities. This has led Zain to embrace the most crucial issues in the community, including the support of the country's healthcare system by making its tech capabilities available.

## Kuwait, CDC hold virtual meeting

**KUWAIT:** The US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Kuwaiti Ministry of Health officials met virtually to discuss sharing expertise to address public health challenges and combat COVID-19. This meeting was held as part of the US and Kuwait's ongoing cooperation in the field of health. Both sides hope that this meeting will increase the exchange of research and experts between the United States and Kuwait to improve public health. The meeting was coordinated by the US Embassy in Kuwait, Adviser to the Minister of Health Dr Salman Al-Sabah, and Dr Qais Al-Baghli. In attendance at the meeting from the CDC was Dr Mitch Wolfe, Chief Medical Officer; Dr Rebecca Martin, Director of Global Health; Dr Heather Burke, Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa; and Dr Jay Butler, Deputy Director for Infectious Diseases. The participants from the Ministry of Health consisted of Dr Salman Al-Sabah, Adviser to the Minister of Health and Chief of Surgery at Jaber Hospital; Dr Fahad Al-Ghimlas, Director of Public Health; Dr Qais Al-Baghli; Dr Al-Munther Al-Hasawi; Dr Gheed Al-Salem; and Dr Hamad Bastaki.



## Agreement on allowing wives to sign medical intervention permission

**KUWAIT:** In a step towards more government-law-makers agreement, Al-Qabas daily reported that the parliamentary social and health affairs committee announced that the government prepares to submit a bill to the parliament soon, allowing wives and female relatives of patients to sign documents giving doctors permission to operate on their husbands and children in cases of emergency.

In this regard, committee Rapporteur MP Saadoun Hammad said that health ministry officials who attend-

ed the committee's meeting had no objections to the suggested amendments to the current law, which was recently amended to give the right to mothers for medical intervention on their children only. "They notified the committee about submitting a comprehensive project including those amendments," he said.

"The meeting was adjourned until the bill is submitted," Hammad added, noting that the bill involves setting a law for practicing medicine and assistant medical professions as well as regulating patients' rights and health facilities. Further, Hammad explained that the bill stipulates that no medical procedure can be applied to patients except with their own consensus, and in case patients are incapable of doing so, the approval must be made by mothers, wives or any of the patient's adult male or female second degree relatives.

## Plans to push power plant, landline privatization

**KUWAIT:** The Supreme Council of Privatization decided to move on with privatizing government facilities, starting with the Ministry of Electricity and Water's main plants and the Ministry of Service's communications sector, including landlines. Al-Qabas reported yesterday quoting government sources.

The sources added that the council had accordingly contacted the Cabinet's secretariat general,

which decided offering six practices to select consultant bodies and offices to be assigned to prepare feasibility studies and evaluate assets in both ministries, privatization procedures as well as a feasibility study on the privatization of two related government facilities.

"Execution may take some time," the sources noted but stressed that the most important thing is to get the process started, especially since both bodies had been target for privatization for 18 years now. "Once the assessment and feasibility study process is over, the final privatization schedule will be declared," the sources elaborated, noting that further privatization plans include Kuwait International Airport, North Shuaiba plant, Shuwaikh Port, KAF-CCO, KASCO, TEC, KPTC, Kuwait government printing house, and the post sector.

## Kuwait municipality closes 14 shops in July over violations



**KUWAIT:** Kuwait municipality announced Sunday that it closed more than 14 shops due to violating COVID-19 safety measures in July. The director of Ahmadi municipality's branch, Saoud Al-Dabbous, said in a press release that it issued more than 128 violations and 280 warnings to several shops, markets and groceries in order to comply with all decisions by the Ministry of Health (MOH). He also stat-

ed monitoring teams have lifted many abandoned cars and containers. Moreover, cleaning teams have washed and sterilized 153,987 containers of various sizes, he added.

Meanwhile, Kuwait Municipality teams in the Capital Governorate carried out a campaign to remove abandoned cars in Shuwaikh Industrial, during which a total of 30 cars were impounded on Sunday.

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Coronavirus forces N Zealand election delay; Japan sinks

## Turkey condemns Biden's criticism of 'autocrat' Erdogan

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NETANYA: Israeli and United Arab Emirates flags line a road in the Israeli coastal city of Netanya. - AFP

# Deal 'a killer' for 2-state solution

## Saudi silent over UAE-Israel deal but covert ties under focus

**JERUSALEM:** The agreement between Israel and the United Arab Emirates to normalize ties would kill the two-state solution, strengthen "extremists" and undermine the "possibility of peace", chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said. The fractured Palestinian leadership-from the Palestinian Authority led by Mahmud Abbas in the occupied West Bank to Hamas Islamists in the Gaza Strip-was united in its opposition to the UAE-Israel deal announced Thursday by US President Donald Trump. "I really believe that this step is a killer to the two-state solution," Erekat said.

He argued that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will have less incentive to compromise on a viable Palestinian state "if he believes that Arab countries will line up to make peace with him". In a conference call with foreign reporters, Erekat said that "people like Netanyahu and extremists in Israel believe that the two-state solution is off the table". Meanwhile, "extremists on my side are (saying), 'we told you so from the beginning: the two state solution is off the table'," he added. Erekat condemned the agreement as a "desperate attempt" by Trump to notch a foreign policy success.

He further dismissed senior White House advisor and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, an architect of the UAE-Israel pact, as displaying "a combination of arrogance and ignorance". Netanyahu said Sunday that the agreement upended the notion that "no Arab state would agree to open peace with Israel, before the conflict with the Palestinians would be resolved". "That mistaken notion gave the Palestinians de-facto veto power over peacemaking between Israel and Arab states and held Israel and the Arab world hostage to the most extreme Palestinian demands," Netanyahu said during his Sunday cabinet meeting.

According to a joint US, Israel, UAE statement, the Jewish state has agreed to "suspend" its plans to annex settlements and other territory in the occupied West Bank. Those annexations plans were outlined in Trump's Middle East peace proposal, unveiled in January. Netanyahu has said he remains committed to West Bank annexations, but agreed to hold for now, as part of his pledge to Trump. The Palestinians have called for emergency meetings of the Arab League and the Organisation of the Islamic Cooperation to reject the Israel-UAE deal, but have not received replies from either body, Erekat said.

The top Palestinian negotiator also said he had written to Saudi Arabia and Bahrain to ask them to pressure the UAE to cancel the agreement. "I have received an answer from the Saudi foreign minister reassuring me that Saudi Arabia's position is for a comprehensive peace agreement based on a two-state solution," Erekat said, noting Bahrain "did not answer me yet". Regional heavyweight Saudi Arabia has been conspicuously silent on the deal with no official reaction emerging from Riyadh.

### Covert ties under focus

Meanwhile, UAE's decision to normalize ties with Israel could propel Saudi Arabia to deepen its furtive relations with the Jewish state as Riyadh seeks to entice investments to fund an ambitious economic transformation, analysts say. The United Arab Emirates on Thursday became the first Gulf state to normalize relations with Israel, in a historic US-brokered accord that raised the prospect of similar deals with other Arab states. Saudi Arabia, the Arab world's biggest economy, has maintained a conspicuous silence over the deal, but local officials have hinted that Riyadh is unlikely to immediately follow in the footsteps of its principle regional ally.

However, "the UAE-Israeli normalization lends itself to expanding the realm of indirect Saudi-Israeli relations," said Aziz Alghashian, a lecturer at Essex University specializing in the kingdom's policy towards Israel. "I think Saudi-Israeli interactions will increase via the UAE." Home to Islam's holiest sites, Saudi Arabia would face sensitive political calculations before a formal recognition of the Jewish state. Like the UAE's move, such a step would be seen by Palestinians and their supporters as a betrayal of their cause.

But the kingdom has already cultivated covert ties with Israel in recent years, a shift spearheaded by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman even as his father King Salman has voiced steadfast support for an independent Palestinian state. A shared animosity towards Iran, along with Saudi attempts to attract foreign investment to fund Prince Mohammed's ambitious Vision 2030 economic diversification plan, appear to be pushing the kingdom closer to Israel than ever.

A centerpiece of Vision 2030 is NEOM, a \$500 billion planned megacity on the kingdom's west coast, for which observers say the kingdom requires Israeli expertise in areas including manufacturing, biotechnology and cyber security. The creation of NEOM "requires peace and coordination with Israel, especially if the city is to have a chance of becoming a tourist attraction," said Mohammad Yaghi, a research fellow at Germany's Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. NEOM is set to be built close to the Israeli resort town of Eilat, along the geopolitically sensitive waters of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba.

### 'Integral part'

Gulf states have increasingly sought Israeli technology for the surveillance of their own citizens and to purchase precision missiles that Western countries are unwilling to sell. Yaghi wrote in a research paper in April. Saudi Arabia has sought to keep its outreach to Israel out of the public eye, but it has not been easy. In June, a verified Twitter account linked to the kingdom's embassy in Washington said the Saudi council of ministers had agreed to recruit Israeli cyber security firm Check Point Software in NEOM.

The embassy later denied the claim and distanced itself from the account. Marc Schneier, an American rabbi with close ties to the Gulf, quoted Saudi Arabia's deputy defence minister Prince Khalid bin Salman as once telling him that Israel was an "integral part" of achieving Vision 2030. Schneier made the comment to AFP in May, and Saudi authorities did not dispute that the prince made the remark. Despite the official silence, the pro-government Saudi media has repeatedly tested public reaction by publishing reports advocating closer ties with Israel.

"I forecast a future that entails the creation of a joint high-tech ecosystem among [Gulf Cooperation Council] countries, known as the 'Silicon Wadi'," Israeli consultant Nave Shachar wrote last week for the English website of Al-Arabiya, a Saudi-owned broadcaster. Shachar, who according to his LinkedIn profile was previously employed by the Israeli defense ministry, was referring to a regional equivalent of Silicon Valley. "Now, more than ever, it is in the best interest of Israel and the GCC to increase business cooperation," he said.

### 'An inevitability'

Observers say US President Donald Trump, who backed Prince Mohammed following global uproar over the 2018 murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, holds enormous leverage to get the kingdom to formally recognize Israel. But Saudi Arabia appears to be resisting Washington's pressure as it has more at stake than the UAE. "I do think it is an inevitability that Saudi Arabia and Israel will have fully normalized relations and they will be able to do a lot of great things together," said Jared Kushner, an advisor to Trump, said at the weekend.

"Saudi Arabia has obviously been a great leader in making (modernization) but you can't turn a battleship around overnight," Kushner told CNBC. Schneier said the kingdom's leadership held "conflicting views along generational lines." "This bold initiative by the Emirates will strengthen the generational forces that would like to see this happen now," he told AFP this week. "This announcement from the UAE will transform the current indirect relations between the Saudis and Israel to formal direct relations." — Agencies



RAWALPINDI: Activists of Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) march in a protest rally against the agreement between Israel and the United Arab Emirates to normalize diplomatic relations in Rawalpindi. — AFP

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## International

# Lebanon faces ‘biggest danger’, needs elections, says patriarch

## Flurry of Western and regional diplomacy

**BEIRUT:** Lebanon's top Christian cleric called on Sunday for early parliamentary elections and a government formed to rescue the country rather than the ruling "political class" after the vast explosion in Beirut's port threw the nation into turmoil. The now-caretaker cabinet resigned amid protests over the Aug. 4 blast that killed more than 172 people, injured 6,000, left 300,000 homeless and destroyed swathes of the Mediterranean city, compounding a deep financial crisis.

Patriarch Bechara Boutros Al-Rai, who holds sway in Lebanon as head of the Maronite church from which the head of state must be drawn under sectarian power-sharing, warned that Lebanon was today facing "its biggest danger". "We will not allow for Lebanon to become a compromise card between nations that want to rebuild ties amongst themselves," Al-Rai said in a Sunday sermon, without naming any countries. "We must start immediately with change and quickly hold early parliamentary elections without the distraction of discussing a new election law and to form a new government." Several MPs submitted their resignations over the port explosion but not in the number needed to dissolve parliament.

Under the constitution, President Michel Aoun is required to designate a candidate for prime minister with the most support from parliamentary blocs. The presidency has yet to say when consultations will take place. There has been a flurry of Western and regional diplomacy after the blast, which fuelled public

anger at politicians already accused of corruption and mismanagement. A financial meltdown has ravaged the currency and froze depositors out of their savings. Senior French and US officials have linked any foreign financial aid with implementation of long-demanded reforms, including state control over the port and Lebanese borders. Iran, seen as a major player in Lebanon through backing the powerful Shi'ite movement Hezbollah that helped form the outgoing cabinet, has said the international community should not take advantage of Lebanon's pain to exert its will. Al-Rai said Lebanese want a government that would reverse "national, moral and material" corruption, enact reforms and "rescue Lebanon, not the leadership and political class".

**Explosion 'mystery'**  
Aoun has said the investigation is looking into whether negligence, an accident or "external interference" caused the

detonation of more than 2,000 tons of ammonium nitrate warehoused for years without safety measures. Aoun's influential son-in-law Gebran Bassil, who heads the largest Christian political bloc, said probing negligence should be quick as it was "known and documented", but that the blast itself "is a mystery that requires deep investigation". Bassil, whose party is allied with Hezbollah, also said in a televised speech on Sunday that threats of further Western sanctions would "drown Lebanon in chaos and discord".

His party would not "betray or backstab a Lebanese or act with those abroad against domestic



**BEIRUT:** Diggers remove earth at the blast site next to the silos at the port of Beirut in the aftermath of the massive explosion there that ravaged Lebanon's capital. — AFP

interests", he said. The United States has imposed sanctions on Hezbollah, which it classifies as a terrorist group. U.S. officials have said those sanctions could be extended beyond direct affiliates of the

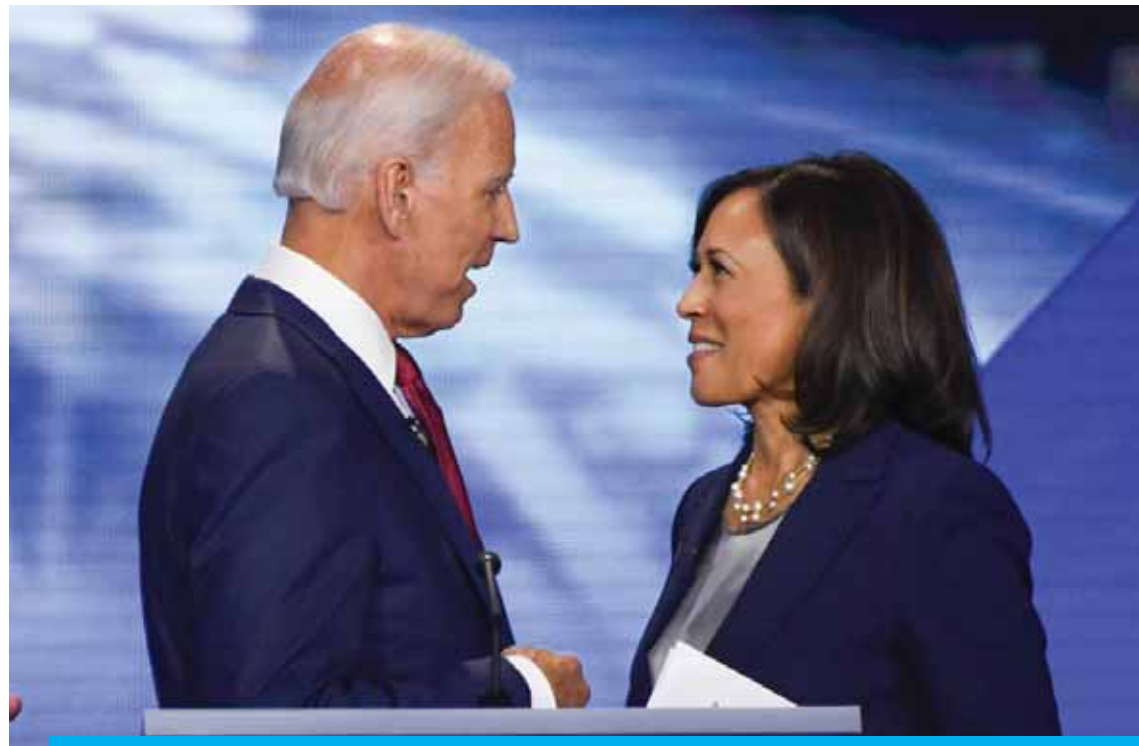
heavily armed movement to its allies. During a visit to Beirut after the blast, French President Emmanuel Macron raised the prospect of sanctions as a last resort to spur Lebanese action on reform.— Reuters

## Turkey condemns Biden's criticism of 'autocrat' Erdogan

**ISTANBUL:** Turkey has condemned remarks made by US Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden criticizing President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and calling for support for the Turkish leader's opponents. Biden made the comments in an interview filmed by the New York Times in December but a video of the remarks only appeared on Saturday before going viral on social media. Asked about Erdogan, Biden described the Turkish president as an "autocrat", criticized his policy towards the Kurds and advocated supporting the Turkish opposition.

"What I think we should be doing is taking a very different approach to him now, making it clear that we support opposition leadership," Biden said. He said it was necessary to "embolden" Erdogan's rivals to allow them "to take on and defeat Erdogan. Not by a coup, not by a coup, but by the electoral process." The comments did not provoke much reaction when they were published in the New York Times in January, but the video of the interview triggered an angry response from Turkey.

"The analysis of Turkey by @JoeBiden is based on pure ignorance, arrogance and hypocrisy," Erdogan's spokesman Ibrahim Kalin tweeted. "The days of ordering Turkey around are over. But if you still think you can try, be our guest. You will pay the price." Biden's statements also embarrassed Erdogan's opponents, who the Turkish government regularly accuses of being in the pay of foreign powers. Several



**HOUSTON:** Former Vice President Joe Biden and Senator Kamala Harris speak on in Houston, Texas. — AFP

officials of the main opposition CHP party quickly distanced themselves from Biden's remarks, calling for "respect for the sovereignty of Turkey".

Some Biden critics also expect a possible deterioration in already testy relations between Ankara and Washington if he manages to defeat Donald Trump in the US presidential election in November. Erdogan,

who in recent years has worked to cultivate a personal relationship with Trump, often lashes out at his predecessor, Barack Obama. Biden was Obama's vice president. Relations between Ankara and Washington were strained during Obama's second term, particularly to disagreements over Syria and growing international criticism over freedoms and rights in Turkey.—AFP



**LIBREVILLE:** A man walks past the headquarter of the French multinational integrated oil and gas company in Libreville. Gabon celebrated 60 years of independence yesterday. — AFP

on to rule the country for 42 years. "The Gabonese have a homeland, Gabon, and a friend, France," he had said. Until his death in 2009, Omar Bongo was one of the symbols of "Francafrrique", the network of political relations and schemes forged by France with its former sub-Saharan colonies—all too many of which were marred by scandal.

### Camp de Gaulle

Rich in oil and uranium, Gabon, with two million inhabitants, has long been a key country for France in Africa. The idea that it is impossible to become president without French approval is still widespread here. "And when opponents have to go into exile, it is in France that they find refuge," said academic Joseph Tonda. The French presence is perhaps most obvious behind a long grey wall bristling with barbed wire. Welcome to Camp de Gaulle, one of the four French military bases in Africa, with nearly 400 soldiers. When Omar died in 2009, his son Ali Bongo succeeded him and promised to end the almost exclusive relationship with France.

"France in Gabon? This is not what it was, we no longer have the influence we had under Bongo senior,"

said a French security source in Libreville. Over a decade later, France has lost ground economically to mainly Asian investors, but have taken over strategic sectors such as logging or port management, said economic analyst Mays Mouissi. In the industrial district, Chinese buildings and hotels have sprung up like mushrooms. And in 2014, China became the number one trading partner. "But China is not as popular as the country of the former colonizer," said Tonda.

### French wine and horses

In the upmarket Gabonese supermarkets, French products such as butter, camembert cheese and milk, are everywhere. "Gabon's consumption is linked to its history with France, because unfortunately we have low Gabonese production," said Alain Rempanot Mepiat, adviser to the CEO of Ceca-Gadis, which imports nearly 80 percent of its products from France. This is especially the case for drinks. Bottles of Burgundy or Bordeaux, from cheap produce to great vintages, fill entire shelves.

In the "matiti", the working-class neighborhoods, the preference is for Regab, a local beer brewed since the 1960s by the French group Castel. —AFP

## Gabon still a 'home' for French 60 years after independence

**LIBREVILLE:** Gabon yesterday marked 60 years since it gained independence from France, and yet a glance around the capital Libreville begs the question whether it has ever made a clean break from the former colonial ruler. The French influence still permeates every crack and crevice of Gabonese life from the language to the waft of fresh croissants in the bakeries and the horse races in Paris playing out on televisions as gamblers sip on French-brewed beer.

"The French are at home in Gabon, they have their shops, their restaurants," laughed Annie, the Gabonese manager of a bar who is dismissive of the Gabonese who frequent the same places. "They think they are in France," she said. France officially colonized Gabon in 1885 and it became part of French Equatorial Guinea. When independence came, France treated Gabon kindly, motivated partly by its uranium wealth which was key to France's nuclear program. As part of that kid-gloves approach, France tolerated and upheld a series of authoritarian leaders, starting with the first president Leon Mba.

### Champagne

Just off Boulevard de l'Indépendance, lies the residence of the French ambassador, nestled on the heights of an immense wooded park overlooking Libreville. In this tropical French garden, a grandiose ball is held every July 14 to fete Bastille Day. Champagne in hand, ministers and opponents of the Gabonese political hierarchy momentarily lay aside their differences to toast the Franco-Gabonese friendship.

The estate is grand in all senses and almost eclipses the golden presidential palace, five kilometers down the road built by Omar Bongo, the second president of Gabon. Placed in power by France in 1967, Bongo went

### News in brief

#### Nepal landslide toll rises to 19

**KATHMANDU:** The death toll from a landslide in Nepal has risen to 19 after eight more bodies were pulled out from a mud-covered village in north-central Nepal, police said. Dozens of villagers in the remote hillside region of Sindhupalchowk district were buried under mud and stone after heavy rains caused a landslide early Friday. Rescuers dug out 11 bodies on Friday and have been searching for survivors. Helicopters were being used to reach the isolated site after the landslide blocked roads. Nineteen people remain missing but hopes that anyone had survived the landslip were fading, authorities said. "Search efforts are under way but we are losing hope of rescuing the missing people alive," local police official Madhav Kafle told AFP said. The houses hit by the landslide were among those rebuilt after a devastating 7.4-magnitude earthquake struck Nepal in 2015. — AFP

#### Eight killed in Colombian region

**BOGOTA:** Eight people were killed in a shooting overnight in one of Colombia's main coca-growing regions, officials said Sunday. The exact motive of the killings in the town of Samaniego in Narino department was not known. President Ivan Duque condemned the slaughter and vowed to catch the killer or killers. In the past two months 20 people have been gunned down in Samaniego, which has a population of 50,000, said Narino governor Jhon Rojas. Narino borders Ecuador and is one of Colombia's main areas for growing coca leaves, the raw material for making cocaine. Its strategic location makes it a favored route for smuggling drugs north to Central America and the US. So it has been fought over by leftist FARC rebel holdouts who rejected a 2016 peace accord, drug traffickers and fighters with a still active rebel group called the National Liberation Army.—AFP

#### Qaeda execute dentist for 'spying'

**DUBAI:** Al-Qaeda militants in war-torn Yemen executed a dentist accused of spying for the government and guiding US drone strikes targeting the Islamist extremists, a local official said on Sunday. The jihadist shot Mottahar Al-Yousoufi, then crucified his corpse and left it outside his health centre, the official told AFP on condition of anonymity. The execution took place on Saturday in Somaa, a district of Yemen's central Al-Baida province, the official added. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which is active in Yemen, is considered by the United States as the radical group's most dangerous branch. The US has carried out a long-running drone campaign in Yemen. The Sunni extremist group has thrived in the chaos of years of civil war between Yemen's Saudi-backed government and Shiite rebels who control the capital.—AFP

#### Attack on Somali hotel kills 16

**MOGADISHU:** At least 16 people were killed in an attack on Sunday by the Islamist group al Shabaab on a seaside hotel in Somalia's capital Mogadishu, according to government spokesman Ismail Mukhtar Omar. The toll includes 11 victims and five assailants, Omar said in a Tweet late on Sunday. "Security forces lost one, 18 people were injured," Omar said. Militants stormed the high-end Elite Hotel in Lido beach, detonated a car bomb and then opened fire with assault rifles, the latest attack by al Shabaab, which has been battling the country's central government since 2008. The hotel is owned by Abdullahi Mohamed Nor, a lawmaker and former finance minister, and is frequented by government officials and members of the Somali diaspora. Dr Abdikadir Abdurahman, director of AAMIN ambulance services, said they had transported to hospitals at least 43 people injured in the attack.—Reuters



## International

# Virus forces NZ election delay as Japan's economy sinks

## COVID has killed over 766,000 people globally

**WELLINGTON:** New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern yesterday postponed the nation's election to focus on fighting a coronavirus second wave, as data showed Japan's economy had endured a historic contraction. With more than 21.5 million cases worldwide, a second wave of infections is also threatening further disruption in Europe where summer holiday-makers are helping fuel a resurgence of COVID-19. The disease has killed more than 766,000 people globally, and the number of deaths hit 50,000 in India, which is still battling its first wave with 2.5 million infections—the third-highest in the world.

The postponement of New Zealand's election to October 17 came after the shock discovery of COVID-19 in Auckland last week, ending the nation's 102-day streak without community transmission. "This decision gives all parties time over the next nine weeks to campaign and the Electoral Commission enough time to ensure an election can go ahead," Ardern said. She said the return of the virus—which sent New Zealand's largest city into lockdown—had rattled Kiwis and could have discouraged some from voting in a September election.

In South Korea, another country that had brought its initial outbreak largely under control, thousands of Protestant church members were asked to quarantine as authorities battled virus clusters linked to religious groups. The largest of those current clusters is centered on the Sarang Jeil Church in Seoul, headed by controversial conservative pastor Jun Kwang-hun. South Korean health authorities have filed two separate complaints

against him for deliberately hindering efforts to contain the virus.

Across the Pacific, less than three months out from the American presidential election, the surging caseload in the United States—the worst in the world at more than 5.4 million with 170,000 deaths—has forced the convention season online. The Democrats' disparate factions are projecting a united front behind Joe Biden as their four-day virtual gathering gets under way, as they seek to oust President Donald Trump—who has been widely criticized for his handling of the pandemic.

The Trump administration and Congress are under increasing pressure to ease the economic pain unleashed by the virus, with tens of millions left jobless and the global economy facing a historic downturn. Many countries have plunged into recession since the coronavirus first emerged in China late last year. The latest evidence of the economic destruction emerged in Japan, which saw its economy shrink a record 7.8 percent in the April-June quarter—the worst contraction in the nation's modern history.

**'We're dancing'**

Italy—once the global epicenter of the coronavirus—has ordered the three-week closure of all dance venues after a pick-up in infections over the weekend blamed in part on young partygoers. Wearing a face mask is also mandatory in public areas from 6:00 pm to 6:00 am. "The contagion is on the rise but we're dancing," proclaimed the Corriere Della Sera newspaper, which slammed Sardinia's clubs as being "joyful contagion machines".



**WELLINGTON:** Prime Minister of New Zealand Jacinda Ardern speaks to the media about changing the 2020 general election date during a press conference at the Parliament in Wellington yesterday. — AFP

chines".

But government attempts to curb the spread of the virus in parts of Spain and Brussels have been met by scepticism and protests. "They are forcing us to use a mask, they want us to stay home practically locked up," said Pilar Martin, 58, at a rally in Madrid that drew a va-

riety of people, many promoting widely debunked conspiracy theories about the coronavirus being a hoax.

That came after Britain removed France, the Netherlands, Malta and three other countries from its list of places exempt from self-isolation rules because of the continent's second virus wave. —AFP

### News in brief

#### COVID deaths in Palestinian camps

**BEIRUT:** The UN Palestinian refugee agency Sunday confirmed four new COVID-19 deaths in camps in Lebanon, calling for vigilance in observing hygiene measures as infections rise across the country. "During the past 24 hours, four deaths have been recorded among Palestine refugees" in Lebanon, UNRWA said in a statement. This brings to eight the total number of Palestinian refugees who have died from the COVID-19 illness since Lebanon first recorded an outbreak of the virus in February. Over 200,000 Palestinian refugees reside in Lebanon, the majority living below the poverty line, according to UNRWA. Their right to work and own property is restricted. The UN agency, which provides health and education services to Palestinians across the region, called for vigilance in observing measures to combat the spread of the virus in the densely populated camps. —AFP

#### DR Congo militia kills 12

**BENI:** Twelve people have been killed over three days by a notorious militia in the troubled Beni region of eastern DR Congo, where the army is battling armed groups, local officials said Sunday. The Allied Democratic Forces, a mainly Muslim movement that originated in Uganda in the 1990s has been blamed for more than 1,000 civilian deaths in the Beni region of North Kivu province since 2014. The group attacked an army position in the village of Mwenda on Saturday night, killing eight people, local administrator Donat Kibwana said. The victims were four women and four men, according to Eteni Kimwele, Mwenda's chief. "The attack was carried out by the ADF," he said, adding that the village's inhabitants were fleeing. Four farmers were also killed in their fields in the nearby village of Mbau on Friday, Richard Kivanzanga, deputy administrator for the Beni territory said. —AFP

#### Floods kill 63 in Sudan

**KHARTOUM:** Sudan said floods caused by torrential rains have killed 63 people since July, with thousands more forced from their homes by the seasonal storms. Over 14,000 homes and 119 public buildings were destroyed, while more than 16,000 homes have been badly damaged, government civil defense organizations calculate, according to a statement from the interior ministry. Heavy rains usually fall in Sudan from June to October, and Sudan faces severe flooding every year. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimates that over 185,000 people have been affected by the floods, with more rainfall expected in the months ahead. The rains have caused flooding, landslides and damage to houses and infrastructure in 17 of the 18 states across the country, OCHA said. —AFP

#### Clashes erupt in Ivory Coast

**ABIDJAN:** At least one person was killed in clashes in Ivory Coast in the latest violence sparked by President Alassane Ouattara's controversial decision to run for a third term in October. The shooting death brings to four the number of people killed in the central town of Daoukro, a stronghold of former president Henri Konan Bedie, who is also a candidate in the election. Across Ivory Coast, at least six people have died and more than 100 have been injured in violence after Ouattara's shock announcement. Tensions were high on Saturday in Daoukro, where clashes between supporters of Bedie and Ouattara began on Tuesday. The town's main market and shops were closed and police were deployed all over. Armed with shotguns, clubs and machetes, young people from the village of Anoumabo rushed to a pro-Ouattara district, where the gendarmerie intervened. — AFP

## South Korea battles worst virus outbreak

**SEOUL:** South Korea warned yesterday of a looming novel coronavirus crisis as new outbreaks flared, including one linked to a church where more than 300 members of the congregation have been infected but hundreds more are reluctant to get tested. The outbreak linked to the Sarang Jeil Church in Seoul is the country's biggest in nearly six months and led to a tightening of social distancing rules on Sunday.

The Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (KCDC) reported 197 new cases as of midnight on Saturday, mostly in the Seoul metropolitan area, marking the fourth day of a three-digit tally. South Korea has been one of the world's coronavirus mitigation success stories but it has nevertheless battled persistent spikes in infections. The latest cases brought its total infections to 15,515 including 305 deaths.

"We're seeing the current situation as an initial stage of a large-scale transmission," KCDC director Jeong Eun-kyeong told a briefing. "We're facing a crisis where if the current spread isn't controlled, it would bring an exponential rise in cases, which could in turn lead to the collapse of our medical system and enormous economic damage." The outbreak at the Seoul church has revived fears seen in February when authorities struggled to contain an out-

## Ship that oozed oil off Mauritius splits in two

**PORT LOUIS:** A ship that has leaked more than 1,000 tons of oil in pristine waters off the coast of Mauritius has split in two. The bulk carrier MV Wakashio ran aground on a coral reef off the southeastern coast of Mauritius on July 25 and began oozing oil more than a week later, threatening a protected marine park boasting mangrove forests and endangered species. Mauritius declared an environmental emergency and salvage crews raced against the clock to pump the remaining 3,000 tonnes of oil off the stricken vessel.

"It was confirmed on August 15 that the vessel has broken into two," the ship's operator Mitsui OSK Lines said in a statement Sunday, noting that the information came from the vessel's owner, Nagashiki Shipping. The split was caused by a crack in a cargo hold at the vessel's stern, Mitsui said. Officials had been bracing for the development for days, and images taken Saturday indicated it was inevitable, with the two pieces only partly attached.

Nearly all the remaining 3,000 tons of oil had been pumped off the ship by that time, though there were still 90 tons on board, much of it residue from the leakage. Mitsui noted Sunday that "an amount of unrecovered oil is believed to have leaked out of the vessel," without elaborating. Thousands of Mauritians have volunteered day and night to clean the powder-blue waters that have long attracted honeymooners and tourists. The spill is both an environmental and economic disaster for Mauritius, which relies heavily on tourism.

The spill already qualifies as the Indian Ocean island nation's "worst ecological disaster". Greenpeace Africa campaigner Happy Khambule said, adding that it "puts unique species under immediate threats". Now that the ship has split, the salvage team intends to pull the front two-thirds out to sea using two tugboats to avoid further damage to the Mauritian coastline, a police official in the capital Port Louis told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to brief the media.

The remaining portion is still stuck on the reef and officials have not yet determined how they might remove it, the official said. That portion includes the ship's engine room, which still contains 30 cubic meters of oil, and rough weather will complicate efforts to pump that oil out, according to a statement Sunday from the Mauritian crisis committee formed to respond to the spill.

The crisis committee expects rough weather for the next five days, "with high energy swells of a maximum height of 3.5 meters", the statement said. Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth has come under fire, including from opposition leaders, for doing too little after the ship ran aground. — AFP

break that emerged in a secretive Christian sect in the city of Daegu and became the country's deadliest cluster.

As in the earlier case, authorities are facing some reluctance to cooperate and difficulty in tracking some of the members of the congregation. Vice Health Minister Kim Gang-lip told reporters earlier the Presbyterian church had provided inaccurate lists of its 4,000 members. While nearly 320 of them had tested positive, including Reverend Jun Kwang-hoon, more than 600 who authorities want to see in isolation were unaccounted for.

"We're very concerned," Kim said, dismissing rumors that authorities wanted to round up church members and would record every test as positive regardless of the truth. "That's impossible. We can't fabricate test results," he said. Jun, leader of the church, is a conservative activist who has also been organizing anti-government rallies calling for the ouster of liberal President Moon Jae-in, raising concern that the virus has been spreading at his protests too.

**'Obstructing tracing'**

Jun, 64, took part in a protest on Saturday in defiance of a government order that all church members self-isolate and get tested. His lawyers said at a news conference yesterday that Jun did not violate quarantine rules nor intentionally offer incomplete lists. Jun said in an interview with a Christian media outlet that his church was a victim of "virus terror". A ban on church services was lifted in April though attendees are required to register and sit apart. Kim said if the rate of new infections did not stabilize this week the government would tighten distancing, shut high-

**Talabat announces 130,000 Euro #LunchforLebanon donation, along with 100% of profits generated from over 115,000 orders.**

- To support the people and city of Beirut, talabat pledged to donate 100% of the profits made from all orders during **#LunchforLebanon** on August 12th, 2020. During this period, talabat users region-wide, placed over 115,000 orders.
- Talabat has also donated an additional 130,000 Euro as a gesture to the people of Lebanon.
- All donations have been sent to the people of Lebanon through the Red Crescent



Talabat, the region's leading food delivery and grocery app, would like to express its heartfelt thanks and gratitude to all its customers in the MENA region who supported the people of Lebanon, through ordering **#LunchforLebanon** on August 12, between 12 - 4pm. During this period, talabat users placed over 115,000 orders region-wide.

On top of all profits donated, talabat has donated an additional 130,000 Euro to the people of Lebanon through the Red Crescent.

Tomaso Rodriguez, talabat CEO, says that the employees of talabat feel humbled to be able facilitate **#LunchforLebanon**, as well as the additional 130,000 euro donation.

"First of all, from us to everyone who ordered **#LunchforLebanon** - thank you. You have enabled us to make a sizable donation on your behalf.

**#LunchforLebanon** was about making it accessible for people to donate, literally as

easy as ordering your lunch, which is a day-to-day occurrence for many people. It was amazing to see our customers and restaurant partners across the region standing united for a shared purpose and supporting the people of Beirut.

"What happened on social media - the amount of people sharing following the incident that took place, contributed to outstanding awareness of the current situation in Beirut, which translated into over 115,000 people ordering to support the people of Lebanon.

"Our farthest order was placed from Berlin, for a customer in the region, which is truly testament to the love that people have for Lebanon.

"Our 130,000 euros donation is a gesture to the people of Lebanon. To tell them we are with them. What Lebanon provides to the world is amazing - the culture, the personality, the cuisine, the heritage. It will take some time for Beirut and its people to get back on their feet, however, we wanted to do our part to help."



TUESDAY, AUGUST 18, 2020

# Business

## Japan's economic plunge erases Abe era gains

### Economy suffers third straight quarter of contraction

**TOKYO:** Japan was hit by its biggest economic slump on record in the second quarter as the coronavirus pandemic emptied shopping malls and crushed demand for cars and other exports, bolstering the case for bolder policy action to prevent a deeper recession.

The third straight quarter of declines knocked the size of real gross domestic product (GDP) to decade-low levels, wiping out the benefits brought by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's "Abenomics" stimulus policies deployed in late 2012. While the economy is emerging from the doldrums after lockdowns were lifted in late May, many analysts expect any rebound in the current quarter to be modest as a renewed rise in infections keep consumers' purse-strings tight. "The big decline can be explained by the decrease in consumption and exports," said Takeshi Minami, chief economist at Norinchukin Research Institute. "I expect growth to turn positive in the July-September quarter. But globally, the rebound is sluggish everywhere except for China."

The world's third-largest economy shrank an annualized 27.8 percent in April-June, government data showed yesterday, marking the biggest decline since comparable data became available in 1980 and slightly off a 27.2 percent fall forecast in a Reuters poll of analysts. While the contraction was smaller than a 32.9 percent decrease in the United States, it was much bigger than a 17.8 percent fall in Japan in the first quarter of 2009, when the Lehman Brothers collapse jolted global financial markets.

The size of Japan's real GDP shrank to 485 trillion yen, the lowest since April-June 2011, when Japan

was still suffering from two decades of deflation and economic stagnation.

Japanese stocks fell yesterday by the most in two weeks and yields on most government bonds fell on the weak GDP data. Elsewhere in the region, Thailand reported its biggest economic decline since the Asian financial crisis of 1998.

#### Consumption plunges

Underlying Japan's dismal reading was private consumption, which plunged a record 8.2 percent as lock-down measures to prevent the spread of the virus kept consumers at home. External demand - or exports minus imports - shaved a record 3.0 percentage point off GDP, as overseas shipments tumbled 18.5 percent, with auto exports hit particularly hard. Falling global vehicle sales have hurt automakers like Mazda Motor Corp and Nissan Motor Co, among the biggest drivers of Japan's economy.

Capital expenditure declined 1.5 percent in the

second quarter, less than a forecast 4.2 percent fall, as solid software investment made up for weak spending in other sectors. Economy Minister Yasutoshi Nishimura conceded the GDP readings were "pretty severe," but pointed to some bright spots such as a recent pickup in consumption.

However, some analysts warn that companies could cut jobs and spending if a resurgence in infections and soft global demand continue to hurt their bottom line. Renewed US-China tensions may also weigh on the fragile recovery. About 90 percent of economists surveyed by Reuters expect the conflict

### Virus deepens economic miseries



**TOKYO:** A general view shows the city skyline in Tokyo yesterday. Japan's economy shrank a historic 7.8 percent in the April-June quarter, the worst contraction in the nation's modern history, as the coronavirus deepens the country's economic woes. —AFP

to affect Japan's economy.

"Demand for business investment is expected to fall due to worsening corporate profits and risk of the coronavirus spreading," said Saisuke Sakai, senior economist at Mizuho Research institute.

"There is a chance economic activity may stagnate if major nations adopt lockdown measures again, or Japan re-issues a state of emergency," he

said. Japan has deployed massive fiscal and monetary stimulus to cushion the blow from the pandemic, which hit an economy already reeling from last year's sales tax hike and the US-China trade war. While the economy has re-opened after the government lifted state of emergency measures in late May, a recent worrying rise in infections cloud the outlook. —Reuters

## Virus fastens push for congestion charge in cities

**BANGKOK:** The coronavirus outbreak gives city authorities an opportunity to implement congestion pricing to curb traffic and pollution, urban experts said, even as the pandemic has forced Singapore to put its new satellite-based system on hold.

Congestion pricing, which charges private vehicles entering the city's busiest areas, was first introduced in Singapore in 1975. London, Milan, Oslo and Stockholm are among the cities that also have a charge, with New York City planning to introduce one from 2021. Dozens of other cities have signaled interest. "There's enough evidence that it is effective in curbing traffic, but it has been slow to take off because it is politically challenging to implement," said Marion Terrill, director of the transport and cities program at the Grattan Institute think-tank in Melbourne.

"The case is strong now in the light of COVID-19. Cities are repurposing their streets, and people don't feel safe in public transit, so if governments do nothing to manage traffic, it would be a disaster," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. Drivers spent more time stuck in traffic in 2019 than in previous years, losing hundreds of hours due to congestion that costs countries billions of dollars, according to a study by transportation analytics firm INRIX Inc.

Congestion pricing - including variably priced lanes, tolls, and cordon charges - can limit private

car use, shift more users to public transit, reduce air pollution and bring in revenue. But those opposed say it is expensive to install, difficult to enforce beyond a small area, and that such a charge would force businesses to flee from the city center.

"If it were such a great solution, why have so few cities implemented it? It is simply not feasible for technical, political and economic reasons," said Dinesh Mohan, an honorary professor at the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi. "It is possible to reduce congestion through better street design and better traffic management, yet we keep floating congestion charge as the only solution, and that keeps us from thinking about other solutions," he said.

#### Right timing

During lockdowns to contain the pandemic, city authorities worldwide added more bicycle lanes, barred traffic from some streets and allocated more space for walking. But with ride-hailing and delivery services already having increased gridlock in cities, and the growth of autonomous vehicles seen as exacerbating the problem, congestion pricing is a way to manage traffic better, said Terrill.

"Just the pure weight of urbanization makes it necessary, as you cannot keep building roads," she said.

"The world has changed, and the timing is right for congestion pricing as a way to nudge people to consider other options than their car," she said. Singapore will be the first city to switch to a GPS-based pricing system that will provide more flexibility, with charges based on distance travelled, authorities have said. It would also do away with 70-odd gantries which are more than two decades old, and take up precious land in the



**SINGAPORE:** A view of Singapore skyline. The coronavirus outbreak gives city authorities an opportunity to implement congestion pricing to curb traffic and pollution, urban experts said, even as the pandemic has forced Singapore to put its new satellite-based system on hold. —Reuters

space-starved city, according to the Land Transport Authority (LTA).

There would be an 18-month switchover period, with the new system implemented progressively from 2020, and the government will bear the one-time cost of replacing in-vehicle units.

The timeline is now uncertain. "LTA is assessing the impact of COVID-19 on the implementation timeline for the new Electronic Road Pricing system and will provide an update in due course," an LTA spokeswoman said. In response to concerns about surveillance from the GPS system, the spokeswoman said that data will be anonymized. "Safeguarding motorists' privacy is a critical area of focus of the new ERP system. The new system will also have robust security and controls ... that help to protect data privacy." —Reuters



**BANGKOK:** This file aerial photo shows apartment buildings on the outskirts of Bangkok. The coronavirus pandemic pushed most of the world's major economies into unprecedented contractions in the second quarter, except for China which escaped a recession. —AFP

lowing a 1.3 percent drop in the first, according to figures published by the OECD. The US government also publishes annualized figures (-32.9 percent in the second quarter), a method that is not comparable with most other countries.

#### China

China, the world's second-largest economy, may have been where the novel coronavirus originated, but thanks to strict lockdown measures it was able to largely halt the spread of the virus and reopen factories, thus avoiding a recession. In the second quarter its economy rebounded by 11.5 percent, having fallen by 10 percent in the first quarter. Still, growth for this year will be well below the breakneck rates China has seen in recent years. —AFP

## Google slams Australia law forcing tech giants to pay for news

**SYDNEY:** US technology giant Google went on the offensive yesterday against an Australian plan forcing digital giants to pay for news content, telling users their personal data would be "at risk". Australia announced last month that firms such as Google and Facebook would have to pay news media for content, after 18 months of negotiations ended without agreement.

The landmark measures would include fines worth millions of dollars for non-compliance and force transparency around the closely guarded algorithms firms use to rank content. Google is now fighting a rearguard action to prevent the measures from entering into force-and been accused by Australia of spreading "misinformation" in the process.

Yesterday it told users in a new homepage pop-up that "the way Aussies use Google is at risk" and their search experience "will be hurt" by the changes. The technology titan linked to an open letter claiming it would be forced to hand over users' search data to news media companies and give them information that would "help them artificially inflate their ranking" above other websites.

Google says it already partners with Australian news media by paying them millions of dollars and sending billions of clicks each year, suggesting the changes could put its free services "at risk". "But rather than encouraging these types of partnerships, the law is set up to give big media companies special treatment and to encourage them to make enormous and unreasonable demands that would put our free services at risk," the letter states.

The legislation will initially focus on Facebook and Google-two of the world's richest and most powerful companies-but could eventually apply to any digital platform. Australia's proposals are being closely watched around the world, as regulators increasingly train their focus on the rapidly changing sector.

News media worldwide have suffered in the digital economy, where big tech firms overwhelmingly capture advertising revenue. The crisis has been exacerbated by the economic collapse caused by the coronavirus pandemic, with dozens of Australian newspapers closed and hundreds of journalists sacked in recent months.

Unlike other countries' so-far unsuccessful efforts to force the platforms to pay for news, the Australian initiative relies on competition law rather than copyright regulations. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, which is drafting the government's code of conduct, hit back at Google's open letter saying it "contains misinformation". The consumer watchdog said the digital behemoth would "not be required" to share additional user data with the news media or charge Australians to use its free services "unless it chooses to do so".

"The draft code will allow Australian news businesses to negotiate for fair payment for their journalists' work that is included on Google services," it said in a statement. It has strong support from local media outlets and is expected to be introduced this year. —AFP

## Virus pushes world's leading economies into record slumps

**PARIS:** The coronavirus pandemic pushed most of the world's major economies into unprecedented contractions in the second quarter, except for China which escaped a recession. Here are second-quarter changes in gross domestic product (GDP) compared to the previous quarter for the world's top economies. Unless stated otherwise, the figures are from the national statistics institutes.

#### Japan

Japan announced in mid-May that it was already in recession-two consecutive quarters of contraction-when first-quarter GDP slid by 0.6 percent after a 1.9 percent drop in the final quarter of 2019. Yesterday the world's number three economy recorded a further slump of 7.8 percent in the April-June quarter, its worst on record, as the coronavirus deepens the country's long-running economic woes.

#### Britain

The UK suffered the worst recession in Europe in the first two quarters of the year, also recording the continent's highest number of coronavirus deaths. GDP fell 20.4 percent in the second quarter after a 2.2 percent drop in the first.

#### Germany

Europe's top economy was hit less hard by the

#### France

The eurozone's number two economy was in a longer and stricter lockdown than its eastern neighbor, and second-quarter GDP fell more steeply, by 13.8 percent, after a drop of 5.9 percent in the previous three months. France's previous all-time worst quarterly blow to output was dealt by a general strike in May 1968.

#### Italy

Italy's growth was impacted very early on by the coronavirus which hit its richest region, Lombardy, particularly hard. Italian GDP fell by 5.4 percent in the first quarter and then by 12.4 percent in the second.

#### Spain

After a 5.2 percent drop in the first quarter, Spain's economy contracted a further 18.5 percent in the second, notably because of a 60 percent drop in tourism income and a fall by one-third in exports.

#### Eurozone

The eurozone's overall GDP plunged 12.1 percent in the three months to June, after 3.6 percent in the first quarter, making the second quarter downturn "by far" the worst since statistics agency Eurostat started compiling growth data for the area in 1995.

#### United States

The United States, the world's top economy, suffered a 9.5 percent slump in the second quarter fol-



## Business

## NBK Economic Update

# Kuwait's credit growth softens due to lockdown measures

## Opening up of economy will likely support loan growth going forward

**KUWAIT:** On the back of the lockdown measures and the weak operating environment, domestic credit growth softened to 0.7 percent q/q (KD 255 million) in 2Q2020, resulting in a 2.4 percent YTD increase (+3.8 percent y/y). Just like in 1Q2020, credit growth was fully driven by business lending (+1.3 percent q/q), pushing the YTD growth to 4.7 percent (+5.1 percent y/y).

The "trade" sector continued to be a main driver of business lending as it expanded by 7 percent q/q (+15 percent YTD), accounting for as much as 86 percent of the increase in business lending in 2Q2020. On the other hand, real estate, the largest component of business lending with a 42 percent share, was flat in 2Q2020 resulting in a 2.2 percent YTD increase. This could be linked to the weakness in that market, especially in the context of the authorities' intention to limit the expatriate population numbers.

For the second consecutive quarter, household credit was broadly flat as it has been impacted by the lockdown measures that were imposed for most of 2Q2020, resulting in a 2.9 percent y/y increase. Housing loans inched up by 0.2 percent q/q in 2Q2020, after dropping in the previous quarter resulting in a nearly-flat YTD performance. Personal consumption loans were broadly flat in 2Q2020, deepening the weakness that started in 1Q2020 to reflect a growth of only 2.2 percent YTD, compared with a 36 percent surge in 2019.

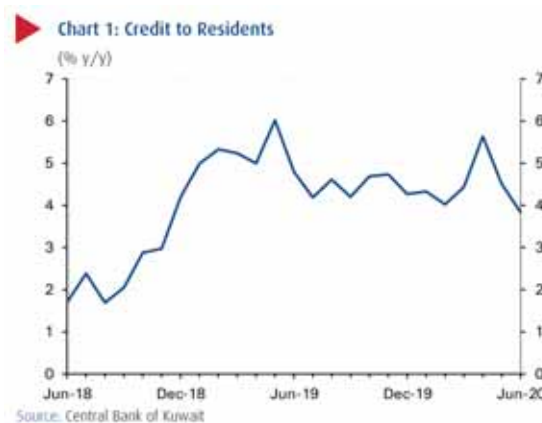
Credit to non-bank financial institutions was a drag on growth for the second quarter in a row, resulting in a 5.3 percent YTD decrease. Finally, credit to non-residents was flat in 2Q2020 resulting in a 4.3 percent YTD increase, and representing around 7 percent of total credit in the Kuwaiti banking sector by the end of June.



### Household credit flat in Q2 due to lockdown

Domestic deposit growth was strong in 2Q2020, standing at 3.6 percent q/q (+3.2 percent YTD, +2.3 percent y/y) and the fastest quarterly expansion in more than four years. This was fully driven by private sector deposits, which increased by 5.5 percent q/q (KD 1.85 billion), following three consecutive quarters of decrease. Two possible factors that could have contributed to the relatively high growth in private sector deposits in 2Q2020 are

1) weak consumer spending in 2Q2020, which



decreased by 23 percent q/q and 28 percent y/y given the lockdown measures (i.e. increase in savings at the expense of spending) and

2) the retail loan repayment holiday, which temporarily inflates both sides of banks' balance sheets. One point in favor of these possible explanations is that 91 percent of the increase in private sector KD deposits in 2Q2020 was in the form of sight/saving deposits as opposed to time deposits. On the other hand, government deposits slipped by 4 percent q/q, the first quarterly decrease in more than a year. Money supply (M2) tracked private sector deposits, increasing by 5.7 percent q/q. The high growth in domestic deposits in

2Q2020 was offset by a steep fall in non-resident deposits, which dropped by 4.2 percent q/q (KD 158 million) following a solid increase in each of the previous four quarters. The lower interest rates locally and/or banks' shedding of relatively expensive corporate deposits to support their net interest margins may have been reasons for this fall in non-resident deposits. By the end of June, non-resident deposits accounted for 7 percent of total deposits in the Kuwaiti banking sector. The banks' simple loans-to-deposits ratio stood at 87 percent at the end of June, slightly below the level one quarter before, and indicating ample room to increase lending going forward.

The gradual opening up of the economy will likely support loan growth going forward, especially in the context of the significant easing of capitalization and liquidity requirements by the Central Bank of Kuwait back in April, in addition to the record-low level of the discount rate (1.5 percent), which effectively made borrowing cheaper for corporate and retail customers. On the other hand, the outlook remains clouded with high uncertainty regarding the speed of the economic recovery and the success in controlling the virus especially as the economy fully opens up. This is expected to keep loan growth in check as banks would aim to safeguard their asset quality. In addition, expiry of the retail loan repayment holidays would naturally exert pressure on net loan growth in the latter part of 2020.

## Abdulaziz Al-Shaya elected Chairman of Boubyan Bank



Abdulaziz Abdullah Dakheel Al-Shaya



Fahad Al-Fouzan

**KUWAIT:** Boubyan Bank has announced the election of Abdulaziz Abdullah Dakheel Al-Shaya as Chairman of the bank's Board of Directors by acclamation, to succeed late Mahmoud Yousef Al-Fulaj, who passed away in the past week.

As per the usual procedures in these circumstances, the bank has announced last week the admission of Fahad Ahmad Al-Fouzan to the bank's board of directors, being the first substitute member during the last elections, while the board of directors has convened this Sunday and selected Al-Shaya as Chairman.

Al-Shaya joined Boubyan Bank's Board of Directors in 2009, and he enjoys 40+ years of experience in trading and real estate sectors as he manages one of the most renowned trading companies. As for Al-Fouzan, he has more than 30 years of experience in the banking sector, where he served in Boubyan Bank's executive management in 2012, and occupied a GM position until his resignation in 2015 in addition to his banking experience with NBK and KIB.

## Burgan Bank reveals winners of Yawmi account draw

**KUWAIT:** Burgan Bank announced yesterday the names of the daily draw winners of its Yawmi account draw, each taking home a cash-prize of KD 5,000.

### The lucky winners are:

1. Souad Abo Alalla Ibrahim
2. Tahssein Thabit Hussein Awad
3. Ghassan Mohammad Zein
4. Saud Abdulrahman Alsamakah
5. Safaa Mejren Essa Al-Loughani

In addition to the daily draw, Burgan Bank also offers a quarterly draw with more chances to win higher rewards, offering the chance to one lucky customer to win KD 125,000 every three months. The Yawmi Account offers daily and quarterly draws, wherein the quarterly draw requires customers to maintain a minimum amount of KD 500 in their account for two months prior to the draw date. Additionally, every KD 10 in the account will entitle customers to one chance of winning. If the account balance is KD 500 and above, the account holder will be qualified for both the quarterly and daily draws.

Burgan Bank encourages everyone to open a Yawmi account and/or increase their deposit to maximize their chances of becoming a winner. The higher the level of the deposit, the higher the likelihood to win.

## FinFirst, an app for financial services launched in Kuwait

**KUWAIT:** A new, secure mobile app marketplace that simplifies and accelerates financial services for the industry and consumer alike has been launched in Kuwait.

FinFirst, which is revolutionizing the industry providing transparent financial services at a customer's fingertips across four service streams: Business Banking; Consumer Banking, Auto Financing, and Insurance. The superapp has been founded by Abbas Hijazi, CEO of finfirstcapital, with a multi-national team of finance and technical experts.

"FinFirst creates immediate growth value for bank partners by acquiring real time high-profile prospects through matching their criteria to customer profiles," explained Hijazi. "For the consumer, FinFirst delivers a superior and personalized user experience available 24 hours a day, which is totally independent of any banking system, providing key product information specific to their requirements and enabling them to



Abbas Hijazi



Afrah Al-Hubail

apply and seek approval for loans and other financial services from the luxury and convenience of their home, office or even coffee shop."

At no cost to themselves, consumers can browse bank services and reviews, compare multiple product options, submit applications, and seal deals in a complete, end-to-end transaction. "This will make consumers savvy about the financial services available," explained Hijazi.

FinFirst will also enable a faster route for SMEs to raise business development funds with an easy sign up and application procedure and deliver essential time-saving approvals.

For banks, car agencies and insurance compa-

## Gulf Bank announces winners of Al-Danah weekly draw

**KUWAIT:** Gulf Bank held its weekly draw on 16th August 2020 announcing the names of the winners for the week of 9 - 13 August 2020. The weekly draw consists of five winners who receive KD 1,000 each, every week.

### The winners this week are:

Ahmad Abdulhussain Abdulbaqi Al-Bustan  
Ali Mohammad Ibrahim Al-Rughaib  
Fayez Alfayez  
Ahmed Abbas Hasan Ismaeil  
Ibrahim Feras Ibrahim Ishaq Alturkait

Al-Danah is now offering its biggest prize yet, with an annual draw prize of KD 1,500,000. The annual draw will be held on 14 January 2021, and the last chance to deposit into an Al-Danah account to participate is 30 September 2020.

Gulf Bank encourages customers to increase their chances of winning with Al-Danah by deposit-

## Al-Tijari announces winners of Al-Najma weekly draws

**KUWAIT:** Commercial Bank conducted the weekly draws on Al-Najma Account and Salary Transfer Campaign on August 16. The draws were conducted in the presence of Ministry of Commerce and Industry representative Ahmad Al-Basman.

### The results of the draws were as follows:

1 Al-Najma weekly account - the prize of KD 5,000 went to the winner Moussa Gaber Nassar Abdelali.

2 Salary account campaign - the prize of up to KD 1,000 went to the winner Amal Ali Al-Thuwaini.

The bank stated that the salary campaign is aimed at customers who transfer their salaries of KD 500 or more to the bank, especially Kuwaiti employees and residents working in the government, oil sectors and companies listed with the bank

ing more into their Gulf Bank accounts using the new ePay (Self-Pay) service, which is available on Gulf Bank's online and mobile banking services. Al-Danah offers a number of unique services to customers, including the Al-Danah Deposit Only ATM card, which allows account holders to deposit money into their accounts at their convenience. Account holders can also calculate their chances of winning the draws through the 'Al-Danah Chances' calculator available on the Gulf Bank website and app. Furthermore, loyal Al-Danah customers are rewarded with loyalty chances. Loyalty chances are the total chances accumulated from the previous year, which are added to the customer's chances the following year. Therefore, the total chances earned by Al-Danah customers in 2019, have been added to their 2020 chances, and the same process will take place in 2021, and so on. Terms and conditions apply.

Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account is open to Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents of Kuwait. Customers require a minimum of KD 200 to open an account and the same amount should be maintained for customers to be eligible for the upcoming Al-Danah draws. If the customer's account balance falls below KD 200 at any given time, a KD 2 fee will be charged to their account monthly until the minimum balance is met. Customers who open an account and/or deposit more will enter the weekly draw within two days.

as well as retirees, and take advantage of the benefits of this campaign and get an instant cash gift from KD 250 to KD 500 or an interest-free loan of five times the salary and a maximum of KD 10,000, in addition to the cash gifts, there will be a weekly draw for new and local Kuwaiti customers who transfer their salaries to the Bank to earn an amount equal to one salary of the salaries they receive monthly.

The Bank stated that Al-Najma Account prizes are distinguished by the highest cash prize and diversity of prizes throughout the year clarifying that the account offers weekly prize of KD 5,000, monthly prize of KD 20,000 and a semi-annual prize of KD 500,000 in addition to the largest prize - linked bank account payout of KD 1,500,000.

Al-Najma Account can be opened by depositing KD 100, and customer should maintain a minimum amount of KD 500 to be eligible to enter all draws on Al-Najma Account prizes. As for the chances of winning, the more balance a customer maintains in Al-Najma Account, the more chances the account holder will get to win, the account also offers additional benefits like the ATM card, a credit card against customer's account and all CBK banking services that customer can enjoy.

nies, FinFirst will offer round-the-clock digital exposure to over 100,000 customers, a client matching service, a more efficient customer service and data analytics via a tailored and embedded algorithm. "FinFirst enables financial service providers to effectively participate in the inevitable digital experience that consumers and SMEs now expect and to gain valuable insights that can empower them to make better informed decisions on improving their products and strategies," explained Afrah Al-Hubail, Chief Operation Officer. "The sector now has an end-to-end financial services aggregator and credit solution so it can serve customers quickly while our 'Pay as you lend' approach provides it with higher conversation rates and lower client acquisition costs." In its official pre-launch phase from March to June this year, FinFirst has notched up 100 percent month-on-month transactions growth and now boasts 4,000 customers mostly Kuwaitis of managerial level and has processed 85 loan applications valued at KD 10 million (\$32.5 million).

The company has international ambitions for the app planning to lead in five countries, and successfully partnered with local and international banks, financing companies in addition to retailer and car agencies with objective to close \$100 million in financial transactions by end of 2021.

## Thailand suffers biggest economic slump since 1998

**BANGKOK:** Thailand's economy suffered its biggest annual contraction since the Asian financial crisis in the second quarter due to the fallout of the coronavirus, prompting the government to slash its GDP forecast for the year and announce more stimulus.

Data from the state planning agency yesterday showed a 100 percent fall in foreign tourism dealt the biggest blow to Southeast Asia's second-largest economy, while the coronavirus and measures to curb it also hit consumption, private investment and exports.

New Deputy Prime Minister Supattanapong Punmeechaow told a media conference the government would announce more stimulus this month, "to support the economy and all groups of affected people," adding these would be discussed at a Aug 19 meeting. The data, which also showed a record contraction quarter-on-quarter, represents another headache for the government, also facing its biggest anti-government protests since the 2014 coup.

"Today's economic release underscores the collapse of aggregate demand, both externally and internally," said Kobsidthi Silpachai, head of capital markets research of Kasikornbank.

"Recovery will be lengthy as the shock to the demand and supply side has been the most severe in living memory."

Thailand's economy, which is heavily reliant on tourism and exports, shrank 12.2 percent in the second quarter from a year earlier after a revised 2.0 percent fall in the March quarter. It fell a record 9.7 percent on the quarter, on a seasonally adjusted basis. Economists in a Reuters poll had forecast the economy would shrink 13.3 percent year-on-year and fall 11.4 percent quarter-on-quarter.

The National Economic and Social Development Council (NESDC) cut its gross domestic product forecast for the year, expecting the economy to fall 7.3 percent-7.8 percent in 2020, having previously forecast a 5 percent-6 percent slump. The economy saw a record annual contraction of 7.6 percent in 1998.

While Thailand has lifted most curbs after seeing no local transmission of the coronavirus for over 80 days, its economy continues to suffer from tepid global demand and an ongoing ban on foreign visitor numbers. — Reuters



## Business

## KFH earnings webcast transcript H1 2020

**KUWAIT:** Ahmed Al-Kharji, Acting Group Chief Executive Officer at Kuwait Finance House (KFH) highlighted the financial performance for H1 2020.

He added during the Earnings Webcast T1H2020 that KFH has, by the grace of Allah, reported net profit of KD 56.9 million for the first half of 2020 for KFH shareholders; which represents a decrease of 47.1 percent compared to the same period last year. Yet and despite COVID-19 pandemic, KFH Group achieved an 18 percent increase in the Net financing income for the same period where the same reached KD 295.7 million.

Al-Kharji said that net operating income for the first half of the year reached KD 267.6 million which represent a growth of 11.2 percent compared to the same period last year. Total assets rose by KD 1.2 billion to reach KD 20.6 billion, representing a growth of 6.1 percent compared to end of last year 2019.

He pointed out that financing portfolio grew by 5.7 percent which is actually KD 528 million as an amount which will bring our financing portfolio to KD 9.9 billion for the first half of this year. Investment in Sukuk for the first half of 2020 reached KD 3.4 billion; an increase of KD 1.1 billion representing a growth of 49.3 percent compared to end of last year 2019.

Al-Kharji indicated depositors accounts reached KD 14.6 billion i.e., increasing by KD 1.0 billion or 7.6 percent compared to the end of last year. He said: "Needless to say, KFH enjoys a robust capital based reflected in capital adequacy ratio of 16.53 percent which is above the minimum required limit."

#### Fahad Al-Mukhaizeem, Group Chief Strategy Officer

Meanwhile, Eng Fahad Al-Mukhaizeem, Group Chief Strategy Officer, highlighted the Kuwait operating environment with an overview on KFH.

Al-Mukhaizeem pointed out that the Central Bank of Kuwait lowered the discount rate to 1.5 percent as a stimulus for the economy against the COVID-19 effect. On the other hand, the IMF expects around 1 percent decrease in GDP in 2020.

He added that KFH has supported the local economy during the coronavirus pandemic which included contributions to the dedicated government fund to combat the spread of COVID-19. KFH also postponed customer installments for six months providing further support for the corporates and SMEs. This comes in line with the KFH's commitment to its social and national responsibility.

Al-Mukhaizeem indicated that KFH benefitted from its digital strategy & FinTech innovations which allowed for a smooth customer experience during lockdowns, and the successful activation of the business continuity plan in emergency cases. He boasted KFH's online services proved their efficiency to meet customer needs, indicating customers benefited from Swift GPI, online gold purchasing and selling, Kuwait Clearing Co. dividend subscriptions, cardless withdrawals using QR code through mobile, in addition to many other high-quality digital banking services online.

As an overview of KFH's awards and ratings, Al-Mukhaizeem said that KFH won



Ahmed Al-Kharji



Fahad Al-Mukhaizeem



Shadi Zahran

many prestigious awards. Fitch and Moody's have affirmed long term ratings for KFH at A+ and A1 respectively. Moody's have recently changed their outlook from Stable to Positive and put the rating under review.

Furthermore, Al-Mukhaizeem said that KFH, through its more than 521 branches, continues to participate locally and regionally in key mega projects in such vital sectors as energy, water, infrastructure, and construction.

#### Shadi Zahran, Group Chief Financial Officer

Shadi Zahran, Group Chief Financial Officer said: "Given that Kuwaiti banks including KFH didn't publish financials for the first quarter of this year due to COVID 19 pandemic and local regulations, we will cover in this call In Sha' Allah the financial performance for KFH group for first quarter 2020, and first half 2020. However, we will cover first the full period H1-2020 then move to the first quarter results separately at the end."

Zahran added that KFH Group has achieved Net Profit After Tax (NPAT) attributable to Shareholders for the period ended 30th June 2020 of KD 56.9 million lower by KD (50.7) million or (47.1 percent) compared to same period last year of KD 107.7 million.

The lower profits is mainly due to higher provisions including precautionary provisions on potential COVID-19 consequences considering the uncertainty from current unprecedented regional and global situation. He added that the net financing income (NFI) has increased by KD 45.1 million or 18.0 percent compared to last year mainly on account of lower COF with significant improvement in Kuwait and Turkey.

The decrease in COF is due to decrease in benchmark rates, lower distributable profits impacting distribution to depositors, and the improvement in CASA deposits at group level. Net Operating income at KD 267.6 million increased by KD 26.9 million or 11.2 percent compared to H1-19; the increase is mainly from net financing Income by KD 45.1 million and net gain from Foreign currency transactions by KD 18.3 million offset by the decrease in Investment income by KD 24.2 million and fees and commissions by KD 9.5 million as a result of lower business and investment activities due to COVID 19 lockdown.

He went on to say that the decrease in investment income by KD 24.2 million is mainly attributable to prior year's gains, which led to drop in the contribution from investment income to total operating income to reach 9 percent compared to 15

percent last year. However, the other non-yielding income contribution remained at 21 percent of total operating income.

Total Operating Expenses at KD 152.1 million has increased slightly by KD 0.5 million or 0.3 percent compared to prior year same period. Cost to income ratio improved further by 24bps to reach 36.24 percent compared to H1-19, due to increase in operating income while maintaining the group expenses at the same level.

Furthermore, at KFH-Kuwait, C/I ratio at 32.6 percent which is significantly below the local Islamic Banks average of 43.6 percent and lower than local conventional Banks average of 36.6 percent (this calculated from published financials for 2019). Average Yielding Assets is up by 9.1 percent compared to 2019 and 10.3 percent compared to H1-19, resulted from the growth in financing receivables and Sukuk. (avg. YoY financing receivables is up by KD 0.5 billion and avg. sukuk is up by KD 1.0 billion)

Zahran indicated that the Group Net Financing Margin NFM at 3.22 percent shows a 19bps increase over H1-19 of average 3.03 percent. Average Yield decreased by (80) bps due to drop in DR by CBK and Fed rates. However average COF declined

quarter "pre-COVID-19" and contributed mainly from Kuwait and Turkey while other international banking entities demonstrated slower growth. I would like to highlight here that Group financing receivable is affected by the KD 96 million modification loss on consumer and installments financing receivables deferral of 6 months.

During the period, in response to COVID-19 pandemic Kuwaiti banks agreed to provide 6 months payments deferral for consumer and installments financing without charging the customers additional profits. Based on the regulatory directive issued by CBK as concessionary measures to mitigate the impact of COVID-19, the one-off modification losses of KD 96 million arising due to the 6-months payments holiday has been recognized directly in equity. However, for capital adequacy ratio, CBK allowed to phase out this charge equally over 4 years starting from 2021.

Investments in Sukuk at KD 3.4 billion increased by KD 1.1 billion or 49.3 percent since Dec-19 (58.1 percent compared to Jun 19) with major growth contribution from KTPB, mainly in Sovereign Sukuk. The growth in Sukuk portfolio was mainly in response to rapid growth in deposits with limited good quality financing opportunities available within the Group's overall Risk appetite in view of COVID-19. The group achieved significant growth in deposits in H1-20 of KD 1.0 billion or 7.6 percent (13.6 percent compared to Jun 19) with contribution from all banking operations reflecting depositors confidence in KFH group.

Additionally, the favorable deposits mix continues to show very healthy contribution from CASA deposits which now represents 50.5 percent of total group deposits as at the end of H1-20 compared to 44.3 percent at the end of 2019. It is

Coverage ratio (provision) for Group is 209 percent in H1-20 (2019: 231 percent). moving to first quarter performance, Zahran said: "For the period ended 31st March 2020, The Group achieved Net Profit After Tax attributable to Shareholders of KD 44.3 million lower by KD 7.3 million or (14.2 percent) compared to Q1-19 of KD 51.6 million. The lower profits were mainly due to higher provisions.

Net financing income (NFI) increased by KD 17.6 million or 13.7 percent compared to last year mainly on account of lower COF. Net operating income at KD 139.1 million increased by KD 20.9 million or 17.7 percent compared to Q1-19; the increase is mainly from net financing income by KD 17.6 million and net gain from foreign currency transactions by KD 8.9 million offset by the decrease in fees and commissions by KD 4.7 million.

Zahran added that there was a slight increase in investment income by KD 0.5 million as compared to Q1-19, however investment income and other non-yielding income contribution to total operating income both remained at same level of last year. Total assets by end of first quarter reached KD 20.0 billion representing an increase of KD 0.6 billion or 3.2 percent compared to Dec 2019.

He pointed out that financing receivables at KD 9.8 billion increased by 4.9 percent over 3 months period (Q1-20 vs. 2019). Growth in financing receivables contributed from Kuwait, Turkey and Bahrain despite market competition and challenges during first quarter while other international banking entities demonstrated slower growth focusing on asset quality. Investments in Sukuk reached KD 2.6 billion as of 31st March 2020 representing an increase of KD 0.3 billion or 12.2 percent since Dec-19, again with a major growth

- **Al-Kharji: 18% increase in the net financing income despite COVID-19 pandemic**
- **Al-Mukhaizeem: KFH benefitted from its digital strategy, succeeded in activating business continuity plan**
- **Zahran: KFH dominates local market in saving accounts with share of 40%**

by 99 bps due to increase in CASA in the major entities and drop in distributable profits. Net Operating Income contribution from banking activities improved by 3 percent to form 93 percent of Group Net Operating income

He added: "Now, with regards to provisions, the group total provisions and impairment charge for the period increased by KD 86.2 million or 86.2 percent to reach KD 186.2 million. Higher financing receivables and investments provisions are mainly on account of conservative provisions on potential consequences of COVID-19 Total Assets at KD 20.6 billion increased by KD 1.2 billion or 6.1 percent over 6 months period. (9.8 percent compared to Jun 19).

He said that financing receivables at KD 9.9 billion increased by 5.7 percent from Dec 2019, (6.8 percent compared to Jun 19). Significant portion of the Growth in financing receivables was during the first

also worth mentioning that KFH Kuwait dominates local market in saving accounts with share of 40.0 percent (as per CBK latest published reports, May-20).

Customer deposits as a percentage of total deposits at 82.2 percent reflecting healthy funding mix and shows robust liquidity. Looking at the key performance ratios for H1-20 compared to last year same period are as follow:

- ROAA decrease from 1.23 percent to 0.67 percent
  - ROAE decrease from 11.63 percent to 5.80 percent
  - C/I improved from 38.65 percent to 36.24 percent, and
  - EPS decrease from 28.68 fils to 15.06 fils
- NPL ratio increased to reach 2.23 percent (as per CBK calculation) in Jun-20 compared to 1.90 percent at Jun-19 (2019: 1.88 percent).

contribution from KTPB and mainly in Sovereign Sukuk.

The group deposits increased by KD 0.7 billion or 5.3 percent during the first quarter of this year reaching KD 14.3 billion, with contribution from all banking entities in KFH Group.

He concluded: "Customer deposits as a percentage of total deposits at 84.0 percent as at the end of Q1-20 reflects healthy funding mix and robust liquidity." Now, In the last slide looking at the key performance ratios for the first quarter 2020, compared to last year same period are as follow:

- ROAA decrease from 1.38 percent to 1.07 percent
- ROAE decrease from 11.26 percent to 8.79 percent
- C/I improved from 39.98 percent to 36.82 percent, and
- EPS decrease from 27.62 fils to 23.45 fils.

## Back to paddy fields: Virus smashes Indian middle-class dreams

**DUTTA NAGAR, India:** Until late March, Ashish Kumar was helping to make plastic boxes for Ferrero Rocher praline chocolates and the plastic spoons tucked inside Kinder Joy eggs to scoop out the milky sweet cream inside. With a diploma in plastic mold technology, the 20-year-old had a foot on his chosen career ladder. His younger brother Aditya chose law, but Ashish had his sights set on plastic.

"I want to start a business of my own," he said, explaining how he wants to recycle plastic to make day-to-day products at his own factory. India's coronavirus lockdown has thrown those plans into disarray. Educated but unemployed, Ashish Kumar is one of countless people across the globe whose social progress has been halted by the new coronavirus that has infected more than two million people in India alone, and thrown the economy into reverse. With it, the aspirations of millions are fading.

For years, people in rural India have been gaining prosperity and moving into what economists call a burgeoning middle class of consumers - those who earn more than \$10 a day, by some definitions. This group has been a keystone of plans for economic development in the world's second most populous country. In the COVID-19 pandemic, India's economy is forecast to shrink by 4.5 percent this year, according to the International Monetary Fund. At least 400 million Indian workers are at risk of falling deeper into poverty, according to the International Labor Organization (ILO).

Kumar is one of around 131,000 people who local officials estimate returned from working around India to Gonda, the district in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh that he left last June. Nationwide, about 10 million people made long, hard journeys back to rural villages they'd left. Some have gone back to the cities, but many of those who had been sending back funds are still stuck in the countryside. Working in a factory in Baramati in the western state of Maharashtra, Kumar was earning 13,000 rupees (\$173) every month, more

than twice his father's pay from a job in a grain market near Kumar's home village in Uttar Pradesh, a sprawling agrarian state. Of that, the young man was sending home around 9,000 rupees every month, much of which was helping to fund his younger brother's studies.

No longer. Once a provider for his family, now he has become a financial burden. Kumar whiles away his time back home in the village of Dutta Nagar, bantering with friends in the muddy courtyard - they jokingly call it their "office" - outside the ramshackle primary school where he studied. In Uttar Pradesh, around 60 million of the state's population of more than 200 million lives in poverty, according to the World Bank.

He said he has applied for several jobs at plastic factories in western Gujarat state and other parts of northern India but hasn't found work. "No matter what," he said, sitting near his parent's single-storey home, surrounded by jade green paddy fields. "I need a job."

#### Plastic for pralines

As a schoolboy, Kumar was obsessed with plastics. A chance conversation with a cousin who had studied

plastic engineering got him hooked, Kumar said, and he started researching. In Dutta Nagar, where there were no internet connections, that often meant asking one of a handful of locals with a smartphone to Google the opportunities. Kumar's ambitions were a world removed from his father Ashok's early years. The 47-year-old, who assists with weighing and pricing grain harvests, remembers when the family had neither enough food, or proper clothes.

A slight man with a weather-beaten face, he never finished high school. "I thought that the children shouldn't fall into our rut. They should be pushed ahead," he said. Kumar, who says he has never tasted a Ferrero Rocher praline, finished his diploma in Gujarat last June, and took the train to start work as a technician at an Italian-owned factory 1,500 km (930 miles) away from home.

The factory that employed him is run by Dream Plast India, a subsidiary of Gruppo Sunino SpA, an Italian plastics maker with 10 plants around the world. "The factory was first class," Kumar said. His contract included a monthly contribution from the company into a

retirement fund and a bonus. Workers were served one meal every day, the supervisors were friendly, and the salary came on time, he said. Six days a week, his work typically involved overseeing two machines and a couple of contract workers. At the end of the day, he would relax with a game of badminton or watch wrestling on YouTube. His income over the past year helped his parents build a proper four-roomed brick home, after decades of living in a tumble-down mud hut where the roof let in heavy monsoon rains. It helped pay the fees for his brother to go to law school in Baramati, an hour and a half's drive away from their home village. Then COVID-19 struck.

#### Broke in Baramati

Kumar first heard of the coronavirus in early March. When India's lockdown forced Dream Plast India to temporarily shut its plant in Baramati on March 21, he had enough cash to wait it out in town. As the pandemic swept through India, a survey of some 5,000 workers in April and May found 66 percent of participants had lost their jobs, and 77 percent of households were consuming less food than before. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government announced a 20 trillion rupee package promising free rice, wheat and pulses for millions of people and a programme to provide employment in rural areas.

Even for those with work, trade unions and labour experts say conditions are deteriorating, for migrants particularly.

In May, India's state governments issued health and safety guidelines for factories as they re-opened after lockdown, which included compulsory face masks, thermal screening, social distancing and frequent sanitisation. Union leaders allege many companies did not follow all protocols and cut corners, but they have not identified Kumar's. Indian states including Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat said in May they were looking to relax workers' rights, including weakening regulations on wages and working hours, to support industry. That proposal drew criticism from workers' unions and the ILO. The amendments have only taken effect in some states.

Kumar's factory, which reopened in early May, did not respond to a question on measures taken there, but Dream Plast India's managing director Nitin Gupta said in an email the "company takes utmost precautions to adhere to the laws at all times." He declined to elaborate further.—Reuters



Ashish Kumar is one of countless people across the globe whose social progress has been halted by the new coronavirus that has infected more than two million people in India alone, and thrown the economy into reverse. —Reuters



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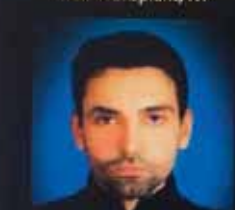
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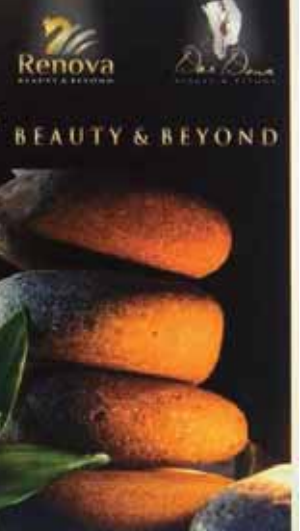
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## Lifestyle | Features



Climate activist Howey Ou (center), 17, stages a protest on a street in Guilin. — AFP photos



Climate activist Howey Ou is seen next to the first tree she planted outside her family home in Guilin.



Climate activist Howey Ou paints some signs and placards at her hotel in Guilin.



Signs and placards painted by Howey Ou are seen at her hotel in Guilin.



Howey Ou paints some signs and placards at her hotel in Guilin.



Howey Ou poses for a portrait.

## CHINA TEENAGE CLIMATE WARRIOR FIGHTS A LONELY BATTLE

While most of her peers are preparing for university or enjoying summer vacation, 17-year-old Howey Ou is braving intimidation and criticism in China to save the world from climate catastrophe. Young environmental activists around the world have skipped school to attend marches in protest at global inaction over climate change. But in China, grassroots social movements are heavily suppressed by the government, and the movement is severely lacking in participants. It has changed Ou's life though. She was inspired by Swedish teenage climate campaigner Greta Thunberg, and held her own week-long solo protest in May last year outside her local government buildings, gaining international recognition.

"The climate emergency is the biggest threat to the survival of mankind. I feel anxious every day about the climate and the extinction of animal species," said Ou, an intense figure who speaks in a fast monotone, reeling off a trove of scientific data from memory. "I feel like we're all on a sinking ship but everyone is still eating, drinking and being merry." While Thunberg has addressed global leaders at the UN Climate Action Summit and received awards for her work, the Chinese activist has been kicked out of school for refusing to give up her campaigning.

Known as Ou Hongyi in China, she has also faced run-ins with police, family pressure, and harsh online criticism. But the teenager says it is her "life mission" to sound the alarm before it is too late. She told AFP that although she "wasn't scared of the police", her parents were under pressure from authorities. "After I was interrogated by the police, my parents tried to stop me by all means, such as by keeping me at home, not letting me accept interviews or take part in the climate movement, and searching my electronic devices," she said. "One day I argued with them for eight hours. I found it very difficult and painful."

After her protest outside the government offices, she started planting trees in the surroundings of Guilin, the southern Chinese city where she lives, and studied methods of non-violent protest, poring over the works of Mahatma Gandhi. She has also tried to recruit more young people to join her cause, but most of the time she is a lone figure, carrying hand-painted placards as people walk by, oblivious.



Howey Ou shows the plastic bags she hides inside of her desk in her room at her family home in Guilin.

## 'Never oppose the government'

As her campaigning attracted more attention, Ou chose to move out of her family home—highly unusual for a minor in China—and now lives alone at a hostel in Guilin. Her parents worry about her safety, and her father is anxious that she may be lagging behind her peers due to start university. "I don't see a future for her if she stays on this road," her father, who did not wish to be named, told AFP. "I warned her never to oppose the government and the Party in her activism." Ou, however, insists she is not trying to go against authorities, and sees it instead as "a question of morality".

## Lone journey

Ou has thousands of followers on social media but has struggled to find wider support within China. Last summer she travelled solo around the country on a shoestring, meeting with environmental NGOs and activists. But she says many had little understanding of the climate crisis—and the journey formed the loneliest period of her life. "I didn't know the way and didn't know what kinds of people in China would support me... I felt like I was in a very open and empty place, isolated and cut off from support," she recalled.

Then last October, she faced criticism from millions online when a German media interview with her went viral on Chinese social media. Many accused her of attention-seeking and "armchair activism", while others made unflattering comparisons to Thunberg, who is a frequent object of ridicule on the Chinese internet. She avoided



Howey Ou paints some signs and placards at her hotel in Guilin.

social media for several months after that. During the hardest moments, Ou says she drew comfort and strength from the spectacular natural scenery in her hometown—something she has enjoyed since childhood. "My reconnection with nature helped me to see my own value," she said.

Ou believes the Chinese public are either ignorant or dismissive of the climate crisis, but she still hopes to build a youth movement, like her idol Thunberg. "There are many young Chinese people who may only need a bit of encouragement to bravely step forward. But if my voice does not reach them... we can't unite," she said. "So right now I am trying my hardest to make sure my voice gets heard." — AFP



Howey Ou stages a protest on a street and talks to youths in Guilin.

## SHOW GOES ON FOR FRENCH HOLIDAYS IN SUMMER LIKE NO OTHER

French resorts and holiday destinations are buzzing at the height of the season despite the pandemic but, with foreigners staying away and the shadow of the coronavirus looming large, this is no ordinary summer. A weeks-long summer holiday, often taken at home rather than abroad, is an annual sacred ritual for the French and the government actively encouraged people to go on vacation to help prop up an economy already ravaged by the pandemic.

The glitzy Mediterranean resort of Saint-Tropez—usually a magnet for the international jet-set—is far from empty but it is domestic tourists who are filling the town and not free-spending foreign visitors. "In summer, we normally have 85 percent international visitors and 15 percent French visitors. This year, 60 percent of the visitors are French," Claude Maniscalco, the head of the Saint-Tropez tourist office told AFP. There are foreign visitors from neighboring countries but the absence of tourists from further afield is the most marked difference, said senior municipal official Georges Giraud. "We have a wealthy French and European clientele, who

stay in high-end establishments. But they do not spend lavishly like our Russian or American visitors," he told AFP.

The resort of Saint-Tropez remains a byword for decadent glamour thanks to its associations with artists Matisse and Picasso but above all with the actress Brigitte Bardot who fell in love with the town while filming 1950s erotic classic "And God Created Woman" and still lives there. Jean-Francois Tourret, head of the Saint-Tropez marina, said that his port was even busier than last year but the trends were indeed very different with more French boats and no super yachts from Russia or the Gulf docking. "We are doing better than last summer, our port is almost full every evening, however we have fewer yachts and more boats under 40 meters," he said.

## 'Masks in the heat'

But this, as President Emmanuel Macron had already warned France, is a "summer like no other" and not even holidaymakers can escape the shadow of the coronavirus. With infection rates now on the rise across France, Saint-Tropez this month made mask-wearing



A woman wearing a face mask walks past the closed 'Le Cafe Senequier' situated along the Quai Jean Jaures, on the Saint-Tropez harbour, as the city made wearing a protective mask mandatory in the town center due to a resurgence in the COVID-19, coronavirus.



People wearing face masks walk past 'Le Cafe Senequier' situated along the Quai Jean Jaures, on the Saint-Tropez harbour. —AFP photos



Yachts are moored along the Quai Jean Jaures in the Saint-Tropez harbor.

obligatory outside after a spate of cases in bars and restaurants. Night clubs are still shut across France but this has not stopped impromptu parties taking place on beaches and in homes which can then become clusters for the spread of infections.

More bad news came this week when the British government imposed 14-day quarantine on travellers from France, which is likely to reduce the number of UK visitors to just a trickle. "Having to wear a mask in this heat is going to make tourists cancel," fretted Chloe Coulomb, who said that until now sales in the high-end leather goods shop that she manages had been steady. nAt the Trois-Palmiers hotel, the receptionist says she has taken a dozen cancellations since the mask measure was announced. "It's a shame, the hotel was full every night, it needed to stay that way," she said. The famous Senequier Cafe, a favoured haunt of Bardot, has

been temporarily shuttered after some staff tested positive for the coronavirus.

## 'Normally fully booked'

Further inland in Provence, the southern French city of Avignon was dealt a hammer blow with the cancellation of its world famous annual theatre festival which usually runs for several weeks in the summer. "We had just 20 percent of hotel rooms filled in July whereas normally everything is fully booked up one year in advance," said Grazia Scarcelli of the Hotel du Palais. The season has been a disaster for restaurants in Avignon. "In streets usually thronged with festivalgoers, there has been an 80 percent fall in custom," said Patrice Mounier, head of the regional hospitality sector association.

River cruises have largely been axed and the number of visitors at the gothic Palais des Papes world heritage site has plummeted to 2,500 daily com-

pared to a peak of 6,000 in August 2019. It is the same story in neighboring Arles where the annual photography festival—which normally brings in tens of thousands of visitors—has been axed. But according to Mounier, it is not all bleak news, with the picturesque villages of the Luberon region of Provence and high-end offerings holding their own despite the crisis. In the small town of L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue outside Avignon, tourists through the narrow streets renowned for their antiques shops.

In her shop specializing in truffles, Michelle Colomina enjoyed a 40 percent increase in sales thanks largely to Germans, Dutch and Swiss with French tourists now providing a boost in August. The rest of France will be hoping that trend is repeated across the country. — AFP



# Lifestyle | Features



Stained glass maker Maya Hussein works inside her workshop in Hazmiyeh, Lebanon. — Reuters photos



A man walks past the 19th century Saint Louis Capuchin Cathedral in the Bab Idriss district of Beirut's historic city centre, in the aftermath of a massive explosion in Beirut, Lebanon.



A view shows damaged stained glass at the 19th century Saint Louis Capuchin Cathedral in the Bab Idriss district of Beirut's historic city centre, in the aftermath of a massive explosion in Beirut, Lebanon.

## A LIFE'S WORK SHATTERED: STAINED GLASS ARTIST COUNTS COST OF BEIRUT BLAST

Two decades of Maya Hussein's work to restore stained glass windows destroyed in the Lebanese civil war was lost in an instant in the seismic port explosion in Beirut. "I can say that in this blast, 20 years of my professional life was on the ground," said Hussein, 60, who has worked on historic landmarks including many of Beirut's churches. "Part of me has gone." The Aug 4 detonation of a massive quantity of explosive chemicals

stored unsafely at Beirut port killed at least 178 people, injured some 6,000 and damaged buildings across a swathe of Beirut, carpeting streets in broken glass. Damaged buildings included the Sursock Museum, a modern and contemporary art museum reopened in 2015, whose vibrant stained glass had been painstakingly restored by Hussein. Its windows, which were particularly eye-catching at night when they were

illuminated, were blown out by the blast. At least 10 of the projects Hussein has worked on since the 1975-90 civil war have been destroyed. "Every day I am getting phone calls," she said at her workshop on the outskirts of Beirut. Hussein learnt her craft in France, sent by her father, a church engineer who used to order stained glass from overseas as leaded, stained glass was not common in Beirut prior to the war.

One of the projects in which she took greatest pride was the 19th century St Louis Capuchin Cathedral in the Bab Idriss district of Beirut's historic city centre, an area where she recalls going to drink lemonade with her friends as a child. The windows of the church, which was destroyed in the war, were restored by Hussein over two years in a project completed around four years ago. "I had tried, as much as possible, to feel the history of this church," she said. "At

that point I broke down, it was as if I was injured, certainly not physically, but emotionally." Hussein said she had been thinking about stopping work in two years but her plans had now changed. "Even if 20 years of my work has gone - and perhaps I won't last in this work for another 20 years ... we will rebuild." — AFP



This photo shows people watching a performance as they cool off in a swimming pool in Wuhan in China's central Hubei province. — AFP

## Humans off the hook? Climate change killed woolly rhinos, says study

A woolly brown rhinoceros that weighed two tons once roamed northeastern Siberia before mysteriously disappearing around 14,000 years ago. Was its demise caused by humans, or the warming climate of the time? A new study by a Swedish and Russian team of scientists who examined DNA fragments from the remains of 14 of these prehistoric mammals lets our species off the hook. They say the population of the animal—also known by its scientific name *Coelodonta antiquitatis*—remained stable for millennia as they lived alongside humans, before dropping sharply toward the end of the last ice age. "That makes it more likely that climatic changes that happened around 14,000 years ago are the primary driver of extinction, rather than humans," Love Dalen, a geneticist at Sweden's Centre for Palaeogenetics, told AFP. Dalen led the study that was published in the journal *Current Biology* on Thursday. How did they reach that conclusion from DNA strands taken from the remains of animals frozen in the soil for thousands of years? The size of a population of a species is proportional to its level of genetic diversity and the degree of inbreeding, said Dalen. The team were able to analyze the complete genome of one rhinoceros dating from 18,500 years ago. By comparing the chromosomes inherited from the mother and from the father, they determined inbreeding was low and

diversity was high. "One individual's genome is a mosaic of all its ancestors," explained Dalen. "18,000 years ago, that rhino belonged to a large population, and its ancestors must also have belonged to a large population" going back tens of thousands of years. From other animals they were able to harvest mitochondrial genomes—which are passed down from the mother—and from this could estimate the size of the female populations over time. Humans arrived in this part of Siberia 30,000 years ago. Though they hunted the rhinos, the animal's population remained steady for 12,000 more years until an abrupt period of warming known as the Bolling-Allerod. The same team previously published the genome of another megaherbivore, the woolly mammoth—and believe this species likewise went extinct due to climate change, not human hunting. Their conclusions are still being debated among the scientific community. A key difference is that the mammoths went extinct twice: the ones on mainland Siberia disappeared around the same time as the rhinos, but a few hundred survived on Wrangel Island six millennia longer. Today, the closest living relative of the woolly rhino is the Sumatran rhino. Frequently poached and facing the destruction of their habitat, there are fewer than 80 left in existence. Here, no one can argue that humans are free of blame. — AFP



This undated handout image shows a preserved woolly rhinoceros (*Coelodonta antiquitatis*) from the Kolyma region. — AFP

## Offshore refueling deepens fears for S Africa's penguin haven

Generators hum loudly in the background as a tour boat bobs past a towering vessel filled with ship fuel, anchored in Algoa Bay, a stone's throw away from the world's largest breeding colony of African penguins. Mid-way along the Europe-Asia sea route, the bay's deep-water port was an obvious choice for South Africa's first offshore bunkering operation. Since 2016, mostly cargo ships have pulled in for ship-to-ship (STS) refueling, allowing them to carry more freight, bypass port fees and save time. But conservationists, ecotour operators and nature lovers are alarmed about the long-term impact in a marine biodiversity hotspot and major foreign tourist magnet. They claim the bunkering takes place too close to foraging and breeding grounds, disrupting the ecosystem and exposing sea animals to oil spills. The risk has been highlighted by the catastrophic oil spill which began earlier this month into a protected marine park off the pristine coastline of Mauritius, after a bulk carrier ran aground on July 25. With the main storage tanker in Algoa Bay able to hold 100,000 metric tons of fuel, opponents fear a potentially massive leak. In two minor spills, in 2017 and 2019, rangers rescued dozens of oil-tarred penguins. Scientists are also studying whether the noise, pollution and increased ship traffic could affect the marine animals. They are particularly worried that vibrations caused by the activity may drive away those that rely on sonar to hunt fish. "This is too close to the Marine Protected Area, there are too many risks involved..." warned environmental scientist Ronelle Friend, of the Algoa Bay Conservation community group, calling for an end to bunkering in the bay.

### Follow the sardines

Algoa Bay—an inlet off the city of Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape province—is home to myriad species of seabirds, including just under half the global population of African penguins, classed as endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. The world's largest group of bottlenose dolphins was recorded in the bay in 2018, according to a report last year by the Port Elizabeth-based Nelson Mandela University. The site is also on the path of an annual sardine run, touted as one of the planet's most spectacular marine events. "This (bunkering) operation is slap-bang in the middle of a hotspot for bait fish that birds feed on," said veteran whale watcher and tour operator Lloyd Edwards, who has run his Raggy Charters marine tours in the area for over two decades. "People used to be blown away by the amount of animals we had in this bay," he said, adding he'd noticed that certain whale species were not easy to spot since the STS refueling started. "They have all moved away," he complained, blaming the noise.

### 'Safe, regulated, environmentally friendly'

Three maritime companies have acquired bunkering licences since 2016. Between them, they operate the main storage vessel and up to seven smaller bunker barges, according to Kosta Argyros, the South Africa representative for one of the three, Minerva Bunkering. Sat on a key trade route, sea traffic has increased as a result of the fuelling hub, conservationists said. Argyros stressed

that bunkering was a "safe operation" in a "very regulated industry". When "two vessels are tied together they become like one entity," he told AFP.

"This is environmentally friendly no matter what the people say," South African Marine Fuels, which was behind the July 2019 spill, said it "occurred due to an overflowing tank of the receiving vessel" and that between 200 and 400 litres (53 and 106 gallons) of oil fell into the sea. The company "is highly committed to the safety of its operations and responsibility to people and the environment," it said in a statement to AFP. Heron Marine, the third licensed company, said it operated according to all health, safety and environmental regulations.



A volunteer moves a baby African penguin rescued from Algoa Bay at the SANCCOB seabird rehabilitation center in Port Elizabeth.

### Sludge-covered penguins

About 100 oiled penguins were recovered from last year's spill. Seabird scientist Lorian Pichegru said that, while damage from the incident had been limited, bunkering posed yet another threat to a species whose global population fell below 40,000 last year. "The oil on their feathers takes away their waterproofness," said the Nelson Mandela University researcher, who has been studying African penguins in Algoa Bay since 2007. Eventually they die of "starvation and cold", plus oiled adults tend to abandon their eggs and chicks, she added. In attempting to clean themselves, the birds also ingest toxins shown to damage their internal organs and breeding capacity. African penguins, distinct by their bray-like call and black horseshoe marking across their chest, only breed in South Africa and Namibia but are found in Mozambique too. Over three decades, their numbers have fallen by more than 60 percent due to climate change, oil spills, human activity, overfishing and habitat destruction, experts say. In Algoa Bay, the population has also fallen sharply—from 10,900 breeding pairs in 2015, to 6,100 in

2019, according to figures from South Africa's Environmental Affairs department. "Any additional threat to them might kill the entire species," Pichegru warned.

### Bad vibrations?

Parts of Algoa Bay last year were declared a Marine Protected Area. The 2019 university report on the Eastern Cape coastline, centered around the bay, also highlighted that it was a foraging area for seabirds, sharks, cetaceans and turtles, on the migration route for loggerhead and leatherback turtles and home to the world's largest Cape gannet colony. However, scientists and conservationists say they have observed changes in animal behavior which they suspect are a consequence of bunkering activity—even without spillage.

"We think the noise of the engines disrupts the penguins' and dolphins' ability to find fish," said Gary Koekemoer, who heads the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa in Algoa Bay. "Any animal that is using sonar or sound to locate its prey will have difficulty navigating with the vibration from the engines."

### Jobs at stake

The loss of marine life could be devastating for tourism. Ocean safaris have boomed in recent years, with visitors contributing more than nine billion rand (\$507 million) to the surrounding Nelson Mandela Bay (NMB) municipality in 2018. Tourism generates some 40,000 direct and indirect jobs in the area, according to municipal figures. "Beaches and wildlife are the two big drawcards for visitors and... offshore bunkering is bound to impact both of those," Shaun Fitzhenry, NMB Tourism board chairman, said. The South African Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA), which licensed the bunkering operators, said STS refueling generated employment but had to be balanced with environmental concerns.

"We need to sustain the protected area, but we need to use the opportunity to develop the economy," SAMSA acting chief executive Sobantu Tilayi told AFP. "That is the balance we keep navigating around." Since the 2019 spill, bunkering times have been limited, barges carry more oil containment booms and several response boats are on constant standby in case another leak occurs. Kevin Kelly, owner of oil spill response company Xtreme Projects, agreed that bunkering had created "a lot" of jobs and a budding ship chandler industry. But, out at sea, skipper Jake Keeton frowns, concerned at the sight of an unusually small cluster of penguins nesting on the outcrops of a rocky island. —AFP



A volunteer moves a baby African penguin rescued from Algoa Bay. —AFP Photos



## Sports

## Photo of the Day



Parkour professional Dimitris Kyrsanidis performs in Panama. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

## Marco Andretti captures pole for 104th Indy 500

**WASHINGTON:** Marco Andretti edged Scott Dixon for pole position in the 104th Indianapolis 500 with a dramatic final qualifying run Sunday, following famed grandfather Mario onto the pole 33 years later.

In treacherously windy conditions at Indianapolis Motor Speedway, Andretti had a four-lap qualifying average of 231.068 mph around the 2 1/2-mile (4km) oval to defeat New Zealand's Dixon by 0.017 mph with Japan's Takuma Sato completing the front row for next Sunday's race.

"Fantastic. I mean it was unbelievable," car owner and proud father Michael Andretti said. "The car was so loose and he didn't take his foot off the throttle. He drove the hell out of it. "He did a hell of a job."

No Andretti had sat on the pole since Mario in 1987, Marco's best start on the outside of row one in 2013. But a tense run enabled him to change that. "For me, I started feeling it lap two, which meant it was going to be a long couple of laps," Andretti said. "Lap three and four was sketchy."

Marco Andretti has won only twice in 236 starts over 15 IndyCar seasons, his best Indy 500 showing a near-miss runner-up effort in his 2006 debut. But starting on the inside of row one helps his chances.

"Best seat in the house," he said. "Speed is always good here, and man, horsepower is so cool." Since Mario Andretti won the 1969 Indy 500, members of the family have spent a half-century trying to do it again.

"Actually I thought of him because today I walked out of the motorhome, it was pretty windy," Marco Andretti said of his 80-year-old granddad. "He has a famous quote — within us, he doesn't say it to many people — he says, 'The wind will scare you but it will never crash you.'"

"Today, he was right. It was pretty awesome." Saturday's nine fastest qualifiers for the field of 33 advanced to Sunday's pole battle to decide the starting order in the front three rows for the race, postponed from May 24 and to be staged without spectators due to the COVID-19 pandemic. — AFP

# Rossi fumes after miracle escape in 300 km/h Austrian MotoGP crash

‘The saint of motorcyclists today did a really great job, it was a very dangerous thing’

**SPIELBERG BEI KNITTLEFELD:** World motorcycling superstar Valentino Rossi said a rival's stray bike, travelling at around 300 km/h (187mph), almost "killed me" in a horrifying near-miss at the Austrian Grand Prix on Sunday.

The 41-year-old Italian, a nine-time world champion, was left badly shaken after Franco Morbidelli's Yamaha flew across the track just centimetres in front of him. Morbidelli and the Ducati of Johann Zarco had collided just seconds before the riders slipped through turn four at Spielberg on lap eight of the race. Both men were unseated.

Zarco's free-wheeling Ducati also came desperately close to hitting Rossi as well as his Yamaha factory teammate Maverick Vinales who was just ahead of him. "Morbidelli's bike nearly killed me," fumed Rossi. "Even Zarco's Ducati passed a few metres over me, it was a very dangerous moment." Incredibly, Rossi managed to compose himself and after the race was restarted came home in fifth place. "I was so scared. I am shaken, resuming the race was tough. I took the biggest risk of my career," Rossi told Sky Italia. "I saw a shadow, I thought it was the helicopter from above, sometimes it happens during the race that the helicopter passes over and casts a shadow. Instead, two 'bullets' arrived. "The saint of motorcyclists today did a really great job, it was a very dangerous thing."

Morbidelli, possibly a teammate of Rossi's next season at the Yamaha satellite team, did not mince his words. "Zarco is almost a murderer," Morbidelli told

Sky Sport Italia. "Braking like this at 300 km/h means having little love for yourself or for those you are racing against. "I hope this major incident makes Zarco think. It was really dangerous for me, him, for Rossi and Vinales who were up front and saw a bike coming at them at 280 per hour."

Rossi insisted that too many MotoGP riders take too many risks and fail to understand that "our bikes, at these speeds, are bullets". He added: "We're competing in a very dangerous sport, you have to have respect for those who run on the track with you," added Rossi after a race won for the second year in succession by Andrea Dovizioso on a factory Ducati.

"Zarco is not new to these things, what happened is very clear: Zarco overtook Morbidelli on the straight and then didn't want to be overtaken by Franco, so he specifically went to brake in front of him. "But at 300 km/h, being a MotoGP, Morbidelli was unable to do anything. Zarco braked in front of him, Franco couldn't do anything," Zarco, the 30-year-old French rider, said he was unsure what caused the crash.

However, he claimed he was innocent of any wrongdoing. "I feel like Morbidelli's bike pushed me. I was able to overtake him in the straight line, I was already well ahead and, when braking, I swerved to the right and that's where we hit," he said. "It was not a manoeuvre done on purpose and I explained it to Franco and Valentino. But seeing the two motorcycles completely destroyed was scary. "We must have been at 270 km/h at the time of the accident."



SPIELBERG: Monster Energy Yamaha's Italian rider Valentino Rossi (L) and Monster Energy Yamaha' Spanish rider Maverick Vinales compete during the Moto GP Austrian Grand Prix at the Red Bull Ring circuit in Spielberg, Austria. — AFP

Vinales eventually finished 10th and is third in the championship standings, 19 points behind series leader Fabio Quartararo. "I just heard the scratching sound of crashed bikes and then I felt the impact of Johann's bike hitting the wall," said the Spaniard.

"Then, when I looked, I saw one bike coming towards me and I covered my head and the bike jumped up. For sure we were very lucky today, someone saved us, and this is the most important."

Earlier, in the Moto2 race, Malaysia's Hafiz Syahrin also had a narrow escape when he crashed into the bike of Italian Enea Bastianini which was lying in the middle of the track after a fall. Syahrin hit the machine at full speed, sending him through the air, smashing his bike into pieces. The stricken Syahrin was treated on the track and rushed into an ambulance with his team saying the rider was conscious. He only suffered an injured hip. — AFP

## Herman edges Horschel to capture third career US PGA title

**WASHINGTON:** Jim Herman fired an eagle and seven birdies in a seven-under par 63 on Sunday to capture his third US PGA Tour title at the Wyndham Championship in Greensboro, North Carolina.

Herman followed up his career-low round of 61 with another sparkling effort at Sedgefield Country Club, where his 21-under par total of 259 gave him a one-stroke triumph over former FedEx Cup champion Billy Horschel. The win in the final regular-season event before the US tour's playoffs begin also vaulted Herman from 192nd — outside the playoff field — to 54th in the FedEx Cup standings. That gets him into the 125-man Northern Trust at TPC Boston next week with room to spare. "Oh my gosh, obviously (I'm) ecstatic," said the 42-year-old Herman, his voice breaking. "It's tough to put into words what this means." Herman picked up where he left off on Saturday with 29-foot birdie putt at the first, followed by a tap-in birdie at the fourth and a 60-foot eagle putt at the fifth.

After his lone bogey at the sixth, he rolled in a 14-foot birdie at the 14th and a five-footer at 13. Another birdie at the par-five 15th moved him to 20-under. But Horschel, who also eagled the fifth, rolled in his fifth birdie of the day at the 15th to reach 21-under.

Herman seized the lead with a three-foot birdie at the 17th as Horschel bogeyed 16. Horschel had birdie looks

of 12 and nine feet at the last two holes but couldn't get either putt to drop.

Herman added a third title to those he won at the 2016 Houston Open and 2019 Barbasol Championship. But he certainly didn't see a victory coming after a tough weekend at the PGA Championship at Harding Park last week — nor after he needed to birdie three of his last four holes at Sedgefield on Friday just to make the cut.

"I came here with no expectations, pretty much," said Herman, who had missed the cut in eight of his last 11 starts. "After four holes I had missed every fairway," he added, saying he told his caddie it looked like being a short week. "It just shows that in golf anything is possible," Herman said. "If you get your attitude right and make a few putts, anything can happen." Horschel, who out-duelled Rory McIlroy to win the 2014 Tour Championship and claim that year's FedEx Cup title, was chasing a sixth career crown.

"It's a little disappointing," the 33-year-old said. "I had two good looks on the last two holes — I thought I would make one of them." Overnight leader Kim Si-woo of South Korea, who was seeking a third tour title after he won the 2016 Wyndham and the 2017 Players Championship, carded an even par 70 to share third on 262 with Americans Kevin Kisner, Webb Simpson and Doc Redman. — AFP

## Sports weekend in quotes

**PARIS:** Who said what over the sporting weekend: "One day we'll break this gap to the quarter-finals."

— Man City coach Pep Guardiola after his team were knocked out of the Champions League by Lyon, 3-1. Guardiola is yet to get beyond the last eight in his four years in charge of City.

"Different year, same stuff. We need to learn, it's not good enough."

— City's Belgian star Kevin De Bruyne.

"We eliminated a Juventus side who were one of the contenders to win the Champions League, and a Manchester City side who were contenders to win the Champions League. Bayern will be exactly the same."

— Lyon coach Rudi Garcia on facing Bayern Munich for a place in the final.

"Losing is not acceptable. Getting to semi-finals isn't acceptable but the best team lost."

— Manchester United defender Harry Maguire after the 2-1 loss to Sevilla in the Europa League semi-finals.

"Thanks a lot for your love and support throughout. From 1929hrs consider me as retired."

— India cricket icon MS Dhoni announces his retirement from the international game.

"What you've done for the country will always remain in everyone's heart."

— Current India captain Virat Kohli on Dhoni.

"I was in a daze, just another zone."

— Lewis Hamilton after winning the Spanish Grand Prix for a record 156th podium finish. It was his 88th victory.

"At the moment, I have to say that he drives in a league of his own."

— Mercedes chief Toto Wolff on Hamilton.

"Morbidelli's bike nearly killed me. The saint of motorcyclists today did a really great job, it was a very dangerous thing."

— Valentino Rossi, who escaped serious injury or worse at the Austrian Grand Prix, when the bike of the unseated Franco Morbidelli flew past him at 300kmh and missed him by just centimetres.

"We have hit rock bottom. Tonight was unacceptable for Barcelona. It was a disgrace."

— Barcelona defender Gerard Pique after the 8-2 Champions League humiliation at the hands of Bayern Munich.

"It's done my swede in!"

— Veteran English snooker player Jimmy White after the world championship semi-final between Kyren Wilson and Anthony McGill. Wilson won 17-16 after McGill missed a snooker eight times in a row before Wilson fluked a green to effectively seal victory. — AFP



## Sports

# White Sox hit four straight home runs to beat Cardinals

## Rays beat Blue Jays in extras to take series

**CHICAGO:** Yoan Moncada, Yasmani Grandal, Jose Abreu and Eloy Jimenez connected on four consecutive home runs in the fifth inning to tie a major league record, and Dallas Keuchel pitched 5 2/3 strong innings to lift the host Chicago White Sox to a 7-2 victory over the St. Louis Cardinals on Sunday afternoon. Limited to two hits in four innings against St. Louis starter Dakota Hudson — including a Jimenez RBI single in the first — the White Sox erupted for six runs against rookie reliever Roel Ramirez. Moncada began the long-ball barrage with two on and two out, snapping an 0-for-14 skid with a blast against Ramirez (0-1), who is the first pitcher to give up four consecutive homers in his major league debut. It was the second time in club history that Chicago hit back-to-back-to-back-to-back home runs. The White Sox also accomplished the feat on Aug. 14, 2008. Keuchel improved to 3-2 and earned his first victory since July 31, giving up two runs and four hits with two walks and one strikeout in 5 2/3 innings.

### RAYS 7, JAYS 5 (8 INNINGS)

Wily Adames hit a tiebreaking two-run home run in the eighth inning as Tampa Bay defeated Toronto in the rubber match of a three-game series in Buffalo, N.Y. Yoshi Tsutsugo added a three-run homer and a double for the Rays, who tied the game at 5 in the top of the seventh. Austin Meadows singled and scored when right fielder Teoscar Hernandez made an error fielding a two-out single by Yandy Diaz. The game was scheduled for seven innings as it followed the Rays' 3-2 victory in a nine-inning game that was carried over to Sunday after being suspended because of rain on Saturday. Aaron Loup (3-0) pitched the bottom of the seventh to get his second win of the day. Aaron Slegers pitched a perfect eighth for his first save this season.

### DIAMONDBACKS 5, PADRES 4

Eduardo Escobar's three-run home run with two outs in the bottom of the eighth inning rallied Arizona past San Diego in Phoenix. Escobar, who had hit just one home run and was batting .167 going into Sunday, connected off Emilio Pagan (0-1)

with Arizona trailing 4-2. Taylor Clarke (1-0) got the win in relief, and Archie Bradley worked the ninth inning for his sixth save. The Diamondbacks won their fourth straight game and 10th consecutive home game over the Padres. San Diego has lost five in a row. Kole Calhoun also homered for Arizona, and Eric Hosmer hit a two-run homer shot for the Padres.

### BRAVES 4, MARLINS 0

Nick Markakis drove in three runs to lead Atlanta's victory over host Miami, giving the visitors the series win 2-1. Atlanta scored all four runs against Miami's bullpen. Offensively, the Marlins managed just one walk and two hits — both singles — and were shut out for the first time this season. The Marlins — after a 7-1 start — have lost five of their past seven games. On Sunday, the Braves used five pitchers. Starter Robbie Erlin tossed four scoreless innings, striking out five, walking none and allowing just one hit. The Braves also got scoreless relief pitching from Darren O'Day (2-0), A.J. Minter, Shane Greene and Tyler Matzek.

### PHILLIES 6, METS 2

J.T. Realmuto had three hits, rookie Alec Bohm added two hits and an RBI, and host Philadelphia completed a three-game sweep over New York. Andrew McCutchen smacked a two-run homer — his first of the season — and Bryce Harper and Scott Kingery contributed two hits each for the Phillies, who swept the Mets for the first time since 2015. Phillies starter Zack Wheeler (3-0) tossed seven strong innings and gave up six hits and two runs in his first outing against his former team. He struck out four and walked one. Luis Guillorme drove in two runs while Robinson Cano and J.D. Davis had two hits apiece for the Mets. Mets starter Rick Porcello (1-3) lasted six innings and allowed 10 hits and four runs while striking out six and walking none.

### ATHLETICS 15, GIANTS 3

Stephen Piscotty homered and drove in five runs as Oakland mauled host San Francisco to complete a three-game sweep of its Bay Area rival. Chad Pinder and Marcus Semien joined Piscotty in home-



**CHICAGO:** Tim Anderson #7 of the Chicago White Sox steals second base in the first inning against Kolten Wong #16 of the St. Louis Cardinals at Guaranteed Rate Field in Chicago, Illinois. — AFP

ring during a nine-run fifth-inning uprising. Matt Olson went 3-for-5 with three runs scored and Pinder went 3-for-4 despite not starting as the Athletics racked up 17 hits. The win is the fourth in a row for Oakland, which owns a major league-best 16-6 record. The Giants have dropped four straight to fall to 8-15. The easy manner of victory on Sunday differed from the Athletics' efforts in the first two games of the series. Oakland scored five runs in the ninth to tie the contest on Friday en route to an 8-7, 10-inning triumph, and tallied four times in the ninth on Saturday to post a 7-6 win.

### ASTROS 3, MARINERS 2

Kyle Tucker delivered his first career walk-off home run and Houston completed a three-game series sweep of visiting Seattle. Tucker lofted a 2-2 fastball from right-hander Erik Swanson (0-2) into the seats in right field — his second home run of the season — and improved the Astros' record against the Mariners to 24-2 since the start of the 2019 campaign. Astros closer Ryan Pressly (1-1) earned the win with a perfect

ninth inning. Mariners rookie left-hander Justus Sheffield delivered his strongest start of the season, limiting the Astros to two runs — one earned — on six hits and one walk with four strikeouts over six innings.

### TWINS 4, ROYALS 2

Max Kepler hit a two-run homer and had two hits, and Randy Dobnak picked up his fourth win of the season as Minnesota defeated Kansas City in Minneapolis. Luis Arraez had two hits, Jorge Polanco had two RBIs, and Alex Avila doubled, walked twice and scored two runs for the Twins. Kepler put Minnesota ahead 3-2 in the fifth inning with his sixth home run of the season, driving in Avila, who had walked. Dobnak (4-1), who entered the game leading the majors with a 0.90 ERA, allowed solo home runs to Hunter Dozier and Alex Gordon, the first two homers he has allowed in 10 major league starts and only the second and third homers allowed in 53 2/3 innings in his career. He left after 5 1/3 innings after allowing three hits and a walk and two runs while striking out three. — Reuters

## Barca officials to meet with 'Setien to be axed'

**MADRID:** Top Barcelona officials will hold an emergency board meeting late Monday following the team's humiliating 8-2 Champions League quarter-final defeat by Bayern Munich, a club source told AFP on Sunday with under-fire coach Quique Setien likely to be axed.

"The president (Josep Maria Bartomeu) has called an imminent emergency meeting of the executive committee, which will be held at the start of

## Kohli hails mentor Dhoni

**NEW DELHI:** India skipper Virat Kohli told Mahendra Singh Dhoni "you will always be my captain" as he hailed the influence of the cricketer great, who has called time on his international career. Kohli, who made his India debut under Dhoni's leadership in 2008, heaped praise on the talismanic captain who led his country to Twenty20 and 50-over World Cup triumphs.

"Words fall short a lot of times in life and I think this is one of those moments," Kohli said in an emotional video message on the Board of Control for Cricket in India website. "All I can say is that you will always be that guy who sat in the last seat of the bus. Not saying much but your presence, your aura saying a lot."

Dhoni, a flamboyant wicketkeeper-batsman, quit Tests in 2014 and stepped aside as limited-overs captain three years later, paving the way for Kohli to lead the team across all formats. But Kohli has frequently called on his mentor for guidance from his position behind the stumps.

"We have shared a great camaraderie, friendship, understanding and that has happened because we have always played for the same roles, same goals, which was to make the team win," said Kohli.

"It's been a pleasure playing alongside you and playing under you initially in my career. You showed belief in me, which I would always be grateful for." "I have said it before, I will say it again, you will always be my captain," he signed off.

Dhoni, 39, drew the curtains on his 16-year international career Saturday. India coach Ravi Shastri said: "As a leader and captain he can sit on Mount Everest with those kind of achievements. "Multiple world cups, Champions Trophy, number one Test team in the world, IPL titles, Champions League. You name it and he has got it."

Dhoni led India to the Twenty20 World Cup in 2007, the 50-over event in 2011 and the Champions Trophy in 2013. Dhoni will continue to lead his Indian Premier League side Chennai Super Kings, which has won three title under him, in the upcoming edition next month in the United Arab Emirates.

Dhoni has not played for India since their World Cup semi-final loss against New Zealand in England last year — his 350th one-day international.

He holds the record for most international matches as captain, 332, and his 195 international stumpings is also the most by any wicket-keeper. — AFP

next week, possibly Monday," wrote sports daily Mundo Deportivo, following a similar report from radio station RAC1.

A source at the club confirmed the meeting would take place later without specifying the time but RAC1 claimed it would begin at 1100 local time (0900GMT).

"The blaugrana management committee is going to meet tomorrow, (coach Quique) Setien will be dismissed and a date could be brought forward already for the presidential elections," added Catalan daily L'Esportiu.

Defender Gerard Pique said he wanted sweeping changes at the Camp Nou but Bartomeu called for patience after the heavy loss to the German champions. "We are hurting, but once we get to next week we will start making decisions," he told television channel Movistar.



**TORONTO:** Mathew Barzal #13 of the New York Islanders celebrates the game winning goal at 4:28 past Braden Holtby #70 of the Washington Capitals during the first overtime period for a 2-1 win in Game Three of the Eastern Conference First Round during the 2020 NHL Stanley Cup Playoffs at Scotiabank Arena. — AFP

## Isles' overtime win puts Caps on brink

**TORONTO:** Mathew Barzal scored 4:28 into overtime to give the New York Islanders a 2-1 win over Washington and a commanding 3-0 lead in their Eastern Conference quarterfinal series in Toronto. Anders Lee scored in the first period and Semyon Varlamov made 22 saves for the Islanders, who are up 3-0 in the first round for the second straight year. They swept the Pittsburgh Penguins last April. Evgeny Kuznetsov scored in the second for the Capitals, who now must try to become the fifth team in NHL history to come back from an 0-3 deficit to win a series. Braden Holtby recorded 32 saves. Barzal's goal came seconds after Varlamov turned back a breakaway opportunity and a subsequent putback by Capitals left winger Jakob Vrana. On the next trip down the ice, Barzal took a pass from Jordan Eberle, swooped in on Holtby and backhanded a shot into the left corner of the net.

### BLUES 3, CANUCKS 2 (OT)

Brayden Schenn scored on a breakaway at 15:06 of overtime as St. Louis won for the first time in the postseason, defeating Vancouver in Edmonton, Alberta to pull within 2-1 in the best-of-7 Western Conference first-round series. Schenn took the puck at center ice and outskated the Canucks' Troy Stecher, beating goaltender Jacob Markstrom into

"The credibility of a coach is diminished when this happens, clearly. That is obvious, but that does not bother me right now.

"I think what happens today needs to be analysed with a bit more perspective," he added.

Bartomeu on Friday said he would not rule out the elections being moved up from next summer following Barca's worst ever defeat in Europe, and the club's first season without silverware since 2007-08.

Late on Sunday Catalan television channel broadcast a debate regarding the future of the outfit which included Victor Font, Jordi Farre, Joan Laporta and Lluís Fernandez Ala, who could all stand to replace Bartomeu. The fate of sporting director Eric Abidal is also set to be discussed, as is the future of Lionel Messi whose contract is due to expire at the end of next season. — AFP

## Leipzig's Nagelsmann faces Tuchel reunion

**LISBON:** Having already outwitted Jose Mourinho and Diego Simeone in the Champions League, RB Leipzig boss Julian Nagelsmann now faces Paris Saint-Germain and Thomas Tuchel, who helped spark his coaching career 12 years ago, in today's semi-final.

The 33-year-old Nagelsmann is the youngest coach to reach the last four of the Champions League, underlining his reputation as one of Germany's brightest tacticians in Leipzig's first appearance in the competition's knockout phase.

Nagelsmann got the better of Simeone's Atletico Madrid in a 2-1 victory Thursday, claiming another famous scalp following the disposal of Mourinho's Tottenham — last year's runners-up who were beaten home and away in the last 16. Next up is PSG and fellow German Tuchel, under whom Nagelsmann took his first steps into coaching for Augsburg's reserves in 2008 after a persistent knee injury forced him to retire aged just 20. "Of course I was his player, but that was many years ago," said Nagelsmann, a decent centre-back in his youth. "I'm more into the day-to-day business now, just like him."

### 'NEVER BEEN CLOSE'

As coach of his ex-club Hoffenheim, Nagelsmann lost twice and drew against Tuchel, then in charge of Borussia Dortmund in the Bundesliga between 2016 and 2017.

"Matches against him are always interesting, because he has a good idea about football," added Nagelsmann. "I have often played (as a coach) against him (Tuchel) but rarely won. That should change now," he added.

"It's clear the quality they (PSG) have - Angel Di Maria will be back and (Kilian) Mbappe will be fit enough to start. "We will need a top performance to reach the final." A knee injury cut short his playing career in 2008, "otherwise I would have needed an artificial knee when I was 40," said Nagelsmann.

Barely out of his teens, he was offered a scouting role by his Augsburg reserves coach Tuchel. "It was a pragmatic decision - since Augsburg were still paying me, I spotted opponents for Tuchel," Nagelsmann said in a 2015 interview. The pair have "never been extremely close", revealed Nagelsmann.

"He wasn't my mentor, even if many refer to him as one. "Our relationship was too pragmatic for that, but I am grateful for him giving me the idea to become a coach."

Tuchel went onto to work at Mainz and Dortmund, who he steered to the 2017 German Cup title before joining PSG in 2018 and winning back-to-back French league titles.

All the while, Nagelsmann gained experience coaching youth teams at Augsburg, 1860 Munich and Hoffenheim before moving to Leipzig in 2019. After coaching their Under-17 team, Nagelsmann rose up the ranks in Hoffenheim. — AFP

### FLYERS 1, CANADIENS 0

Jakub Voracek scored in the first period and goaltender Carter Hart protected that by stopping all 23 shots he faced as Philadelphia moved back on top 2-1 in its first-round series against Montreal in Toronto. Hart, who got pulled during a 5-0 loss in Game 2, picked up his first career postseason shutout and, at 22 years, 3 days, is the youngest Flyers goalie to record a playoff shutout. Canadiens goalie Carey Price, playing on his 33rd birthday, made 19 saves coming off a shutout in Game 2.

### STARS 5, FLAMES 4 (OT)

Alexander Radulov was the hero as Dallas scored late in regulation and then beat Calgary in overtime in Edmonton to even their opening-round Stanley Cup playoff series at 2-2. Seconds after his team rang a shot off the post, John Klingberg, who collected three assists, rifled a point shot that Radulov deflected for the game winner on his team's 62nd shot. Joe Pavelski collected his first career playoff hat trick — capped by a game-tying tally with 11.9 seconds left in regulation — and goalie Anton Khudobin made 36 saves for the Stars, the biggest against Johnny Gaudreau early in overtime. — Reuters



**14** Rossi fumes after miracle escape in 300 km/h Austrian MotoGP crash



**15** White Sox hit four straight home runs to beat Cardinals



**15** Isles' overtime win puts Caps on brink



COLOGNE: Manchester United's English defender Harry Maguire and Sevilla's Dutch forward Luuk De Jong both jump to head the ball during the UEFA Europa League semi-final football match Sevilla v Manchester United in Cologne, western Germany. —AFP

## Sevilla punish wasteful Man Utd

### De Jong sends gritty Sevilla into Europa League final

**COLOGNE:** Ole Gunnar Solskjaer admitted Manchester United face a busy few weeks in the transfer market after losing a third semi-final this season as Sevilla reached the Europa League final by coming from behind to win 2-1 in Cologne.

United were made to pay for their profligacy in front of goal after Bruno Fernandes's early penalty put them in front. Suso quickly levelled for Sevilla before goalkeeper Bono kept them in the game and substitute Luuk De Jong continued the Spanish side's remarkable Europa League run in recent years by slotting home the winner 12 minutes from time.

United had already secured their place in the Champions League next season by finishing third in the Premier League, but an over-reliance on a small core of players was again exposed as Solskjaer did not make a single substitution until three minutes from time.

United's new Premier League campaign could now begin in just over four weeks time and initial talks over the signing of Jadon Sancho have stalled with Borussia Dortmund insisting the England international will remain in Germany next season.

"We need to strengthen the squad depth of course. It will be a long season," said Solskjaer. "I

cannot say when or if transfers are going to be done, but we are looking at it. It is a quick turnaround. We just have to be 100 percent sure when we do those deals."

Sevilla have now won 25 of their last 26 Europa League knockout ties and will believe they are destined to win the competition for a sixth time when they face Inter Milan or Shakhtar Donetsk in Friday's final.

"This is the best Manchester United of the last few years and the form team in England so it is normal that we had to suffer," said Sevilla boss Julen Lopetegui. "We are very excited for the final, but it will be the hardest game yet and we have to prepare."

Lopetegui is enjoying a renaissance in Seville after a tough couple of years when he was sacked as Spain coach on the eve of the 2018 World Cup for accepting the role as Real Madrid manager and then fired again just months into

his time at the Santiago Bernabeu.

Sevilla are now unbeaten in a club record 20 games, but were unsettled by the pace and movement of United's front four early as Marcus Rashford was wiped out by Diego Carlos after his initial effort was saved by Bono.

#### 'SUPPORT IMPORTANT'

Fernandes has ensured United's early season woes from the spot are long forgotten as the Portuguese converted his eighth penalty for the club and the 22nd the Red Devils have been awarded in a 13-month long campaign.

Sevilla grew back into the game and levelled with a fine team goal on 19 minutes. On-loan Real Madrid

left-back Sergio Reguilón is in demand from a host of top European clubs and his run opened up the United defence before his cross was swept home by former Liverpool winger Suso.

#### Solskjaer eyes signings



### Hamilton sweeps to record-breaking win in Spain

**BARCELONA:** Lewis Hamilton claimed his 88th Formula One career victory and, with it, an outright record 156th podium finish on Sunday when he drove his Mercedes to a masterful victory in the Spanish Grand Prix.

It was the world championship leader and six-time champion's fifth win in Spain and his fourth in consecutive years, extending his record run of finishes in the points to 39.

Hamilton came home 24 seconds ahead of nearest title race rival Max Verstappen of Red Bull who finished 20 seconds ahead of Valtteri Bottas in the second Mercedes Hamilton had shared a record 155 podium finishes with Michael Schumacher whose other records for championships and wins are in the Briton's sights this year.

His victory increased his lead in the drivers title race to 37 points ahead of Verstappen.

Sergio Perez, back in his Racing Point after missing

two races with coronavirus, was fourth ahead of his team-mate Lance Stroll and Carlos Sainz of McLaren.

"Wow, I was in another zone then," said Hamilton. "I didn't even know it was the fastest lap. Thank you everyone. I was just in a daze out there - it was good."

Verstappen was satisfied with his result. "To split them was the best we could do today," said the Dutchman who won the 70th Anniversary Grand Prix at Silverstone last week. "We didn't have the speed of Lewis and it was important to get past Valtteri at the start."

Bottas said: "I lost a place at the start and that was it - it's so difficult to pass around here." Four-time champion Sebastian Vettel, in his final season with Ferrari and linked with a move to Aston Martin next year, finished seventh ahead of Alex Albon in the second Red Bull, Pierre Gasly of Alpha Tauri and Lando Norris who was 10th in the second McLaren.

On another hot afternoon at the Circuit de Catalunya, with a track temperature of 50 degrees Celsius and the air at 31, Hamilton made a clean start from his 92nd pole position, but behind him Bottas made sluggish progress from second. Both Verstappen and Stroll took advantage on the 'drag race' down to the first corner, pushing the Finn down to fourth. All of them were aware of the threat of serious tyre degradation in the conditions, a hazard that

persuaded Hamilton to control the lead pace with caution.

Bottas was soon back on pace, passing Stroll into Turn One and then launching his chase after Hamilton and Verstappen. The champion was soon clear of the Dutchman by 1.5 seconds, but not surging clear as he backed up Verstappen towards the Finn.

By lap 12, he was lapping faster and reeling off fastest laps, opening a gap of 1.7, which he increased to four seconds by lap 15 while Bottas, third, closed to within two seconds of Verstappen.

All of the top ten drivers had started on softs, the rest on mediums. This meant pit-stops were inevitable with tyre-wear and strategy sure to be critical factors.

Albon was the first to blink, taking a set of hard tyres for his Red Bull as the team sought the means for him to make progress and opted, in vain, for a one-stop race. He returned for mediums on lap 43.

By lap 20, a frustrated Verstappen was grumbling about his soft rear tyres. "The tyre is dead," he shouted. "I'm losing so much time." He pitted two laps later taking mediums in a remarkable 1.9 seconds stop.

This move enabled Bottas to regain second, ten seconds behind his team-mate with Verstappen rejoining third, adrift by nearly 30 seconds - but on lap 24 Mercedes 'double-stacked' their men for medi-

Despite the lack of a crowd in Cologne there was no lack of passion or tension as Sevilla were roared on by their substitutes, staff and directors and tempers flared with both benches exchanging words.

"It is one of the curiosities of this situation (playing behind closed doors)," added Lopetegui. "The support of your teammates is important."

United rode out the Sevilla storm and had a host of chances early in the second half to go back in front but a combination of Bono, poor finishing and brave last-ditch defending kept them at bay.

Anthony Martial was the biggest culprit as three times the Sevilla's second-choice stopper denied the Frenchman one-on-one as United began to cut through Sevilla at will.

Lopetegui responded by sacrificing top scorer Lucas Ocampos for De Jong and his changes worked to perfection as Sevilla regained their composure before landing the sucker punch.

De Jong has had a difficult first season in Spain, but went a long way to redeeming himself as he was alive to turn home former Manchester City winger Navas's cross with the United defence sleeping, which led to a confrontation between Fernandes and his teammate Victor Lindelof. —AFP



MONTMELO: Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton celebrates on the podium after the Spanish Formula One Grand Prix at the Circuit de Catalunya in Montmelo near Barcelona. —AFP

ums in a slower move.

Hamilton was stationary for 4.3 seconds and Bottas for 3.1, a delay that allowed Verstappen to regain second, 4.3 down on the leader. Behind the leaders, the mixed strategies ensured plenty of positional battles including scraps between Lando Norris of McLaren and Ferrari's Charles Leclerc for 10th and the two Racing Points for fifth. —AFP