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# Fewer medical grads from Muslim states entering US

## US to force out foreign students taking classes fully online

WASHINGTON: The number of foreign medical graduates from Muslim-majority nations coming to the United States to become doctors has declined by 15 percent under the Trump administration, exacerbating shortages in America's physician workforce, a study said. International medical graduates represent about a quarter of practicing doctors in the United States. They are required to take several licensing exams and then complete two or three years of training to practice medicine in the United States.

Overall, citizens from Muslim-majority nations made up 4.5 percent of the US physician workforce in 2019, with Pakistan, Egypt and Iran historically providing the bulk. The number of graduates from Islamic nations applying for certification in the United States rose from 2009-2015, peaking at 4,244, before falling steadily to 3,604 in 2018 - a decline of 15 percent. A small drop occurred in 2016, the year in which Trump was elected but his predecessor

Barack Obama was still in office, before hastening in 2017 and 2018.

The study appeared in the Journal of the American Medical Association, and was led John Boulet, vice president of the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates that oversees the certification process. Boulet and colleagues said that recent US policies, such as the travel ban on Muslim-majority countries "affect the inflow of IMGs (International Medical Graduates) by restricting travel to the country for citizens from specific nations."

They added: "Even a perceived immigration ban could affect who chooses to complete the requirements for... certification" while potential difficulty obtaining a visa could dissuade the program directors of medical residencies from making a job offer.

The US demand for physicians has long outstripped supply for a variety of reasons, from population growth and aging, to a federal cap on funding for residency training. As a result, the United States could see

a shortage of as many as 122,000 doctors by the year 2032, according to a 2019 report by the Association of American Medical Colleges.

Some economists also argue that the short supply of doctors has led to a surge in their wages - costs that are eventually passed down to patients. "To the extent that citizens from some countries no longer seek residency positions in the US, gaps in the physician workforce could widen," the authors said. The attractiveness of the United States as a destination may have also waned in comparison to other countries like Canada, New Zealand, Australia and Britain, the authors wrote.

In a related development, the US said Monday it would not allow foreign students to remain in the country if all of their classes are moved online in the fall because of the coronavirus crisis. "Nonimmigrant F-1 and M-1 students attending schools operating entirely online may not take a full online course load and remain in the United States,"



LOS ANGELES: This photo illustration shows a US visa stamp on a foreign passport. — AFP

US Immigration and Custom Enforcement said in a statement.

"Active students currently in the United States enrolled in such programs must depart the country or take other measures, such as transferring to a

school with in-person instruction to remain in lawful status," ICE said. "If not, they may face immigration consequences including, but not limited to, the initiation of removal proceedings."

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## Irked panel vows to review laws to cut expat numbers

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Head of the National Assembly's manpower development committee MIP Khalil Al-Saleh yesterday criticized the government for failing to provide its vision on how to reduce the number of expats in the country. Saleh said that the committee had given the government ample time to submit its ideas on the issue, but concerned government authorities failed to provide anything so far.

The lawmaker said the committee as a result has decided to proceed with its legislation and will write a report to the Assembly on ways to reduce the number of expats in Kuwait. The committee has been assigned by the Assembly to study various draft laws submitted by MPs proposing solutions to cut the number of expats, who number 3.35 million and form 70 percent of the population.

Saleh had previously said he believes Kuwait can reduce up to one million expats within three months, mainly by replacing expats in government jobs and deporting some 500,000 low-paid workers. The panel is expected to review a draft law calling to introduce certain percentages for foreign communities in Kuwait, proposing the largest community - Indians - should not exceed 15 percent of Kuwaiti citizens. The bill also proposes that Egyptians, Bangladeshis and Filipinos among others must not each exceed 10 percent of Kuwaitis. This would require deporting around 2.5 million expats.

Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem has said it is not possible to introduce the quota system at present, adding that he and other MPs plan to submit a new draft law aimed at binding the government to gradually reduce the number of expats. Interior Minister Anas Al-Saleh also said that the ministry has completed proposed wide-scale amendments to the residency law to facilitate reducing the number of expats. He said the draft law will be sent to the Assembly within two weeks.

The head of the Assembly panel MIP Saleh however said that a government committee formed in 2014 to study the population structure has practically done nothing over the issue, which has escalated after the outbreak of the coronavirus. He said the parliamentary committee will not wait and will send its report to the Assembly based on proposals by lawmakers, adding that the country is heading towards a dark future regarding this issue because the government is not serious.

## Scientist: View mask refusers like drink drivers

PARIS: People who refuse to wear face masks during the coronavirus pandemic should be stigmatized the same as drink drivers, the head of the prestigious Royal Society science journal said yesterday. The comments from Venki Ramakrishnan come as two new peer-reviewed studies showed how wearing face coverings may help significantly reduce the spread of viruses such as COVID-19.

"It used to be quite normal to have quite a few drinks and drive home, and it also used to be normal to drive without seatbelts," Ramakrishnan wrote in a comment article. "Today both of those would be considered antisocial, and not wearing face coverings in public should be regarded in the same way." Ramakrishnan stressed how masks are only genuinely effective if worn by most people. "If all of us wear one, we protect each other and thereby ourselves, reducing transmission," he said.

Estimates vary, but it is thought around 40-60 percent of transmissions occur when carriers are pre- or asymptomatic - that is, they may not know they are ill but are still able to infect others. One study by teams from the Universities of Pennsylvania and Cambridge analyzed pregnant women admitted for delivery in New York City who were screened for COVID-19. They found that 13.7 percent of the



BANI NAIM: Palestinian Waad Manasra adjusts one of her hand-embroidered protective masks on a customer's face at her home in this village east of the West Bank city of Hebron on Monday. — AFP

women were carrying the virus, 88 percent of whom showed no symptoms. Cloth face masks reduce oral particle dispersion between 50-100 percent, depending on a number of factors, the researchers wrote.

In pre-symptomatic individuals, studies have shown that viral droplets are emitted not only by sneezing and coughing, but also by talking and breathing, meaning mass face coverings would sig-

nificantly reduce the risk of new infections. Another study published Monday in the Royal Society outlined vast discrepancies in mask-wearing rates among rich nations.

In late April - as COVID-19 raged throughout Europe - mask-wearing uptake in Britain was around 25 percent, the study found. This compared to 83.4 percent in Italy, 65.8 percent in the United States and 63.8 percent in Spain. — AFP

## US 'looking at' banning TikTok, Chinese apps

WASHINGTON: Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has said the US is "looking at" banning Chinese social media apps, including TikTok, over allegations Beijing is using them to spy on users. India has already barred the wildly popular TikTok app over national security and privacy concerns while other countries are reportedly mulling similar measures. Asked on Monday by Fox News's Laura Ingraham if the US should consider blocking the apps - "especially TikTok" - the country's top diplomat said the Trump administration was "taking this very seriously; we are certainly looking at it."

Pompeo said the US had been working for a "long

time" on the "problems" of Chinese technology in infrastructure and was "making real progress". "With respect to Chinese apps on people's cell phones, I can assure you the United States will get this one right too," he said. "I don't want to get out in front of the president, but it's something we are looking at."

Pompeo earlier lashed out at what he called China's "Orwellian" moves to censor activists, schools and libraries in Hong Kong under a sweeping new security law. Authorities in the financial hub have ordered schools to remove books for review under the law, which has criminalized certain opinions such as calls for independence or more autonomy. Libraries in Hong Kong said they were pulling titles written by a handful of pro-democracy activists.

"The Chinese Communist Party's destruction of free Hong Kong continues," Pompeo said in a sharply worded statement. "With the ink barely dry on the repressive National Security Law, local authorities - in an Orwellian move - have now established a central government national security office, started removing books critical of the CCP from library



shelves, banned political slogans, and are now requiring schools to enforce censorship," he said.

Pompeo condemned what he called the "latest assaults on the rights and freedoms of the people of Hong Kong". "Until now, Hong Kong flourished because it allowed free thinking and free speech, under an independent rule of law. — AFP

## Local

# Kuwait travel agencies struggle to navigate through COVID-19 crisis

## Agencies lament airport's 'very long' reopening stages

By Nawara Fattahova

**KUWAIT:** As part of the gradual return to normal life in Kuwait, the second phase of the government plan allowed most businesses to reopen. Travel agencies also reopened, but cannot function like before the coronavirus pandemic due to the unclear situation of flights and tourism locally and internationally.

Sami, an employee at Almadar travel agency, said their work is hampered as international carriers haven't uploaded their schedule of flights yet to the system. "Travel destinations are not clear yet, as most favored destinations are not open for passengers from Kuwait. Currently we are only booking for Turkey and Dubai. Europe is not open for Kuwaitis except for Britain, which requires 14 days of quarantine, so only students are flying to the UK," he told Kuwait Times.

“Travel agencies safer for bookings”

### Only 30 percent

Flights will also be limited. "As the government set operations at the airport at only 30 percent capacity until February, the number of flights will be fewer than usual. The six-month period for each phase of the airport's opening is very long, and I think this should be modified. Also, most people are afraid of travelling in the first place," added Sami.

Travel agencies are safer for making bookings, especially under the current circumstances, according to Sami. "The coronavirus crisis exposed the risk

of booking online through some companies that went bankrupt and customers didn't get their money back, as these websites or online companies are based abroad. But travel agencies have financial guarantees at the bank, and in case of any complaint, this money will be frozen and the client will get refunded," Sami explained.

Losses have been huge. "Even before the pandemic, our business was facing difficulties due to online competition. But this crisis was very tough for our industry and we are considered among the most affected businesses. Only in this complex of travel agencies, four agencies shut down completely. I also know 12 employees who were terminated, in addition to six who left the country. And some of the agencies only paid half the salaries to their staff due to the pandemic," concluded Sami.

### Limited choices

Yazan from Alostoora travel agency said travel choices are very limited presently. "As many popular destinations are not yet open for passengers from Kuwait, we only have demand for Turkey. Far East destinations are not in demand although they are open, as people are afraid of the coronavirus. Furthermore, the procedure of getting a PCR test is not clear, as some countries require it while others don't," he pointed out.

"Apart from tourists, we also have clients booking for their domestic helpers whose visas have expired and they are flying back home. The majority are



**KUWAIT:** This May 17, 2020 file photo shows passengers checking in at Kuwait International Airport to travel on repatriation flights back to their home countries. — Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

heading to two destinations - the Philippines and India. Flights that are currently leaving Kuwait are for repatriation of expats, who usually book through their embassy," added Yazan.

But most people are still booking online as they find it cheaper or easier. "I prefer to book online as I

can choose from a variety of options and compare prices. Also, I always holiday with my friends, and they also like to book online. We are young men, so we don't mind taking a risk with booking hotels online, as we can stay at any hotel. Honestly, I haven't faced any problems in the past," said Ahmad.

## Coronavirus in Kuwait: What we know so far

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait has recorded 50,644 cases infected with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) as of Monday, in addition to 373 deaths. With the exception of 152 cases in intensive care, all infected cases are in stable condition and are recovering in quarantined locations designated by the government for this purpose, while thousands have been discharged from quarantine after exhibiting no symptoms during their 14-day quarantine period, the Ministry of Health confirmed. Meanwhile, 41,001 people have recovered completely after previously being infected with the virus, while there are 9,270 people receiving treatment.

### Curfew

Kuwait imposed a three-week partial curfew starting May 31 (from 6:00 pm to 6:00 am), as part of a five-phase plan for a gradual return to normal life, brought to a standstill by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). The curfew hours were later reduced to start on 7:00 pm and end at 5:00 am, starting from June 21, 2020. The first phase includes a total lockdown on Farwaniya, Khaitan, and Hawally, joining Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh which were put under lockdown earlier. The lockdown ended in Hawally and Khaitan on June 21, 2020, and will be lifted on Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh on July 9, 2020. Activities resumed in the first phase included home deliveries of restaurants, telecommunication companies, food retailers, companies' transportation of employees, gas stations, private clinics and car workshops.

Kuwait moved to the second phase starting from June 30, 2020. The second phase saw the curfew shortened to be between 8:00 pm and 5:00 am, while resuming work in the government and private sectors with the workforce being less than 30 percent, in addition to resumption of constructions, banking sector, pickups from restaurants, as well as reopening of commercial complexes, malls, parks, and other places of leisure between 10:00 am and 06:00 pm.

The third phase would see an end of curfew, and health authorities would be assessing situation of areas under lockdown. It would see increase of workforce to less than 50 percent. Visits for social care homes would be allowed, reopening of hotels, resorts and hotel apartments. Taxis will be allowed to operate with only one passenger, and mosques would be allowed to perform Friday prayers.

Phase four would see an increase in workforce, restaurants would be receiving customers but with restrictions, and public transportation resumed but with distancing. All activities would resume in phase five, government and private sector returned to normal, families could gather, weddings and graduation ceremonies, health clubs and gyms to reopen, as well as cinemas and theaters.

Mosques in the so-called 'model residential areas' reopened their doors for worshippers on June 10 amid

strict health precautionary measures. Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs Mohammad Al-Afasi said that mosques in commercial, markets and heavily-populated areas will remain closed for the time being. Worshippers must wear face masks, keep social distancing between queues and between worshippers must be strictly observed. Worshippers must bring their own mats so they do not get in contact with mosque carpets. Mosques will reopen five minutes before prayer time and close 10 minutes after prayer.

Earlier, Kuwait imposed a total curfew from May 10 to May 30, allowing room for people to walk out for daily exercise between 4:30 pm to 6:30 pm, and to shop at co-ops and supermarkets once every six days during the curfew hours by making an appointment through www.moci.shop. Before that, Kuwait enforced a country-wide partial curfew from 5:00 pm to 6:00 am, which was later extended to start from 4:00 pm until 8:00 am during Ramadan, while allowing restaurants and food stores to make home deliveries from 5:00 pm until 1:00 am. The government also locked down Mahboula and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh in a bid to contain the spread of the virus and enable health workers to test inhabitants. Earlier, the government decided to close all shopping malls, beauty salons and barber shops as part of its measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. The government also allowed supermarkets, restaurants and shops to host a maximum of five people at a time and in case there are lines, the distance must be at least one meter between people. The Ministry of Commerce launched a website (www.moci.shop) to enable people to book appointments to shop at co-operative societies in their areas. The Public Authority for Industry also announced that companies can apply to evacuate their workers from Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Mahboula. To do so, they must fill a 'workers' evacuation form' available on www.pai.gov.kw, and send the form via email to: Jasiri@moh.gov.kw.

### Precautions

Kuwait halted all commercial flights until further notice, and has sent special flights to repatriate Kuwaitis back home from countries affected with the virus' spread. Kuwait took all measures to test Kuwaitis repatriated from infected areas for potential infection. Kuwait had required all expatriates who arrived from travel on March 1 and beyond to visit Kuwait International Fairground where the Ministry of Health has set up a center to test people for possible infection. Meanwhile, the Cabinet announced on April 9 the operation of all airline flights for expats who are wishing to return back to their countries. Authorities also announced a public holiday in the country from March 12 to May 28, with work resuming on May 31, while entities providing vital services will remain open. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education has suspended classes at all public and private schools (for both students and teaching staffs): first from March 1 to

March 12, and later extended it until March 29, before eventually suspending schools until August for grade 12 and October for other stages. State departments have been on high alert to take precautions against the potential spread of the virus. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has taken measures to make sure that facial masks, hand sanitizers and other goods remain accessible to the public.

Kuwait suspended issuing entry permits and visas unless those issued through diplomatic missions. The Interior Ministry issued an amnesty allowing residency violators to leave the country between April 1 and April 30 without paying any fines or airfare with a chance to return to Kuwait later. The amnesty was issued in view of the circumstances the country is currently going through and as part of the precautionary measures taken to fight the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). During the amnesty period, individuals desiring to procure valid residencies in Kuwait and were willing to pay the fines without being subjected to investigations were allowed to pay the fines and legalize their status if they meet the required conditions.

### Hotlines

The Ministry of Health has set the following hotlines to receive inquiries about the coronavirus 24/7: 24970967 - 96049698 - 99048619.

The Education Ministry set the following hotlines to receive inquiries on school closures related to the anti-coronavirus measures:

- 24970967 (24/7 hotline)
- 51575591 (Capital Educational Zone)
- 51576117 (Hawally Educational Zone)
- 51576576 (Farwaniya Educational Zone)
- 51577055 (Jahra Educational Zone)
- 51577655 (Ahmadi Educational Zone)
- 51577951 (Mubarak Al-Kabeer Educational Zone)
- 51578171 (Religious Studies Department)
- 51588599 (Private Education Department)
- 51592515 (Services Department)
- 51594544 (Public Relations Department)

### Medicine delivery

Kuwait's Ministry of Health (MOH) launched a new medicine delivery service for people in Kuwait, which they can use to order medications to be delivered during curfew hours. The medications will be delivered within 72 hours after the order is submitted. To place an order, patients should send a WhatsApp to the numbers for the hospitals and medical centers as listed below. The patient should include their name, Civil ID number, hospital or clinic file number, mobile phone number and the medicine needed to the following numbers:

In My View

## Aviation return urgent necessity



By Khalaf Al-Mane

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**T**he return of aviation is an urgent necessity for countries' economies to start reviving. Aviation contributes to 35 percent of international trade, which is estimated at \$2.7 trillion, and 57 percent of international touristic activity, which contributes to creating nearly 65.5 million jobs.

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) hoped to celebrate its 75th anniversary under better circumstances than such difficult times, as it never occurred to it that fleets of airline companies would stop flying and remain on the tarmac for more than four months so far. IATA seeks to overcome the crisis but the circumstances are contrary to what is hoped for.

IATA appeals to governments to quickly implement temporary health measures to limit the risks of the coronavirus, while taking guidance from the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) for instructions for air travel to be followed by airlines to guarantee safe operations, especially after making sure that aircraft manufacturers implement a strict sterilization system inside the cabin with HEPA filters that are highly efficient in cleaning the air of microscopic germs such as bacteria, viruses and fungi.

The regional collapse of aviation traffic is unprecedented and did not occur previously in history. Demand for transporting passengers by air in the Middle East dropped by 97.3 percent in April compared to the same month in 2019, by 96.6 percent in North America, 98.1 percent in Europe and 96 percent in Latin America, while it dropped by 88.5 percent in Asia Pacific and by 98.3 percent in Africa.

## Fewer medical grads from...

Continued from Page 1

ICE said the State Department "will not issue visas to students enrolled in schools and/or programs that are fully online for the fall semester nor will US Customs and Border Protection permit these students to enter the United States". F-1 students pursue academic coursework and M-1 students pursue "vocational coursework", according to ICE. Universities with a hybrid system of in-person and online classes will have to show that foreign students are taking as many in-person classes as possible, to maintain their status. M-1 vocational

program students and F-1 English language training program students will not be allowed to take any classes online.

Critics quickly hit back at the decision. "The cruelty of this White House knows no bounds," tweeted Senator Bernie Sanders. "Foreign students are being threatened with a choice: risk your life going to class-in person or get deported," he said. For Gonzalo Fernandez, a 32-year-old Spaniard doing his doctorate in economics at George Washington University in the US capital, "the worst thing is the uncertainty". "We don't know if we will have classes next semester, if we should go home, if they are going to throw us out."

Most US colleges and universities have not yet announced their plans for the fall semester. A number of schools are looking at a hybrid model of in-person and online instruction but some, including Harvard University, have said all classes will be con-

ducted online. Harvard said 40 percent of undergraduates would be allowed to return to campus - but their instruction would be conducted remotely.

There were more than one million international students in the United States for the 2018-19 academic year, according to the Institute of International Education (IIE). That accounted for 5.5 percent of the total US higher education population, the IIE said, and international students contributed \$44.7 billion to the US economy in 2018. The largest number of international students came from China, followed by India, South Korea, Saudi Arabia and Canada.

According to Aaron Reichlin-Melnick, who works as the policy counsel at the Washington-based think tank American Immigration Council, the new rule is "almost certainly going to be challenged in court". He explained on Twitter that foreign students will likely struggle to continue their studies

while abroad, due to time differences or a lack of access to technology or academic resources.

Trump, who is campaigning for reelection in November, has taken a bullish approach to reopening the country even as virus infections continue to spike in parts of the country, particularly the south and west. "SCHOOLS MUST OPEN IN THE FALL!!!" he tweeted Monday.

With more than 130,000 deaths linked to the novel coronavirus, the United States is the hardest-hit country in the global pandemic. While cracking down on immigration is one of his key issues, Trump has taken a particularly hard stance on foreigners since the health crisis began. In June, he froze until 2021 the issuing of green cards - which offer permanent US resident status - and some work visas, particularly those used in the technology sector, with the stated goal of reserving jobs for Americans. — Agencies

Local

# Amir's directives guideline to protect Kuwait public funds: Govt

## Ministers briefed on health situation after second stage's implementation

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Cabinet on Monday held its weekly meeting online, chaired by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. After the meeting, Deputy Prime Minister, Interior Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh made the following statement about the proceedings of the meeting: At the beginning of the meeting, the Cabinet discussed the reception of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah of the President, Vice President and Board Members of the Public Anti-Corruption Authority, who took oath on the occasion of assuming their new

positions in the presence of His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister. The Cabinet affirmed that His Highness the Amir's lofty directives will be a guideline for the government in its work in cooperation with the Anti-Corruption Authority and all relevant bodies to ensure the preservation of public funds and achieve desired goals.

Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Humoud Al-Sabah briefed the Cabinet on developments of the health situation in the country as well as precautionary measures taken by the Ministry to limit the spread of COVID-19 with the im-

plementation of the second stage of the return to normalcy plan. Furthermore, the Cabinet discussed recommendation received in the minutes of the meeting of the Public Services Committee regarding the periodic report submitted by the Public Authority for Housing Welfare on the progress of work for Al-Mutlaa housing project and measures taken by relevant government agencies in this regard. The Cabinet also discussed the grilling motion submitted by MP Riyadh Al-Adsani on June 30, 2020 against Minister of Finance Barak Al-Sheetan, as the grilling will be included in the agenda of the upcoming session of the National Assembly. — KUNA



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah chairs the meeting. — KUNA

## Tender for Bangladeshi MP's company canceled

KUWAIT: The Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT) cancelled the extension of a cleaning contract at Kuwait International Airport and its facilities that was signed with a company connected to a Bangladeshi lawmaker currently detained in Kuwait on human trafficking and money laundering charges, reported Al-Qabas Arabic newspaper. The contract, signed with the Directorate General of Civil Aviation, was canceled because the company's file is suspended at the Public Authority for Manpower due to the investigation and felony charges against one of its owners.

Meanwhile, sources said another of the Bangladeshi man's companies in Kuwait has many valid cleaning contracts with government bodies including a contract with a department that supervises many places in the Capital and Hawally governorates. Companies owned by the Bangladeshi lawmaker have now had their accounts frozen by the public prosecution and this could lead to problems including possibly nonpayment of salaries among these company employees which in turn may lead to illegal strikes by these employees and a disruption of government sector work.

## NBK supports staff during pandemic

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) launched a special healthcare program for its employees for three months (until next September), as part of its continuous efforts during coronavirus pandemic to preserve the mental and physical health of employees, which the bank regards as its true wealth and a key pillar of its long-standing success.

The program engaging a number of physicians and specialists, has four key pillars: Mental health, general health, nutrition and physical fitness in order to support the bank's employees during this exceptional period. The program will provide medical advice in mental and general health in addition to various training sessions covering the basics of fitness given by certified trainers, through special visits, as well as through interactive platforms and the bank's social media channels.

The program features interactive content and virtual meetings that provide awareness medical advice and guidance offered by specialized

physicians, and health topics will be discussed through online lectures, especially those posing challenges during the period of combating Coronavirus pandemic outbreak.

On this occasion, Assistant General Manager, Public Relations and Communications of National Bank of Kuwait, Manal Al-Mattar said that NBK extends all kinds of support to its employees in these exceptional circumstances to preserve their safety and health, which is a top priority for the bank.

She added that the bank raised the slogan of 'Health and Safety of Our Employees Come First' in all the measures and decisions that have been taken since the outset of Coronavirus pandemic outbreak, noting that the bank has held many programs and activities that focus on promoting a healthy lifestyle and raising awareness on the importance of medical checkups to avoid any negative impacts on the physical and psychological wellness of bank employees during this pandemic.

She pointed out that the bank will continue to give priority to promoting physical health and other activities to reduce stress and exhaustion caused by the psychological pressures resulting from coronavirus pandemic, and will also work on motivating its employ-

ees and spreading positive energy among them to get through this hard times, which will ultimately help them return to work in good health.

Mattar stressed that, in manifestation of NBK's leading position in the local and regional banking sector, the bank spares no effort in providing utmost support to its employees and investing in them, the fact that sets it as the employer of choice among private sector institutions attracting talented, experienced and competent people.

National Bank of Kuwait recognizes the importance of improving the health and safety of key stakeholders, including employees and customers, as an integral part of the sustainable development approach, as the bank is working to update its health and safety policy formulated according to regional and international best practices in relation to health and safety matters.



Manal Al-Mattar

## 'Solar powered gas station opens in Abdali

KUWAIT: The Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) announced Monday the inauguration of a new fuel station in Al-Abdali area with a bearing number '130' working from 6 am to 8 pm under the current circumstances. In a press statement, KNPC said that they are aiming to set up more fuel stations in several areas in order to serve more people with petroleum products. The station is distinguished with modern design, using solar energy technology, which saves 30 percent of its electrical needs, KNPC added. Moreover, Al-Ab-



KUWAIT: The new fuel station KNPC inaugurated in Al-Abdali. — KUNA

dali station is among 18 stations that are under construction. Eight stations were opened in the areas of Jaber Al-Ahmad, north west Sulaibikhat and Sabah Al-Ahmad. — KUNA

## Jarallah, UK state secretary discuss issues

KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah received on Monday a telephone call from Dominic Raab, Britain's secretary of state for Middle Eastern affairs, discussing bilateral relations, regional and international topics. The two sides affirmed necessity of pursuing contacts during the current critical conditions prevailing across the world for coordination and consultation within framework of the Kuwaiti-British partnership. They have also expressed eagerness toward the forthcoming sessions of the joint guidance commission. — KUNA



Khaled Al-Jarallah

### News in brief

#### KJA sends reminder to subscribers

KUWAIT: On its first meeting following the lockdown due to the spread of COVID-19, Kuwait Journalists Association's (KJA) board of directors issued a final reminder urging all members to start paying their 2020 subscription fees and receive their 2020 membership cards. During the meeting held on Sunday, July 5, 2020, KJA announced that members can check with its secretarial staff during official working hours from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm, noting that the final date to pay subscriptions would be Wednesday, July 29, 2020.

#### Chamber staff tested

KUWAIT: The mobile team of the Public Health Department of the Ministry of Health, in coordination with the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry, conducted COVID-19 tests for the Chamber's employees using nasopharyngeal swabs, as an effort to limit the spread of the novel coronavirus. Nearly 400 swabs were collected.

#### Twenty flights

KUWAIT: The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) announced that 20 flights were set to depart from Kuwait International Airport yesterday, carrying a total of 3,525 passengers. They included six flights to India, five flights to Egypt, three flights to Nepal, two flights to the UAE, one flight to Qatar, one flight to Turkey, one flight to Bangladesh, and one flight to Iran.

#### Oil price up

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil went up by 95 cents to \$44.05 per barrel Monday as oppose to \$43.10 pb on Friday, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. At the global level, the price of the Brent crude went up by 30 cents to \$43.10 per barrel, the same case with the West Texas Intermediate, which went up by two cents to \$40.63 pb.

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed.

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## Local

# Kuwait affirms approach to bolster cooperation with China

## Chinese, Arab FMs reject Israeli plan to annex Palestinian land

**KUWAIT:** Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah affirmed the State of Kuwait's determination to expand cooperation with China as one of its key commercial partners. The minister made the statement as he chaired Kuwait's delegation partaking in the 9th ministerial session of the Arab-Chinese Cooperation Forum, held via videoconference on Monday. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement that the forum addressed the distinctive strategic bonds between Arab states and China, and means of developing the forum, noting that the participants in the gathering discussed proposals regarding latest regional and international issues of common concern, namely those related to combating the novel coronavirus.

The ministry said the foreign minister addressed the conferees with greetings to eminent participants, namely Jordanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Ayman Al-Safadi, the Chinese state advisor and foreign minister Wang Yi, and Arab League Secretary General Ahmad Abul Gheit. He expressed gratitude to Jordan for hosting the forum and praised Beijing for its keenness on organizing it regularly, despite current extraordinary circumstances worldwide. He also expressed identical sentiments to the Arab League for co-organizing the event.

### Special circumstances

Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser stated that the meeting was held in shadow of the special circumstances that have jolted the world due to spread of the coronavirus which has led to unprecedented social and economic repercussions, posing a real threat to states' security and stability. One of the key lessons that can be derived from this pandemic experience is that no state, regardless how abundant its resources and capacities may be, can solely face it solely and that global cooperation is the option to face and contain the outbreak. In this vein, he pointed out, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah had ordered allotting \$100 million for this purpose, adding that part of the allocation was dedicated for Arab states to face the pandemic, in addition to supporting the World Health Organization and research centers throughout the world to speed up search for a vaccine. He lauded the regular holding of this forum, founded in 2004, noting that commercial exchanges between Arab countries and China reached \$266 billion in



**KUWAIT:** Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah speaks during the forum via videoconference. — KUNA

2019, growing by nine percent per year. The state of Kuwait welcomes Saudi Arabia's planned hosting of the first Arab-Chinese summit, a step that would further bolster the strategic partnership between the Arabs and the Chinese. Citing a tangible example of Kuwait's keenness on boosting the bonds with China, the foreign minister noted the Kuwait-Chinese summit, held in Beijing in 2018. He has affirmed that China is one of the major trade partners with Kuwait with the trade volume estimated at \$18.7 billion. Moreover, he has pointed out, that the Chinese-inspired 'silk road initiative' constitutes a promising opportunity for both with respect of implementing Kuwait Vision 2035. He affirmed the determination to continue to develop cooperation through economic, commercial, technical mechanisms as well as bilateral treaties, affirming the Arabs' policy of non-intervention in the Chinese domestic affairs. The Kuwaiti foreign affairs ministry noted in its statement that an official statement was issued in the end of the meeting-including the topics that were discussed and a pledge for solidarity for fighting the novel coronavirus. The Kuwaiti delegation at the meeting included the Assistant Foreign Minister for Asian Affairs Ali Al-Saeed, the Assistant Foreign Minister for the Arab world Affairs Ambassador Fahad Al-Awadhi, the Assistant Foreign Minister for the Minister's Bureau Affairs Ambassador Saleh Al-Loughani, the State of Kuwait Permanent Envoy at the Arab League Ahmad Al-Bakr and other senior officials of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

### Strategic partnership

Arab countries and China stressed the importance of enhancing the Sino-Arab strategic partnership relations for mutual development and common benefits. This came in the Amman declaration issued at the end of the session. The declaration pointed to the necessity of working to establish the Chinese-Arab community "for establishment of the common future society to be presented to the upcoming Arab-Chinese summit." The two sides recorded positive evaluation of the 8th session of the ministerial meeting, successfully held in Beijing July 10, 2018, with the participation of His Highness the Kuwaiti Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Chinese President Xi Jinping. They also agreed to hold an Arab-Chinese summit to serve the common interest, and welcomed the planned of this summit by Saudi Arabia, indicating that its date would be set according to a mutual agreement. They also praised Chinese President's initiative for cooperation, promising opportunities and mutual benefit.

The conferees agreed to continue coordination to support the Palestinian cause and rejected Israel's plans to annex any part of the occupied Palestinian territory, considering it serious escalation of its aggressive policies and violation of the Palestinian people rights. The two sides called on Israel to lift its blockade of the Gaza Strip and resolve issue of the Palestinian refugees in a fair manner in accordance with the relevant UN resolutions, welcoming a decision of the United Nations General Assembly to extend the mandate of the relief agency, UNRWA, for three years. In this regard, they expressed deep concern about the agency's chronic financial deficit, calling on the international community to secure sustainable financial resources for its budget and activities in order to enable it to continue its role. The declaration strongly rejected United States' decision to recognize the "sovereignty of Israel over the occupied Syrian Golan," stressing that this decision constituted a serious violation of UN Charter, international law and relevant UN resolutions. Moreover, they affirmed commitment to the unity, sovereignty, stability and territorial integrity of Lebanon, calling on Israel to withdraw from the rest of the occupied Lebanese territories and immediately end its recurring breaches of the Lebanese sovereignty.

### Political solutions

They stressed importance of joint international and regional efforts to find political solutions to crises and regional issues in accordance with international legitimacy resolutions and relevant agreements, stressing the integrity and territorial integrity of Arab countries, especially in Syria, Libya and Yemen. The declaration reaffirmed the support of the two sides for the efforts made by Lebanon, Iraq, Somalia and Sudan to achieve and enhance security, stability, development, prosperity and combating terrorism. They emphasized the principle of freedom of maritime navigation in international waters in accordance with the established rules in international law and the conventions of the law of the sea and the need to ensure the security and safety of maritime navigation at the Arabian Gulf, Sea of Oman, Red Sea, Strait of Hormuz, Bab Al-Mandab, and secure energy supply lines.

Furthermore, they also condemned all acts targeting the security and safety of navigation, energy supplies, oil pipelines, oil installations at the Arabian Gulf and other waterways. The declaration stressed the importance of cooperation relations between the Arab countries and Iran based on the principle of good neighborliness, non-interference in internal affairs, respect for the principle of the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of states, the resolution of disputes by peaceful means, and the refusal to use force or threat. They also emphasized support for all efforts aimed at preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, noting the importance of implementing the resolution on the Middle East that was adopted in 1995.

The session stressed the results of the 2000 and 2010 review conferences and welcomed the holding of the first session of the conference to establish a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East chaired by Jordan in 2019. They also welcomed, in this regard, Kuwait presidency to the second session of this conference, and appreciated China's participation. They also expressed condemnation of terrorism acts and work to combat extremist ideology and terrorism. The session emphasized the need to continue enhancing cooperation in economic, social, development and information fields between the Arab countries and China, as they welcomed holding the 10th session of the meeting in china in 2022. — KUNA

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**KUWAIT:** KRCS and social affairs ministry officials pose for a group photo after handing over boxes containing the protective masks. — KUNA

## 45,500 protective masks for social care homes

**KUWAIT:** Chairman of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) Dr Hilal Al-Sayer affirmed on Monday the society's support for the state and civil efforts for combating the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Dr Sayer was speaking to the press after the assistant undersecretary for social affairs at the Ministry of Social Affairs, Musallam Al-

Subaiee, handed over 45,500 protective masks, donated by the United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN HABITAT) to the Kuwaiti Social Care Homes Complex. The KRCS chairman affirmed special concern for occupants of the care houses, namely those of special challenges and the elderly, noting that the association had provided medical utensils to many State institutions. The current emergency situation in Kuwait warrants collaborated efforts by the official and private institutions to secure all the resources for combating the pandemic. Dr Sayer noted further. Meanwhile, Subaiee affirmed that the complex management has enforced all necessary protective measures in the face of the pandemic, safeguarding the occupants and the serving staff. — KUNA

## Health Minister honors WHO award winner

**KUWAIT:** Minister of Health (MoH) Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah honored the Secretary General of Kuwait Society for Preventing Smoking and Cancer Anwar Burhama, who won the World Health Organization's (WHO) anti-smoking award. Sheikh Basel said in a press statement Monday that WHO granted this award on 'World No Tobacco Day,' which annually falls on May 31. Burhama is also a member of MoH's committee of the National Program for Combating Smoking, he pointed out. Burhama designed nine educational advertisements that were shown on Kuwait TV and displays inside cooperative societies, in addition to 25 others on radio, in collabora-



**KUWAIT:** Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah (right) honors Secretary General of Kuwait Society for Preventing Smoking and Cancer Anwar Burhama. — KUNA

tion with the Ministry of Information. Accordingly, he presented the first play to show smoking's harmful effects in 2015 with a group of major artists, including David Hussein and Mohammad Al-Hamali, the minister mentioned. — KUNA



Iraq jihadism expert Hashemi shot dead

## Morocco to prosecute journalist for 'insults and drunkenness'

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AL HAJJAH: A Yemeni child suffering from malnutrition lies in a bed at a treatment centre in Yemen's northern Hajjah province. —AFP

# Starving kids, grim legacy of Yemen war

## Cries of malnourished children a vivid reminder of the human cost

**SANAA:** Masirah Saqer could barely open her eyes, as she struggled to swallow the milk her grandmother attempted to feed her with a syringe. Nearby, the cries of other malnourished children reverberated around the pink-walled hospital ward, a vivid reminder of the human cost of Yemen's devastating conflict, which drags into a seventh year yesterday. Masirah, just short of three months old, was undergoing treatment at Al-Sabyine hospital's infant malnutrition department in the capital Sanaa. Swaddled in a pink and white comforter, her tiny frame and slender limbs were dwarfed by the full-sized bed on which her grandmother sat as she tried to feed her.

The war in Yemen, the Arabian peninsula's poorest country, has mutated into what the United Nations calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis. After years of protests and political crises that escalated into violent clashes, the conflict took a decisive turn on July 8, 2014. Houthi rebels from the north pulled off a decisive victory in the battle for the city of Amran north of Sanaa, comprehensively defeating government troops. The major battlefield win opened the way for the rebels to march on the capital and take it with ease—but not without a dire human cost, with millions eventually pushed to the brink of starvation.

### Brink of famine

Masirah was one of the many thousands of infants affected by the conflict. Weighing just 2.4 kilograms (5.3 pounds), she suffered from acute malnutrition, her grandmother told AFP. "We needed a medical checkup, milk, and food. If the medicines are available in the hospital, they give them to us, if not we have to buy them outside," she said.

Millions of children in Yemen now face starvation due to a lack of aid for the country, UNICEF said in June. The long conflict has devastated the health system and displaced 3.3 million people who live in camps where cholera and other diseases are rife. The humanitarian situation has worsened since Saudi Arabia intervened in March 2015, leading a coalition in support of government forces against the rebels, who are in turn backed by Riyadh's arch-rival Iran.

### Serious shortages

Yemen, a country with scarce clean water supplies, is now facing another threat—the spread of the novel coronavirus. Officially, the respiratory disease has killed 330 people in the country. Doctors at Al-Sabyine's malnutrition department,



### Devastating war drags into 7th year

a facility with capacity for 25 patients, have warned that COVID-19 coupled with fuel shortages have worsened the situation and acted as a barrier to treatment.

Many parents fear their children are at risk of the deadly respiratory disease if they are hospitalized, said doctor Hazaa Abdallah Al-Farah. "Some people ... won't send their children to hospital any more" due to fears about the virus, he said. But

Brazil is the second worst-hit country in the world by the pandemic, with more than 65,000 deaths and at least 1.6 million cases. Bolsonaro had been tested three times previously—all came back negative. On Monday, the far-right leader made more changes to weaken a law that would require citizens to wear face masks in public. He had already watered down the bill Friday by vetoing several articles, such as requiring employers to supply face masks for their staff and another mandating that public authorities should provide face coverings for "economically vulnerable people."

Now Bolsonaro has also vetoed articles requiring masks be worn in prisons and another obliging businesses to provide information on how to wear masks properly. Some states have already made the wearing of face-coverings mandatory, but this was the first such law on a national level. On Saturday, Bolsonaro published photos on social media in which he is not wearing a face mask at a lunch with the US ambassador and several ministers celebrating the July 4th holiday. Since he was in a private residence, he did not break the new law—but that did not spare him from an avalanche of criticism online for not providing a good example. —AFP

## Brazil's Bolsonaro takes virus test after showing symptoms

**BRASILIA:** Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro, who has long minimized the risks posed by the coronavirus, said Monday he had been tested after showing symptoms including a fever. Bolsonaro told CNN Brazil that he underwent an X-ray of his lungs at a military hospital as a precaution. Local media said the virus test results would come at about midday. He also said he was taking hydroxychloroquine as a preventive measure.

Local media said the 65-year-old Bolsonaro had cleared his schedule for the week. "The president is in good health at the moment and is in his residence," his office said in a statement. Since the beginning of the virus outbreak, Bolsonaro has minimized the risks of what he initially called "a little flu" and flouted social distancing rules and containment measures, such as wearing a mask in public.



LONDON: A protester holds a Yemeni flag-themed placard in Parliament Square in London as she demonstrates against the continued conflict in Yemen. —AFP

the true scale of the impact of coronavirus in the Houthi-controlled north of Yemen remains a mystery. The internationally recognized government accuses the rebels of a cover-up. NGOs and the UN are braced for a catastrophe. UNICEF, the latter's children's agency, has called for \$461 million to fund humanitarian work in Yemen and an additional \$53 million to fight COVID-19.

Despite the urgent need, only 39 percent of the first sum and just 10 percent of the second have so far been amassed, UNICEF says. The agency has also sounded the alarm over the reduction to its services on the ground. In June, the UN raised just \$1.35 billion of the \$2.41 billion it was aiming to secure for Yemen during a virtual donor conference. "They die in their homes unable to get to the health centre or hospital or a clinic because of their bad financial situation," said Amin al-Aizari, another doctor at Al-Sabyine. "They need food," he said. "The children of Yemen die every hour and every minute." —AFP

## Egypt's law allows soldiers to run for office

**CAIRO:** Egypt's parliament on Monday approved amendments that would allow active or former military personnel to run for the presidency and parliament only with the army's approval. The legislative changes come a year after Egyptians overwhelmingly voted in favor of constitutional amendments that potentially allow President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, a former army chief, to stay on until 2030.

The amendments are expected to make it almost impossible for military personnel to run in any election, in effect preventing anyone from squaring off against Sisi. Since it became a modern republic, all but two of Egypt's presidents have hailed from a military background. The army is highly visible in Egypt's public life, with former top brass currently serving as ministers and heading governorates as well.

The nationalist institution boasts a sizeable business portfolio ranging from massive construction projects to producing protective masks. Sisi led the army's overthrow of elected president Mohamed Morsi in 2013 following mass protests against the Islamist leader's rule. Sisi won his first term as president in 2014 and was re-elected in March 2018 with more than 97 percent of the vote, after standing virtually unopposed. The amended law also prohibits officers from divulging information during their service publicly or joining political parties without the Supreme Council of Armed Forces' permission. —AFP



BRASILIA: Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro holds a girl in his arms, both wearing face masks, during the flag-raising ceremony before a ministerial meeting at the Alvorada Palace in Brasilia, amid the new coronavirus pandemic. —AFP

## International

# Wave of political arrests follows Ethiopia protests that killed 166

## Five senior members of an opposition party detained

**ADDIS ABABA:** Five senior members of an opposition party representing Ethiopia's largest ethnic group, the Oromo, have been detained in a wave of political arrests following protests last week which left at least 166 dead. Violent demonstrations broke out in the capital Addis Ababa and the surrounding Oromia region following the murder last Monday of popular Oromo singer Hachalu Hundessa which fuelled ethnic tensions.

The opposition politicians from the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) were seized by security forces in Addis Ababa, party chairman Dawud Ibsa told AFP. Those arrested include senior political officers Chaltu Takkele and Gemmechu Ayana, as well as Kennesa Ayana, a member of the party's central committee. "We don't know why they were taken," Dawud said. "They were just simply sitting in their rooms and doing their jobs."

The political crackdown deepens fears of a large-scale roundup of government critics as Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed seeks to maintain control and keep a lid on simmering ethnic tensions and resentments. Hachalu's songs channeled marginalization among his Oromo ethnic group, and were the soundtrack to anti-government protests that swept Abiy, the country's first Oromo leader, to office in 2018.

News that he was shot dead led to an outpouring of anger among the Oromo and officials have said the deaths that followed were a result of lethal force by security officers and inter-ethnic violence. An Oromia police official said late Saturday that 156 people had been killed across the region in the ensuing violence, including 11 members of the security forces. Ten additional deaths have been reported

in Addis Ababa. The situation in the capital has been calm since Friday, though a nationwide internet blackout remained in effect Monday for a seventh consecutive day.

### New leader, old tactics

Abiy, who won last year's Nobel Peace Prize in part for opening up Ethiopia's political space, lifted a ban on the OLF shortly after he assumed office in 2018. But the OLF's Dawud said some senior members of his party had been arrested numerous times since then and held for extended periods—several months in some cases—without ever seeing a courtroom, a tactic common under previous Ethiopian leaders. "It's the continuation of the past and we don't know why it's happening," he said. The OLF is not the only party to be targeted in recent days. During last week's unrest, officials also detained Jawar Mohammed and Bekele Gerba from the Oromo Federalist Congress, as well as Eskinder Nega, a long-time government critic who has recently spoken out against government policies he argues favor Oromos. All three men appeared briefly in court last week.

On Friday officials also detained Yilkal Getnet, chairman of the opposition Ethiopian National Movement Party, for reasons that remain unclear, according to Girma Bekele, vice chairman of the Ethiopian Political Parties Joint Council, a consortium of more than 100 parties. "I for one do not think Yilkal has any involvement with recent unrest. He believes in a peaceful, legal struggle," Girma told AFP.

### Gunshots, beatings, burns

Officials have not provided a detailed breakdown



**ST PAUL:** Members of the Oromo community gather to celebrate the life of musician and revolutionary Hachalu Hundessa at the Oromo Community Center in St Paul, Minnesota. — AFP

of the cause of the protest deaths, but a doctor at the referral hospital in the town of Adama, about 100 kilometers southeast of Addis, told AFP that 18 deaths and more than 90 injuries had been confirmed at the facility. "A lot of them were bullet injuries," the doctor said, noting that in many cases victims reported having been shot by security forces. The doctor, who spoke to AFP on condition

of anonymity, also said 24 patients were "burn cases" who said that civilians threw scalding chemicals on them during inter-ethnic violence. Still other victims were stabbed with knives or bludgeoned with sticks, the doctor said. Tensions among Ethiopia's many ethnic groups have repeatedly spilled over into violence under Abiy, forcing millions to flee their homes. — AFP

### News in brief

#### Surge in NYC shootings

**NEW YORK:** New York reeled from a spate of holiday weekend shootings Monday, with police fueling controversy by partially attributing them to reforms undertaken following the death in custody of George Floyd. The Big Apple was rocked by 45 shootings—which resulted in 11 deaths—over the long July 4th weekend, up from just 16 shootings for the same period in 2019. Terence Monahan, the NYPD's highest-ranking uniformed officer, said "tremendous animosity" shown towards officers following the recent Black Lives Matter protests had contributed by lowering police morale. Shootings soared 130 percent in June compared to the same period last year, NYPD statistics show, with Monahan also saying early release of prisoners due to coronavirus put more violent offenders on the streets. Monahan also denounced a new law that bars New York police officers from keeping a suspect on the ground by pressing on his chest. — AFP

#### Six shot dead in Bangladesh

**DHAKA:** At least six tribal activists were shot dead yesterday in an ambush by a rival group in Bangladesh's restive Chittagong Hill Tracts, where scores have died in an insurgency in recent years, police said. Gunmen attacked supporters of a splinter group off the Jan Sanhati Samiti (JSS) insurgent movement at Bagmara in Bandarban district, about 400 kilometers south-east of the capital Dhaka, according to officers. The splinter group's district head was among the dead and three other people were critically wounded, SM Mobassher Hossain, deputy head of the Bandarban police said. The JSS is the main insurgent group in Bangladesh's three Chittagong hill districts that include Bandarban. It fought a battle with government forces that claimed about 2,500 lives in the area from the early 1980s until a peace treaty was signed in 1997. — AFP

#### India, China ease tension

**NEW DELHI:** Chinese troops were seen removing structures from a Himalayan valley where they fought a deadly battle with Indian soldiers last month, Indian army sources said Monday, after high-level talks between the nuclear-armed neighbors. Brutal hand-to-hand fighting in the Galwan Valley in Ladakh on June 15 left twenty Indian soldiers dead and sent tensions between the countries soaring. China has acknowledged it suffered casualties but has not given figures. The two sides agreed on Sunday to "completely disengage" from the border flashpoint and ensure "a phased and stepwise de-escalation in the India-China border areas," India's foreign ministry said Monday. In a CCTV readout of the meeting, China's representative Foreign Minister Wang Yi said Beijing would "effectively defend its territorial sovereignty, while maintaining peace in the border areas". — AFP

#### US 'knee-deep' in first wave

**WASHINGTON:** The United States is still "knee-deep" in its first wave of coronavirus infections and must act immediately to tackle the recent surge, the country's top infectious diseases expert said Monday. Anthony Fauci said the number of cases had never reached a satisfactory baseline before the current resurgence, which officials have warned risks overwhelming hospitals in the country's south and west. "It's a serious situation that we have to address immediately," Fauci said in a web interview with National Institutes of Health director Francis Collins. — AFP

## Colombia fuel truck inferno kills seven

**BOGOTA:** At least seven people were killed and dozens injured after the contents from an overturned tanker exploded in a fireball in northern Colombia, police said Monday. Dozens of people had gathered around the tanker after it overturned and were trying to siphon off fuel when it ignited, causing an inferno, police said. "We believe there are at least seven people burned to death in this tragic accident," said Fabian Ospino, mayor of the town of Pueblo Viejo, where the accident happened, in a video posted on social media.

Local police subsequently confirmed the explosion had killed seven people and left a further 49 people with burn injuries. The accident



**PUEBLO VIEJO:** Handout picture shows the remains of a tanker truck carrying fuel that caught fire, in Pueblo Viejo, north of Bogota, Colombia on July 6, 2020. — AFP

occurred on the road between the cities of Barranquilla and Santa Marta on Colombia's

Caribbean coast. "There are people who have burns over 90 percent of their body," said Carlos Caicedo, the governor of the local department of Magdalena, who said efforts were underway to transport people suffering serious burns to specialist hospitals.

"We are working with the air force for a medicalized flight in order to be able to send patients to other cities where they have burn wards. "Let's not forget that in Magdalena there is no burn ward," said Caicedo. President Ivan Duque sent a message of solidarity to the families of the victims, saying the situation they faced was "painful." "The message is one of solidarity with the people who lost their loved ones in this accident," Duque said at an event in Bogota. Hospital services in Barranquilla, around 45 kilometers (28 miles) from the accident, are reported to be close to saturation because of the coronavirus outbreak in one of Colombia's worst-hit regions. — AFP

## Macron picks new interior minister in cabinet revamp

**PARIS:** President Emmanuel Macron Monday replaced his embattled interior minister and shuffled other cabinet positions as he seeks a "new path" to see France through its worst economic crisis since World War II and win re-election. Bruised by the drubbing of his ruling party in local elections last month, Macron had on Friday appointed senior bureaucrat Jean Castex as prime minister and spent the weekend in consultations with the new premier to appoint a government. In the most significant change on Monday, Macron dropped Christophe Castaner as interior minister and replaced him with budget minister Gerald Darmanin.

Darmanin, 37, is considered one of the president's most loyal allies but is also the subject of a rape investigation. Castaner, appointed in 2018, had struggled to balance increasing criticism for alleged heavy-handedness and racism within the police force and complaints from officers themselves that he failed to protect them. However, the reshuffle stopped short of more radical change, with Macron keeping on Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire and Defense Minister Florence Parly.

Health Minister Olivier Veran, who has led the country's ongoing battle against the coronavirus outbreak, which has claimed nearly 30,000 lives, is also staying on. Macron axed the only black member of his cabinet, government spokeswoman Sibeth Ndiaye, who caused a recent controversy by suggesting a long-standing ban on racial population data in France should be overturned. However Elisabeth Moreno, a tech businesswoman who was born in Cape Verde, becomes minister for equality. And making a return to government is Roselyne Bachelot, 73, a veteran of previous right-wing governments including under Jacques Chirac and who is tasked with saving the arts in France as culture minister.

### 'Musical chairs'

After the dismal local election showing for his centrist Republic on the Move (LREM) party, Macron replaced his popular prime minister Edouard Philippe with relative unknown Castex, a bureaucrat and small-town mayor. Analysts said the move reflected a desire by Macron to tighten his grip on executive power after reports of policy disagreements with Philippe—who fared far better than the president in opinion polls.

Macron is looking ahead to the 2022 presidential election, in which he is likely to be challenged by far-right leader Marine Le Pen. Macron wrote on Twitter on Sunday that a "new path" was needed, listing the new government's priorities as "reviving



**PARIS:** In this file photo, French Interior Minister Christophe Castaner (left) listens to French President Emmanuel Macron after a meeting at the Elysee presidential Palace. French Interior Minister Christophe Castaner leaves the French Government following a reshuffle by newly nominated Prime Minister. — AFP

the economy, continuing an overhaul of our social protection and the environment, re-establishing a fair republican order and defending European sovereignty". But the president of the right-wing opposition The Republicans (LR) Christian Jacob rubbished the reshuffle as a "game of musical chairs" saying that in the face of "unprecedented crisis" Macron was simply "trying to buy time". In perhaps the biggest surprise of the reshuffle, star criminal lawyer Eric Dupond-Moretti, famous for his record in winning acquittals for his clients, was named minister of justice. "Naming a person who is so divisive and who has such scorn for the judiciary, is a declaration of war towards the judiciary," said Celine Parisot, head of the USM judicial union of the controversial appointment.

### 'Enough talking'

For the environment ministry, Macron appointed Barbara Pompili, a former secretary of state for biodiversity to replace Elisabeth Borne. The green EELV party, of which Pompili was a member before joining the LREM, made huge gains in the local elections and said it would not join the new government if asked, accusing Macron of paying lip service to environmental issues. Castex, not specifically known for a green agenda, has insisted since his appointment that a healthy environment "is not an option but an obligation". Julien Bayou, the secretary general of the EELV said in reaction to Pompili's appointment: "Enough talking. Let's see action."

Darmanin is accused by a woman of having raped her after she sought his help in having a criminal record expunged. Last month, appeals judges in Paris ordered the reopening of an investigation into the claims that date from 2009. Darmanin, whose father was a bar owner and mother a cleaner of Algerian origin, said it was a "great honor... for the grandson of an immigrant to be interior minister of our beautiful country." An Elysee source said the rape complaint made against him did not "pose an obstacle" to his nomination while the case appears to be "going in the right direction" for him. — AFP

## Morocco to prosecute journalist for 'insults and drunkenness'

**RABAT:** Moroccan authorities on Monday released a journalist detained for drinking in public but said he will still be prosecuted, his lawyer announced, after a probe was opened into his alleged links to foreign intelligence services. Omar Radi has been at the centre of a spat between Morocco and Amnesty International after the rights group last month accused Rabat of bugging his phone. "He was taken into custody on the instructions of the prosecution after an incident last night around 11:30 pm" and detained in Casablanca, the spokesman for the DGSN security service said Monday.

Radi was released on Monday but he will be prosecuted for allegedly "being drunk in public and hurling insults", his lawyer Miloud Kendil said. Rabat said in late June it was investigating Radi for receiving "foreign funding" in exchange for "intelligence services". The Moroccan authorities said they suspected him of having "links to the liaison officer of a foreign country". But Radi, who was given a four-month suspended sentence in March for criticizing a judge in a tweet, wrote on Facebook Saturday that "I have never been and nor will I ever be in the service of a foreign power".

He accused media outlets including website Chouf TV of "a coordinated defamation campaign against me" over market research he had carried out for two consulting firms. He said it was "very common for journalists, especially those specializing in economic affairs, to produce this type of due diligence and consulting work (which) has absolutely nothing to do with the intelligence world". "I am neither a spy nor a paid agent on a foreign payroll," he added.

Radi's father Radi Driss wrote on his own Facebook page that on Sunday evening, the journalist was detained with a friend following an "altercation" with a reporter from Chouf TV who had "come to provoke them". Radi, who has already been interviewed twice by police, in late June accused Chouf TV of a "lynching campaign". The website has accused him of being a "spy". His arrest comes after Amnesty said in June that software developed by Israeli security firm NSO Group was used to insert spyware on to Radi's mobile phone. The Pegasus software can switch on the phone's camera and microphone as well as access data, effectively turning it into a pocket spy. Moroccan authorities responded by demanding the rights group provide evidence to support the "serious and tendentious" accusations, threatening otherwise to take "the necessary measures to defend its national security". Amnesty said Saturday it had already provided ample proof, saying its researchers had shown that the software had been installed in a way that would require access that "only a government could authorize". — AFP

## International

# US tech giants resist as China censors Hong Kong's internet

## 116-page document reveals expanded powers for police

**HONG KONG:** China has unveiled new powers to censor Hong Kong's internet and access user data using its feared national security law—but US tech giants have put up some resistance citing rights concerns. The online censorship plans were contained in a 116-page government document released on Monday night that also revealed expanded powers for police, allowing warrantless raids and surveillance for some national security investigations. China imposed the law on semi-autonomous Hong Kong a week ago, targeting subversion, secession, terrorism and colluding with foreign forces—its wording kept secret until the moment it was enacted.

Despite assurances that only a small number of people would be targeted by the law, the new details show it is the most radical change in Hong Kong's freedoms and rights since Britain handed the city back to China in 1997. Late Monday, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo spoke out against "Orwellian" moves to censor activists, schools and libraries since the law was enacted. "Until now, Hong Kong flourished because it allowed free thinking and free speech, under an independent rule of law. No more," Pompeo said.

### Restore stability

Under its handover deal with the British, Beijing promised to guarantee until at least 2047 certain liberties and autonomy not seen on the authoritarian mainland. Years of rising concerns that China's ruling Communist Party was steadily eroding those freedoms birthed a popular pro-democracy movement, which led to massive and often violent protests for seven months last year.

China has made no secret of its desire to use the law to crush that democracy movement. "The Hong Kong government will vigorously implement this law," Chief Executive Carrie Lam, the city's Beijing-appointed leader, told reporters yesterday. "And I forewarn those radicals not to attempt to violate

this law, or cross the red line, because the consequences of breaching this law are very serious."

With pro-democracy books quickly pulled out of libraries and schools, the government signaled in the document released on Monday night that it would also expect obedience online. Police were granted powers to control and remove online information if



### Pompeo slams 'Orwellian' moves

there were "reasonable grounds" to suspect the data breaches the national security law. Internet firms and service providers can be ordered to remove the information and their equipment can be seized. Executives can also be hit with fines and up to one year in jail if they refuse to comply. The companies are also expected to provide identification records and decryption assistance.

### Big tech unease

However the biggest American tech companies offered some resistance. Facebook, Google and Twitter said Monday they had put a hold on requests by Hong Kong's government or police force for information on users. Facebook and its popular messaging service WhatsApp would deny requests until it had conducted a review of the law that entailed "formal human rights due diligence and consultations with human rights experts," the company said in a statement.



HONG KONG: A riot police officer (2nd left) points at a woman (center) laying down after being searched during a demonstration in a mall in Hong Kong in response to a new national security law. — AFP

"We believe freedom of expression is a fundamental human right and support the right of people to express themselves without fear for their safety or other repercussions," a Facebook spokesman said. Twitter and Google told AFP that they too would not comply with information requests by Hong Kong authorities in the immediate future. Twitter told AFP it had "grave concerns regarding both the developing process and the full intention of this law". Tik Tok, which is owned by Chinese com-

pany Byte Dance, announced it was pulling out of Hong Kong altogether. "In light of recent events, we've decided to stop operations of the TikTok app in Hong Kong," Tik Tok told AFP. Tik Tok has become wildly popular amongst youngsters around the world. However many Hong Kongers have distrusted it because of its Chinese ownership. ByteDance has consistently denied sharing any user data with authorities in China, and was adamant it did not intend to begin to agree to such requests. — AFP

### News in brief

#### Two small planes collide

**LOS ANGELES:** Two small planes collided over a lake in the northwestern US state of Idaho with at least eight on board the aircraft believed dead, officials said Monday. The jets crashed and plunged into Lake Coeur d'Alene, a popular summer tourist destination some 350 miles north of state capital Boise, on Sunday afternoon. Three bodies have been retrieved from the lake. They could not be immediately identified "due to the nature to the accident," Kootenai County Sheriff Ben Wolfinger said. "At this time it is believed there are no survivors," Wolfinger said in a statement. Four victims on board a de Havilland DHC-2 run by local tourism company Brooks Seaplanes were related, believed to be "father and kids," said sheriff's office lieutenant Ryan Higgins at a press conference. — AFP

#### 'Surge' in suicide attempts

**GAZA CITY:** At least 17 people have taken their own lives in the impoverished Gaza Strip this year and hundreds more have made suicide attempts, a Palestinian rights group said yesterday. Israel has imposed a stifling land, sea and air blockade on the Gaza Strip for over a decade, after having withdrawn from the densely populated enclave in 2005. "We have registered 17 suicides and hundreds of attempted suicides, namely among young people," since the start of the year, said Samir Zaqout, deputy director of the Al Mezan Center for Human Rights. He told AFP that "extreme poverty", difficult living conditions and a lack of freedom of expression were all factors behind these suicides. — AFP

#### Trump's niece 'memoir'

**NEW YORK:** Donald Trump's niece will release her unflattering book on the US president on July 14, her publisher announced Monday, after a judge lifted a temporary ban on publication. Simon & Schuster has brought forward the release of the memoir by two weeks, according to an update on its website. In her 240-page book, Mary Trump dubs America's leader "the world's most dangerous man." It is set to be the latest bombshell book to dish dirt on Trump after former aide John Bolton's tome, which describes Trump as corrupt and incompetent, hit shelves last month. Last Wednesday, an appeals court judge in New York ruled that Simon & Schuster is allowed to release Mary Trump's book "Too Much and Never Enough: How My Family Created the World's Most Dangerous Man." — AFP

#### Dominican opposition wins

**SANTO DOMINGO:** Opposition candidate Luis Abinader swept to victory in the Dominican Republic's presidential election, early results showed Monday, ending 16 years of unbroken rule by the Caribbean nation's center-left PLD party after voters braved a worsening coronavirus outbreak to cast their ballots. Abinader, the candidate of the Modern Revolutionary Party (PRM), took 52.4 percent of the vote with 93.2 percent of polling station returns counted, the Central Electoral Board said. "We won, today we won," a victorious Abinader told dozens of supporters at his campaign headquarters in the capital Santo Domingo. — AFP

## Iraq jihadism expert Hashemi shot dead

**BAGHDAD:** Renowned jihadism expert Hisham Al-Hashemi was shot outside his home in Baghdad on Monday and died shortly thereafter at a local hospital, Iraqi officials said. Hashemi was an authoritative voice on Sunni jihadist factions including the Islamic State group, but was also frequently consulted by media and foreign governments on domestic Iraqi politics and Shiite armed groups. He had warm ties with top decision-makers, including President Barham Saleh, but was also trusted by rival parties and armed groups, which used him as a mediator.

The investigator assigned to the killing told AFP that Hashemi, 47, walked out of his home in east Baghdad and was getting into his car when three gunmen on two motorcycles fired at him from meters away. Hashemi was wounded and ducked behind his car, but the gunmen approached and shot him four times in the head at close range, the investigator said. A medical source at the hospital confirmed to AFP that Hashemi had suffered "a hail of bullet wounds in several body parts." "He passed away and his body is now in the hospital freezer," said Saad Maan, head of the ministry's media relations department.



BAGHDAD: TV screen grab shows Jihadism expert Iraqi Hisham Al-Hashemi speaking during an interview in Baghdad. — AFP

### No stranger to threats

Raised in Baghdad, Hashemi published several books on jihadism, then went on to work with top research centers including Chatham House in London and most recently the Center for Global Policy in Washington, D.C. He had come out strongly in favor of the popular protests that erupted across Baghdad and Iraq's Shiite-majority south in October, which had slammed the government as corrupt, inefficient and beholden to neighboring Iran. More than 500 people lost their lives in protest-related violence, including several prominent activists who were gunned down in Baghdad, Basra in the south and other cities gripped by the

rallies. High-profile political killings have otherwise been rare in recent years. But Hashemi was no stranger to threats.

In September, anonymous online accounts accused him and a dozen other Iraqi activists, researchers and journalists of "collaborating with Israel." In April, he was threatened again by anonymous Twitter users who deemed him too close to the US government. But his killing has sent shock waves across Iraq. From protesters and activists to foreign ambassadors and the United Nations, many were quick to mourn him. "Cowards killed my friend and one of the brightest researchers in Iraq, Hisham Al-Hashemi. I am shocked," wrote Harith Hasan, who was an academic researcher before becoming an advisor to Iraq's current premier.

Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhemi swore he would hold Hashemi's killers to account. "We vow to his killers that we will pursue them so they are justly punished. We will not allow assassinations to return to Iraq for a single second," Kadhemi said in a statement. The UN's top official in Iraq Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert slammed the killing as a "despicable act of cowardice."

"Our heartfelt condolences to his family and loved ones. I call on the government to quickly identify the perpetrators and bring them to justice," she wrote. And Iraq's Hashed Al-Shaabi, a state-sponsored network of armed factions including many who are close to Iran, published a statement mourning Hashemi's death. — AFP



KUALA LUMPUR: A woman walks along the Saloma Link Bridge in Kuala Lumpur. — AFP

## Malaysia probes Al Jazeera over migrant arrests

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Malaysian police said yesterday they are investigating an Al Jazeera documentary about the arrests of undocumented migrants during the coronavirus lockdown after officials denounced it for damaging the country's image. The move comes after several activists, journalists and opposition figures have been put under investigation recently in what critics say is a bid to silence dissent.

The documentary by the Qatar-based broadcaster, "Locked Up in Malaysia's Lockdown", focused on the detention of hundreds of migrants found without valid documents in areas under strict lockdowns. Authorities defended the May arrests as necessary to protect public health, but rights groups warned that putting the foreigners in detention centers could increase the risk of infection. National police chief Abdul Hamid Bador said an investigation had been launched after complaints

were lodged about the 25-minute documentary. Officials would examine whether the report "contains elements of sedition, or any other offences, under the laws of the country", he told a press conference. "We will be calling them soon for questioning... We will decide on the charges after we question them." Al Jazeera, which broadcast the documentary last week, did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The program sparked a backlash online, and ministers have lined up to criticize it—with Defense Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob on Monday demanding an apology from Al Jazeera.

He said the broadcaster had "reported incorrect things, accusing us of being racist". Concerns about worsening freedom of expression have been growing in Malaysia since the collapse of a reformist government in February and the return of a scandal-plagued party to power. One of the country's leading independent news portals, Malaysiakini, faces contempt of court proceedings next week over reader comments on its site that were critical of the judiciary. Malaysia is home to large numbers of migrants from poorer countries—including Indonesia, Bangladesh and Myanmar—who work in industries ranging from manufacturing to agriculture. — AFP

## Chinese students take virus-delayed entrance exam

**BEIJING:** Nearly 11 million stressed-out Chinese students began taking the country's grueling annual college entrance exam yesterday following a month-long coronavirus delay, with inspectors this year checking both for cheaters and fevers. The two-day test-known in Chinese as the "gaokao"—is an annual moment of great anxiety for students and parents who dream of sending their children to university, but the coronavirus added another layer of pressure by closing schools for months.

At a testing centre in Beijing, students took selfies and exchanged hugs and high-fives with family and friends before going in for the exam. In a sign of the high stakes, some even stood outside the venue, poring over their study materials for some 11th-hour cramming. "I'm actually more nervous than my son," said a 49-year-old parent who gave her surname, Yi. "The pandemic did impact him. He hasn't gone to school for seven months since the school closed in January. He is too young to swiftly adapt to these big changes in our society."

More than 7,000 exam sites have been set up across China, with nearly one million invigilators or other workers to watch over the students, according to state media. Officials will not just be looking for cheaters. They will be watching if students have fevers or coughs. Test-takers who show symptoms will be taken to an isolation room with disinfectant, according to the official Xinhua news agency. The students and invigilators had to track their health during the 14 days prior to the exam. Students from high-risk areas have to wear masks during the tests. Zhao Kexin, who is taking the exam in Beijing, had to report her temperature to her school every day leading up to the exam. "Though there are enough measures to protect us from contracting the virus, I am still feeling a bit nervous about gathering in a public area, but I have to take the test," Zhao said. — AFP

## Business

WEDNESDAY, JULY 8, 2020



LAHTI: Janne picks up strawberries in Lahti, Finland. Thousands of Finns have answered a desperate call from farmers to save the summer's berry harvest, after coronavirus restrictions have kept many of the usual foreign pickers away. —AFP

## Finns turn to berry-picking amid job losses

### Coronavirus restrictions keep many usual foreign pickers away

**HOLLOLA, Finland:** Thousands of Finns have answered a desperate call from farmers to save the summer's berry harvest, as coronavirus restrictions have kept many of the usual foreign pickers away. "After 22 years, we have Finnish workers on the strawberry fields again, it's a very unusual situation," Vesa Koivistoinen, owner of Finland's largest strawberry farm in the southern village of Hollola, said.

When AFP visited Koivistoinen's 100-hectare farm two weeks into the strawberry harvest, the large field was dotted with hundreds of people, from teenagers to pensioners, crouching down to pick strawberries then putting them in crates to be weighed and loaded in a lorry. To handle the berry harvests, Finland normally needs about 16,000 seasonal workers a year, "who mainly come from abroad," Kati Kuula of the agricultural union MTK said.

But when coronavirus travel restrictions were imposed in the spring, agricultural associations and the government feared a labor shortage and launched a number of recruitment programs. One of the largest, the government-backed #Seasonwork social media campaign, features a tanned, blonde couple standing proud in a wheat field, and calls for "every available pair of hands" to "secure domestic food on Finnish dinner tables". So far this year, only a third of the usual workers have arrived from abroad, all from Ukraine, with the rest of the shortfall recruited from within Finland, Kuula said.

#### Wage bump

Of the 350 Finns employed on Vesa Koivistoinen's strawberry farm, the majority are students aged 15-20, but

many others are those made jobless by the coronavirus. Sari, a 52-year-old masseuse, replied to the job advert after her own business dried up during the spring.

"I'm the daughter of a farmer and I was working in strawberry fields when I was young," she said. "So I knew what to expect," she added. Meanwhile, 29-year-old Janne Erola, who has worked in a number of seasonal jobs but never before in fruit-picking, said he intended to stay until the strawberry season ends in late August. Filling one sev-



#### Large field dotted with hundreds of people

en-kilogram (15.5-pound) crate takes "a bit more than an hour", Erola said, earning him 1.2 euros (\$1.36) per kilogram. Koivistoinen said that as the Finns aren't able to pick as fast as the experienced Ukrainian workers, he has offered them a 10-percent bonus to make it worth their while.

The recruitment efforts and higher salaries have pushed up costs, but Koivistoinen says he will gladly employ home-grown workers in future, too. "We wanted to be

able to employ Finns because lots of other firms can't offer summer jobs this year," Koivistoinen said.

Yet the demanding physical work in the changeable Finnish weather does not appeal to everyone. "It's really physical, and it's quite far from my home," said 17-year-old Laura, who signed up along with her schoolfriends Senni and Mohammed. All three are sitting by the side of the field having a break, their fingers red with strawberry juice. "I actually had a job offer earlier this summer, but then they said they couldn't take me because of corona," Mohammed added.

#### Berry rescue plea

Yet while domestic labor has come to the rescue of Finland's strawberry harvest, the fate of this year's crop of bilberries, a cornerstone of Finnish food culture, looks far more precarious. Every year, Finnish industries from food to cosmetics require 20 million kilograms of bilberries—a small, European variety of the blueberry which is not cultivated in fields but grows abundantly in Finland's vast forests.

The berries are usually picked by Thai workers brought over for the harvest season in late summer, but the pandemic restrictions mean none will be admitted this year. Instead, Finland's social media is awash with posts imploring "every working-age Finn to collect a bucket's worth of bilberries" to stop the berries going to waste. Some of the companies which rely on berries have not been assuaged by the potential reach of social media, and have said they will import their bilberries from Poland or Russia this year, warning this could lead to higher prices on the shelves. —AFP

to support the recovery.

The main risks include a potential wave of new infections, more permanent scars from the crisis, including unemployment and corporate insolvencies, and the absence of a EU-UK future relationship deal. "At the global level, the still rising rate of infections, particularly in the US and emerging markets, has deteriorated the global outlook and is expected to act as a drag on the European economy," the report said. The Commission said its inflation forecasts were little changed, at 0.3 percent this year and 1.1 percent in 2021. In the United States, high-frequency data assembled by Federal Reserve officials, economists, cellphone tracking companies, and employee time management firms suggests activity has slowed in recent days after an upbeat employment read-out.

Some reopening plans have been put on hold and restrictions placed on the bars, restaurants and other hospitality industry companies that helped the US economy add 4.8 million jobs in June. —Reuters

## Gas boom risks 'perfect storm' for climate, economy

**PARIS:** Global natural gas capacity under construction has doubled in a year according to new analysis that warned yesterday the investment boom in the world's fastest-growing fuel risks a "perfect storm" of climate chaos and stranded assets. Capital expenditure on liquefied natural gas (LNG) facilities has surged from \$82.8 billion to \$196.1 billion over the last 12 months, according to a report by Global Energy Monitor.

Following a string of divestments from high-profile LNG funders, the report warned that at least two dozen projects were recently cancelled or are in serious financial difficulty. "LNG was once considered a safe bet for investors," said Greg Aitken, research analyst at Global Energy Monitor. "Not only was it considered a climate-friendly fuel, but there was substantial governmental support to make sure that these mega-projects were shepherded to completion with all the billions they needed."

"Suddenly the industry is beset with problems," Aitken said. As the coronavirus pandemic squeezes investors and a growing social movement against new gas projects gathers pace, the report said troubled projects were facing a range of difficulties in sustaining finance.

In the past year Berkshire Hathaway and the governments of Sweden and Ireland were among financiers to drop several billion dollars' worth of gas project funding, it noted.

While its proponents push LNG as a "bridge fuel" because it is less polluting than coal, a new gas-fired power plant has roughly the same environmental impact as a new coal plant, given the leakage of methane throughout the supply line. Methane is dozens of times more potent a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide over a 100-year time scale. —AFP

## Eurozone set for deeper recession

**BRUSSELS:** The eurozone economy will drop deeper into recession this year and rebound less steeply in 2021 than previously thought, the European Commission forecast yesterday, with France, Italy and Spain struggling the most due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The downbeat assessment of Europe's economy comes amid concern the US recovery may also be faltering as a surge of new coronavirus infections prompts states to delay and in some cases reverse plans to let stores reopen and activities resume.

The EU executive said the 19 nation single currency area would contract by a record 8.7 percent this year before rising by 6.1 percent in 2021. In early May, the Commission had forecast a downturn this year of 7.7 percent and a rebound in 2021 of 6.3 percent. The

Commission said it had to revise its previous forecasts because the lifting of COVID-19 lockdown measures in euro zone countries was proceeding less swiftly than it had initially predicted.

The EU executive significantly cut its earlier forecasts for France, Italy and Spain, three of the countries hardest hit by the pandemic, and now expects now downturns in excess of 10 percent this year in each nation. Conversely, for the euro zone's largest economy, Germany, where widespread testing has helped limit fatalities, the 2020 downturn would be 6.3 percent, less pronounced than May forecast of 6.5 percent. The rebound in Germany in 2021 is however expected to be less pronounced than previously estimated.

The new figures indicate an economic recovery gathering momentum in June, although it is based on a number of "critical" assumptions. The forecasts assume no second wave of infections triggering renewed restrictions, although social distancing measures would persist, while monetary and fiscal policy measures are expected

abroad and she has to come back. I cannot afford it anymore," Hosseini said. The cause of Hosseini's misery was a sharp drop in the Iranian rial to its weakest against the US dollar. The currency's fall has not only made life more expensive, it may also test Iran's ability to prop up an economy battered by crippling US sanctions and the new coronavirus.

The dollar was being offered for 215,000 rials on Monday, according to website Bonbast.com, against an official rate of 42,000. The currency plunge in recent weeks had forced the central bank to act, pumping hundreds of millions of dollars into the market to stabilise the rial. Central Bank Governor Abdolnasser Hemmati described the interventions as "wise and targeted".

The bank had ample foreign reserves, he said, without disclosing their amount.

But current account and fiscal deficits brought on by the economic crisis may require tapping

those reserves, weakening Iran's ability to curb rampant inflation, economists have said. "They have limited foreign exchange reserves to inject in the market and will not be able to contain further depreciation in the presence of U.S. sanctions and isolation from the international community," said Garbis Iradian, chief economist for MENA at the Institute of International Finance.

#### Eroding reserves

The rial has lost about 70 percent of its value following the US withdrawal from Iran's 2015 nuclear pact with six powers in 2018 and reimposition of sanctions. The government has sought to compensate by creating several foreign exchange rates aimed in particular at easing the financial burden of importers. But in the free market, the rial has continued its downward spiral, even after the latest central bank intervention. —Reuters

## Currency crisis hits Iranians, strains economy

**DUBAI:** Desperate to afford her daughter's overseas university fees, 58-year-old retired Iranian teacher Maryam Hosseini withdrew all her savings from the bank to buy US dollars. It was not enough. With three years of study still to do, her daughter is heading back home, her future now on hold. Hosseini's tale of growing poverty is an increasingly familiar one among Iranians, who have long bought US dollars to support their children financially or squirrel away savings.

"My daughter has to bury her dream of studying



TEHRAN: People watch the rial rates at an exchange in Tehran. Iranian currency's fall has not only made life more expensive, it may also test Iran's ability to prop up an economy battered by crippling US sanctions and the new coronavirus. —Reuters



## Business

# Samsung Electronics forecasts 23% profits jump despite coronavirus

## Tech firm reports strong demand for memory chips and displays

SEOUL: Samsung Electronics forecast a 23-percent rise in second-quarter operating profit yesterday, with strong demand for memory chips and displays overcoming the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on smartphone sales. The world's biggest smartphone and memory chip maker said in an earnings estimate that it expected operating profit to be 8.1 trillion won (\$6.8 billion) for April-June, up from 6.6 trillion won in the same period last year.

The prediction was far ahead of analyst forecasts of a single-digit decline. Lockdowns imposed around the world in the face of the coronavirus pandemic—especially in Europe and the United States—have boosted Samsung's chip business with data centers moving to stockpile DRAM chips to meet surging demand for online activities. "The earnings surprise seems to have stemmed from Samsung's memory chip sector," said Park Jin-suk of market observer Counterpoint, pointing to "increased demand for memory chips for PCs and a continuing rise in DRAM chip prices".

Similarly TV sales, which have been on a long-term decline, were "moving upward as people spend more time at home", said James Kang, an analyst at market observer Euromonitor International Korea.

Samsung attributed the estimated operating profits rise to a one-off profit generated from its display division, without offering details. The company predicted overall sales in the second quarter would be down by 7.3 percent from a year earlier.

The firm is the world's largest smartphone maker,

accounting for 20 percent of global market share in the first quarter-ahead of China's Huawei with 17 percent and Apple on 14 percent—according to Counterpoint. Global smartphone sales slumped more than 20 percent year-on-year in the first quarter, their worst performance ever, according to market tracker Gartner, as the pandemic hit consumer spending and sparked widespread economic uncertainty.

### Border boost

Looking forward, analysts expect the firm's smartphone and television businesses to improve, with mobile sales growing as restrictions are lifted in some parts of the world. Smartphone "sales in the US and Europe showed signs of improvement from late in second quarter", said Park.

"Going into the third quarter, we expect the sales figure to rise," he added, predicting smartphone sales in the "low 70 million" for July-September. A recent military brawl between India and China also could play in Samsung's favor, Kang said, if Indian consumers choose Samsung devices over Chinese brands amid

heightened nationalistic sentiment against Beijing.

Despite the positive forecast, Samsung Electronics shares closed down 2.9 percent yesterday, leaving them nearly 15 percent off January's record high. LG Electronics, South Korea's second largest appliance firm after Samsung, forecast second-quarter operating profits would plunge 24.4 percent year on year to 493.1 billion won. Its shares closed down 3.8 percent. Samsung Electronics is

based on government statistics and WHO data. As job losses mount and incomes plunge due to coronavirus lockdowns and border closures, many African countries risk spikes in poverty and hunger, food experts have warned.

### Innovation

In Benin, a dozen entrepreneurs are developing ideas to tackle the coronavirus pandemic, from masks to 3D-printed protective gear, with financial and technical support from a government-United Nations taskforce launched in April. "Because it hasn't been easy to import goods into the country, we have to take a hard look at what we can produce locally," said Claude Bona, head of Seme City, the government's innovation and entrepreneurship center, co-leading the project.

"I think people are slowly taking measure of what's happening here in Africa with innovation, and how it can be a very powerful tool." Atingan is one start-up which received backing from the taskforce to adapt to the crisis, switching from making eco-friendly stoves to handwashing stations operated by pedals so users do not have to touch anything.

"They have sold more than 600 units for about \$100 each to clients that include the United Nations, said Franck Zanhoundah, who founded the company with his brother. "All of the artisans, all the welders in the country have started to make them," he said, adding that the simple metal frame is easily replicable, and that they have shared the design to encourage wider production.

The production of handwashing stations has enabled the small company to survive the crisis, he added.

The Alodo Initiative - a group of fashion designers - is another project receiving support from the taskforce to rapidly scale up its work, both to bolster the fight against COVID-19 and minimize its negative economic impact. It is

immediately respond to a request for comment. "The initial data is revealing many recipients that are appropriately raising eyebrows, which was one of the many reasons we wanted it public," said Danielle Brian, executive director of the Project on Government Oversight.

### Detailed picture

The colossal data set released by the US Treasury Department and Small Business Administration (SBA), after initial resistance, gives Americans their first full look at who got cash from the first-come-first-served PPP that has been dogged by technology, paperwork and fairness issues. To date, the SBA has released geographical distribution figures but the new data paints a much more detailed picture of which communities and sub-sectors received support. Senior administration officials hailed the program as a "wild success," with the data showing it supported about 84 percent of all small business employees.

The data includes information on 660,000 loans of \$150,000 or more, including recipient name, address, lender, business type, jobs retained, and some demographic information. That accounts for roughly 73 percent of the dollars granted, but only 14 percent of the 4.9 million loans, according to a summary of data the agencies released on Monday.

While the data does not say exactly how much money each borrower received, they are placed in one of five bands: \$150,000-350,000; \$350,000-1 million; \$1-2 million; \$2-5 million; and \$5-10 million. More than 4,800 loans were issued in the top band, while the overall average loan size was \$107,000, the data shows. Among those in the mix: the Americans for Tax Reform Foundation, whose stated mission is to curb government spending. It was approved for a loan of between \$150,000 and \$350,000. Despite some eyebrow-raising recipients, the funds reached a wide swath of businesses - more than \$67 billion for the healthcare and social assistance sector, \$64 billion-plus for construction businesses, \$54 billion for manufacturing and, at the smaller end, more than \$7 billion for religious organizations, the data showed.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin had initially refused to name any recipients, saying it could expose



SEOUL: Pedestrians passing a Samsung promotional event outside a store in Seoul. Samsung Electronics forecast a 23-percent rise in second-quarter operating profit yesterday. —AFP

crucial to South Korea's economic health. It is the flagship subsidiary of the giant Samsung group-by far the largest of the family-controlled conglomerates known as chaebols that dominate business in the world's 12th-largest economy.

Its overall turnover is equivalent to a fifth of the national gross domestic product. Vice chairman and de facto leader Lee Jae-yong is currently

being retried over a sprawling corruption scandal that could see him return to prison. He is not being held in custody during the proceedings, but a guilty verdict could deprive the firm of its top decision-maker. Samsung withholds net profit and sector-by-sector business performance data until it releases its final earnings report, expected later this month. —AFP

## African innovators keep COVID-hit economies afloat

ROME/WASHINGTON/HARARE: Ghanaian pilot Eric Acquah started a drone company in 2017 to spray crops with pesticides, but when coronavirus hit the West African country he found a new mission - saving lives. The company has used 20 drones to disinfect about 38 open-air markets in Ghana, spraying a couple of acres in minutes, a job that would take a dozen people several hours, and there are now also plans to use them to disinfect classrooms, said Acquah.

"We targeted the market areas because in Africa they are open-air and always overpopulated. So we thought if the virus is going to spread fast it will be from them," said Acquah, who was paid by local authorities to spray the markets. "Just closing the borders and quarantining the whole country wouldn't make sense unless there is a mass disinfection of places where people gather in larger numbers," the founder of AcquahMeyer Drone Tech told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

The markets have since re-opened, with everyone wearing masks and social distancing, and traders and buyers said they felt safer, said Acquah, who is lobbying private donors for funds to disinfect other public areas - at about \$15 per acre. Acquah is just one of a host of African innovators helping poor households adapt to and survive the pandemic which has so far infected more than 416,000 people in Africa with more than 11,300 deaths, according to a Reuters tally

## US pandemic aid program saved 51.1m jobs

WASHINGTON: A high-profile pandemic aid program protected about 51.1 million American jobs, the Trump administration said on Monday, as it revealed how \$521.4 billion in taxpayer cash was injected into small businesses but also into the pockets of the rich and famous.

The data on the small business Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) seemed to confirm worries among Democrats and watchdog groups that in addition to mom-and-pop shops, the funds went to well-heeled and politically-connected companies, some of which were approved for between \$5 million and \$10 million. Those include several firms that lobby on public policy, such as Wiley Rein LLP and APCO Worldwide, as well as prominent law firms like Kasowitz Benson Torres LLP, which has represented President Donald Trump, and Boies Schiller Flexner LLP.

Kasowitz Benson Torres said the funding helped the law firm preserve hundreds of jobs at full salary at a time when federal courts and its offices were shut down.

The gallery of well-connected names extended deeply into the world of America's privileged and super famous. Sidwell Friends School, an exclusive private school which educated former President Barack Obama's daughters, was approved for between \$5 million and \$10 million, as was Saint Ann's School in Brooklyn, which - with tuition exceeding \$50,000 per year - is attended by the children of hedge fund managers and celebrities. Newsmax Media Inc, the media company run by Trump donor Christopher Ruddy, got the nod for between \$2 million and \$5 million. So did billionaire rapper Kanye West's Yezy LLC clothing company. Newsmax said in a statement it was eligible for the program and did receive a loan, but declined to elaborate. Aside from Kasowitz Benson Torres and Newsmax, the other companies and schools did not



A drone is deployed to disinfect an open-air market in Ghana

producing masks from locally available fabrics, which were tested in a lab to ensure their effectiveness in preventing coronavirus transmission. They have sold millions, some of which the government bought to distribute in schools.

"The textile sector often takes a hit when there is an economic crisis. And it's a sector that employs a lot of workers," said Charlemagne Amoussou, President of the Association of Fashion Designers of Benin. "This local production breathed life into the textile sector in Benin, and I think that almost all the tailors, all the designers had work."

### Digital

With coronavirus cases still rising in Africa, digital networks have proven crucial in keeping economic activity going. As disease-wary customers shun open-air markets, food sellers using Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp have seen a surge in demand, said Rumbidzai Mbambo, 27, founder of Quickfresh, one of the newest Zimbabwean online grocery start-ups. —Reuters



NEW YORK: A woman runs past the Charging Bull sculpture in the Financial District in the Manhattan borough of New York. —Reuters

borrowers' proprietary business information. But under pressure from lawmakers, he agreed to shine a light on large borrowers. Launched in April, the unprecedented program - which has been extended until Aug. 8 - allows small businesses hurt by the pandemic to apply for a forgivable government-backed loan from a lender.

More than 5,000 U.S. lenders participated in the program, with JPMorgan accounting for \$29 billion in loans. JPMorgan, Bank of America, Truist Bank, PNC Bank and Wells Fargo originated 17 percent of total PPP loans, according to the data. In the scramble to distribute funds, the program was beset by technology glitches, documentation snags and revelations that some lenders prioritized their most profitable clients. Some investment firms, for example, were also on the list. That included Advent Capital Management LLC, a New York-based debt investor with \$9 billion in assets; Metacapital Management LP, a New York-based fixed income investor with more than \$1 billion in assets; and Semper Capital Management LP, which invests nearly \$4 billion in mortgage-backed securities. Deepak Narula, the head of Metacapital, said his company decided it did not want the money and returned it "pretty quickly." —Reuters

## An end to Australia's apartment binge looms over growth

SYDNEY: The hit to Australia's population growth from closing its international borders is quickly turning a long-running housing shortage into a glut, bringing an end to the apartment building boom behind much of the country's recent prosperity.

Since 2000, Australia has added about 6 million to its population, more than six times the growth seen in Germany, with most of that coming from immigration. That fueled huge demand for housing construction, much of it smaller dwellings in larger, higher-density urban blocks, not just the bungalows on sprawling plots for which Australian suburbs are better known.

With Australia's borders likely to remain closed until the coronavirus pandemic is successfully contained, a heavy decline in construction, which accounts for roughly 10 percent of all jobs and economic activity, is set to push unemployment higher and hurt businesses both up and downstream. Lindsay Partridge, managing director of Brickworks, a building materials company, sees the pipeline for big multi-unit housing developments drying up as immigration stalls and non-permanent residents depart.

"We are seeing quite high vacancy rates emerging," Partridge told Reuters. "A lot of the people who were renting apartments are going home." Sydney, the biggest city, is experiencing the worst residential vacancy rate in the country at over 16 percent in May from between 4 percent and 5 percent late last year, according to SQM research. Since 2014, higher density housing has accounted for about 43 percent of residential construction, more than double the proportion during the 1980s. Significant demand has come from the massive influx of foreign students who make up about 40 percent of Australia's immigration intake.

In May, the number of higher density homes approved for construction fell 34.9 percent to a near eight-year low, data showed last week. Economists see further declines ahead. BIS Oxford expects construction starts for high rise apartments to fall to just 21,500 in the year to June 2021, down by two-thirds from five years ago. To head off the expected shock, the central bank has slashed borrowing rates to record lows. State and federal governments have brought forward massive public works spending and offered grants for home alterations.

There are also hopes that demand for houses in areas outside the major cities might pick up as employers increasingly embrace remote working arrangements. —Reuters



SYDNEY: The hit to Australia's population growth from closing its international borders is quickly turning a long-running housing shortage into a glut, bringing an end to the apartment building boom behind much of the country's recent prosperity. —Reuters

## Business

# Kuwait Airport's T4, first step to become Middle East's hub through partnership

## IIAC making efforts to shift the paradigm of T4 operation

KUWAIT: Travelers using T4 often praise how fast the departure process is and how clean its facilities are. The time taken from check-in to the gate at T4 averaged around 20 minutes, which is much faster than the international organization's (IATA) recommended standard of 40 minutes.

Incheon International Airport Corporation (IIAC) is a world-class airport operator, having awarded as the No 1 airport worldwide for 13 consecutive years by ACI (Airport Council International). It has been top ranked



### Level up to world class terminal operation at T4

for more than 10 years in the World's Airport Award by Skytrax and is also awarded as the "World's Best Terminal" and the "World's Best Transfer Airport" in 2020. More than 70 million passengers used the airport last year being served world best service. Based on this know-how and stabilized operation over the past two years, IIAC aims to make 2021 the first year to focus on planting world class services at T4.

Kuwait has the best conditions to become a new hub airport in the Middle East, as shown by its high transfer rates. What Kuwait needs to become a hub airport in reality is the world-class service transplantation by global operator as shown in the Dubai's case. IIAC is making utmost effort to shift the paradigm of the airport operation based on the long friendly relationship between Kuwait and Korea.

#### 1. Level up to the world class terminal operation

World class airport service shall not be realized in short time without strong fundamental readiness, changes in service mind and strong aviation policy. IIAC aims to level up T4's operation to the world class based on our experiences as the world best airport, advanced operation procedures & systems.

Based on the contract between Civil Aviation and IIAC, IIAC has carried out the operation, development and maintenance of T4. Total number of 572 staff covers maintenance of mechanical, electricity, ICT, civil engineering, architecture, operation of the AOC, passenger service, security, cleaning

service, commercial and airport operation training of Kuwaitis. We have provided 80 more staff than the contracted staff number of 491 for the stable operation of T4.

Kuwait Airways is responsible for the airline's ground handling (check-in, boarding and de-boarding, cargo and baggage loading and unloading, fuel supply, etc.) in T4, one of the major business areas for airlines worldwide. The KAC has no involvement in the operation and maintenance of T4 except for airline business areas, but IIAC operates T4 in cooperation with the KAC.

In order to establish world-class operating procedures in T4, 13 SOPs were established based on Incheon International Airport's Standard Operation Procedure (SOP). In addition, the company aims to improve service levels by establishing Key Performance Index (KPI) and conducting customer satisfaction surveys. To encourage not only the improvement of airport operation services but also airline services, we have signed an SLA with Kuwait Airways to oversee and evaluate the services.

IIAC is in charge of maintenance for T4 with cooperation of Cengiz, the construction company of T4. For the efficient maintenance of terminal facilities, it is a worldwide practice for airport operators to sign a contract with terminal construction companies for maintenance. Incheon makes it efficient through thorough maintenance planning.

Our utmost efforts in Kuwait not only limited to work scope of the contract but also strong cooperation & partnership between the countries to realize regional aviation development strategy in Middle East area.

#### 2. Maximized revenue contributing Kuwait government's finances

Based on the know-how from the experience of operating the world's most selling duty free shop, IIAC has contributed to the Kuwaiti government through the maximized commercial revenue generated from T4's successful biddings. The aeronautical and non-aeronautical revenue from T4 is expected to cover all of T4's construction costs within the next couple of years and will continuously contribute to the welfare of the people of Kuwait. All revenues from T4's operation belong to the Kuwaiti government, and not even IKD is attributed to the Incheon. IIAC is only collecting rent on behalf of DGCA under the contract with Civil Aviation. The rumor that IIAC takes a certain percentage of rent is misunderstanding of the deposit collected in preparation for unpaid rent payments and damage to the airport facilities. This deposit



Incheon International Airport Corporation (IIAC) is a world-class airport operator, having awarded as the No 1 airport worldwide for 13 consecutive years by ACI (Airport Council International). It has been top ranked for more than 10 years in the World's Airport Award by Skytrax and is also awarded as the "World's Best Terminal" and the "World's Best Transfer Airport" in 2020.

shall be returned to the concessionaires when the contract is over.

#### 3. T4's security services recognized by international organizations

T4's security service has been accredited by TSA (Transportation Security Administration of US), enabling KAC's direct flights for New York. T4's security staff has been trained and guided by qualified and experienced Korean security experts. T4's security operation has shown an excellent performance achieving a higher score than other terminals at the ICAO's inspection, reaching historical record for Kuwait International Airport. T4's security service has been accredited by 3 main international organizations including ICAO (Int'l Civil

Aviation Organization), DFT (Dept. for Transport, UK) and TSA.

During the first phase of operation started in 2018, all the security staff has been trained by the Korean instructors and certified by DGCA according to the Kuwaiti Civil Aviation Security Program. After that they were trained at MoI's training center supported by MoI. But after IIAC's Aviation Security Training Center was built at T4, IIAC have been training all security staff on a regular basis and all 230 staff has qualified certifications.

#### 4. Rapid airport procedures and improvement on airline punctuality

Delay and long process times, which have been chronic problems with Kuwait's

airport services, were the top priorities that Incheon Airport wanted to solve. Based on the efficient airport operation and service level agreement in cooperation with KAC, Kuwait Airways has ranked eighth in the world in terms of punctuality in 2019. In addition, the time taken from check-in to the gate at T4 averaged around 20 minutes, which is much faster than the international organization's (IATA) recommended standard of 40 minutes.

Incheon International Airport will not stop and start a new journey for better service by strengthening the cooperation between stakeholders.

#### 5. Raising the next leading generations

IIAC tries its best to follow government policy on ratio of Kuwaiti employment, focusing on training of the next leading generations for Kuwait. Nevertheless, as 380 janitors and security staff takes almost 75 percent of the total employment, it is clearly groundless rumor that the cost for an employee takes KD 1,300. It is just a division result of 1-year budget KD 7.7 million by the number of staff. How can we run T4 without any expense, only spending budget for salary?

IIAC provides professional training courses, including education at Incheon International Airport in Korea every year so that Kuwaiti employees of DGCA and IIAC can experience advanced airport services. IIAC believes that those trained young Kuwaitis will lead the next generation airport in Kuwait. Thanks to this effort, all the employees are qualified and certified by the International standard if necessary, and showing good performance.

### World's Best Airport Terminals 2020

1	Seoul Incheon - T2
2	Singapore Changi - T3
3	London Heathrow - T2
4	Paris CDG - T2-M
5	London Heathrow - T5
6	Munich - T2
7	Singapore Changi - T4
8	Tokyo Haneda - Int'l Terminal

### Article on KAC's punctual Service

KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways ranked eighth in punctuality among 175 international airlines, according to a report by the British aviation company OAG, which is specialized in checking the punctuality performance of the civil aviation sector. "We are honored by the latest report issued by the world's most credible agencies in evaluating the performance of airports and airlines in the world," Chairman of Kuwait Airways Board of Directors, Yusef Al-Jasser, said in a press release. Jasser pointed out that the results of the report showed that the rate of the punctuality of Kuwait Airways was 98 percent in July. He noted that being the eighth place among the 175 major international airlines affirms the good reputation of Kuwait Airways.

## IAA Compass Awards 2020

KUWAIT: The IAA Compass Awards have been created to celebrate leadership excellence demonstrated by the members of the marketing communications industry and the IAA global family and to honor their commitment to driving excellence in communications as well as their contribution to worldwide advancement of the International Advertising Association.

The honorees of these awards are the navigators that are dedicated to steering the IAA and the marcom industry to achieve the IAA mission as the global compass of marketing communications.

IAA Chairman and World President, Srinivasan Swamy, announced the winners of the 2020 IAA Champion and Young Leader Compass Awards and said: "The IAA is primarily a people organization and the IAA Compass Awards pay tribute to our outstanding members for their many achievements and services to advance the IAA globally as well as to make a difference impacting the worldwide arena of marketing communications. They have contributed their leadership and professional expertise and inspired the mar-

coms community with vision, passion, energy and committed action. We are proud of their accomplishments and services dedicated to our industry."

#### IAA "Champion" Compass Award honorees

This award honors the lifetime achievements, vision, and committed services of leaders in the IAA and their contributions to advancing the IAA and communications in the worldwide marketing communications industry.

#### IAA "Young Leader" Compass Award honorees

This award recognizes individual YP members who are significantly contributing leadership and services in the Young Professionals' arena and creating dynamics in the marketing communications industry.

The award winners for each group were selected by separate judging councils of IAA Board members representing the five IAA regions, chaired by Heather Leembruggen, IAA VP & Chairman IAA Compass Awards. Nominations are reviewed and considered in the light of various criteria including career experience, significant contributions, IAA involvement, and advancing IAA locally and globally, among other specific categorical criteria.



In commenting on the nominations and winners of the 2020 IAA Compass Awards for IAA Champion and Young Leader, Vice President IAA Awards, Heather Leembruggen said: "We were delighted with the calibre of the nominees and the spread of countries represented in the entries we received. It demonstrates that the global network we embrace is truly international in its scope and service to the industry, and also, importantly, that the IAA family is comprised of many high achievers and leaders in the marketing communications community. I congratulate all this year's winners for their contributions, their services and their leadership for bringing to life IAA's value proposition as "the global compass of marketing communications."



This year's four recipients of the IAA Young Leader Awards (left to right): Anant Goenka, Executive Director, The Indian Express Group, India, Emmalee Fagerstrom, Data & insights Strategist, ANZ, Verizon Media, Australia, Adrian Pasita, Founder, DigitalSuperhero.ro, Romania, Frank Chen, Senior Deputy Marketing Manager, Sanlih E-Television Inc, Taiwan.



This year's five recipients of the IAA Champion Awards (left to right): Prashant Kumar, Founder & Senior Partner, Entropia, Malaysia, Maruiz Jan Demner, Founder & CEO, Demner, Mericek & Bergmann, Austria, Joel Nettey, Chief Executive Officer, The Ninani Group, Ghana, Walid Kanafani, Senior Managing Partner, Beyond Consulting Services, Kuwait and Tom Doctoroff, Global Senior Advisor, Prophet, USA.

## Burgan Bank announces winner of Al-Thuraya Salary Account draw

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank, announced yesterday Anfar Hussein Mohammed Malang as the lucky winner of the draw prize of Al-Thuraya Salary Accounts monthly draw. The draw rewards new and existing customers who transfer their salary to Burgan Bank by offering them a chance to win KD 10,000 every month. Each account holder has one chance to enter the draw.

The Al-Thuraya account holders have the option to

hold money in Kuwaiti dinar and other major currencies and can access account-related services such as standing orders, loans and credit cards, and benefit from the discounts and offers throughout the year. Customers wishing to open the Al-Thuraya account can do so by simply visiting the nearest Burgan Bank branch and obtain all the necessary details, or simply call the bank's call center on 1804080.

## US groups urge China to buy more US goods, services

WASHINGTON: The US Chamber of Commerce and over 40 trade associations on Monday urged top American and Chinese officials to redouble efforts to implement a Phase 1 trade agreement signed by the world's two largest economies in January despite pandemic-related strains.

In a letter to US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and Chinese Vice Premier Liu He, the groups said they were encouraged by the progress so far, but urged a significant increase in China's purchases of US goods and services. They said combating the novel coronavirus pandemic and restoring global growth depended in part on successful implementation of the U.S.-China trade deal, which helped defuse a nearly 18-month trade war marked by tit-for-tat tariffs. The agreement called for China to purchase \$200 billion in additional US goods and services over the next two years. —Reuters

## Gulf Bank winner Ali claims cash prize worth 12 times his salary

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank has announced the winner of its fourth monthly Salary Account draw of the year, which was postponed since April. This month's lucky winner, Abdulwahab Waleed Abdulraheem Mohammad Ali, will take home a cash prize worth 12 times his salary. The Salary Account draw took place at Gulf Bank's Head Office in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce.

With the 2020 Kuwaiti Salary Offer, new customers who transfer their salaries to Gulf Bank are automatically enrolled in the monthly draws, giving them the chance to win cash prizes of up to 12 times their salary. Customers are also enrolled in a yearly draw of Kuwait's largest salary prize, a cash prize of up to 100 times the winner's salary.

Gulf Bank's Salary Account also gives new customers the opportunity to receive either a KD 100 cash gift upon transferring their salaries to Gulf Bank, or an interest-free loan of up to KD 15,000. Customers must have a minimum salary of KD 500 and are eligible for the offer following their first salary transfer to Gulf Bank.

Customers can also enjoy additional benefits like a Visa or MasterCard credit card free of charge for a year. They can also apply for a loan of up to KD 70,000 with a repayment period of 15 years, or a consumer loan of up to KD 25,000.

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A student of the Leap of Dance Academy, Precious Duru, performs a dance routine in Okelola street in Ajangbadi.



A student of the Leap of Dance Academy, Olamide Olawale, performs a dance routine.



A student of the Leap of Dance Academy, Olamide Olawale, performs a dance routine.



A student of the Leap of Dance Academy, Anthony Madu (right), performs a ballet dance routine in front of his mother's shop in Okelola street in Ajangbadi, Lagos.



Students stretch during rehearsals at the Leap of Dance Academy in Ajangbadi, Lagos.—AFP photos

## Nigeria academy looks to spread ballet among Lagos poor

A small group of Nigerian girls and boys wearing leotards and leggings limber up in a spare room at a run-down primary school with patches of damp on the walls. They launch into pirouettes and arabesques but have to make do without music. Today, the stereo is not working, because there is no electricity. This is Leap of Dance Academy—a ballet school in a poor district of sprawling megacity Lagos that aims to bring classical dance to underprivileged children in Africa's most populous nation. The school is the brainchild of self-taught ballet aficionado Daniel Ajala, who opened its doors in late 2017 after studying the dance moves online and in books.

Now the academy—which Ajala funds out of his own pocket—has 12 pupils aged between six and 15. The lessons are free and shoes and kit provided to the children, most of whom had never heard of ballet before they got involved. "Ballet is for people who have money, who are very high class, because ballet is expensive," Ajala tells AFP. "In this area, I know we can't actually afford the luxury of ballet, or dance education—so I think it's a beautiful art to introduce to our people here." He says locals in the neighbourhood of Ajangbadi were sceptical at first about his plan to



Students of the Leap of Dance Academy pose for portrait in Ajangbadi, Lagos.

teach ballet. "When we started ballet here, people were like 'what are they doing? Is it not indecent? It's not a Christian dance!'"

"We want to make sure to show them that this is not a bad dance—ballet is a very disciplined, forward dance that is very important in the growth of a child." Now after several years of training and effort the dancers have gained more acceptance. And when they practice their moves outside around the area they now draw admiring—if sometimes still confused—glances. Ballet has provided an inspiration and window onto unknown cultures for 15-year-old student Olamide Olawale. She has even begun thinking of becoming a dance teacher herself. "My dream is to make children around the world to be able to share the same dance experience," she says. "I want them to be able to express their feelings through dance." Ifoma Madu watches on with pride as her son Anthony Madu performs a grand jete leap alongside his classmates. "I feel great, I feel wonderful, I'm very excited," she told AFP. "When I see him dancing, it gives me joy."—AFP

## Dior strikes gold as Paris fashion makes mixed virtual debut



Italian fashion designer Maria Grazia Chiuri for Dior poses during a session portrait in Dior's sewing workshop in Paris.—AFP photos



An employee sews a miniature dress for the recording of Dior Haute Couture collection's presentation movie, in Dior's sewing workshop in Paris.

The first ever digital Paris fashion week started Monday to mixed reviews from fashionistas. Forced online by the coronavirus, labels tried to replicate the glitz and glamour of the real thing by recruiting film and television stars for the films which replaced runway shows. In a bold move, Dior raised eyebrows by drafting in the Italian director Matteo Garrone, best known for gritty gangster films "Gomorrah" and "Dogman", to immortalise its haute couture collection. The gamble seems to have paid off in spades.

His mythologically inspired video featuring Greek nymphs, a mermaid and a rather horny Pan clocked up more than 1.5 million views on Instagram in four hours. Garrone weaved the story of the Theatre of Fashion, a touring exhibition of dolls dressed by French designers including Christian Dior just after World War II, into the fantastical universe of his own 2015 film, "Tale of Tales", starring Salma Hayek and Vincent Cassel.

### 'Not one black person'

In the Dior video, two bell boys wheel a trunk modelled on the fashion house's Paris headquarters through a dreamy primeval forest and offer the nymphs and forest goddesses each a heart-stopping look to try. The director said Dior's Italian creator Maria Grazia Chiuri gave him the idea for the storyline. "When I saw the trunk with the small dresses it was already a fairytale," he added. But not everyone was so enchanted.

Some of the most liked comments on the video pointed out that there was "not even one black person in it", while the New York Times' Elizabeth Paton tweeted wryly, "Not very diverse casting (with the exception of the man-goats)." Supermodel Naomi

Campbell had earlier opened fashion week by saying it was time the industry took on the lessons of the Black Lives Matter movement and started "enforcing inclusion". Like Dior, the Dutch designer Iris van Herpen called in cinematic reinforcements for her video.

### Could do better

Her compatriot, actress Carice van Houten—the Red Priestess from "Game of Thrones"—was the star of Van Herpen's digital offering, which concentrated on a single one of her ethereal high-tech looks. Van Herpen said she found the leap to digital difficult, "very unsure and quite hectic". She said she missed the "collaborative aspect of previous shows" and the adrenaline of showing live. Although a big fan of Van Herpen and Garrone, critic Diane Pernet, who also runs the ASVOFF fashion film festival, said she was not impressed by much of what she had seen. "I am all into digital," she told AFP, "but it is not doing it for me."

"I am sorry, I think they can do more," the Paris-based American said, saying labels "could pick up a few tricks from students at the Royal Academy in Antwerp", the alma mater of such acclaimed designers as Dries Van Noten, Martin Margiela, Balenciaga's Demna Gvasalia and Ann Demeulemeester. But New York Times critic Vanessa Friedman said the online couture shows also had their upsides. "I'll say one thing... you don't have to sit there for the usual 20-30 minutes twiddling your thumbs and waiting for them to start," she tweeted. The Paris haute couture shows continue until Thursday, to be followed by four days of menswear shows.—AFP



An employee sews a miniature dress for the recording of Dior Haute Couture collection's presentation movie, in Dior's sewing workshop in Paris.

## Fossil of giant 70m year-old fish found in Argentina

A giant 70 million year old fossil of a fish that lived amongst dinosaurs has been discovered in Argentine Patagonia, a team of researchers said on Monday. Argentine paleontologists "found the remains of a predator fish that was more than six meters long," the researchers said in a statement. The discovery was published in the scientific journal *Alcheringa: An Australasian Journal of Palaeontology*. The fish "swam in the Patagonian seas at the end of the Cretaceous Period, when the temperature there was much more temperate than now," the statement said. "The fossils of this carnivorous animal with sharp teeth and scary appearance were found close to the Colhue Huapi lake" around 1,400 kilometres south of the capital Buenos Aires.

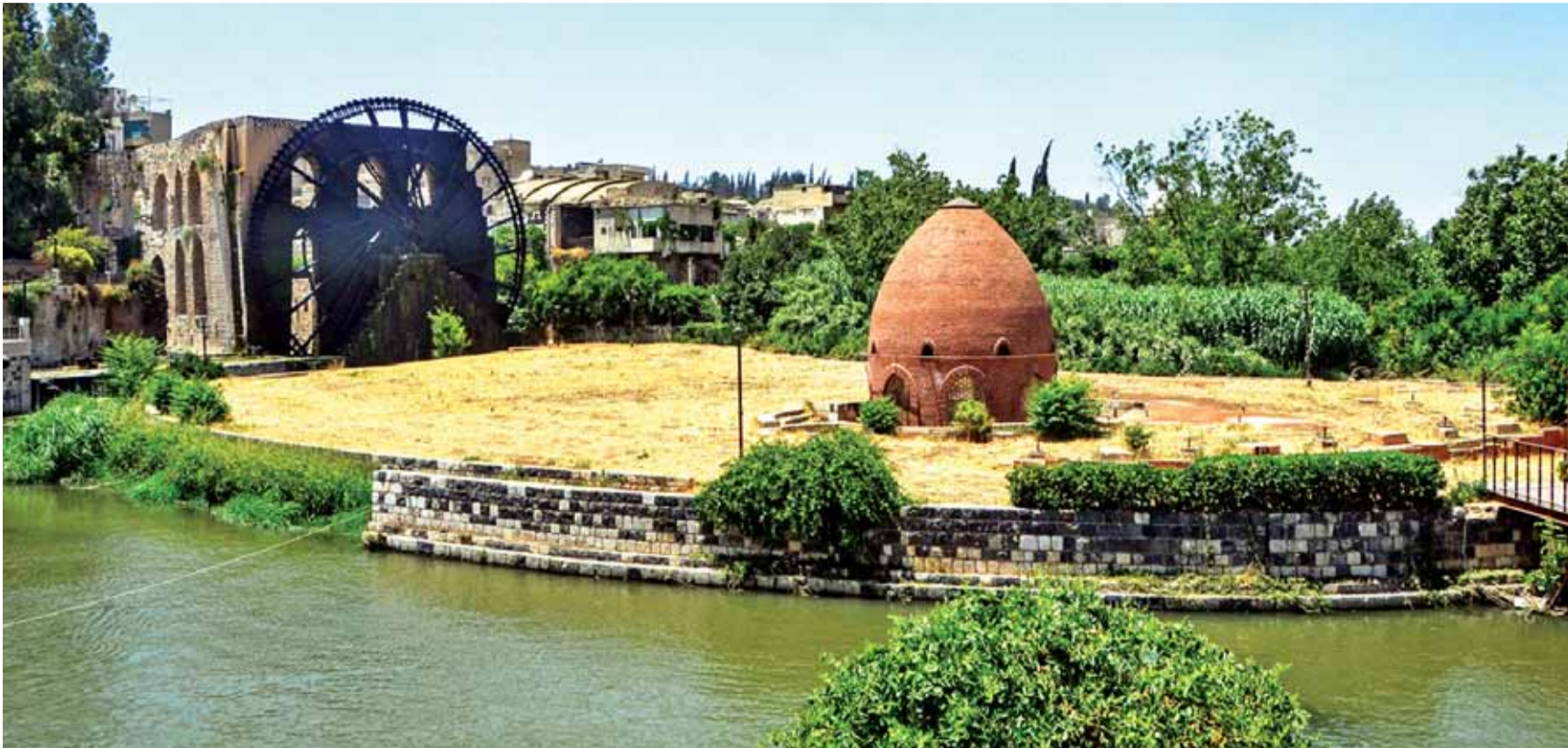


The fossilized remains of this Xiphactinus - similar to the one found in Argentina - was discovered in the US state of Kansas and sold at auction in 2010.

— www.bangkokpost.com

This fossil belonged to the Xiphactinus genus, "amongst the largest predatory fish that existed in the history of Earth." "Its body was notably slim and ended in a huge head with big jaws and teeth as sharp as needles, several centimetres long." Examples of this species have been found in other parts of the world, "some of which even have preserved stomach contents," said Julieta de Pasqua, one of the study authors. Previously, the Xiphactinus had only been found in the northern hemisphere, although one example was recently found in Venezuela. Patagonia is one of the most important reservoirs of fossils of dinosaurs and prehistoric species.—AFP

Lifestyle | Features



This picture shows a view of the Maamorieh Noria (water wheel) along the Orontes (Assi) river in the city of Hama in west-central Syria.—AFP photos



A view of the Dawalek Noria (water wheel) along the Orontes (Assi) river.



# ON SYRIA RIVER, CRAFTSMEN REVIVE FAMED WATER WHEELS

On a riverbank in Syria's Hama, Mohammed Sultan tinkers away on a giant water wheel, one of a dwindling number of artisans able to restore the city's ancient wooden landmarks. Used for centuries to bring water to gardens and buildings on the shores of the Orontes River, the water wheels or "norias" of Hama are believed to be unique worldwide, according to UNESCO. The touristic landmarks have largely been spared by Syria's nine-year war, but some have fallen into disrepair or seen part of their timber stolen or burnt. "It's our duty to bring them back to life," the 52-year-old said, sweat forming on his forehead after hammering a tenon into a freshly cut wood beam.

Nearby passers-by pose for pictures at the feet of the huge dark wooden wheel he is fixing, the city's largest and oldest, known as the Mohammadia. Twenty-two metres (72 feet) in diameter, the wheel rises high above the water level and is believed to date back to the 14th century. "The norias are Hama's spirit," Sultan told AFP, as children splash around in the Orontes. "Without them, the city would be dead and drab."

### 'Giving back to my city'

Clambering up and down a stone staircase to the wheel's centre, Sultan replaces some wood along one of its massive spokes. "When I work with my colleagues to fix the norias, I feel like I'm giving something back to my city," said the artisan, who has 22 years of experience in his unique field. "I forget how tired I am as soon as one starts turning again." Hama

city, north of the capital Damascus, was mostly spared fighting during the war, though battles did at times rage in the nearby countryside. In other parts of Hama province, 10 of the region's 25 norias have in recent years stopped their slow, creaking rotation above the waterline.

The water wheels are believed to have originated in the Arab medieval era, but a mosaic dated 469 BC suggests they could have existed even earlier, UNESCO says. Held together by an assortment of walnut, pine, poplar and oak wood, they once carried small wooden boxes that scooped up water each time they plunged into the river. The wheels drew from the Orontes to irrigate nearby gardens, as well as supply water to mosques, public baths and homes on its banks. Though no longer the case today, the wheels remain the pride of the city, drawing in droves of tourists before the war and featuring on Syrian banknotes. "We continue to give great importance to restoring these historical relics in view of their symbolic value," Hama mayor Adnan Tayyar said. "It's impossible to visit Hama without stopping by the norias," he added.

### Last of the noria craftsmen

Ahd Saba al-Arab, head of the Hama noria authority, said he hoped visitors would soon flock back to the city. But maintenance of the water wheels was becoming increasingly difficult, he said. This was because the right wood had become expensive and in short supply, and there was now "a great scarcity of artisans with the right know-how". The number of suitably skilled craftsmen has fallen from 35 to just nine, after many died or emi-



This picture shows a view of the "I (love) Hama" sculpture before the Jesrieh Noria (water wheel) along the Orontes (Assi) river in the city of Hama in west-central Syria.

grated during the conflict. Ismail, another of the last surviving experts, says he is proud to be able to carry on a tradition "all done by hand". "The norias are the city's backbone," said the bespectacled man in his fifties.

But, moving agilely from one side of the Mohammadia to the other, he is worried about the next generation's

lack of interest in the profession. "Our craft is transmitted from father to son, but today we can no longer pass it on to our children," he said.—AFP



A view of the (left to right) Saahonieh and Gaabarieh Norias (water wheels) along the Orontes (Assi) river.



This picture shows a view of the (left to right) Kilanieh, Saahonieh, and Gaabarieh Norias (water wheels) along the Orontes (Assi) river in the city of Hama in west-central Syria.



A panoramic view from the Mohammadieh Noria (water wheel) along the Orontes (Assi) river in the city of Hama in west-central Syria.

## Johnny Depp libel trial set to start in London

A libel trial began yesterday between Hollywood actor Johnny Depp and a British tabloid newspaper over claims that he was violent to his former wife, Amber Heard. Depp, 57, is suing News Group Newspapers (NGN), publisher of The Sun, and its executive editor Dan Wootton for an April 2018 article which referred to him as a "wife beater". The "Pirates of the Caribbean" star strenuously denies the accusation. The case, which was delayed because of the coronavirus outbreak, will be heard over 15 days at the High Court in London. The couple settled a divorce out of court in 2017. She donated a settlement of \$7 million (£5.6 million, 6.2 million euros) to charity. Depp denies being abusive towards Heard, 34, and has brought separate libel proceedings against her in the

United States.

As well as Depp and Heard, his former partners Vanessa Paradis, the French singer, and the actress Winona Ryder are due to give evidence. In pre-trial witness statements Paradis—his former long-time partner with whom he has two children—has described the actor as "kind" and "non-violent". Ryder said she could not "wrap my head around" Heard's accusations that Depp was abusive.

### Text messages

NGN failed last week in a last-ditch bid to have the case dismissed, arguing Depp was in breach of a court order for failing to disclose documents from the US case. Nicol, who will rule on the case, agreed he was in breach but decided the trial should

go ahead nonetheless. The Sun is relying in its defence on 14 separate claims of domestic violence that Heard alleges occurred between early 2013 and May 2016. During pre-trial hearings, NGN lawyers said Depp had failed to hand over details of text messages from 2015, which allegedly referred to drug-taking. They argued they were "profoundly damaging to his case". The messages were sent shortly before what Heard has claimed was a "three-day ordeal of physical assaults" in Australia, the court heard.

Judge Nicol had previously refused an application by Depp's legal team to require Heard to disclose evidence, including a secret recording of a conversation with the actor. The request also involved communications between Heard and "Rocketman", a contact saved in her phone who Depp claims is the SpaceX and Tesla founder Elon Musk, as well as with actor James Franco. Depp's lawyer David Sherborne told the court last week that Heard had affairs with both Musk and Franco while she was going out with or married to his client. The couple met on the set of the 2011 film "The Rum Diary" and married in February 2015.—AFP

In this file photo US actor Johnny Depp and his wife US actress Amber Heard arrive for screening of the movie "Black Mass" presented out of competition at the 72nd Venice International Film Festival on at Venice Lido.—AFP



## 'Devil Went Down to Georgia' country star Charlie Daniels dies

Charlie Daniels, a musical force who melded country music and southern rock, showcasing his blistering fiddle skills on hits like "The Devil Went Down to Georgia," died Monday. He was 83 years old. The Country Music Hall of Fame musician died following a hemorrhagic stroke in Tennessee, a statement on his website said. Originally a session musician who worked with icons including Bob Dylan, Ringo Starr and Leonard Cohen, Daniels made his name as leader of the Charlie Daniels Band, a country-rock group that hosted the Volunteer Jam annual music festival.

An outspoken persona who waffled between patriotic and countercultural bents, Daniels' intrepid attitude was on full display in his best known hit "The Devil Went Down to Georgia," which hit number one on the country charts and jumped into the top ten pop songs. The uptempo but growling bluegrass song recounts a fiddle player's musical duel with Satan after wagering his soul—and playing well enough to keep it—a song hearkening to historical associations tying fiddle-playing to dark arts and sin.

The rollicking hit won Daniels a Grammy in 1979. The singer long backed veterans' causes and was also a staunch supporter of the National Rifle Association. He favoured Jimmy Carter, a Georgian, and played the former Democratic president's inauguration ball. Later in life he called former president Barack Obama a "fresh-faced, flower-child president (with) his



In this file photo singer/songwriter Charlie Daniels talks with The Press during Lipscomb University's Copperweld Charlie Daniels' Scholarship.—AFP

weak-kneed, Ivy League friends." Daniels often sounded off his opinions on his website in a section entitled "Soap Box," with a final post celebrating the United States' Independence Day on July 3. Late last month on the site he skewered protestors marching for anti-racist causes and against police brutality, railing against the demonstrations as a "revolutionary street battle... funded and lead by socialist factions." "Gun sales are through the roof and America is locked and loaded to protect their families and their neighbourhoods," Daniels wrote.—AFP

## Sports

## Photo of the Day



ISTANBUL: Abdo Feghall performs during the Red Bull Car Park Drift World Final in Istanbul in 2019. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

## IPL will only be staged abroad as a last resort

**NEW DELHI:** India's cricket board will only consider staging the Indian Premier League (IPL) abroad as a last resort if there is no other way to salvage the lucrative limited-overs tournament this year, a top BCCI official has told Reuters.

The annual tournament was originally scheduled to begin on March 29 but was postponed indefinitely due to COVID-19. India's death toll from the pandemic surpassed 20,000 on Tuesday.

Sri Lanka and the United Arab Emirates have offered to host the league but BCCI treasurer Arun Singh Dhumal said the board was optimistic about staging it on home soil.

"We've to consider India first and then think of overseas," Dhumal told Reuters. "They have sent these proposals in case we want to organise it there."

"We will discuss it in the next IPL governing council meeting where we will take a call."

The 2009 edition of the franchise-based league, which coincided with India's elections, was held in South Africa and the UAE hosted the early matches of the tournament five years later for the same reason.

The BCCI, facing a \$535 million loss of revenue if it cannot stage the IPL this year, would be keen to slot it into the Twenty20 World Cup's October-November window if that event was unable to go ahead in Australia due to the pandemic.

The uncertainty around the World Cup, the BCCI has said, has created a scheduling headache for cricket boards trying to recoup some of the losses caused by the pandemic. "Everybody is under the pressure because of the uncertainty," Dhumal added. —Reuters

# Lin Dan retirement ends era of 'Chinese sports superstar'

## 'When will the next Lin Dan appear?'

**SHANGHAI:** The retirement of two-time Olympic champion Lin Dan signals the end of a golden era of Chinese sporting superstars, state media said yesterday. Arguably the greatest badminton player of all time, the 36-year-old said on Saturday that he was bringing the curtain down on a career that also brought five world titles. NBA All-Star Yao Ming, Olympic gold-medal hurdler Liu Xiang and two-time tennis Grand Slam champion Li Na have all retired in the last decade. "With the 'Super Dan' curtain call, people cannot help but sigh," Xinhua news agency said.

"The era of the superstar that once belonged to Chinese sports has faded. "When will the next Lin Dan appear? Or when will the next Yao Ming, Liu Xiang and Li Na appear? "Where is the next Chinese sports superstar who will create a collective memory for us?" The quartet were not just world leaders in their sport and popular in China, but also had "considerable influence in the international arena and became a window for the world to understand China," Xinhua said.

Of prominent Chinese athletes left, women's volleyball player Zhu Ting has the potential to rise to superstar

level, Xinhua said, while disgraced swimmer Sun Yang "enjoys high popularity (in China), but unfortunately he is banned".

The 28-year-old is appealing against an eight-year ban for refusing to give a doping sample. The three-time Olympic freestyle champion's career will effectively be over if he loses his appeal at the Swiss Federal Tribunal.

China has world champions in other sports, and finished third behind the United States and Britain in the medal table at the Rio 2016 Olympics, but they are not generally well-known even inside the country, Xinhua said.

Table tennis player Zhang Jike, another three-time Olympic gold medalist, deserves to be mentioned in the same breath as Lin, said the Oriental Sports Daily.

But at 32 his best days are behind him and as far back as 2016 he signalled his intention to retire, before having a change of

heart. "When will the next Lin Dan and China's next sports superstar appear again?" asked the newspaper. "This question may not be answered in a short space of time." — AFP

## China has world champions



## Sports prepare for return, but virus doubts persist

**LOS ANGELES:** Four months after grinding to a halt due to the deadly coronavirus pandemic, major professional sports leagues in North America are taking their first nervous steps back on the road to recovery.

But as basketball, soccer and baseball gear up for long-awaited returns this month, they are doing so against a backdrop of anxiety and surging COVID-19 cases across the United States.

Athletes in all three sports have expressed deep misgivings about arrangements put in place for their return, and in several cases have opted to skip participating altogether.

The National Basketball Association and Major League Soccer have drawn up plans which will see teams based in a protective "bubble" in Orlando, Florida where COVID-19 cases have skyrocketed in recent weeks.

Yet a cluster of outbreaks involving two MLS teams already inside the bubble has highlighted the omnipresent threat posed by the coronavirus, even in the face of carefully crafted mitigation measures.

"It's important that the leagues realize that even in a 'bubble', there is still risk to all players and staff for contracting COVID-19," said Robert Glatter, an emergency physician at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York.

"It's impossible to completely mitigate the risk even when players and staff practice social distancing and wear masks."

That point was underscored by Monday's news that 11 members of Dallas FC's organization — 10 players and a technical assistant — had tested positive for COVID-19. Dallas FC were later withdrawn from the MLS is Back tournament altogether, less than 48 hours before it kicks off on Wednesday.

Nashville SC, another team taking part, have also reportedly suffered multiple coronavirus cases since arriving in Florida.

### ENTERING THE BUBBLE

Zach Binney, an epidemiologist at Oxford College of Emory University in Atlanta, believes the two MLS outbreaks have exposed the single biggest flaw in the "bubble" models.

"The most difficult part is getting everyone into the bubble safely without introducing the virus right at the start," Binney told AFP.

"This was always something I was worried about but it has been shown to be a much bigger deal than I thought. "I still believe that bubbles can work — it's just that nobody has mastered getting into the bubble safely."

Binney believes the answer may be to introduce an "airlock" system, where teams spend a period of up to seven days in isolation in their home market before they travel. For athletes on the ground, meanwhile, news of the positive cases has fuelled a sense of anxiety.

"It's certainly something that we've abruptly been faced with," said Inter Miami midfielder Wil Trapp. "We're players who want to play, that's one part of it, but we're also human beings and this is bigger at times than sports."

For others, the risk of traveling to Florida has proved too much. Los Angeles FC's star striker and reigning MLS MVP Carlos Vela on Monday said he would miss the tournament, citing concerns for his family's health. The Mexico international's wife is pregnant.

### BASEBALL RISKS

Baseball superstar Mike Trout is wrestling with an identical dilemma. The Los Angeles Angels slugger revealed at the weekend he is contemplating skipping Major League Baseball's abbreviated season to remain with his wife, who is expecting the couple's first child next month.

"I love baseball, but I have to do what's right for my family," said Trout, widely regarded as baseball's biggest star. While basketball and soccer have opted to base all their teams in one location, Major League Baseball will start their shortened season this month with teams playing at their home stadiums.

Public health experts believe it is a riskier proposition than the bubble plans put in place by the NBA and



KUALA LUMPUR: File photo taken on April 5, 2019 shows China's Lin Dan hitting a return against Japan's Kanta Tsuneyama during their men's singles quarter-final match. China's two-time Olympic badminton champion Lin Dan announced his retirement in a social media post on July 4, 2020, thanking his family and fans. — AFP.

MLS. "Major League Baseball is basically trying to run the Bundesliga plan — but they're trying to do it in the US, not Germany," said Binney, referring to German football's top-flight, which successfully returned to action in May.

"MLB's plan would work great in Germany, South Korea, or Vietnam or New Zealand. I have sincere doubts it's going to work in the United States. The number of cases is just so high." Unlike the NBA and MLS comebacks, where all games will be played in empty arenas, baseball has been more circumspect about whether or not to allow fans in ballparks. As it stands, local government rules about coronavirus will determine whether spectators can attend games.

### 'SOCIOPATHIC' INDY 500

At least one US sporting event, however, plans to host a mammoth crowd despite the warnings of public health experts: the rescheduled Indianapolis 500 IndyCar Race on August 23.

Organisers of the iconic race at Indianapolis Motor Speedway have said they plan to operate at 50% fan capacity — meaning a potential crowd of around 175,000 for the event.

That prospect alarms epidemiologists like Binney, who describes the decision to allow fans as "completely unacceptable, sociopathic." "It shows a complete disregard for public welfare and public health," Binney said. "The only explanation I can see is that they want money."

"We should have no fans at any professional sporting event until there's a vaccine. It just doesn't make sense." New York physician Glatter agreed. "It is not safe to stage the Indy 500 even at half-capacity," he said.

"In excess of 100,000 fans, simply put, leads to unsafe conditions which produce 'superspreaders' — persons who can then transmit the virus more efficiently to significant numbers of people." Binney said even a half-full Indy 500 would see significant fan congestion at entry and exit points, as well as bathrooms and concession lines.

"I don't think you can bank on people keeping their distance from each other, nor do I think you can bank on them wearing masks," he said. "175,000 people is an unimaginably bad idea." — AFP

## All-rounders Stokes and Holder to lead from the front

**LONDON:** Two of the world's best all-rounders Ben Stokes and Jason Holder will be captaining their respective sides when England face the West Indies in the first Test at Southampton starting today.

Holder tops the ICC's Test all-rounder rankings, with fellow paceman Stokes in second place as international cricket resumes for the first time since March 2 following the coronavirus lockdown.

They both average in the 30s with the bat, with Holder's bowling mark of 26.37 slightly more economical than Stokes' 32.68.

But while Holder, 28, is a seasoned skipper, Wednesday's match will be the first time the 29-year-old Stokes has captained a cricket team since he was a teenager.

England's talisman has been thrust into the role, with regular skipper Joe Root missing the series opener to attend the birth of his second child. Pace-bowling all-rounders Ian Botham and Andrew Flintoff saw their individual games decline with the cares of the England captaincy.

"The concern is that something similar will happen to Stokes, a key figure in England's World Cup triumph last year when his spectacular century also saw the team to a remarkable win over Australia in an Ashes Test at Headingley."

It appeared any chance of Stokes becoming England captain disappeared when he was charged with affray following an incident outside a Bristol nightclub.

But after being found not guilty at a 2018 trial, he regained a position of responsibility as Root's vice-captain.

"After that happened it was 'right, what am I going to do from this point forward?'," Stokes said last week. "I'm quite proud to say I'm in this situation (of being England captain) through hard work and determination."

Holder was made captain of the West Indies' one-day side aged just 23. A year later he was put in charge of the Test side against a backdrop of administrative chaos that included bitter rows between senior players and administrators. —AFP

## Sports

# Barca wake from slumber to give glimmer of hope to Setien

## At 33, every year for Messi is precious

MADRID: "Barcelona haven't thrown in the towel", read the front page of Mundo Deportivo after a night that offered hope to the team and a lifeline for their coach Quique Setien. Setien has been in charge for only three months of competitive football but looked likely to be out in the cold by next season, following Tuesday's draw away at Atletico Madrid.

Three draws in four games, deteriorating performances and unrest in the dressing room were all stacking up against Barca's new coach but the loud-est alarm bell of all was rung by his captain.

Frustrated with the lack of direction at the club, Lionel Messi halted talks about extending his contract beyond 2021 and his current plan is now to leave, said Spanish radio station Cadena Ser.

Messi's principle grievance is not with Setien but Barcelona's board who, under president Josep Maria Bartomeu, have overseen a string of political blunders off the pitch and a period of decline on it.

With presidential elections to come next year, Messi's hesitation may be aimed at undermining this regime to accelerate change, but Setien was undoubtedly caught in the crossfire. Amid the chaos at Barcelona, he has increasingly looked like a bystander, "a passenger" according to Antoine Griezmann's father, demonstrated all too literally by his lack of influence in team talks.

Messi ignored him and his number two Eder Sarabia during one water break and the contrast was unfortunate against Atletico, whose players

huddled round, hanging on the every word of their coach Diego Simeone.

And yet the 4-1 victory over Villarreal on Sunday gave a glimpse of what this Barca could look like under Setien and what presumably the board were hoping for when they appointed him in January.

Free-flowing, dynamic, confident, it was the team's best performance under Setien and perhaps their most complete all season. Some complaints were answered too as Griezmann started, played well, scored a sensational chip and combined instinctively with Luis Suarez and Messi.

The passing was quicker and the chances more regular, a welcome improvement after a series of plodding displays in which possession too often came at the expense of end product. And Setien was bold, dropping Messi back into a more central attacking position behind Griezmann and Suarez, who was then taken off

after an hour with the result still not yet secure. It was a morale-boosting win that will surely come too late for Barca's title bid given Madrid's four-point lead and a friendly looking run-in. But it might renew some faith in Setien, from Bartomeu, who visited his house for discussions last week, and from Messi, whose approval is the one that really counts.

Removing Setien this summer would be another admission of failure for Barca, who would have to pay compensation they cannot afford and find a replacement for a job that might prove difficult to promote.



BARCELONA: File photo shows Barcelona's Spanish coach Quique Setien (R) and Barcelona's Spanish defender Jordi Alba react during the Spanish League football match between FC Barcelona and Club Atletico de Madrid at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona on June 30, 2020. —AFP

This is a squad that needs renovating at a time when funds are no longer readily available while the prospect of presidential change next year would offer a new coach little long-term security. Xavi Hernandez is waiting in the wings, with his new Al-Saad contract reportedly containing a break clause that allows him to join his former club at any time.

Setien, for another season at least, would be

the easier option then but a failing team will not help Bartomeu and it will not bring comfort to Messi either. At 33, every year for him is precious. Barcelona have four games left and then the Champions League next month, with the chance to resuscitate one of their most disappointing seasons in recent memory. Setien's future depends on it. —AFP

## Relieved Bremen stay in Bundesliga on away goals

BERLIN: Relieved Werder Bremen sealed their Bundesliga survival for next season on away goals after a dramatic 2-2 draw at second-division Heidenheim in Monday's nerve-racking relegation/promotion play-off, second-leg with the crucial second goal scored in added time.

"I'm just happy and glad that we made it after all that," said Bremen coach Florian Kohfeldt as the play-off finished in a 2-2 draw on aggregate. "We were dead so many times this year, we always came back," he added after Bremen had only qualified for the relegation play-off on the last day of the season.

"It's an incredible pressure that is off us all. "Every criticism was justified, but chapeau to the boys." Bremen, who won the last of their four German league titles in 2003-04, preserve their record of the most seasons spent in the Bundesliga by any club while Heidenheim remain in the second tier.

"We had a great chance, we are mega disappointed," said Heidenheim coach Frank Schmidt, whose side blew their chance of playing in the Bundesliga after a goalless draw at Bremen in last Thursday's first-leg.

"We may not have lost in either game, but you feel like a loser. "It is brutal for us now, we will need a few days to recover." After Heidenheim conceded an own goal within just three minutes, their striker Tim Kleindienst equalised on 85 minutes to keep the hosts' hopes alive.

However, Bremen's survival was confirmed four minutes into added time. Replacement forward Fin Bartels beat the defence and set up Swedish defender Ludwig Augustinsson to fire home his first goal of the season and his team's crucial second.

In the dying stages, Bremen defender Theodor Gebre Selassie then conceded a penalty when he



HEIDENHEIM: Bremen's Kosovan midfielder Milot Rashica tries to score during the relegation second leg play-off football match between German second division Bundesliga club FC Heidenheim and First division Bundesliga club Werder Bremen in Heidenheim, on July 6, 2020. —AFP

fouled Heidenheim midfielder Tobias Mohr in the box. Kleindienst fired home the resulting penalty in the eighth minute of added time, but it was too late.

Bremen made a flying start when Heidenheim centre-back Norman Theuerkauf gifted his former club an own goal after just three minutes. With ten minutes gone, a long-range shot by Bremen forward Milot Rashica had to be tipped over the crossbar by the Heidenheim goalkeeper.

It was 1-0 at the break, but Heidenheim flew out of the blocks in the second half and drew Bremen under pressure before forcing the equaliser. With clock ticking down, Heidenheim drew level on 85 minutes when midfielder Tobias Mohr clattered the

crossbar and Kleindienst tapped home the rebound before both teams scored in the dramatic closing stages.

Fans are not allowed in German grounds since the league restarted in mid-May after a two-months hiatus due to the coronavirus pandemic. However, there were curious scenes midway through the second-half when a group of young people appeared briefly in the main stand before quickly being ushered away.

Heidenheim, who finished third in the second division, had been bidding for their first Bundesliga season, while Bremen, who finished third from bottom in Germany's top flight, preserve their status. —AFP

## Tension mounts in Premier League relegation battle

LONDON: Tension is mounting at the bottom of the Premier League as the fight to avoid relegation heads towards a dramatic conclusion. With just five games left, rock bottom Norwich are seven points from safety and are sliding towards the Championship.

Bournemouth and Aston Villa, who currently fill the remaining two places in the relegation zone, are locked in a four-team battle for survival with fellow strugglers Watford and West Ham. AFP Sport takes a closer look at the teams scrapping to preserve their top-flight status:

### BOURNEMOUTH

Thrashed 5-2 at Manchester United on Saturday, Eddie Howe's side are in free-fall after an eight-game winless run featuring five successive defeats.

The second bottom Cherries, one point from safety, face Tottenham, Leicester and Manchester City in their next three games.

That sequence that will surely determine whether Bournemouth can

extend their five-season stay in the top-flight for another year.

Bournemouth's lack of goals has been a huge part of their downfall, with the starting line-up at Old Trafford managing just eight between them so far this season.

"Games are running out. If we're going to stay in the division, we're going to have to start picking up points," Bournemouth winger Junior Stanislas said.

"We'll have no excuses. We can't keep talking. It's time for action."

"There's no reason why from now until the end of the season we can't pick points up."

### ASTON VILLA

A wretched run of nine matches without a win has left third bottom Villa one point from safety.

Dubious pre-season investment in several underwhelming signings have left Villa relying on captain Jack Grealish to inspire their survival bid.

But Dean Smith's side have lost three of their five games since the restart and still have to face Manchester United and Arsenal before a potential final-day shootout with West Ham.

They could count themselves unfortunate not to have secured what would have been a point at Anfield in

Sunday's 2-0 defeat against champions Liverpool.

That obdurate display offered hope that Villa could still avoid an immediate return to the Championship, but Smith knows they will have to be more ruthless to achieve that aim.

"I don't want to be a valiant loser, we're scrapping for points," Smith said.

"To out-shoot Liverpool at home at Anfield, in terms of efforts on goal, it's excellent, but we need to take our opportunities. We never found the quality in the final third they did."

### WATFORD

Saturday's 3-0 drubbing at Chelsea condemned Watford to a third consecutive loss, leaving them perilously positioned one point above the bottom three.

Nigel Pearson's fourth bottom team have not won just their stunning 3-0 success against Liverpool on February 29.

After five years in the top-flight, the Hornets, who face Manchester City and Arsenal in their last two games, could find their fate settled by Tuesday's home clash with Norwich and a visit to West Ham on July 17.

"The important thing is we understand our situation, that we don't fear it," said Pearson, whose men have

managed just two goals in their last five games.

"We need to show fighting spirit, and we also need to have the ability to still make good decisions."

### West Ham

Sitting four clear of the relegation zone in 16th place, West Ham are in the best position to stay up thanks to their surprise 3-2 win over Chelsea last week.

Twice blowing the lead in Sunday's 2-2 draw at Newcastle was a setback in their survival bid, but David Moyes' side have control of their own destiny.

West Ham have now lost 24 points from winning positions in the Premier League this season, more than any other side.

But with games against Norwich, Watford and Aston Villa to come, their forward Michael Antonio is confident of beating the drop.

"The mindset for our next few games is that we want three points from each of them, and that's what we believe we can get," said Antonio, whose club have not been in the Championship since 2012.

"Now we've managed to show our attacking form and we are scoring goals, we need to shore up our back as well." —AFP

## World Cup 2022 organisers to cut staff: Sources

DOHA: The organisers of the 2022 World Cup will lay off an undisclosed number of staff as gas-rich Qatar cuts costs amid the coronavirus economic downturn, several sources have told AFP.

The job losses, which have not previously been reported, follow similar redundancies at state-run organisations including Qatar Petroleum and Qatar Airways.

The government body organising the tournament, known as the Supreme Committee, directly employs 550 people — both Qataris and expats — but oversees the work of tens of thousands of contractors. "The Supreme Committee has recently undertaken an internal exercise to assess the current workforce and engaged in a budget management and operational efficiency exercise as part of this transition," the organisation said in a statement to AFP Monday.

The 2022 organisers did not confirm how many posts would be lost or what the projected savings would be. Qataris have largely been spared from past staff cuts at other state-controlled organisations.

### EXPAT EXODUS

"As a result, we have taken the decision to make a number of positions redundant. All due salary and end of service benefits will be paid to those leaving, in line with Qatari labour laws," the statement added. A source at one major engineering firm involved in the completion of one of seven new stadiums being built for 2022 told AFP that some staff at the company, an SC contractor, had also been terminated.

Despite the impact of coronavirus on construction work, slowing progress to permit social distancing, officials insist preparations are ahead of schedule and 85 percent of all tournament infrastructure is now complete.

Officials have confirmed more than 1,100 cases of COVID-19 among workers at tournament projects and at least one virus death.

Qatar passed the milestone of 100,000 coronavirus cases on Monday and has one of the world's highest per capita infection rates. Of its 2.75 million population, 100,345 people or 3.65 percent have tested positive for COVID-19. Almost 94,000 of those have recovered and 133 people have died.

The economy of super-wealthy gas exporter Qatar has been buffeted by the global economic downturn and associated energy price collapse caused by the pandemic.

Qatar-based broadcaster BeIn will shed around 100 jobs and cut some salaries in response to the virus downturn, while Qatar Airways will slash some pilot pay by as much as a quarter.

The wider Gulf is in the midst of an expat exodus as foreign workers, who make up the majority of the populations in Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, return home.

The Supreme Committee said it was transitioning its focus from "constructing tournament infrastructure" to "delivering the event operations". "The organisation's workforce needs to transition as well," the statement said. —AFP

**14** Lin Dan retirement ends era of 'Chinese sports superstar'



**15** Barca wake from slumber to give glimmer of hope to Setien



**15** Relieved Bremen stay in Bundesliga on away goals



LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur's Welsh defender Ben Davies (R) blocks a shot by Everton's English striker Dominic Calvert-Lewin during the English Premier League football match between Tottenham Hotspur and Everton at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London, on July 6, 2020. —AFP

## Son clashes with Lloris as Spurs win

Tottenham's win lifts them into eighth place, one point behind Arsenal

LONDON: Hugo Lloris insisted he had made peace with Son Heung-min after the Tottenham stars were involved in a furious row during their side's 1-0 win against Everton on Monday. As Son walked towards the tunnel at half-time, France goalkeeper Lloris confronted the South Korea forward, shouting at him and shoving his shoulder.

The usually placid Son responded angrily and the pair had to be kept apart by team-mates Harry Winks and Moussa Sissoko as the altercation threatened to boil over. Lloris was irked by Son's failure to close down a loose ball in midfield moments before Everton threatened through Richarlison.

"I think to concede a chance a few seconds before half-time because we didn't make a press annoyed me. But yeah, that's football," Lloris said. Neither of the feuding players was hauled off at the break as Tottenham manager Jose Mourinho tried to keep the peace.

Son and Lloris looked to have buried the hatchet when they hugged at the final whistle in north London after Tottenham secured their second win since the coronavirus hiatus.

"It just belongs to the changing room. Outside you can say whatever you want. What happened is just part of football sometimes," Lloris said. "Let's be honest, we are in a situation we are not happy with so we have to fight, to make sure we all go in the same direction."

"Most important is to stay focused on the team. We can only do it as a team. "When you play a season like this one it's very easy to fall apart but we showed we are still together. "There is no problem at all. You could see after the game we were fine."

Tottenham sealed the points thanks to a first half own goal from Everton defender Michael Keane, who deflected in Giovanni Lo Celso's shot. It was somehow fitting that the always combative Mourinho's 200th Premier League victory featured the flare-up between Son and Lloris.

In fact, Mourinho was delighted with the row because it showed a desire to win. "That's beautiful. It's

probably as a consequence of our meetings, so if you want to blame someone blame me," he said.

"I asked them to demand more from each other and put colleagues under pressure. It was the situation of the first half where an amazing kid, a team boy like Sonny, that the captain thought 'you have to do more'.

"A team of nice boys, the only thing they can win at the end of the season is the Fair Play Cup. Something I have never won and have no interest in winning. "What happened should not happen on the pitch, it should happen inside the dressing room, but I promise you my winning teams we had big fights in the team."

### STROKE OF LUCK

Tottenham's second win in their last 10 games in all competitions lifted them into eighth place in the Premier League one point behind north London rivals

Arsenal in seventh. Just a year after reaching the Champions League final under previous boss Mauricio Pochettino, Tottenham have been reduced to fighting for a place in the Europa League.

This win ensured they could still avoid being out of European competition entirely for the first time since the 2009-10 season. Everton haven't beat Tottenham since 2012 and a first defeat in four games could end their European hopes for this term.

Thursday's limp 3-1 defeat at Sheffield United left Mourinho questioning the desire of his players, but took the lead in the 24th minute thanks to a welcome stroke of luck.

Son found Harry Kane in the area and his effort deflected to Lo Celso, whose shot was going wide until it span wickedly off Keane to wrong-foot Everton keeper Jordan Pickford. Everton finally threatened in stoppage-time when Richarlison burst forward to shoot wide after Son failed to chase down the loose ball.

Following Lloris's angry exchange with Son, both players were in the spotlight for more positive reasons in the second half as Tottenham held firm. — AFP

## WCup '26 US host hopefuls start work after virus delay

LOS ANGELES: US cities bidding to host 2026 FIFA World Cup matches will take part in a coronavirus-delayed virtual candidate workshop yesterday with 17 hopefuls chasing 10 places in the event lineup.

No deadline is set for selection of the US venues of the event, to be co-hosted by Canada and Mexico,

after pandemic delays in the bid analysis process, including the wipeout of a planned March workshop in Dallas.

US candidates include Atlanta, Miami, Nashville, Orlando, Houston, Dallas, Kansas City, Boston, Baltimore, New York/New Jersey, Cincinnati, Denver, Seattle, Philadelphia, Washington, San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Chicago, host of the 1994 World Cup's opening game, has not made the cut of US cities.

Montreal, Toronto and Edmonton in Canada and Mexico City, Guadalajara and Monterrey in Mexico appear set in the other host nations.

FIFA chief tournaments and events officer Colin Smith gave no timetable for when the list might be

trimmed, hopeful of starting stadium and site tours in late 2020 but knowing the deadly virus could impact that effort.

"It's not clear yet when we will be able to come and conduct those inspection visits," Smith said. "I would say that we need a few more weeks yet to see how things develop and then I would say Q3, beginning of Q4 this year, we would have a better idea as to the inspection visit schedule and then the time needed for the selection."

FIFA makes the final decisions, including a stadium of at least 80,000 seats for the final, with input from US Soccer.

The original plan had been for US cities to be named between March and June 2021 but that was

based upon a March start for the process to begin, a first look at bids, and two inspection visits through the remainder of the year.

"It's very difficult to give a final date, because when we don't know when the start date is," Smith said of the visits.

Former US Soccer chief executive Dan Flynn, overseeing the US city selection, said the 2026 event could act as a catalyst with greater potential what the nation experienced after hosting the 1994 World Cup.

"I think it takes on a greater role than it certainly did in '94," Flynn said. "But I also think there's just greater opportunities. Our sport is at a different level." — AFP



### A team of nice boys