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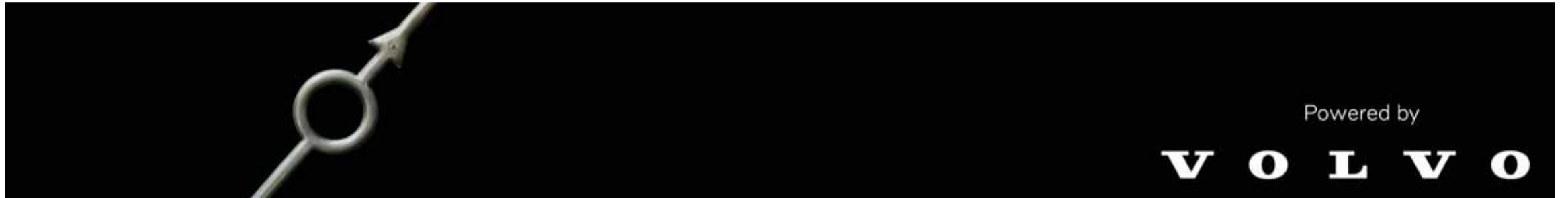
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# Kuwait's COVID cases top grim milestone of 100,000

Gulf cases surpass 800,000 • US passes 200,000 deaths • World sees record cases

## 10 MPs sign non-cooperation motion against prime minister



KUWAIT: HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah speaks during a grilling session at the National Assembly yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Ten opposition lawmakers yesterday signed a non-cooperation motion against HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah following a 10-hour marathon grilling over alleged violations and failure to handle the coronavirus. National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem told MPs voting on the motion will take place on Sept 30. This means the Assembly term will not end tomorrow as scheduled.

According to the constitution, if the Assembly supports the motion next week - a remote possibility - the issue will be referred to HH the Amir, who will decide whether to dismiss the prime minister or dissolve the Assembly. The MPs who signed the motion are Mohammad Hayef, Mohammad Al-Mutair, Abdullah Fahhad, Nayef Al-Merdas, Riyadh Al-Adasani, Thamer Al-Suwait, Abdulkarim Al-Kandari, Hamdan Al-Azemi, Al-Humaidi Al-Subaei and Bader Al-Mulla.

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KUWAIT: The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) infected 719 people in Kuwait in the past 24 hours, as total cases since the outbreak started reached 100,683, official spokesman of the Ministry of Health Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad announced yesterday. Three patients died in the past 24 hours, bringing the total count of deaths to 588, he added. The health ministry had earlier announced 682 coronavirus patients recovered during the past 24 hours, taking the total number of recoveries to 91,612.

The new cases include 187 in Hawally health zone, 162 in Ahmadi, 151 in Farwaniya, 120 in the Capital health zone and 108 in Jahra. Sanad said 99 patients are receiving medical care in intensive care units, with the overall number of confirmed cases that continue to receive medical care at 8,483. He added that up to 4,651 swab tests were conducted during the past 24 hours, raising the tally of tests to 715,887.

Sanad called upon the public to take all necessary precautions against the pandemic, abstain from mingling and observe social distancing. Kuwait's daily case numbers have fluctuated between 900 and 400 a day since early May. Kuwait began a partial resumption of commercial flights on Aug 1 while banning flights from several countries.

The number of recorded novel coronavirus cases in the six Gulf states has doubled in three months to over 800,000, according to a Reuters tally.

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## Protest held against ties with Israel

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: A group of Kuwaitis staged a peaceful protest outside the National Assembly yesterday against normalization of ties with Israel. They held banners in Irada Square saying 'normalization with Israel is betrayal' and the 'Kuwaiti people reject normalization and peace deal with the Zionist entity'.

US President Donald Trump claimed last week that Kuwait was likely to normalize ties with Israel soon. The remarks were made at the White House on Friday following a ceremony in which Trump awarded HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah the prestigious Legion of Merit, a top US honor.

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KUWAIT: Kuwaiti citizens hold a demonstration in Irada Square opposite the National Assembly yesterday to express their rejection of any normalization of ties with Israel. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

### News in brief

#### Americans in Bahrain alerted

MANAMA: The US Embassy in Bahrain on Monday warned American citizens in the Gulf kingdom of the "need for caution", days after Manama signed a US-backed deal with Israel. "The Embassy encourages all US citizens to review their personal security plans, remain aware of their surroundings, including local events, and maintain a high level of vigilance," an embassy statement read. — AFP

#### Abu Dhabi eases alcohol sales

ABU DHABI: Authorities in the UAE capital Abu Dhabi have abolished the requirement for permits to purchase and consume alcohol. "We are announcing the cancellation of permits for alcohol, and residents and tourists will have the right to buy it in authorized stores," said an official circular from the Department of Culture and Tourism. — AFP (See Page 5)

#### 5 found alive in debris

MUMBAI: Emergency workers rescued five more people from the rubble of a collapsed apartment block in western India yesterday, more than 30 hours after the building came crashing down, killing 20, officials said. — AFP

## Palestine quits chairing Arab League sessions

RAMALLAH: Palestine has quit its current chairmanship of Arab League meetings, the Palestinian foreign minister said yesterday, condemning as dishonorable any Arab agreement to establish formal ties with Israel. Palestinians see the accords which the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain signed with Israel in Washington a week

ago as betrayal of their cause and a blow to their quest for an independent state in Israeli-occupied territory.

Earlier this month, the Palestinians failed to persuade the Arab League to condemn nations breaking ranks and normalizing relations with Israel. Palestine was supposed to chair Arab League meetings for the next six months, but Foreign Minister Riyad Al-Maliki told a news conference in the West Bank city of Ramallah that it no longer wanted the position.

"Palestine has decided to concede its right to chair the League's council (of foreign ministers) at its current session. There is no honor in seeing Arabs rush towards normalization during its

presidency," Maliki said. In his remarks, he did not specifically name the UAE and Bahrain, Gulf Arab countries that share with Israel concern over Iran. He said Arab League Secretary General Ahmed Aboul Gheit was informed of the Palestinian decision.

In a new move addressing internal Palestinian divisions, officials from West Bank-based President Mahmoud Abbas's Fatah faction and the Islamist Hamas movement were due to hold reconciliation talks in Turkey yesterday. Hamas seized the Gaza Strip in 2007 from Fatah forces during a brief round of fighting. Differences over power-sharing have delayed implementation of unity deals agreed since then. — Reuters

## 'Pen guns' the latest threat in Afghan capital

KABUL: Police in Kabul have seized a stash of "pen guns" they say criminals and insurgents are using in a wave of targeted assassinations that has gripped the Afghan capital in recent months. The cylindrical, single-bullet firearms look much like regular ink pens and are easy to carry undetected. "It is like a click pen, the shooter puts the bullet in the cartridge, aims and clicks the thrust but-

ton to fire the bullet," an official at Kabul's Criminal Investigation Department (CID) told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Police last weekend unveiled a cache of 48 pen guns discovered in a larger haul of weapons including "sticky bombs" that can be slapped under vehicles and detonated remotely or on a timer. "The terrorists wanted to use these weapons in complex-target killings in the capital," interior ministry spokesman Tariq Arian interior ministry spokesman said.

Rising unemployment and poverty have worsened Kabul's already abysmal security situation, with kidnappings, robberies and drive-by shootings commonplace. — AFP



KABUL: In this handout photograph taken on Sept 19, 2020, a stash of "pen guns" and sticky bombs are displayed by officials in a residential house. — AFP



## Local

# Kuwait commends Saudi achievements as kingdom celebrates 90th national day

## Deputy Amir praises development, progress under King Salman's reign

**KUWAIT:** The Kuwaiti leadership congratulated on Tuesday the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which is celebrating its national day, commending on the occasion all the Saudi achievement throughout the fellow GCC nation's history. In a congratulatory cable, His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah conveyed greetings from His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to the King of Saudi Arabia Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud on this joyous occasion. His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince lauded the strong and historic relations between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, praising the development and progress attained during the reign of King Salman. He expressed wishes for evermore welfare and growth for Saudi Arabia under its keen and wise leadership. His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent a cable of similar content to the Saudi King.

Saudi Arabia celebrates today the 90th national day to commemorate the efforts of founder King

Abdulaziz bin Abdulrahman Al-Saud, who unified one of the biggest countries in the region. The kingdom enjoys a big geographical and cultural diversity, giving it strength at a regional and international level. The late King Abdulaziz had set a great economic, military, political, cultural and educational



### Amir's greetings conveyed to Saudi King

system, leading the country to become an international key player. King Salman bin Abdulaziz followed on his father's steps in building a modern country today.

Saudi youth have great ambition and opportuni-

ties now under the Saudi Vision 2030. Moreover, holding the G20 summit in Riyadh in November is part of the effective economic role the kingdom plays globally. Saudi Arabia also plays a big role in keeping a balance in international oil markets through Aramco company, which showed great expertise in dealing with crises and overcoming obstacles. On the political level, the kingdom is a key player in preserving peace, security and stability in the Arab and Islamic World, as well as being part of international decision making on prominent issues.

The country also exerts great efforts every year in Hajj season to ensure the safety of worshippers, especially during the spread of coronavirus, and develop and expand worship sites. The kingdom has very strong and historic relations with Kuwait as the two countries cooperate in all fields regionally and internationally. On 18 July, 2018, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and King Salman signed an agreement to establish a coordination council for the two countries. — KUNA



His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

## GCC chief, Bahraini Foreign Minister mull cooperation



MANAMA: GCC Secretary General Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf meets with Bahraini Foreign Minister Dr Abdullah Al-Zayani. — KUNA

**MANAMA:** Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Dr Nayef Al-Hajraf discussed Monday with Bahraini Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr Abdullah Al-Zayani boosting cooperation among GCC states. This came during Zayani's reception of Dr Hajraf and his accompanying delegation in Manama today, according to the Bahraini News Agency (BNA). The Bahraini Foreign Minister lauded GCC

chief's relentless efforts to promote joint GCC work and boost relations of the GCC countries with the rest of the world in order to meet the aspirations of the GCC leaders and peoples. Meanwhile, Dr Hajraf expressed happiness about visiting the Kingdom of Bahrain to discuss key issues pertaining to GCC joint work. Both sides discussed a number of issues related to joint GCC work and means of tackling various challenges. — KUNA

## Spain's parliament speaker praises Kuwaiti women

**MADRID:** Speaker of Spain's House of Representatives Maritxell Batet praised Kuwaiti women's leading role in politics and taking leadership positions. Batet made the remarks during a meeting with Kuwait's Ambassador to Spain Ayadah Alsaïdi at the parliament to discuss boosting bilateral ties between two nations, Kuwait Embassy in Madrid said in a statement Tuesday. She praised appointment of Kuwaiti women as judges, which was highly recognized at the government and parliamentary levels in Spain. Batet called on importance of exchanging political and parliamentary expertise between both nations. Batet said she would urge the Spanish government to support Kuwait's quest to waive European Union's (EU) Schengen visa

requirements on Kuwaiti citizens. The 26 Schengen countries are: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. The Kuwaiti diplomat highlighted the importance of parliamentary diplomacy in boosting bilateral ties. Batet expressed her deepest wishes for a fast recovery for His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and further progress, prosperity, stability, and security for Kuwait and its people, under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir. — KUNA



MADRID: Speaker of Spain's House of Representatives Maritxell Batet meets with Kuwait's Ambassador to Spain Ayadah Alsaïdi. — KUNA

## Kuwaitis urged to abide by German travel guidelines

**BERLIN:** The embassy of the State of Kuwait in Berlin yesterday urged Kuwaiti citizens in Germany to comply with the new travel guidelines set by the

German authorities. A statement by the embassy called on expired Schengen visa holders to leave German soil before the end of September. Those seeking to stay in Germany must go through official channels to obtain residency, indicated the statement, adding that persons with expired Schengen visas - who could not leave the country due to special circumstances - were implored to contact the department of foreigners' affairs to look into their individual cas-

es. The Germany Foreign Ministry, as of October, will issue new coronavirus (COVID-19) travel restrictions connected with each pandemic-stricken country individually. The Kuwaiti embassy reiterated that travel ban, instituted by German authorities, would remain as is, adding that people seeking travel to Germany must contact the European country's embassies and diplomatic missions in their respective countries to view the latest guidelines. — KUNA

## Kuwait's COVID cases top grim...

Continued from Page 1

All countries have lifted internal curfews and lockdowns, but restrictions on gatherings and foreign travel remain, and social distancing measures are being enforced.

Since reaching 100,000 cases in mid-May, the time it takes for infections to double has widened from half a month, to one month to three months. A longer doubling rate indicates slower growth in the infection rate. As of yesterday, the tally in the energy producing region stood at 800,651 infections, with 6,805 deaths.

The UAE, Oman and Bahrain have seen daily case numbers rise again in September. Ten days ago, the UAE recorded its highest daily number of infections since the start of the pandemic, at 1,007. Authorities said people were not adhering to social distancing measures. The business hub Dubai reopened to foreign visitors in July while airports in the rest of the UAE remain closed to visitors.

Saudi Arabia, which has the highest regional count at more than 330,000 infections and over 4,500 deaths, has seen a downward trend in daily case numbers since early July. On Monday 492 new cases were reported, compared to mid-June peak of 4,919. A week ago the kingdom partially lifted a suspension of international flights to allow "exceptional categories" of citizens and residents to travel. It will scrap all air, land and sea travel restrictions for citizens on Jan 1, 2021.

Iran yesterday announced the highest number of cases of the novel coronavirus in a single day, with 3,712 people infected in 24 hours. The highest case number recorded before was on June 4, when 3,574 cases were detected, according to official figures. Iran has been battling the Middle East's deadliest

outbreak of COVID-19, with the death toll standing at 24,656 people out of a total of 429,193 people infected.

Meanwhile, the United States registered its 200,000th death from COVID-19 yesterday, the latest grim milestone for the country just weeks before voters decide if President Donald Trump will stay in office. According to a rolling tally by Johns Hopkins University, 200,005 Americans have died and 6.86 million have been confirmed infected by the novel coronavirus.

The coronavirus pandemic appears to be accelerating worldwide, with new cases soaring last week to a new seven-day high of almost two million, even as new deaths decreased, WHO statistics showed. In a fresh global update, the World Health Organization said late Monday that during the week ending on Sept 20, 1,998,897 new cases of the novel coronavirus were registered around the world.

That marks a six-percent increase over a week earlier and "the highest number of reported cases in a single week since the beginning of the epidemic", the UN health agency said. Since the novel coronavirus first surfaced in China late last year, it has infected more than 31 million people around the globe and has killed nearly 962,000, according to an AFP tally from official sources on Monday.

Nearly all regions of the world saw new cases rise last week, WHO said, with Europe and the Americas seeing new cases swell by 11 and 10 percent respectively. Only Africa, which has remained relatively unscathed by the pandemic, dodged the upward trend, reporting a 12-percent drop in fresh cases from a week earlier. Even as cases shot up across much of the world, the number of new deaths is going down, the WHO statistics showed.

Last week, some 37,700 new deaths linked to the virus were recorded worldwide, marking a decline of 10 percent compared to the previous week. The decline was driven by the Americas, long the hardest-hit region, where new deaths were 22 percent lower than a week earlier, and by Africa where new deaths dropped 16 percent. — Agencies

cial position and parliamentary and popular positions, which reject the Israeli occupation and establishing ties with Israel. He also asked if the government contacted the US administration to see why Trump made such remarks and if the Kuwaiti government has denied the country's intention to normalize ties with Israel.

Dallal also asked if the Kuwaiti delegation which received the award discussed the issue of normalization with US officials and why the foreign ministry has not issued any statement regarding Trump's remarks, which apparently aim at involving Kuwait in the normalization issue. The UAE and Bahrain last week signed deals with Israel at the White House, breaking decades of Arab consensus that there would be no relations with the Jewish state until it had made peace with the Palestinians.

## 10 MPs sign non-cooperation...

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During the debate of the grilling, the prime minister praised his government's handling of the coronavirus crisis, saying Kuwait has booked enough vaccines for the deadly pandemic when they become available. Responding to accusations about the government's failure to handle the coronavirus crisis, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled, the first Kuwaiti prime minister to face a grilling in public, insisted that Kuwaiti authorities took a large number of bold decisions that averted a food crisis and the spread of the disease.

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled said the government only spent KD 500 million on the coronavirus, denying that it spent KD 1 billion. He reiterated that the ideal population structure of Kuwait is 70 percent citizens and 30 percent expats, exactly the opposite of the existing demographics, but acknowledged that a long time is required to achieve the target.

MP Kandari began the grilling by accusing the prime minister of failing to devise policies to tackle problems faced by the country in almost all aspects of life. He said the prime minister should have resigned following the uncovering of a state security spying case.

This case should have resulted in the resignation of the whole government, the lawmaker said. Another leak was related to the Malaysian sovereign fund scandal. Kandari charged that spying on people by the secret service police is in contradiction of democracy and accused the government of attempting to turn the country into a police state.

The lawmaker charged that the government failed in handling the coronavirus pandemic, claiming that the government committed a number of mistakes, adding that in the beginning the government demanded a PCR test from expats, but the decision was cancelled after Egypt protested. He said the government's incoherent policy in fighting the coronavirus had resulted in a rapid rise in the number of cases, which has now passed 100,000 cases.

Kandari claimed that the government spent a lot of money on containing the coronavirus and some of its projects have been rejected by the Audit Bureau. The lawmaker also accused the prime minister of failing to introduce a policy for controlling the population structure, which is heavily in favor of expatriates.

## Protest held against ties...

Continued from Page 1

The honor was received by Sheikh Nasser, the Amir's eldest son, as HH the Amir is undergoing medical treatment in the US.

A number of lawmakers have called on the foreign ministry to issue a statement denying Trump's remarks. In a question to Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Sabah, MP Mohammad Al-Dallal inquired about Trump's remarks, which contradict Kuwait's offi-

He accused the prime minister of not succeeding in curbing corruption and in managing the financial policy following the crash in oil prices and questioned how he plans to meet a huge KD 14 billion budget deficit this fiscal year.

MP Subaei accused the prime minister, in the PM's capacity as head of the Supreme Petroleum Council, of not adopting a prudent oil policy and failing to force top oil executives to employ Kuwaitis in the oil sector. He said some oil sector executives squandered billions of dinars in failed contracts and no one held them to account.

He said major oil companies have been hiring employees through manpower companies that provide foreign staff, adding that these companies have supplied 50,000 expats while there are unemployed Kuwaitis waiting for a job. He insisted that MPs will never accept the imposition of taxes and hiking of prices while the government continues to squander millions of dinars.

Subaei accused the government of abusing the basic rights of Kuwaiti citizens by revoking the citizenship of a number of people to oppress and terrorize them and challenged that the process was against the law. Subaei was rushed to the Assembly clinic during the grilling after feeling some pain.

The prime minister denied the accusations and said his government has recorded many achievements despite its short life of 10 months, and faced many challenges. He said the government has been tackling the coronavirus crisis since January and it faced major obstacles, mainly the presence of three million expats and security challenges.

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled added that the country has recorded around 100,000 cases and 584 deaths, both of which are very low compared to cases worldwide. The premier said the government countered exceptional conditions during the coronavirus crisis and was forced to take hard decisions including stopping prayers in mosques, suspending schools and imposing lockdowns and isolations.

Hospital beds for coronavirus treatment increased from 168 at the onset of the outbreak to 3,211 beds, while intensive care units rose from 235 to 925. Facemask stocks were also increased from 25,000 to 9 million. The premier said all countries in the world have been affected.

Sheikh Sabah however admitted that agencies committed mistakes like all agencies in the world, but these were quickly rectified. He said major companies worldwide sustained heavy losses and that some 20 percent of small and medium companies in the world are subjected to closures, according to reports. He also addressed the Malaysian sovereign fund leaks.



Local

# Kuwait reiterates support for Palestinians' rights

## Backing efforts to reach just, comprehensive solution to Palestinian issue

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait has stressed support for all efforts aimed at reaching a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian issue, a senior official said. The government has reiterated Kuwait's stance calling for an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, returning of Palestinian refugees, and the establishment of a Palestinian state on the pre-June 5, 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Interior and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh said following the Cabinet's weekly meeting on Monday. The ministers had discussed the political affairs in light of the current developments in the political arena at the Arab and international levels, especially those related to the peace process in the region.

At the onset of the meeting held at Seif Palace under the chairmanship of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, the Cabinet congratulated His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah after he was awarded a Legion of Merit, Chief Commander Degree by US President Donald Trump, noting that this prestigious award is in recognition of His Highness's pioneering role in

strengthening the strategic cooperation and bilateral relations with the US. His Highness the Prime Minister also briefed the Cabinet on latest health developments in the country in light of statistics and data related to the numbers of coronavirus cases of infection, recovery, deaths and those receiving treatment. He pointed out that recovery rate has increased whereas fatalities and hospitalizations have went down. In the meantime, the Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education Dr Saud Hilal Al-Harbi apprised the cabinet of a report on the results of the general secondary examinations for the academic year 2019-2020 for grade 12 students, which came in exceptional circumstances unprecedented due to the coronavirus pandemic. — KUNA

Meanwhile, Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah updated the Cabinet on latest health developments in the country in light of statistics and data related to the numbers of coronavirus cases of infection, recovery, deaths and those receiving treatment. He pointed out that recovery rate has increased whereas fatalities and hospitalizations have went down. In the meantime, the Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education Dr Saud Hilal Al-Harbi apprised the cabinet of a report on the results of the general secondary examinations for the academic year 2019-2020 for grade 12 students, which came in exceptional circumstances unprecedented due to the coronavirus pandemic. — KUNA



**KUWAIT:** Kuwaiti citizens demonstrate in Irada Square yesterday to express their rejection of normalization of ties with Israel. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## Commerce Ministry clamps down on laptop dealers

**KUWAIT:** The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has cracked down on computer dealers who stacked up to 150 laptops in a warehouse with the intention to monopolize the sets and raise prices. The ministry said in a statement yesterday that the warehouse was shut down, following two rounds of inspections by the department personnel of stores selling computers and various electronic parts in the district of Hawally. Having recorded an unjustified and unreasonable hike of sets' prices, the department has referred the case to competent authorities for further legal action. The ministry warned traders that it would not be slack or complacent with respect of any bids by dealers to make customers sustain heavy prices for electronic devices namely computers. It also urged citizens and expatriates to report any "illogical" hike of commodities' prices via the hotline 135, stressing that companies and commercial stores must adhere to the set trading rules. The crackdown coincided with reports that computer sets and parts, namely laptops, have become in great demand due to the adoption of online learning by schools and colleges. The e-learning has been warranted by the novel coronavirus crisis. — KUNA



**KUWAIT:** A Ministry of Commerce and Industry inspector examines laptops stacked in a warehouse in Hawally that was closed yesterday for alleged illegal price hiking. — KUNA

## Lockdown could force rethink of overseas treatment program

**KUWAIT:** It has been eight months since Kuwait's confrontation with COVID-19, during which the airport was closed for months and curfews and strict preventive measures were imposed. However, Kuwait has remarkably managed to do without overseas treatment for over six months without any effect on the health system or failure in providing healthcare services to citizens who could not be sent abroad for treatment. Al-Rai reported yesterday.

Notably, the annual budget set for overseas treatment is estimated in the hundreds of millions of Kuwaiti dinars. The issue has been always controversial and suspected to involve corruption and wastage of public funds, especially after a number of scandals at a number of Kuwait health offices abroad, the Arabic daily wrote.

## Rat infestation problem in Hawally?

**KUWAIT:** A local newspaper published a report highlighting what it described as a rats' infestation problem that Hawally, one of Kuwait's most populated areas, is reportedly suffering from. "Hawally seems no different today from various global cities like New Orleans and others, where rats are spreading after many restaurants and eateries, upon which these rodents rely for food, were forced to shut down in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic," Al-Rai Arabic daily wrote yesterday.

Health quarantines, lockdowns and total curfews have reduced the amount of household trash and people's movements, which made rats adapt to the new situation and wander around more often, the

report said that the suspension of overseas treatment without affecting health systems or local patients' treatment strategies raises a number of questions about the feasibility of spending hundreds of millions over the past years on providing medical services that turned out to be doable in Kuwait. Observers said the overseas treatment topic seems to have been an electoral tool for many lawmakers, who have been rewarded by the government with medical trips for their voters, including those that are really sick and others faking sickness.

Further, the observers stressed that the past few months proved that all diseases are locally treatable and that Kuwait can actually do without the entire overseas treatment issue and save hundreds of millions that can be used to develop healthcare services here in Kuwait by building more hospitals or bringing international medical experts to Kuwait instead of going to them.

### 'Mass success'

Meanwhile, the same daily reported that the recent 'mass success' of grade 12 students and their joy of passing with flying colors seems to have

caused a headache for officials at the ministry of higher education in view of the limited number of university seats available. Educational sources warned of a crisis that might last for two years due to what they described as the 'mass success' plan which gave around 38,000 students the right for a university seat, bearing in mind that higher education institutions' annual capacity has always been 25,000.

Further, the sources ruled out that the ministry of higher education will opt to increasing the minimum percentage needed to be accepted in universities, because they had already been raised two years ago. "Moreover, the capacity of private universities and Public Authority for Applied Education and Training is limited and it is too late for scholarships abroad, as study has already started in Europe, US and most other countries," the sources underlined.

They added that whoever set this 'mass success' plan has placed dangerous mines before the new minister of education and higher education in case of a Cabinet reshuffle or change because no criteria has been set to accept successful students in higher education institutions. "The only solution is to immediately open a new government university in Kuwait University's old buildings," the sources advised.

daily argued. "Rats have also become bolder in terms of wandering day and night without fear, and some of them have started to nibble on the cables of parked automobiles," it wrote.

"To probe the matter after receiving many complaints from residents, Al-Rai toured blocks 9 and 10 in Hawally and found rats have started sharing food with cats in various dumpsters," the report reads. Abdul Rahman Amer, a resident, is quoted in the report saying that rats gnawed the computer cable of his friend's vehicle. He added that huge rats are now living in many old abandoned buildings in the area, where many people throw their garbage. Another resident claimed that he once saw a huge rat standing on its hind limbs with its forelimbs on a vehicle's tire. "It was as if it was a mechanic examining the brake pads," he exclaimed.

Abu Fadi, who resides in block 9, said he has noticed a larger numbers of rats in the evening, unusually foraging among cats in various garbage

containers. He hoped all trash containers are tightly sealed, and suggested collecting trash twice a day to prevent the spread of rats. Mohammed Khattab, a block 10 resident, said the gathering point of rats is behind an electrical transformer near Hassan Al-Basri Street, where huge piles of garbage can be found.

"I'm so worried that these rats might someday gnaw the electric cable in the unit," he warned, noting that rats had always existed in the area and that their numbers had significantly dropped after residents reported the matter and rodent fighting teams sprayed the area with pesticides. "But they reappeared massively during the curfew period," Khattab stressed. The Ministry of Health's rodent and insect fighting project manager Dr Samya Al-Tabeekeh said rodent fighting teams work regularly and intensively, but mounds of trash in some densely populated areas attract rodents. She also stressed the importance of regular garbage collection.

## Policeman, three others arrested with drugs, guns

**KUWAIT:** A police officer, two Kuwaitis and a bedoon were arrested with drugs and a considerable number of weapons in Salmiya, Al-Rai reported yesterday quoting security sources. Case papers indicate that while on a routine tour in Amman Street, a Hawally police patrol suspected a vehicle with four people inside who seemed nervous on spotting the police. Checking on them, the driver turned out to be a police officer, accompanied by two Kuwaitis and a bedoon. Detectives found drugs and weapons in the vehicle. The weapons included two Kalashnikovs, four magazines, 101 bullets, an old machinegun, a pistol and nine bullets. Detectives also found four pieces of hashish, a number of psychotropic pills, a bag of meth, a cleaver, a scale and KD 1,500. A case was filed and the suspects were referred to relevant authorities pending further legal action and investigations.

Separately, the same daily reported yesterday that police are searching for a Kuwaiti man who allegedly attacked his ex-wife's house in Abbasiya waving a cleaver, which he used to damage the doors and windows before fleeing when the woman called the police. Security sources explained that the woman called the police requesting help and reported her ex-husband broke into her house carrying a cleaver. However, on arriving at the scene, policemen found the suspect had escaped. A case was filed and a search is in progress.

Stay safe. Stay home. Stay informed.





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# Resolving disputes peacefully pillar of Kuwaiti diplomacy: Foreign Minister

## Kuwait highlights importance of nuclear non-proliferation

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Minister of Foreign Affairs and Acting Defense Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah has stated that promoting peaceful resolution of disputes has become key pillar of Kuwait's diplomacy. This came during the celebration of the International Peace Day organized by the Kuwaiti Woman Institute for Development and Peace under the slogan 'Peace is our way', with the participation of the Arab League Secretary-General Ahmad Abul Gheit and the Deputy Chairman of the Isa Cultural Center in the Kingdom of Bahrain Dr Khaled Al-Khalifa. "Kuwait has been keen to spread and support cultures of peace, dialogue and moderation, so these principles have become main features of its foreign policy," said Sheikh Ahmad.

Sheikh Ahmad argued that Kuwait always backed the UN efforts to achieve international peace. Kuwait is open for all cultures and had joined the Alliance of Civilizations Initiative to promote dialogue and peaceful co-existence among people of different cultures, he noted. The Kuwaiti minister pointed out that governments, international organizations, civil society institutions, and individuals, are required to strive with sincere intentions to combat extremist ideas which incite hatred towards others. Sheikh Ahmad thanked the Arab League Secretary-General and Dr Khalifa for their participation and the Kuwaiti Woman Institute for Development and Peace for organizing this conference.

### Challenge to peace

Separately, Kuwait reiterated that the proliferation of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction is a challenge to international peace and security. In a keynote speech at IAEA General Conference online talks on Monday, Sheikh Ahmad also acknowledged the right to produce and use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes as per the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). On the

matter, he called on North Korea to abide by Security Council resolutions, in regards to its nuclear program, in order to ensure the stability of the Korean Peninsula. He also called on Iran to return to full compliance with the nuclear deal (JCPOA) it had signed with world powers in 2015 after an IAEA Director General report recently revealed that Tehran was not ensuring its full commitment to the deal. "We look forward to its approval and implementation of the additional protocol," said the minister.



KUWAIT: Minister of Foreign Affairs and Acting Defense Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah. — KUNA



## Kuwait marks Int'l Peace Day

Kuwait has "followed with concern" Iran's incomplete compliance with NPT Safeguards Agreement, he added, welcoming the IAEA's efforts to encourage this and stressing the importance of fulfilling this objective. "Iran should settle all outstanding issues in order for the agency to be in a position to provide credible assurances regarding the absence of undeclared nuclear materials and activities in Iran and to ensure its continued status as a non-nuclear weapon state," he said. Kuwait welcomes the first session of the conference on the proposed Middle East nuclear weapon free zone agreement in November last year, he added, urging the need for Israel, in turn, to commit to the NPT.

### \$300,000 pledge

Meanwhile, Kuwait pledged \$300,000 to an

manent standing with the Yemeni people and its support for its security.

Meanwhile, the Kuwait Foreign Minister stressed Kuwait is fully committed to the security and stability of Yemen amid the impoverished country's lingering civil war. Kuwait supports all international efforts, including measures the Yemeni government has taken to get the country's warring parties on the same page, aiming to reach a decisive solution to the conflict, the minister said. The humanitarian catastrophe in Yemen, exacerbated by a recent cluster of coronavirus, can only end through a solution that works within the frameworks of the Gulf initiative, Yemen's national dialogue and relevant

International Atomic Energy Agency initiative, which provides access to joint scientific research and expertise on means to monitor, prevent and respond to pathogens and diseases. The sum, pledged to the Zoonotic Disease Integrated Action initiative (ZODIAC) follows a \$10 million contribution for the establishment and operation of the IAEA LEU (low enriched uranium) Bank in late 2019. "Kuwait, as a member of the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency, affirms its commitment to actively participate in the Council's efforts and to contribute to its activities in a manner of consensus and technical professionalism," the minister said.

Urging other nations to follow suit, he expressed Kuwait's keenness to cooperate with the IAEA on other matters, such as the Atoms for peace program. He also praised the agency's Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship Program (MSCFP) which provides women with scholarships for Master's programs in nuclear science, saying this mirrors Kuwait's 2035 Vision plans, "which emphasize women's empowerment." — KUNA

UN security resolutions, he added. The Yemeni Foreign Minister then thanked Kuwait for standing by Yemen through this crisis.

Separately, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad received an audio-visual call from the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Kosovo, Meliza Haradinaj. During the call, the two sides discussed overall close bilateral relations between the two friendly countries, ways to develop them in various fields and enhancing cooperation to confront the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. They also discussed latest updates on regional and international arenas and issues of common concern between the two friendly countries. — KUNA

## ABK marks Int'l Day of Sign Languages

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) is celebrating the International Day of Sign Languages today with the Bank highlighting that it currently provides sign language for customers with hearing disabilities at seven branch locations across Kuwait. The branches include Head Office, Shaab, Jabriya, Adan, South Sabahiya, Al-Firdous and Jahra 1. ABK has a total of 43 full trained sign language staff who can be identified by the badges they wear showing they are sign language proficient.

The International Day of Sign Languages is celebrated globally and aims to raise awareness of the importance of sign language and the importance of being able to communicate with people that have a hearing impediment. According to the World Federation of the Deaf, there are approximately 70 million deaf people worldwide.

In a move to improve communication with its customers with hearing impediments, ABK holds sign language training courses on a regular basis for branch staff. ABK is committed to playing an active role in the communities it operates in, and will continue to encourage a strong sense of belonging among all individuals in the community, while also ensuring the bank delivers the best level of customer service.

## Kuwait committed to Yemen security

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister and Acting Minister of Defense Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah Monday on Monday received a phone call from Yemeni Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammad Al-Hadhrani. During the call, the Yemeni minister expressed gratitude and praise of the outcomes of the ministerial meeting in Yemen held September 17, and Kuwait per-

## US Ambassador visits Kuwait Society for the Handicapped

KUWAIT: Sabika Saad Al-Jasser, Vice Chair of the Kuwait Society for the Handicapped stated that Alina Romanowski, the United States Ambassador to the State of Kuwait, visited the society and participated in various activities with its students and employees. That visit came as a result of the society's commitment to build strong relationships with community partners and different local and foreign organizations in order to share experiences and serve children with disabilities in a best possible way. The Ambassador witnessed a training session in the area of professional development training organized in cooperation with the Burrow Recovery Centre's Team aiming to exchange experiences, learn new treatment techniques and be more productive.

"Our local brand is all about inspiring people of Kuwait to live a healthier and more fulfilling lifestyle," said Jassim Al-Mudhaf, the Chief Executive Officer of the Ring Side General Trading, and the Burrow Recovery Centre. "Part of our vision is to collaborate with community services on a regular basis, to educate and enhance the quality of life of people in

Kuwait. Our collaboration with KSH mirrors this vision, where our specialists in Physiotherapy lead and inspire individuals to improve their skills and knowledge of Rehabilitation."

Jasser added that the society has been running an art project specially designed for children with disabilities and led by an artist who works as an occupational therapist. The artist or therapist guides participants through art sessions providing adaptations to activities or environment according to the needs of children with different disabilities. The US Ambassador joined an art session to promote and encourage inclusion of all persons regardless of their skills and abilities.

Jasser also said that the society has been offering currently free consultations for physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech/language therapy to children with disabilities from all nationalities in addition to nursing tips for caregivers of persons with disabilities aiming to help them to improve their mobility, self-regulation, sensory processing, etc. The Ambassador visited treatment rooms where she watched some of the hands-on treatment and movement progression of children with disabilities.

Concluding her visit, Ambassador Romanowski expressed support to the society's mission of providing ongoing innovative and accessible care, education and support to children with disabilities thus changing their lives and helping their inclusion in the society.

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Chinese tycoon and Xi critic jailed for 18 years for corruption

## NY police officer charged with spying for China

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LONDON: Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson leaves 10 Downing Street in central London yesterday to make a statement to MPs in Parliament on the COVID-19 pandemic. The British government will announce fresh steps to try and stop a coronavirus surge in England, while the United States was on the verge of 200,000 Covid-19 deaths. — AFP

# Britain to impose new virus curbs as US crosses over 200,000 deaths

## Pandemic is showing no signs of slowing down

LONDON: The British government will announce fresh steps today to try and stop a coronavirus surge in England, while the United States crossed over 200,000 Covid-19 deaths. The pandemic is showing no signs of slowing down — more than 31.2 million infections have been detected worldwide, with 964,000 deaths — and nations are scrambling to contain new outbreaks.

The ramped-up response in Britain follows warnings that the country could see up to 50,000 cases a day by mid-October, and a month later exceed 200 deaths every day. France and Spain are battling similar surges.

"If we don't do enough, the virus will take off and at the moment that is the path that we are clearly on," said Chris Whitty, the British government's chief medical officer. "And if we do not change course, then we are going to find ourselves in a very difficult problem."

Under new rules to come into force on Thursday, English pubs, bars and other hospitality venues will be

required to close at 10 pm. Food and drink outlets will also be restricted to table service only. Many nations in Europe were easing restrictions after largely overcoming initial outbreaks, but the resurgence of the virus has forced them to tighten curbs again. In the Czech Republic, Prime Minister Andrej Babis admitted Monday that the government had loosened restrictions too quickly. "Even I got carried away by the coming summer and the general mood," he said. "That was a mistake I don't want to make again."

### 'Lies and incompetence'

The number of deaths in the United States was crossed over 200,000 yesterday, with infections in the worst-hit nation in the world approaching seven million. Overall, the US accounts for four percent of the world's population and 20 percent of its coronavirus deaths.

President Donald Trump has faced intense criticism of his handling of the crisis ahead of the November

election. "Due to Donald Trump's lies and incompetence in the past six months, (we) have seen one of the gravest losses of American life in history," his Democratic rival Joe Biden charged on Monday.

"With this crisis, a real crisis, a crisis that required serious presidential leadership, he just wasn't up to it. He froze. He failed to act. He panicked. And America has paid the worst price of any nation in the world."

Trump insisted Monday that the United States was "rounding the corner with or without a vaccine".

But US Federal Reserve boss Jerome Powell will warn Tuesday in testimony before a Congressional committee that a full recovery in the world's biggest economy "is likely to come only when people are confident that it is safe to reengage in a broad range of activities", according to prepared remarks.

### 'I'll never return'

A vaccine is considered crucial to ending the pan-

dem — with multiple development efforts underway around the world — but there are concerns that the poorest nations may not be able to access it.

More than 60 wealthy nations — but not China and the United States — have joined a programmed backed by the World Health Organization to facilitate poor countries' access to vaccines, according to a list published Monday. Until one is available, the options for treatment available to the less privileged are limited. In Mexico, where more than 73,000 people have died, many are choosing to stay at home when they fall ill instead of seeking treatment at creaking public hospitals. Jessica Castillo in Hidalgo state said she suffered for a week at home, and even had suicidal thoughts.

"I felt that the air I was breathing wasn't entering my lungs," said 43-year-old pastry chef, whose coronavirus recovery took more than a month. "But I said: 'If I go to hospital, I'll never return.'" — AFP

## Abu Dhabi abolishes permit system for buying alcohol

ABU DHABI: Authorities in the UAE capital Abu Dhabi have abolished the requirement for permits to purchase and consume alcohol, according to an official circular, after neighbouring Dubai also moved to relax rules. The changes come as both the emirates, among seven in the United Arab Emirates federation, seek to rebuild their tourism industries after the coronavirus shutdown, and also prepare for visitors from Israel after a landmark deal to normalise relations.

"We are announcing the cancellation of permits for alcohol, and residents and tourists will have the right to buy it in authorised stores," said the circular from the Department of Culture and Tourism dated September 15 and seen by AFP yesterday.

The directive said buyers must be at least 21 years of age, that the alcohol must not be re-sold, and that it should be consumed in a private home or an authorised place such as a club. But it did not specify whether Muslims are forbidden to buy alcohol or not. Formerly Muslims were not permitted to acquire an alcohol licence. The circular ends a legal grey area in the emirate. Although liquor stores in Abu Dhabi do not usually ask for permits to sell alcohol, sales were technically still subject to those rules. In Dubai, stores are required to ask residents or tourists to show a permit before selling alcohol, but bars and restaurants do not require patrons to produce the document.

This year, Dubai also relaxed the permit system, making it easier for residents to acquire one by removing the requirement to obtain a "certificate of no objection" from their employer.

Residents need only to fill out a basic form, present their identity card, and pay 270 dirhams (\$74) to obtain the permit. Tourists can get a temporary licence by showing their passport and visas at the store.

However, Muslims still cannot apply for an alcohol permit in Dubai. The sale of alcohol is permitted in six of the seven emirates in the UAE, but is prohibited in conservative Sharjah which remains "dry" with no pubs or bars. Public intoxication and drink-driving are strictly banned across the country. — AFP

## NZ's Ardern seen cruising to victory in election

WELLINGTON: New Zealand's ruling Labour Party has lost some support since July as the coronavirus resurged in Auckland, but it is still set to win the upcoming general election on Oct 17 comfortably, an opinion poll showed on Tuesday. The 1News-Colmar Brunton poll showed support for Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's party, which is seeking a second term in office, at 48%, down 5 percentage points since the last poll in late July.

The opposition National party also lost 1 percentage point taking it to 31%, under newly elected leader Judith Collins. The results mean Labour would get 62 seats, and can govern alone without any coalition.

Small parties like the Green Party got 6% support while the ACT New Zealand surprised with 7% support. But populist New Zealand First Party, a kingmaker in the last election, dropped to 2%, which means it would not get into parliament if it does not win an electorate seat. All recent polls have pointed to a comfortable victory for Ardern, who has won global praise for her leadership during the coronavirus pandemic. Ardern and Collins will face each other in the first live TV debate for the election later yesterday.

Ardern has called it a 'COVID election' and focused her campaign on highlighting the government's success in tackling the health and economic challenges thrown up by the pandemic.

The 40-year-old, who became the world's youngest female leader after unexpectedly winning power in 2017, holds huge appeal domestically and globally where she has garnered praise for her views on issues such as women's rights, climate change and diversity. — Reuters

## US Supreme Court vacancy upends presidential race

MONROE: Supreme Court justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's death has roiled the US presidential race, with the battle over her replacement looming large in swing states likely to determine the course of an election just six weeks from today.

Many Republicans see her passing as a golden if controversial opportunity for President Donald Trump to pick another conservative — his third — for a life-long spot on the nine-member bench.

Michelle Burns, a stay-at-home mother of six in the small city of Monroe, in southern Michigan, said "it's God's will" that Trump fill the court vacancy before the vote. "My own belief is that this was a divine intervention," the 46-year-old told AFP Monday outside her home that features over-the-top Halloween decorations complete with an inflatable Trump.

"What's the coincidence of it happening seven weeks before the election?" Trump's battle with Democrat Joe Biden is on a razor's edge, with the Ginsburg replacement the latest in a series of bitterly divisive election issues: Trump's handling of the coronavirus pandemic, the resulting economic downturn, and tensions over racial injustice. Whether the explosive Ginsburg issue fundamentally alters the race is not yet known. But grassroots Democrats hope Trump nominating a replacement would be met with a backlash that tilts the presidential contest their way in critical Industrial Belt states like Michigan and Ohio.

"It's really life or death at this point," said 21-year-old college student Alexa Cooley, as she and her sister left a Democratic Party office in Monroe with campaign yard signs under their arms.

While she acknowledges the court seat battle is a rallying point for pro-life voters like Burns, Cooley sees a five-alarm fire that will "motivate Democrats" to vote for Biden on November 3. "Especially with Ruth Bader Ginsburg, we could go to Gilead," Cooley said, referring to the patriarchal theocracy in the dystopian novel "The Handmaid's Tale."

"A lot of my friends are talking about, 'our lives are going to be the Handmaid's Tale, all our rights are

going to be taken away" if a conservative majority court strikes down landmark cases protecting women's rights, she said. "That's what women my age are concerned about." Monroe County was one of several in Michigan that voted twice for Barack Obama but flipped to Trump, helping him narrowly carry the state and propel him to a 2016 shock win. Monroe resident James Pocock believes Biden will have to fight hard to win back the county, and said the Supreme Court battle will only intensify the drama. "I feel like it's going to cause a lot of conflict," the 21-year-old said.

Pocock is Republican and comes from a pro-life family, so there is pressure to fall in line and back the president. But he believes Trump has done "questionable things in office" and has badly mishandled the coronavirus, and so Pocock's vote, he said, is going to Biden, despite Pocock's own opposition to abortion.

### 'Fill that seat!'

Trump has announced he will nominate a new justice soon and the Senate's Republican leader said to expect a confirmation vote. The move so close to an election has infuriated Democrats. But in neighboring northwestern Ohio, a closely watched bellwether state won by Trump in 2016, supporters streamed into Trump's Monday open-air rally eager for the president to fulfill his duty.

"It's really important for President Trump to push through another nominee for the Supreme Court (who) believes in life, who believes in the constitution, believes in liberty," said realtor Holly Orman of Toledo as she entered the rally in nearby Swanton.

Orman, 44 and wearing a T-shirt that read "Jesus is my savior, Trump is my president," said the economy was paramount in 2020 but that the court vacancy was vital too, and that Democrats "should back off and let (Trump) do his job." Most rally attendees appeared unconcerned about the Supreme Court showdown having a damaging effect on Trump's re-election effort.

"He's rushing it, and I think he should," Paula Nowicki, wearing a pink "Women for Trump" hat, said of the president's planned nomination.

Her 30-year-old daughter Becky Nowicki, an insurance producer, is a fervent Trump supporter but broke with her mother when asked if she felt the issue could turn the election against him. "Honestly I feel like we could see anything in 2020 so I think it could — which is terrifying," she said. Trump appeared to relish the opportunity to discuss the vacancy with his pumped-up fans. — AFP



## International

# Chinese tycoon and Xi critic jailed for 18 years for corruption

## Ren embezzled almost 50 million yuan (\$7.4 million) of public funds

BEIJING: A Chinese tycoon who called President Xi Jinping a clown and criticised his handling of the coronavirus outbreak was jailed for 18 years yesterday for corruption, bribery and embezzlement of public funds. Ren Zhiqiang — once among the ruling Communist Party's inner circle — disappeared from the public eye in March, shortly after penning an essay that lambasted Xi's pandemic response. His outspokenness had earned the former chairman of state-owned property developer Huayuan Group the nickname "Big Cannon".

Yesterday's verdict said Ren embezzled almost 50 million yuan (\$7.4 million) of public funds and accepted bribes worth 1.25 million yuan, according to a statement from the Beijing No. 2 Intermediate People's Court. It said the 69-year-old "voluntarily and truthfully confessed all his crimes", and would not appeal the court's decision. He was also fined 4.2 million yuan (\$620,000). Rights campaigners accuse Xi and the Communist Party of using corruption charges to silence dissent. Beijing has stepped up its crackdown on civil society since Xi took power in 2012, tightening restrictions on freedom of speech and detaining hundreds of activists and lawyers. Yesterday's verdict claimed that Ren also "abused his power" in his role at Huayuan Group, which caused more than 116 million yuan of losses to the state-owned holding company and more than 53 million yuan worth of property losses for the group.

### 'Clown'

The Communist Party's disciplinary watchdog launched an investigation into Ren in April, and the trial opened at a Beijing court on September 11 with a handful of supporters outside and a heavy police

presence. One supporter told AFP they backed Ren because he "dares to speak the truth". Ren's essay, from earlier this year, has been scrubbed from



### Abused his power

China's internet — which regularly censors content that challenges the authorities — but was shared online outside China. "This epidemic has revealed the fact that the Party and government officials only care about protecting their own interests, and the monarch only cares about protecting their interests and core position," Ren wrote, without naming Xi.

"Standing there was not an emperor showing off his new clothes, but a clown stripped of clothes who insisted on being an emperor," he wrote. Ren's influential blog on the Twitter-like Weibo platform attracted millions of followers before his account was closed by authorities in 2016 after he repeatedly called for greater freedom of the press.

Online reaction to Ren's sentencing was also being rapidly scrubbed yesterday. "The only real-estate tycoon who dares to tell the truth in China has been censored," read one comment on Weibo.

"He was born in 1951 and is 69 years old this



BEIJING: This photo taken on November 18, 2013 shows Ren Zhiqiang, the former chairman of state-owned property developer Huayuan Group, speaking at the China Public Welfare Forum in Beijing. A Chinese tycoon who called President Xi Jinping a clown and criticised his handling of the coronavirus outbreak was jailed for 18 years yesterday for corruption, bribery and embezzlement of public funds. — AFP

year... maybe he won't live to see the day he gets out of jail," said another. The son of a former vice-commerce minister and a Communist Party member for decades before he was expelled in July, Ren was well connected with party elites. He wrote in his memoir that he had been friends with vice-president and former anti-corruption chief Wang Qishan

since they were teenagers, when Wang was assigned by their school to mentor the younger Ren. He is also a controversial figure, particularly over his defence of China's soaring house prices — once telling Chinese media that people who had been unwilling to invest in real estate before the boom "now deserve to be poor". — AFP

## Taiwan president praises pilots who intercepted jets

PENGHU: Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen praised yesterday the "heroic performance" of air force pilots who have been intercepting Chinese jets that have approached the island, as its armed forces held drills to simulate repulsing an attack.

Tension between China and the democratic island Beijing claims as sovereign Chinese territory have spiked to their highest in years, with Taiwanese fighters jets scrambling to intercept the Chinese aircraft last week.

Visiting a major air force base on Penghu in the sensitive Taiwan Strait that divides the two sides, Tsai told pilots and engineers she was aware of their "heroic performance" when intercepting and driving away Chinese aircraft.

"I have a lot of confidence in you. As soldiers of the Republic of China, how could we let enemies strut around in our own airspace?" she said, using Taiwan's formal name.

"I'm aware that facing the provocative behaviour of the communist planes that have encircled the island and damaged regional peace in recent days, your duty at the front line of the airspace in Penghu must be even heavier."

The base, now home to F-CK-1 Ching-kuo Indigenous Defence Fighters (IDF) which first entered service in 1997, is at the front line of Taiwan's response to Chinese military intrusions. Wang Chia-chu, one of the senior officers of the "Heavenly Colt" IDF squadron, told Reuters there is just five minutes' time to scramble fighters once Chinese aircraft are spotted.

"We will defend our airspace in real time as long as there's a threat," Wang said. Another senior officer, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Reuters the Penghu-based IDFs are now scrambling "almost every day" as tension runs high.

The air force also put on display its new Wan Chien air-to-ground cruise missiles that entered service in 2018 and can be fired from IDFs at targets about 200 km (125 miles) away, putting Chinese facilities or approaching ships in their sights. Separately, Defence Minister Yen Teh-fa oversaw drills simulating a response to an air attack, involving all Taiwan's air bases as well as naval and surface-to-air missile units, the ministry said. "The enemy threat grows by the day," it cited Yen as saying. "On no account allow the enemy to step out of line, and defend the country's sovereignty, democracy and freedom."

### Crossing the mid line

Unusually, Chinese aircraft last week breached the mid line of the Taiwan Strait, an unofficial barrier for combat aircraft of both sides, though they have not flown over mainland Taiwan. On Monday, China's foreign ministry said the line did not exist, drawing condemnation from Taiwan Foreign Minister Joseph Wu. In Taipei yesterday, Wu called the line an important "symbol" for avoiding military clashes.

"We demand the international community strongly condemns China's words and actions and demand the Chinese government stops everything that it has been doing," he added.

China has been angered by stepped-up US support for democratic Taiwan, including a visit to Taipei last week by US Undersecretary for Economic Affairs Keith Krach. Taiwanese fighters have scrambled many times this year to intercept Chinese aircraft. — Reuters

## Chinese death-row inmate digs tunnel to escape jail

TANGERANG: A Chinese drug trafficker on death row escaped from a jail near Indonesia's capital after digging a 30-metre (100 feet) tunnel from his cell, police said.

Cai Ji Fan, sentenced to death in 2017 for trafficking 110 kilograms (230 pounds) of metham-

phetamine, broke out of Tangerang prison in Banten last week via the narrow tunnel, which connected to a sewer, officials said. "This is the second time he escaped," said Tangerang police's chief Sugeng Hariyanto, adding he also managed to get out of the National Police Criminal Investigation Department cells in Jakarta while on remand.

Officials said Cai had invited his cellmate to join him, but he had declined. Authorities said they had recovered a crowbar, chisel, screwdriver and other tools used to dig the hole, speculating he may have got them from building work being done on a prison kitchen. Cai's first escape was in January 2017 via a hole he made in a bathroom wall using an iron rod.

Along with other prisoners, he then climbed a 2.5-metre (eight-feet) wall, but was recaptured in West Java three days later. Although rare by foreigners, jailbreaks are common in Indonesia, where most prisons are overcrowded and poorly staffed. In 2018, some 90 inmates escaped a prison in Banda Aceh after tearing down a fence during a prayer gathering. A year earlier more than 400 inmates broke out of an overcrowded prison in Riau province.

Also in 2017, four foreigners dug their way to freedom from Bali's notorious Kerobokan jail.

A Bulgarian and Indian were captured in East Timor a week later, but an Australian and Malaysian were never found. — AFP

## After Lebanon blast, future lawsuits pile up against the state

BEIRUT: Elie Hasrouty, who lost his father to the August 4 Beirut port blast, is one of at least 1,228 grieving Lebanese preparing to file a lawsuit against the state. The young computer engineer said going to court won't bring his father back, but it could go some way towards preventing similar disasters from happening again.

"We are pursuing legal action (for) us, the people who remain in this country and who want to live in it with dignity," he told AFP. Hasrouty's father, Ghassan, was among the more than 190 people killed in the mega-blast, caused — the authorities say — by a large stockpile of ammonium nitrate blowing up. The explosion, one of the largest non-nuclear blasts in history, also wounded at least 6,500 people, and ravaged swathes of Beirut. Ghassan worked for most of his life in a control room in the shadow of the port's giant silos, right next to the epicentre of the explosion.

He was buried so deep under rubble, wheat and corn that the foreign rescue teams who rushed to the scene never stood a chance of pulling him out alive. His body was found two weeks after the blast.

His son said the point of legal action was not "retaliation" against the authorities, whose negligence and corruption are widely blamed for the blast, but rather to address the underlying conditions that led to the disaster.

"We need to determine who is responsible as well as all behaviour that led to this situation, so that the issue is addressed and proper measures are taken to deter similar conduct in the future," he said.

"What's the use of... prosecuting those who will be found guilty if (official) conduct does not change?" he asked.

### 'Only want justice'

The Hasrouty family is one of at least 1,228 families who have turned to the Beirut Bar Association to file complaints they hope will become lawsuits against the state, as Lebanese law does not allow for class action procedures.

The Beirut Bar Association is offering its services pro bono as part of an accountability drive it launched after the blast, assigning a lawyer to each



BEIRUT: Candles light-up pictures of victims of August's deadly Beirut blast during a commemoration concert in the gardens of the damaged 19th-century Surssock Palace in Achrafieh in Lebanon's capital. — AFP

of the cases it is currently handling. "We can't stand by idly in the face of a tragic crime of this kind," Melhem Khalaf, the head of the association, told AFP. "We are not seeking revenge in any way. We only want justice."

With an army of 400 volunteer lawyers and 200 legal aides, the Beirut Bar Association has set up seven makeshift centres in blast-hit districts in the aftermath of the explosion, Khalaf said.

They have been backed by more than 450 real-estate appraisers who helped assess the cost of damages suffered by the claimants.

Starting at a computer at the association's Beirut headquarters, lawyer Ali Jaber gave a break-down of the cases. So far, more than 82 percent of all cases brought to the Beirut Bar Association involve people whose complaint focuses on material losses as a result of the blast, according to Jaber.

Those who sustained injuries as well as material losses make up around seven percent of future claimants, while those whose complaint centred solely on injuries accounted for three and a half percent, he said. A little over one percent have lost a relative to the blast. Jaber said claimants would seek first to establish responsibility through a ver-

dict before any second lawsuit for compensation from the cash-strapped state, as Lebanon grapples with its worst economic crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war.

A long history of high-level impunity in Lebanon has pushed many of the country's citizens at home and abroad to call for an international probe into the blast — a demand now backed by Western powers and rights groups.

But Lebanese authorities have rejected such a proposal, favouring instead a local investigation that has so far yielded the arrest of some 25 people. They include the head of the Beirut port and its customs director, but not a single official in government or parliament. The US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and French experts have been assisting Lebanese authorities in a probe that has yet to establish a cause for the blast almost seven weeks later. Amnesty International this month said an "international fact-finding mechanism" is the only way to "guarantee victims' rights to truth, justice and remedy". But the government has instead referred the investigation to "the Judicial Council, a court... whose proceedings inherently lack independence and impartiality". Amnesty said. — AFP

## Father, son jailed over bomb blast at Vietnam police station

HANOI: Twenty people, including a father and son, were jailed yesterday for the bombing of a police station in Ho Chi Minh City that injured three people, state media said.

Authorities said the June 2018 attack was orchestrated by "terrorists" connected to Trieu Dai

Viet, a Canada-based Vietnamese group seeking to overthrow the communist state.

Nguyen Khanh, the architect of the attack, was sentenced to 24 years in prison for "terrorism against the people's administration" and "illegally fabricating, storing and trading explosives", according to state media. His son Nguyen Tan Thanh was sentenced to three years in jail, while 18 accomplices will serve from two to 18 years.

Khanh was charged with giving explosives to two accomplices, who detonated them in a bomb on a motorcycle in front of the police station on the outskirts of the city. The blast shattered the glass facade of the building near the site of violent

protests against a proposed economic law days earlier. It injured two police officers and a cook.

The attack came after huge — and rare — rallies erupted in several cities across Vietnam against a draft law on special economic zones that would grant investors 99-year leases.

It sparked fears that China would take over investment zones, igniting popular and deep-seated resentment against Vietnam's powerhouse neighbour. Weapons and explosives are not widely available in Vietnam, and violent politically linked attacks are rare. Some 15 people were convicted in 2017 on terrorism charges over a failed bomb plot at Vietnam's largest airport in Ho Chi Minh City. — AFP



## International

# Fear of hospitals means some Mexicans 'prefer to die at home'

## People choose to fight virus on their own at home

**MEXICO CITY:** By the time 61-year-old Mexican mechanic Martin Urdiain finally decided to go to hospital to seek treatment for the coronavirus, it was already too late. He died the next day.

When Urdiain and his wife fell ill, they chose to stay at their home in Mexico City rather than put their trust in the creaking public health system. After their symptoms worsened, they even bought two mechanical ventilators for \$3,400 instead of going to hospital.

"He was suspicious because he saw on the news about the overflowing hospitals, and poor care, but in the end he felt worse and finally went," Urdiain's brother Alfredo told AFP.

Urdiain died on June 17, while his wife recovered without hospitalization. In Mexico, it is common to hear of people choosing to fight the virus on their own at home, sometimes refusing to be taken to hospital by paramedics. The government has recognized that the health system has suffered from years of neglect, but says it is working to improve standards. When the pandemic began, Mexico had a shortage of 200,000 doctors and 300,000 nurses, prompting the health ministry to embark on a major hiring spree. It also scrambled to refurbish a thousand hospitals and buy supplies with an investment of \$1.9 billion.

### 'I'll never return'

Rather than set foot in hospital, Jessica Castillo endured a week at home in Hidalgo state in central Mexico where she even had suicidal thoughts, the 43-year-old pastry chef said. "I felt that the air I was breathing wasn't entering my lungs, but I said

"If I go to hospital, I'll never return." Castillo, who suffers from diabetes and hypertension, said her distrust of the public health system stems from the poor care she received before the pandemic. "I don't believe them. They've hurt me a lot physically, and emotionally.

"I haven't even been for medicine for my diabetes for about three years. I prefer to buy it elsewhere," said Castillo, who took more than a month to recover from the virus. With more than 73,000 deaths, Mexico has the world's fourth-highest Covid-19 toll, although the government says that is partly due to its large population.

The country of 128 million has officially registered nearly 700,000 coronavirus infections. There is no official number for the number of Mexicans who have died in their homes, but the government's own figure of excess mortality offers a clue.

From mid-March to August 1, there were 122,765 more deaths from all causes than usual across 24 of the country's 32 states.

"For years, we've had a sick health system without the necessary equipment," Mayra Reyes, a doctor at the Cuautitlan General Hospital just north of Mexico City, told AFP. At the start of the year, her hospital did not even have paracetamol.

### 'Many rumors'

Misinformation has added to this distrust about the public health system. Rumors that disinfection work was spreading the virus sparked riots in the southern state of Chiapas in May and June. A hospital, city hall, homes and vehicles were vandalized.

"There are many rumors that the hospitals end



TLAPA DE COMONFORT: File photo shows a health worker looks for people with symptoms of COVID-19 in Tlapa de Comonfort, Guerrero state, Mexico, on September 7, 2020. — AFP

up killing patients," said Eustaquio Garcia, a 27-year-old driver in Guerrero, another southern state.

Yet even some doctors admit that there is a grain of truth in that. Ivan Carreno, a general practitioner, said that from March to July people's fear "was well founded", since the hospitals "were full, the care

was poor and there was a lack of supplies." Although the situation has since improved, many people remain wary. "I've had patients who ask me if it's true that they remove the fluid from their knees — or if we traffic their organs," Carreno said. "Many people literally prefer to die at home." — AFP

## NY police officer charged with spying for China

**NEW YORK:** US authorities have charged a New York police officer with espionage, accusing him of gathering information about the city's Tibetan community for the Chinese government.

The officer, who worked at a station in the Queens section of the city, was directed by members of the Chinese consulate in New York, according to the indictment released Monday.

Born in China, the man had been granted political asylum in the US, claiming he was tortured by Chinese authorities because of his Tibetan ethnicity.

Through his contacts with the Tibetan community, the 33-year-old man gathered information between 2018 and 2020 on the community's activities, as well as identifying potential information sources.

According to the indictment, the man — who is also an officer in the US Army Reserve — allowed members of the Chinese consulate to attend events organized by the New York Police Department.

The Chinese authorities allegedly paid him tens of thousands of dollars for his service.

The officer has been charged with four counts, including enlisting in the service of a foreign country on US soil, misrepresentation and obstructing the operation of a public service.

New York City police commissioner Dermot Shea said the officer "violated every oath he took in this country. One to the United States, another to the US Army, and a third to this Police Department".

He was brought before a judge Monday and taken into custody, a spokesperson for the Brooklyn federal prosecutor told AFP. According to the NYPD, he is currently suspended without pay.

Beijing dismissed the accusation as "completely made-up." "The so-called indictment is full of 'apparently,' 'possibly' and other assumptions, and these are completely trumped-up charges," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said at a regular press briefing Tuesday.

Despite the man's claims he was tortured in China because of his ethnicity, the investigation allegedly revealed that both of his parents were members of the Chinese Communist Party.

"If confirmed by the courts," the espionage operation "shows that the Chinese Communist Party is engaged in malign operations to suppress dissent, not only in Tibet... but any place in the world," said the International Campaign for Tibet, an advocacy group that promotes Tibetans' freedoms and rights.

Beijing says its troops "peacefully liberated" Tibet in 1951, but many exiled Tibetans accuse the central government of religious repression and eroding their culture. The Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, has lived in exile since 1959. — AFP

## Pandemic splits surrogates from families

**BEIJING:** Cherry Lin wistfully strokes a babygrow, fretting it may be too small for a son she is yet to meet — one of hundreds of Chinese mothers estranged from babies born to commercial surrogates overseas after the coronavirus forced border closures.

China banned all forms of surrogacy — both commercial and altruistic — in 2001 due to concerns poor women were being exploited. But for \$35-75,000 couples can seek women abroad, from Laos and Russia, to Ukraine, Georgia and the US, to carry their babies.

The system has been tipped into chaos by the pandemic, which has seen borders closed, flights cancelled and visas pulled, creating a 'pile-up' of newborns waiting to be picked up by their biological Chinese parents.

It has also revived the black market for surrogacy inside China. "Baby dens" with dozens of newborns in orphanages or apartments have been found as the backlog builds, according to surrogacy agencies in Russia and Ukraine.

"I can't sleep at night thinking my baby is stuck in an orphanage," Lin, who opted for surrogacy after suffering several miscarriages, told AFP from southern city of Chengdu.

Her baby was born in St Petersburg in June, three months after Russia closed its border with China to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

"We don't know how long we have to wait," she concedes. Rising incomes, high rates of infertility and the desire for older couples — well past their reproductive age — to have a son after China scrapped its one-child rule in 2016 has fuelled the demand for foreign surrogates.

Lin, a 38-year-old lawyer, and her husband travelled to Russia last year for IVF and to sign a contract with a surrogacy company. Once the pregnancy was confirmed she shopped for baby products, and even took an infant first aid course.

But her plans unravelled as the virus swept the globe, dropping her into "a nightmare", where she receives fragments of her newborn's first weeks through photos and video clips sent by the surrogacy agency.

### Losing precious time

China's foreign ministry and the Russian embassy in Beijing did not respond to AFP queries about what they were doing to help Chinese parents bring their babies home. And there are no official figures on how many Chinese babies born to surrogates are stranded abroad.

But a video posted in June by surrogacy service BioTexCom in Ukraine showing rows of babies in cribs in a hotel pointed to the scale of the crisis. Nearly half of the 46 babies belonged to Chinese clients, a BioTexCom spokesperson told AFP.

## Venezuela, Cuba denounce US in UN speeches

**UNITED NATIONS:** Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro called Monday for the world to fight against "hegemony" and "imperialist ideas" during the UN General Assembly's virtual summit.

In a pre-recorded speech, Maduro, accused by UN investigators of crimes against humanity, denounced "the world of hegemony, the world of

authorities have since issued special permits for biological parents to claim their children despite border closures. But that is not enough for Li Mingxia, whose son was born in May in Kiev.

Quarantine requirements and infrequent flights means she is still unlikely to reach him until late November. "I will miss the first six months of his life," Li explains, adding: "I can't get that back."

Most babies born abroad do not have birth certificates since their parents are unable to travel to take the DNA tests needed to prove parentage. Russian and Ukrainian police have also started raiding the baby dens — apartments where five or six undocumented babies are being looked after by one nanny — amid fears of human trafficking, Russian state media reported.

"When the police find several Chinese babies without any identification papers, living in a house with a stranger it looks like you are selling babies for organ harvesting," according to Dmitriy Sitko, China Marketing Manager for Vera Surrogacy Center in Saint Petersburg, who worked with Lin.

Lin's agency found a spot at a state-run orphanage to care for her baby for free. But some agencies in Russia charge parents anywhere between 7,000 to 21,000 yuan (\$1,000 to \$3,000) per month, Sitko said.

### Celebrities normalise surrogacy

Nearly one in four couples of reproductive age in China suffer from infertility, according to the Global Burden of Disease study published in medical journal The Lancet in 2017.

Some studies have linked high levels of pollution to declining male fertility, while women are choosing to delay motherhood due to the high costs of living, restrictive maternity policies, and high child-care costs. Surrogacy is sometimes chosen when fertility treatments, such as IVF, don't work for the couple or if they are unable to carry a child.

Stars such as Elton John, Cristiano Ronaldo, Nicole Kidman, and Kim Kardashian West, have

said they used surrogates to expand their families, raising the profile of the practice — but it remains controversial.

The UN has warned commercial surrogacy risked turning children into "commodities" and called for better regulation in places where it is legal.

"There is no right to have a child under international law. Children are not goods or services that the State can guarantee or provide. They are human beings with rights," Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, said in a 2018 report.

Only a handful of countries allow international surrogacy. AFP interviews with 15 surrogacy service providers found it costs about \$35,000 - \$50,000 for surrogacy in Ukraine and Georgia, \$73,000 in Russia and \$200,000 in California, one of the few US states where it is legal.

Russia and former soviet countries including Ukraine, Georgia and Belarus are the top destinations for Chinese couples looking for a birth mother.

The sector was displaced from Asia, with Laos the only remaining nation to allow international surrogacy after Thailand and India — long time hotspots — banned it.

Even in Russia and Ukraine a backlash against foreign surrogacy is building with politicians and activists warning that women and children are being exploited by wealthy foreigners.

But as global travel restrictions have brought the industry to a halt, people are instead turning to the local black market.

Shenzhou Zhongtai, an agency in the southern city of Gaungzhou, told AFP that it costs 600,000 yuan (\$87,000) for "successful transplanting and delivery."

"Add another 200,000 yuan (about \$30,000) for sex selection, and another 200,000 yuan for Dragon and Phoenix twins," an agent said — referring to a package that allowed couples to have a boy and a girl. — AFP



KIEV: This file photo taken on May 15, 2020 shows nurses caring for newborn babies at Kiev's Venice hotel, some of the more than 100 babies born to surrogate mothers stranded in Ukraine as their foreign parents cannot collect them due to border closures imposed during the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

imperialism" and insisted on the need to be "united" in the face of the coronavirus pandemic.

"Venezuela supports a multipolar world, a renewed UN system, a system that knows how to enforce international law and protect the people of the world," he said, condemning US attacks on the World Health Organization, without explicitly naming the country.

"This is not the time to insult, to threaten the WHO, it is now the time to unite in its favor," he said.

"The world defeated fascism 75 years ago. The world will also win against those who seek hegemony, against imperialist ideas, and it will be able to defeat neo-fascism," said the socialist leader, whose legitimacy in office is no longer

recognized by more than 50 countries. Maduro is due today to deliver another virtual speech before the UN during the annual General Assembly, which he has not physically participated in since 2018.

Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez Parrilla also criticized the US. "On this 75th anniversary of the UN, multilateralism and international law are threatened by the largest global power.

"The irresponsible behavior of the United States is the greatest danger to international peace and security," he said.

"It seems that (the US) is at war with the planet... and its inhabitants," Rodriguez Parrilla said, condemning the "economic, commercial and financial blockade" Washington imposed on Cuba. — AFP



# Business

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2020

## Microsoft buys ZeniMax Media for \$7.5bn

### Acquisition adds muscle to Microsoft's Xbox arm

SAN FRANCISCO: Microsoft on Monday announced it will acquire ZeniMax Media for \$7.5 billion, adding muscle to its Xbox arm ahead of a fierce battle in the market for new gaming consoles.

ZeniMax is the parent company of Bethesda Softworks, publisher of popular game franchises including Dishonored, Doom, Fallout and Elder Scrolls.

"Gaming is the most expansive category in the entertainment industry, as people everywhere turn to gaming to connect, socialize and play with their friends," said Microsoft chief executive Satya Nadella. "Bethesda has seen success across every category of games, and together, we will further our ambition to empower the more than three billion gamers worldwide."

#### The rising cloud

Buying ZeniMax "checks a lot of boxes" for Microsoft, according to Baird analyst Colin Sebastian. The acquisition strengthens the Xbox games portfolio as competition for people's play time increases and boosts Microsoft's efforts to be the premier platform for cloud-based gaming, the analyst said in a note to investors. The deal should also free Bethesda to focus on making hit games while Microsoft tends to the work of hosting titles in the cloud for play across a variety of devices. Xbox team head Phil Spencer has promised to bring top Bethesda titles to the Xbox Game Pass service. While it is possible Bethesda may publish games for PlayStation, at least those already in development, it is doubtful any titles would be available to competing cloud gaming services, Sebastian said in a note to investors.

#### All about the games

Adding blockbuster franchises from ZeniMax as exclusives would give the new generation Xbox console more appeal when it takes on the latest PlayStation. Pricing of the consoles is similar, and PlayStation is thought to have an edge but players are



NEW YORK: Microsoft logo is displayed outside the Microsoft Technology Center near Times Square in New York City. Software giant Microsoft on Monday announced it had acquired ZeniMax Media for \$7.5 billion. — AFP

strongly driven by game content.

"If you were going to buy a PlayStation to play Bethesda games, now you are not," said Wedbush analyst Michael Pachter. Since most major video games are playable on personal computers powered by Windows software, that would be unlikely to change once Microsoft owns ZeniMax and its studios.

Consoles, however, are another matter. PlayStation fans devoted to franchises such as Elder Scrolls or shooter Wolfenstein could find them unavailable on the consoles going forward.

"If you want to play Elder Scrolls 6, you will have to

buy Xbox," said Pachter. The extent to which ZeniMax games will remain available on PlayStation will depend on how the company's contracts are written with Sony. "Generations of gamers have been captivated by the renowned franchises in the Bethesda portfolio and will continue to be so for years to come as part of Xbox," Spencer said in announcing the deal. In addition to Bethesda Softworks, ZeniMax also owns Bethesda Game Studios, id Software, ZeniMax Online Studios, Arkane, MachineGames, Tango Gameworks, Alpha Dog, and Roundhouse Studios, employing more than 2,300 people worldwide. — AFP



### Fierce battle for new gaming consoles likely

"Bethesda brings an impressive portfolio of games, technology, talent, as well as a track record of blockbuster commercial success," Microsoft said in statement. The company will pay for the acquisition in cash with the deal expected to close by the mid-2021. The deal comes as Microsoft prepares to release its Xbox Series X in mid-November, its first update to the gaming console since 2013.

Sony's eagerly awaited PlayStation 5 will also launch in November, setting up a holiday-season clash with Xbox as the gaming industry thrives during the pandemic. The competing consoles will be released within two days of each other ahead of the Christmas rush, both aiming to capitalize on a rare bright spot in the economic carnage caused by the coronavirus crisis.



This handout computer-generated image released Monday by the European multinational aeronautics company Airbus shows three prototypes of zero-emission hydrogen-powered aircraft. — AFP

## Airbus aims for hydrogen-powered plane by 2035

PARIS: Airbus is aiming to put the world's first hydrogen-powered commercial plane into service by 2035, the European aircraft maker's boss said in remarks published Monday. Hydrogen is a clean fuel, emitting only steam, but whether it is green depends on the carbon footprint of the fuels used to produce it.

France and other European countries are investing billions of euros in the development of green hydrogen, with the highly polluting transport industry a prime area for its intended use. "It is our ambition to become the first aircraft maker to enter such a plane into service in 2035," Airbus CEO Guillaume Faury told Le Parisien newspaper. The development of decarbonized hydrogen fuel is a "priority axis of

development" for Airbus, he said. The manufacturer has already been using hydrogen technology to power its satellites and the Ariane rocket.

Developing an aircraft that uses carbon-free fuel would not require "any major technological breakthrough", Faury said. The production technology would, however, still need around five years to reach maturity, and suppliers and industrial sites would need another two to be ready, he said.

"We could therefore implement the program around 2028," he said. Aviation generates up to three percent of the world's emissions of carbon dioxide, the main driver of climate change.

Hydrogen use would require some major design changes for aircraft, as the fuel requires about four times the storage space of kerosene for the same energy content. The French government has earmarked 1.5 billion euros (\$1.75 billion) for the development of carbon-free aircraft as part of a support plan for the aviation sector, which has been brought to its knees by the fallout from the coronavirus pandemic. Overall, France is planning to invest seven billion euros in the development of hydrogen solutions, with neighboring Germany setting aside nine billion. — AFP

ment positions to go in the first quarter of 2021. The company's negotiations with unions are proving difficult however, and German media have said pilots at subsidiary Germanwings could be among the first to face redundancy in 2021.

German union Verdi, which represents ground staff, accused Lufthansa of lacking a clear vision for the future. "It's clear to everyone that things can't go on without cuts," Verdi's Mira Neumaier said in a statement. "But the company will not be saved through job cuts alone."



FRANKFURT: German airline Lufthansa aircraft standing at the airport in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany, amid the novel coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

## Lufthansa to cut more jobs as virus pummels travel

FRANKFURT: Lufthansa said Monday it will slash more jobs on top of 22,000 previously announced cuts and put more planes out of service as the coronavirus continues to crush travel demand.

The German airline group said in a statement it was losing some 500 million euros (\$590 million) a month, and bookings were declining after a brief rebound over the summer.

To cut costs, Lufthansa now plans to reduce its roughly 800-strong fleet by 150 planes by 2025, compared with an earlier plan to scrap 100 aircraft. "The previously announced personnel surplus amounting to 22,000 full-time positions will increase as a result of the decisions taken," it said.

The group did not give a figure for the additional job cuts, but sources close to the negotiations put the number at around 5,000. Lufthansa said it would engage in talks with labor representatives to "limit the number of necessary redundancies".

Managers will also be hit, with one in five manage-

## TikTok's promise of 25,000 new US jobs sets lofty goal

WASHINGTON: Even as dealmakers bicker over who will actually own TikTok Global, another question emerged after President Donald Trump agreed over the weekend to keep the wildly popular video-sharing app running in the United States for another week: how can they possibly create 25,000 new jobs in the United States?

That vow, repeated by the president on Saturday at a campaign rally in North Carolina, was part of a concession that dealmakers offered to convince Trump to green-light a transaction in which a new board comprised of US citizens would oversee a new US-based company and co-owned by Oracle Corp and Walmart Inc.

But the lofty hiring target will be tough to justify, experts said. Such a high number suggests an expectation for massive revenue growth at a time when TikTok faces unprecedented global challenges. If TikTok operated at anywhere near the efficiency of other internet companies such as Twitter, TikTok would need to generate up to 19 times more revenue over the next few years.

TikTok is expected to generate about a billion dollars in revenue by the end of 2020, Reuters previously reported. Many of the new American jobs will likely be in engineering, content moderation and security roles, given the US government's intense focus on the app's data privacy policies, said Dan Ives, a technology analyst at Wedbush Securities.

"From a security and infrastructure perspective, they're going to have to hire a few thousand alone to focus on that issue...given the sensitivity," he said. TikTok recently announced a \$1 billion creator fund that will pay popular TikTok influencers for making videos. — Reuters

Lufthansa, which also owns Swiss, Brussels and Austria Airlines, was saved from bankruptcy through a German government bailout worth nine billion euros in June. But the airline has repeatedly warned that the government rescue would not be enough to stave off painful cuts as the sector weathers an unprecedented crisis. "The outlook for international air traffic has significantly worsened in recent weeks," Lufthansa said, in a nod to the rapid uptick in coronavirus cases across Europe.

#### 'Not realistic'

Lufthansa said its previous assumption that travel demand could reach half of last year's in the fourth quarter "no longer seems realistic". Its homebase Germany is also planning new rules from October, requiring travellers arriving from risk zones to go into quarantine for at least five days before taking a test. Lufthansa would prefer it if corona tests were expanded prior to departure, saying it would be a "better alternative than changing inconsistent entry and quarantine regulations".

Germany's new quarantine plans would essentially rule out intra-Europe weekend city hops—something which had resumed over the summer months.

"The continuing high level of uncertainty in global air traffic makes short-term adjustments to the current market situation unavoidable for the foreseeable future," said the group. — AFP

## Cook: Fires, storms show impact of climate change

SAN FRANCISCO: Apple chief Tim Cook said Monday he views the recent increase in fires, hurricanes and floods as strong proof that climate change is real. The disasters should sway those denying science that shows greenhouse gases are dangerously changing weather patterns, Cook said in a talk streamed during an online event by The Atlantic magazine.

Cook reasoned that wildfires raging on the US West Coast, hurricanes slamming the South, and flooding in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions make a compelling case for climate change. "All of these together, I do believe will convince the people that are not currently convinced about climate change," Cook said.

His remote interview with Atlantic editor-in-chief Jeffrey Goldberg was recorded last week, when smoke from wildfires turned day to night in California and ash fell like snow in some places. "It's horrendous," Cook said.

"It's a reminder of how serious climate change is and what's at stake." Cook declined to answer whether he had any luck convincing US President Donald Trump that climate change is real during any of their conversations, saying those exchanges were private.

"I don't want to talk about it in detail, but if you sort of back up from it, my whole philosophy is engagement," Cook said. "I think it's even more important to engage when you disagree on something."

Trump suggested global warming will reverse itself and dismissed climate change as a cause of ferocious fires engulfing swathes of the West Coast during a briefing with local officials in California last week. The president, who flew into Sacramento in central California during a reelection campaign swing, pushed back against state leaders who said that climate change underlies the ever-stronger blazes.

On arrival in McClellan Park, near Sacramento, Trump repeated his argument that the wildfires are due instead to insufficient maintenance of forest areas to make them less combustible.

But at the briefing, California governor Gavin Newsom, a Democrat, countered that the fires are driven mostly by global warming. "It will start getting cooler. You just watch," Trump insisted to Wade Crowfoot, the head of the California Natural Resources Agency.

The official responded: "I wish science agreed with you." "I don't think science knows, actually," Trump said. It was Trump's first visit to California since the devastating blazes began there and in the states of Washington and Oregon. — AFP



CUPERTINO: A handout still image from the keynote video released by Apple inc shows Apple CEO Tim Cook kicks off a special event at Apple Park in Cupertino, California. Apple chief Tim Cook said Monday, he views the recent increase in fires, hurricanes and floods as strong proof that climate change is real. — AFP



## Business

# Charging ahead: Tesla teases 'insane' news on 'Battery Day'

## Tesla could announce potentially 'game changing' battery developments

SAN FRANCISCO: Tesla chief Elon Musk has promised "insane" battery news at a streamed event after the company's annual shareholders' meeting today.

Speculation includes that Tesla will announce it has come up with ways to pack more energy into battery cells, slash production cost and dramatically extend battery life. Musk, however, seemed to tap the brakes a bit on expectations in a tweet Monday, saying announcements will affect long-term production, particularly of Tesla's Semi, Cybertruck and Roadster models.

Innovations will not reach "serious high-volume production" until the year 2022, according to Musk. In response to a Teslerati.com story shared on Twitter contending that the battery announcement might be "more insane than expected," Musk fired off a comment saying, "It will be very insane." In a tweet earlier this month, Musk promised "many exciting things will be unveiled on Battery Day." He finished the message with a lightning bolt emoji. "We know Tesla is going to promote its technology and needs to if Semi and Cybertruck are the next platforms both requiring high density solutions," Canaccord analyst Jed

Dorsheimer said in a note to investors. "But like most things Tesla, the devil will be in the details, which sadly will take some time to play out."

### Million-mile battery?

Along with making electric cars, Tesla has a battery division devoted to rechargeable power cells for its vehicles, as well as storage packs for electricity at homes, businesses or disaster scenes.



### More energy for battery cells, less production cost

Tesla could announce potentially "game changing" battery developments that could make its electric vehicles more appealing while cutting production costs, Wedbush analyst Daniel Ives said in a note to investors.

"We believe the company is getting closer to announcing the million mile battery at this highly-anticipated event,"

Ives said. Morgan Stanley analysts told investors they expected progress toward a million-mile (1.6-million-kilometer) vehicle battery lifespan, along with much more efficient production methods and a higher electricity capacity.

Such an improvement in battery life could make electric cars a more attractive investment and ease environmental concerns. Musk could also announce progress in his drive to stop using cobalt, a vital and expensive component in lithium-ion batteries that comes with concerns about human rights violations in mining operations.

Investors will be particularly interested in whether Tesla can get battery production costs on track to go below the "key threshold" of \$100 per kilowatt hour, according to Ives. Tesla makes batteries at its plants in the US and China, and is building a factory in Germany. Lithium-ion batteries for Tesla models are made by Panasonic at the electric vehicle company's "gigafactory" in Nevada. Some analysts think Musk is keen to ramp up battery supply and interested in more control of production. Musk said in a tweet on Monday that Tesla intends to increase battery purchases from Panasonic, LG and China-based CATL. "However, even with our cell suppliers going at maximum



SAN FRANCISCO: Tesla CEO Elon Musk said he would announce "insane" battery news that will affect long-term production, particularly of Tesla's Semi, Cybertruck and Roadster models. — AFP

speed, we still foresee significant shortages in 2022 and beyond unless we also take action ourselves," Musk said.

The battery event was originally planned for early this year but was delayed due to the pandemic.

Tesla is already ahead of other automakers when it comes to batteries,

the key to the future of electric vehicles. Colorful founder and chief executive Musk has a pattern of envisioning wondrous innovations, from colonies on Mars to meshing minds with computers and people zipping along underground through "hyperloop" tunnel systems. — AFP

## Sterling reverses losses after falling to two-month low

LONDON: The pound recouped losses after slipping to two-month lows against the dollar yesterday, as British Prime Minister Boris Johnson prepared to impose new restrictions to tackle a second wave of the coronavirus outbreak. Sterling recovered as much as 0.08 percent to \$1.2826 against the dollar at 0840 GMT, after sliding as low as 1.2714 earlier yesterday, its lowest since July 23. The pound was at 92 pence against the common European currency.

"Sterling's slide at the beginning of the European session today underpinned the concerns that the investors have for the UK economy, which is right in the middle of this," said Gavin Friend, senior FX strategist at NAB Group.

The pound recovered after Bank of England Governor Andrew Bailey warned escalating coronavirus cases reinforced the downside risks in his

latest forecasts for the economy yesterday as he continues to consider whether negative rates would be effective in Britain. Bailey said the Bank of England's latest policy statement did not imply it would necessarily use negative interest rates, and that observers should not read too much into it. Johnson will tell people to work from home and announce new curbs on pubs, bars and restaurants, stopping some way short of a full national lockdown of the sort he imposed in March.

"Assuming a full two-week lockdown (circuit-breaker) is avoided, the markets may show signs of relief given there has for some time been a strong assumption that full lockdowns like in March-May would be avoided," MUFJ Research said in a note. Latest weekly positioning data shows a small long position in favor of the British pound, but the magnitude of the long bets is barely above zero and is far below the highs of nearly \$2.8 billion in March.

However, the positioning data is at odds with signals from the derivative markets which point to more weakness for the pound. Three-month risk reversals, a ratio of calls to puts for the currency, are approaching 2020 lows. "The UK also has some pretty unique challenges with Brexit," Friend said. "If a deal is struck, sterling is going to



VIENNA: Wads of British pound sterling banknotes are stacked in piles at the GSA Austria (Money Service Austria) company's headquarters in Vienna. — Reuters

rally hard, and if there isn't, sterling is going to be vulnerable. That's why markets are very flighty on sterling." The British government is attempting to pass a bill through Parliament that would allow it to break its Withdrawal Agreement with the European Union. — Reuters

## Founder of truck maker Nikola quits after fraud charges

NEW YORK: Shares of embattled auto startup Nikola tumbled again Monday following the sudden resignation of company founder Trevor Milton in the wake of fraud allegations. The Phoenix-based company said in a statement late Sunday it had accepted Milton's resignation and he would be replaced immediately by Stephen Girsky, a Nikola board member and former vice-chairman at General Motors.

The resignation of Milton, who served as executive chairman, was the latest twist in a heady two-week period that saw the company soar after scoring an alliance with GM, and then reel as it was hit by fraud allegations that put the company on the defensive.

Shares of Nikola fell nearly 20 percent to \$27.58. Milton launched the company in 2015 to develop trucks and pick-ups powered by electric batteries or hydrogen fuel cells, and though Nikola has not yet built anything, it caught attention by signing strategic partnerships with such renowned groups as GM and German engineering giant Bosch.

The announcement of the GM partnership on September 8 caused shares to leap 41 percent on the New York Stock Exchange amid hopes that the Arizona company would be the next Tesla. But two

days later, investment company Hindenburg Research published a report accusing the startup of "intricate fraud" based on multiple lies by Milton, who it said "misled partners into signing agreements by falsely claiming to have extensive proprietary technology." That announcement triggered a plummet in share value, with stock diving 36 percent in three days.

It also sparked investigations by the Securities and Exchange Commission and Department of Justice, according to The Wall Street Journal.

### 'In motion'

Milton hotly denied the charges and said he would refute them, and in the statement announcing his resignation, he said: "The focus should be on the company and its world-changing mission, not me. I intend to defend myself against false allegations leveled against me by outside detractors." Nikola also rejected most of the claims in the Hindenburg report. But it did not deny that it staged a 2017 video of one of its prototypes apparently in action. According to Hindenburg, "Nikola had the truck towed to the top of a hill on a remote stretch of road and simply filmed it rolling down the hill."

Nikola responded that it "never stated its truck was driving under its own propulsion in the video" simply saying that it was "in motion."

On Monday, Milton described Girsky as "the right leader to guide our vision at the board level."

Girsky, who worked in senior roles at GM from 2009 through 2014 and served on the board when the auto giant emerged from bankruptcy after the 2008 financial crisis, thanked Milton for his leadership. —AFP

## UK leisure group Whitbread to cut 6,000 jobs

LONDON: British leisure group Whitbread, owner of Premier Inn hotels, announced yesterday that it could axe up to 6,000 jobs and blamed "subdued" travel demand during the coronavirus pandemic.

Whitbread, which also owns restaurants including Brewers Fayre and Beefeater, said it will consult on the cutbacks that would amount to almost a fifth of its workforce. "With demand for travel remaining subdued, we are now having to make some very difficult decisions, and it is with great regret that today we are announcing our intention to enter into a consultation process that could result in up to 6,000 redundancies in the UK," said chief executive Alison Brittain in a statement.

The London-listed leisure firm said that it expected a "significant proportion" of the redundancies would be on a voluntary basis. Britain reopened its hospitality sector in July, after a months-long nationwide lockdown that began on March 23.

The UK government also launched stimulus package for the troubled industry, including a restaurant discount scheme-entitled 'Eat Out to Help Out'-and a cut in value-added tax (VAT).

However, the government was to unveil new restrictions later to curb rising coronavirus cases across England and prevent a deadly second wave. Under new rules due to come into force tomorrow, English pubs, bars and other hospitality venues will be required to close at 2100 GMT, while food and drink outlets will be restricted to table service only.

Whitbread stressed that its staff had worked "very hard" to reopen the group from lockdown.

"Our teams have worked very hard to reopen our hotels and restaurants and we are now firmly in the 'restore' phase of our response to the Covid-19 crisis," Brittain said. The group's performance following the reopenings "has been ahead of the market," she said.

However, it had been clear from the beginning of the crisis that even as restrictions were eased and hospitality businesses reopened, demand would be "materially lower than 2020 levels for a period of time," Brittain said. —AFP

## EU unity on WTO chief frays as Hungary backs Britain's Fox

BERLIN/BRUSSELS: EU governments agreed on Monday on the qualities they want from the next leader of the World Trade Organization, but no longer back the same candidates after Hungary said committed Brexititeer Liam Fox would be one of its picks. The bloc were united on their choices in the first round of selection as the field was cut from eight to five.

But Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijarto said on Sunday evening his country would back Fox, a former Conservative trade minister who strongly supported Britain's exit from the European Union, as well as Kenya's Amina Mohamed in round two. A number of EU countries, notably France, oppose Fox's candidacy, EU diplomats say. Earlier on Monday, Fox told a briefing that he was hoping for more EU support. "I would say that the UK is following exactly the agenda that the EU would have had, had the EU had a candidate in this race, which of course it doesn't."

His pro-free trade agenda would be beneficial to most European economies, such as Hungary, the 10th most open economy in the world in terms of trade as a percentage of GDP, or two other top 10 nations Luxembourg or Ireland. German Economy Minister Peter Altmaier told a news conference after EU trade ministers met in Berlin that the EU had done well to get three of its picks through - Mohamed, Nigeria's Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and South Korea's Yoo Myung-hee.

He added there was a good chance that an overwhelming majority of EU countries would stick together on the issue. European Commission Vice President Valdis Dombrovskis, who now oversees trade at the EU executive, said there was "strong agreement" among ministers on Monday that the next WTO director-general should be someone capable of managing profound reform. — Reuters

## Uneven progress among members hampers EU's digital ambitions

BRUSSELS: The European Union's bet on advanced technologies to help its companies and the economy recover from the coronavirus pandemic faces hurdles ahead, held back by the uneven digital pace across the 27-country block, the EU's budget watchdog warned yesterday.

Four years after launching a scheme called Digitising European Industry (DEI) to speed up the digitalization of EU businesses, Europe is still not fully benefiting from advanced technologies, the European Court of Auditors said. The project aims to mobilize about 50 billion euros (\$58.6 billion) in public and private investment over the next five years.

The Luxembourg-based ECA, which vets the collection and use of EU funds, said the stakes are high as digitalization could generate more than 110 billion euros (\$129 billion) in annual revenues.

"Digitalization of EU industries has progressed in recent years, but at different speeds between countries, regions and sectors. There are also large disparities between large companies and small and medium-sized enterprises," it said in a statement. ECA cited the example of Germany whose digital strategy includes the building of a technology and know-how center targeting the automotive and robotics industries, and helping small companies.

It said Portugal also has a strategy in place to invest in automation and robotisation and the production of contemporary furniture of innovative design, among other projects. Hungary and Poland on the other hand had yet to develop a comprehensive strategy last year, the ECA said, as it lamented the limited influence Commission activities have on national plans. — Reuters



In this file undated handout image shows a Nikola Refuse truck. The founder and executive chairman of embattled zero-emission truck maker Nikola has resigned, the company announced after allegations of fraud which sparked a stock tumble and a regulatory investigation. — AFP



## Business

# Coronavirus drives overhaul of troubled British rail sector

## Govt ends a franchise system that existed for nearly quarter of a century

LONDON: Britain's government on Monday handed further financial support to the country's privatized railway sector badly derailed by the coronavirus pandemic, while also ending a franchise system that existed for nearly a quarter of a century. While UK train services will continue to be run mainly by private companies, franchising will be replaced by Emergency Recovery Management Agreements (ERMA), the government said after the virus slashed passenger demand by 95 percent.



**Virus slashes passenger demand by 95%**

The Department for Transport said it would continue over the next 18 months to cover losses suffered by private rail operators, extending a system begun following the start of the virus outbreak.

"Ministers today ended rail franchising after 24 years as the first step in bringing Britain's fragmented network back together," the DfT said in a statement. "The new system will create a simpler, more effective structure and will take shape over the coming months."

It is the first major sector-wide overhaul since British Rail was privatized in the mid-1990s by the Conservative government. The franchising system has been long-criticized by passenger groups, who accuse private companies of charging excessive fares despite regularly-delayed train services and large state-subsidies.

Rail operators have meanwhile been critical of high costs they must incur under franchising.

The new deal allows for "an early start on key reforms, including requiring operators to co-ordinate better with each other and driving down the railways' excessive capital costs", the DfT added Monday.

Matthew Gregory, chief executive of FirstGroup, which owns four franchises, called for "a more appropriate balance of risk and reward for all parties". Under privatization, the taxpayer has been forced to take over control of franchises that ran into financial trouble—and currently runs two such operators.

### 'No longer working'

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps on Monday said the changes "will keep the best elements of the private sector, including competition and investment, that have helped to drive growth, but deliver strategic direction, leadership and accountability".

Franchising "has seen significant rises in passenger numbers, but this pandemic has proven that it is no longer working", he added. With Covid-19 decimating passenger demand, as office staff continue to work from home, Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Conservative government has paid out about £3.5 billion (\$4.5 billion, 3.8 billion euros) to support rail operators.

"Until passenger numbers return, significant taxpayer support will still be needed," the DfT said Monday. Keith Williams, a former British Airways boss commissioned by the government to review the sector, welcomed the new strategy that will see the state paying lower management fees to train operators.

"These new agreements represent the end of the complicated franchising system, demand more from the expertise and skills of the private sector, and ensure



LONDON: Trains are seen at Clapham Junction train station in south London. Britain unveiled on Monday a radical overhaul of its coronavirus-plagued privatized rail sector that will see franchises replaced with concessions subject to tougher scrutiny and greater state involvement. — AFP

passengers return to a more punctual and co-ordinated railway," he said. Mick Cash, general secretary of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union, said the changes did not go far enough, a message echoed by the main opposition Labour party. "Public ownership is the only model that works and can steer us through a crisis such as Covid-19," Cash said.

### New lines

The shake-up comes as Britain looks ahead to two major railway building projects this decade. Earlier this month, the country began construction of HS2, a high-

speed railway connecting London with cities in the north of England. Johnson claims that the project—which is to cost more than £100 billion funded mostly by the state and take years to build—will play a part in helping the country get back on its feet following the pandemic. Prior to the virus outbreak, Johnson saw HS2 as a key infrastructure project aimed at helping drive Britain's post-Brexit economy. Meanwhile, London's new "Elizabeth" railway connecting the capital's centre with Heathrow airport, is facing additional costs and further delay on fallout from the pandemic, operator Crossrail said last month. — AFP



SAO PAULO: Women look at cosmetic products on display at the plant of Brazilian cosmetics company Natura, in Cajamar, some 43 km from Sao Paulo, Brazil. Bankers, businessmen, celebrities, environmentalists and even voices from agribusiness sector advocate a green conversion to take Brazil out of recession and increase pressure on the government of Jair Bolsonaro, at a time when fires ravage the country's forests and wetlands. — AFP

## Bolsonaro faces pressure to green Brazil economy

SAO PAULO: As the destruction of the Amazon rainforest and Pantanal wetlands bruise Brazil's international image, bankers, business executives and even agribusiness firms are calling for a greener economy, adding to pressure on President Jair Bolsonaro. Bolsonaro, a far-right climate-change skeptic, has called environmental groups a "cancer" for attacking his policies, which include pushing for protected lands to be opened to mining and agriculture in the world's biggest rainforest.

But he has been forced to respond more cautiously as international investors, powerful voices in the business world, and agribusiness giants such as JBS and Cargill have joined in the criticism. In keeping with tradition, the Brazilian leader will give the first speech to the United Nations General Assembly Tuesday, delivered remotely due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Last year, Bolsonaro used the forum to condemn news on the fires ravaging the world's biggest rainforest as "media lies." This year's speech will again touch on the Amazon, though the goal will be "to show everything we're doing" to protect it, said Vice President Hamilton Mourao, the head of the government's task force on fighting Amazon deforestation.

With countries around the world trying to chart the future of their post-pandemic economies—not least Brazil, the country with the second-highest Covid-19 death toll after the United States—now is the perfect time for Latin America's biggest economy to go green, said Paulo Branco, head of the Development Frontiers Institute. "We have a great window of opportunity, and we have to take advantage of it to push for a sustainable reboot of the economy," he said.

"With our huge green potential, an 'agri-environmental' agenda is the way to a faster recovery," said Marcello Brito, of the Brazil Climate, Forests and Agriculture Coalition. His group, an unprecedented alliance of 230 environmental groups and Brazilian agribusiness companies, sent an open letter last week to Bolsonaro urging him to do more to fight deforestation in the Amazon.

In June, 29 global investment firms managing nearly \$4 trillion in assets also sent an open letter to Bolsonaro, urging him to change policies blamed for accelerating the destruction of the rainforest.

Environmental destruction by Brazilian firms is also threatening a long-sought trade deal between the European Union and the Mercosur bloc, of which Brazil is a member. So far, the president has continued to publicly deny the impact of the record Amazon deforestation on his watch.

"Brazil is the country that does the most to preserve the environment," he said last week, even as record-shattering fires tore through the Pantanal, the

world's biggest tropical wetlands, and deforestation in the Amazon for January to August came in just five percent shy of last year's all-time high. But there are signs he is starting to feel the pressure—including naming the Amazon task force headed by Vice President Mourao and deploying the army to the rainforest to fight wildfires.—AFP

## TikTok deal aims to thread needle on US, China demands

WASHINGTON: A fragile deal to put the popular video app TikTok in American control appeared in jeopardy Monday amid disagreement on the ownership structure and Chinese involvement. The plan unveiled over the weekend would make Silicon Valley data giant Oracle the technology steward for the social platform and allow retail giant Walmart a stake as a commercial partner. But the deal was being portrayed in different terms in the two countries. Here are key points:

### Ownership

According to US officials, the deal would establish a new entity called TikTok Global with Oracle managing data security through its cloud servers. Walmart and Oracle would control 20 percent of TikTok Global ahead of a share offering, and Americans would hold four of five board seats. US President Donald Trump said he would not approve a deal with any Chinese ownership or control. Oracle said that as TikTok shares are distributed, "Americans will be the majority and ByteDance will have no ownership in TikTok Global." But TikTok parent firm ByteDance—a Chinese firm with US investors—disputed what it called "false rumors" and said it would retain 80 percent of the new firm.

### Data security

Trump, who has repeatedly charged that TikTok could threaten national security and be used for spying, said the data would be under American control. "Everything is going to be moved into a cloud done by Oracle... totally controlled by Oracle," he said. In ByteDance's view, the plan does not allow "the transfer of any algorithms and technologies" while enabling Oracle to review the source code of TikTok USA. James Lewis, head of technology policy for the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said the plan appears structured "where TikTok Global will license the algorithms as a service" without giving up the technology, under terms used frequently in cloud computing.—AFP

## stc announces new internal policy allowing parents to work remotely

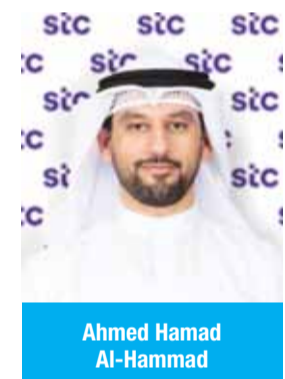
KUWAIT: Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, a world-class digital leader providing innovative services and platforms to customers, enabling the digital transformation in Kuwait, announced its new working from home policy which grants working parents the option to work remotely throughout the academic school year. The policy was put into effect to allow stc employees to supervise and support their children as they attend their classes online.

stc released a statement indicating that due to the circumstances created by the novel Coronavirus, additional safety measures have been enforced by the Kuwaiti Government to commence the school year through online learning. This decision has influenced the traditional education system within the country, presenting new challenges to working parents and their children. To support its employees throughout this period, stc implemented the new work from home policy to assist parents in easing the transition of new learning methods for their children. The policy will enable parents to ensure that their children successfully attend their online classes, complete their schoolwork, and manage any technical difficulties in accessing e-learning services.

The work from home policy falls in line with the Company's ongoing commitment to support its employees and their families in times of uncertainty. Throughout the pandemic, stc applied a series of initiatives to protect its employees and mitigate working conditions to meet the safety measures and guidelines announced by the Ministry of Health.

Engineer Ahmed Hamad Al-Hammad, Chief Human Resources Officer at stc said, "stc highly values its employees, and it is only through their hard work and dedication can stc achieve its goal of offering advanced telecom and digital solutions, enabling digital transformation. The new work from home policy aims to assist our employees in taking care of their priorities at home, while continuing to deliver and maintain the superior level of service that stc provides."

He added, "With the start of the new school year, it would be difficult for working parents to work from the office while trying to manage their children's online curriculum. We are proud to be the first Company in the private sector to provide our employees with the option of working remotely to address this concern. As pioneers in our industry, we believe that adapting our corporate culture to economic conditions engenders employee loyalty and improves overall work efficiency to meet the diverse needs of our valued customers."



Ahmed Hamad Al-Hammad



A general view shows the Venetian Macao casino and hotel, following the coronavirus outbreak in Macau.

## Gambling hub Macau faces long odds of quick recovery

HONG KONG: Fears China is broadening a crackdown on offshore gambling has sparked a rush to withdraw billions of dollars from the world's biggest gambling hub Macau, threatening a recovery in the coronavirus-stricken economy, executives say. An unprecedented stampede to withdraw money from junkets - companies which lure high rollers to gamble - started in July after Beijing identified the cross-border flow of funds for gambling as a national security risk.

Worryingly, the customer withdrawals have spilled into the broader casino industry, leading to a cash crunch in Macau's VIP sector at a time the Chinese territory is struggling to recover from COVID-19 restrictions which has sent tourist numbers and gambling revenues plummeting.

"This is not millions we are talking about being taken out here, but billions," said a casino executive who was not authorized to speak to the media. "We have cash in the bank but with everyone withdrawing, it's a problem."

Several other executives also told Reuters that cash was being taken out in the billions of Hong Kong dollars. While Macau casinos have ample reserves to ride out several months of zero revenues, the rising cash withdrawals point to a major loss of confidence in the crucial VIP junket sector in a further blow to the economy, analysts said.

The sector accounts for around 50 percent of overall gambling revenues, which hit \$36.5 billion last year. The pandemic has already ravaged the economy with gambling revenues down around 96 percent in the second quarter year-on-year. The withdrawals began when hundreds of customers tried to pull deposits from top junket Suncity, at its VIP clubs across Macau, over fears it was being targeted by Chinese authorities. Suncity denied the allegations.

The group then began restricting withdrawals, sparking a panic rush by customers seeking to pull their money from all junkets, executives said. Suncity said it was acting in compliance with new casino policies, but declined to elaborate.

Junkets in the former Portuguese colony are licensed to provide customers with chip deposits and withdrawal services on behalf of casinos Sands China, Wynn Macau, MGM China, Galaxy Entertainment, SJM Holdings and Melco Resorts. All casinos declined Reuters requests to comment.—Reuters



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## Lifestyle | Features

## Job or hijab? Singapore debates ban on Islamic veil at work

Every day before she starts her shift at a government hospital in Singapore, Farah removes her hijab - the Islamic veil she has worn since a teenager. Although minority Muslim women can freely wear the hijab in most settings in Singapore, some professions bar the headscarf - and a recent case has triggered fresh debate on diversity and discrimination in the workplace. Now Farah has joined a growing number of Muslims - who account for about 15% of Singapore's 4 million resident population - calling for the ban to end, with an online petition gathering more than 50,000 signatures. "They told me I can't work here if I wear the tudung," said Farah, using the local Malay term for hijab, as she recounts her job interview two years ago for a physiotherapist position. "I felt a sense of helplessness, it's unfair. Why has the tudung become a barrier for us to look for jobs?" asked the 27-year-old, who used a pseudonym for fear of reprisals at work. She accepted the job eventually but has to remove her headscarf whenever she is at work. Farah's case is not an oddity.

There was outcry last month when a woman was asked to remove her hijab to work as a promoter at a local department store. Halimah Yacob, the country's first female president who herself



Although minority Muslim women can freely wear the hijab in most settings in Singapore, some professions bar the headscarf - and a recent case has triggered fresh debate on diversity and discrimination in the workplace. — Shutterstock

wears the hijab, said there is "no place" for discrimination when asked her view of the case. The store reversed its policy, but many took to social media pointing out restrictions remain on wearing the hijab for some civil servants, including policewomen and nurses.

## Livelihood

The debate surrounding the hijab is not new in Singapore, a modern city-state which takes pride in its multicultural and multiracial background. The country is predominantly ethnic Chinese, many

of whom follow Buddhism or Christianity. In 2013, then Muslim affairs minister Yaacob Ibrahim said wearing a hijab at the workplace would be "very problematic" for some professions that require a uniform. The following year, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said the hijab issue was about "what sort of society do we want to build in Singapore", according to local media reports. Singapore's police force and the health ministry did not respond to repeated requests seeking comment. Referring to the department store case, Singapore's president said discrimination in the workplace was "disturbing" as it deprives a person from earning a living.

"People should be assessed solely on their merits and their ability to do a job and nothing else," Halimah wrote on her Facebook, which attracted more than 500 comments. "During this COVID-19 period when concerns over jobs and livelihoods are greater, incidents of discrimination exacerbate anxieties and people feel threatened," she added.

## Divided

The hijab has been a divisive issue for Muslims worldwide. Many Muslim women cover their heads in public as a sign of modesty, although others see it as a sign of female oppression and in

the Middle East women face jail for eschewing it. In Indonesia's conservative Aceh province, women without a headscarf have been censured. In Malaysia, Islamic authorities have probed a book about Muslim women who refuse to wear the hijab. But women's rights campaigners in Singapore say they want Muslim women to have freedom of choice. Such restrictions have hindered women's job prospects, especially when the coronavirus pandemic has pushed Singapore into recession and companies are laying off, they say.

"Women should be able to practise their religion freely without having to choose between having a job or to practice their religion," said Filzah Sumartono, a writer who helps run Beyond the Hijab, a website focused on Singapore Muslim women. "This issue in Singapore is only being faced by Muslim women, it's a strong discriminatory policy against Muslim women," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

## Identity

Others urge consistency, noting that the turban - headgear worn by Sikh men - is allowed at work in Singapore. "Why the double standard," asked Nur, a Muslim law student who signed the peti-

tion posted online in June. She requested not to use her full name to protect her privacy. The 22-year-old said her mother and sister, who work as a nurse and in a private security company respectively, are both banned from wearing a headscarf at work. She called on officials to explain the restrictions, saying countries such as Britain or Australia have changed tack, with disposable hijabs for nurses to address any hygiene concerns.

"I accept that racial harmony is very fragile, but it's not just acknowledging these differences exist and live with them. It's much more than that," said Nur, a co-founder of Lepak Conversations, an online group. "It's about knowing these differences exist, accepting them and embracing these differences." Filzah of the Beyond the Hijab group said the restrictions can make it more difficult for women to enter the workforce. "Some women don't feel comfortable removing a part of their identity just to be able to earn money," she said. "Having to put this very difficult choice on Muslim women is unfair and unjust." — Reuters

## Talk show host Ellen DeGeneres apologizes over toxic workplace allegations

Ellen DeGeneres on Monday opened the 18th season of her talk show that's been mired in controversy for months with a broad apology that addressed allegations of a toxic workplace culture under her watch. It was the first time the staple of daytime US television publicly addressed the controversy surrounding her, after BuzzFeed News published a report over the summer detailing a culture of fear among her employees that included accusations of sexual misconduct, racism and intimidat-



In this file photo US comedian Ellen DeGeneres introduces Lil Nas X and Billy Ray Cyrus during the 62nd Annual Grammy Awards in Los Angeles. — AFP

tion from the show's management. The scathing reports followed rumors and anecdotal posts on social media that DeGeneres was difficult to work with and not nearly as nice as her feel-good show portrayed her to be. "I want to say I am so sorry to the people who were affected. I know that I'm in a position of privilege and power and I realized that with that comes responsibility, and I take responsibility for what happens at my show," DeGeneres said in her opening monologue, released online ahead of its broadcast later Monday.

DeGeneres said her program was kicking off a "new chapter" after "necessary changes" following an internal investigation from parent company Warner

Media, though she did not go into detail on any of the restructuring. In August three high-level producers were let go: an executive producer Ed Glavin, a co-executive producer Jonathan Norman, and head writer Kevin Leman. The longtime comedian, actor and host also joked that she was in a tough position given her reputation as the "be kind" lady, a nickname she said she earned after she urged kindness following the 2010 suicide of a young man who was bullied for being gay. "Being known as the 'be kind' lady is a tricky position to be in," DeGeneres said. "So let me give you some advice out there if anybody's thinking of changing their title or giving yourself a nickname, do not go with the 'be kind' lady. Don't do it." "The truth is I am that person that you see on TV," she continued, denying allegations that offstage her personality was a far cry from the sunny persona she has crafted onstage.

## 'A platitude'

DeGeneres, 62, made waves in 1997 after becoming one of the first television stars to publicly come out as gay, which she did while starring in the sitcom "Ellen." Last year, prior to the scandal surrounding her eponymous show, she renewed her hosting contract through 2022, also inking a deal to create three shows for the streaming platform HBO Max. DeGeneres had returned to her California studio for Monday's premiere, with a virtual audience on rows of screens due to the coronavirus pandemic. DeGeneres circulated her monologue online, though many social media users mocked her — the line "I am a work in progress" was particularly skewered-saying her words rang hollow.

"It's hard not to feel as though an opportunity was missed here," wrote Daniel D'Addario, chief television critic for entertainment outlet Variety. "DeGeneres' attempt to clear the air fell painfully flat in part because of her unwillingness to engage with her critics in anything more meaningful than a platitude," he said. — AFP

## 'Watchmen' Emmy winners explore 'missing' history and possible sequel

The creators of big Emmy winner "Watchmen," a timely blend of superheroes and political satire that confronts US racism, say they are proud to have spotlighted the nation's historic traumas and modern-day injustices-as fans hope for a possible follow-up. The HBO hit series, based on a seminal 1980s graphic novel, scooped up 11 Emmys at this year's television equivalent of the Oscars, making it Sunday's top honoree. The show opens with the 1921 Tulsa race massacre, in which up to 300 people were killed when white mobs torched a black neighborhood, but which many Americans have never heard of.

The convulsion of violence nearly a century ago received renewed attention this summer when President Donald Trump held a controversial rally just down the road. "When the show premiered back in October, that night the word 'Watchmen' was not trending on Twitter, but 'Black Wall Street' and 'Tulsa massacre' were," creator Damon Lindelof told journalists after his Emmy wins. "And it just showed you that people actually have a real hunger to find these missing pieces of history. You just have to find ways that are a little bit off the beaten path to tell them." The show is set in an alternate timeline created by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons in their "Watchmen" comics. In this universe, superheroes are real, but many have turned out to be sociopathic far-right outlaws.

Featuring on Time magazine's list of the 100 best modern English-language novels, the original book is widely hailed for bringing mainstream popularity and artistic credibility to the graphic novel form. Race plays a central role throughout, not just in the pilot episode's portrayal of the deadly destruction of "Black Wall Street" in Oklahoma. One remarkable episode sees a young black New York cop struggle with blatant racism, surviving a near-lynching and confronting a secret Ku Klux Klan-style



In this file photo US actress Regina King arrives for the Los Angeles premiere of the new HBO series "Watchmen" at the Cinerama Dome in Hollywood. — AFP

society operating within the metropolis's police ranks. The noirish 1930s flashback episode shot in black-and-white won cinematography, writing, sound editing and sound mixing prizes at this year's Emmys.

"Watchmen" depicts white supremacists, police brutality and rows over mask-wearing-all subjects of intensely polarized national debate as the United States gears up for November's presidential election. In the show's present-day scenes, reparations paid to the families of Tulsa massacre victims have galvanized a white supremacist group, who are furious at the government's support for minorities and bent on triggering a race war. For best actress winner Regina King, who wore a tee-shirt bearing the image of Breonna Taylor-an African-American woman killed in a police shooting in her own home-those struggles resonate with the reality of being black in 21st century America.—AFP

## HOLLYWOOD UNIONS SIGN DEAL WITH STUDIOS BOOSTING RETURN TO WORK

Hollywood's top unions announced a deal with major film studios Monday on coronavirus safety measures needed for the entertainment industry to ramp up its return to production. The months-long talks over Covid-related testing, equipment and sick pay were seen as a significant bottleneck in getting Tinseltown back to work, with unions currently needing to approve individual film and television projects on a case-by-case basis. The deal is seen as a shot in the arm for a struggling industry that has seen silver-screen productions grind to a halt-along with obstacles such as lack of coronavirus insurance, local restrictions and high infection rates in shooting locations will remain. "At long last, I'm confident that these protocols, as rigid and thoughtful as those of any industry in America, will keep crew and cast safe as well as the communities they live and work in," said Thomas O'Donnell, director of Hollywood's teamsters union, in a statement to AFP.

The agreement was jointly negotiated by five of Hollywood's biggest unions, including the actors, directors and craft guilds, totaling over 350,000 members. Talks were held with the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers, the trade organization representing major studios including Disney, Universal, Paramount and Warner Brothers as well as top TV networks. "This agreement establishes sensible, science-based protocols that allow members to return to doing the work they love," said Gabrielle Carteris, president of Hollywood's acting guild. Filming in Los Angeles ceased in mid-March due to the coronavirus pandemic, and resumed at low-levels in late June. Activity currently remains at below half usual levels, according to FilmLA. Other regions in the US and abroad have benefited from the difficulty of filming around Hollywood itself. The talks concluded Monday were national in scale and are expected to impact on union members living and working abroad.

A reported sticking point in the talks had been the issue of sick pay. The deal announced Monday includes 10 days of COVID-19 paid sick leave, per producer, and quarantine pay for employees required to isolate, with limited exceptions. It also mandates regular "gold standard" virus testing-more frequent for actors unable to wear protective equipment while filming and those in close contact with them-as well as the presence of on-set coronavirus officers. AMPTP, which did not immediately respond to AFP request for comment, has yet to confirm the details. Covid-19 has triggered massive disruption in Hollywood, with productions suspended and theatrical releases delayed-prompting further postponements to industry staples including the Oscars.—AFP

## EMMYS HIT NEW RATINGS LOW DESPITE PRAISE FOR 'REMOTE' CEREMONY



This handout picture shows host Jimmy Kimmel in front of a wall of nominees watching remotely at the Staples Center during the 72nd Primetime Emmy Awards ceremony held virtually.—AFP

Television's Emmys plummeted to yet another all-time ratings low, despite producers overcoming technical challenges to pull off an innovative and well-received "remote" ceremony, ABC confirmed Monday. The 72nd Emmys, broadcast from an empty Los Angeles theater with dozens of nominees and winners beaming in via video call due to the coronavirus pandemic, was watched by an average 6.1 million viewers. Continuing a trend seen across nearly all major award shows, that figure declined from last year's 6.9 million-itself down from a previous record low, 10.2 million, the year before.

The ceremony was dominated by three shows-limited series "Watchmen" ended with 11 awards, "Succession" claimed the top drama prize, and "Schitt's Creek" achieved a remarkable sweep of the comedy trophies. Attempting to put a positive spin on the stats, ABC noted the Emmys were up against a packed sports sched-

ule, with most major professional leagues now back in action after months of lockdown. "Airing opposite both NBC's 'Sunday Night Football' and the NBA Playoffs on TNT for the first time ever," the Emmys drew the network's "largest audience to the 3-hour time period since April," ABC said in a statement to AFP. Social media engagement with the show was up on last year, it added.

The ceremony-anchored by in-venue host Jimmy Kimmel, and featuring awards handed to winners by presenters dressed in hazmat suits styled as tuxedos-drew glowing reviews from the Hollywood press. Variety praised the "surprising triumph of producing" and Deadline called it "an awards show for the ages." Viewers watching the Emmys-television's answer to the Oscars-have halved since 2014, as fragmented audiences increasingly shun awards shows. The ceremony rotates between the four major US networks. — AFP



Lifestyle | Features



Choir singers perform at a concert for the victims of August's deadly Beirut blast in the gardens of the damaged 19th-century Sursock Palace in Achrafieh in the Lebanese capital. — AFP photos



Candles light-up pictures of victims of August's deadly Beirut blast during a commemoration concert.

# Lebanon hosts concert for Beirut blast victims at ravaged palace

Lebanon on Sunday held a concert for the victims of last month's deadly Beirut blast in the grounds of a 19th-century palace wrecked by the massive explosion. The August 4 blast at the capital's port killed more than 190 people, wounded thousands and destroyed or damaged buildings across swathes of the city. "To be able to mourn, to take the time to really remember, it was important to have this moment of music," artistic director Jean-Louis Mainguy said. The event was held in the

gardens of the Sursock Palace, whose windows, red-tiled roof, ceilings and furniture were ravaged in the blast.

The concert, which did not have an audience on site, but was instead broadcast on television and streamed online, kicked off with a rendition of "Li Beirut", an ode to the city by famed Lebanese singer Fairouz. Portraits of those killed in the blast were displayed in part of the heritage building's grounds, with a candle burning under each. The victims' images and names were also broadcast on televi-

sion, accompanied by the Muslim call to prayer and Christian chants of "Amen" performed by an orchestra and some 250 choir singers from around the country. The concert included live performances as well as pre-recorded contributions, including from Lebanese singer-songwriter Tania Saleh.

In a recording, Lebanese-born French author Amin Maalouf offered "a prayer towards the sky so that Lebanon this time again can stand back up, rebuild its walls, and dress its wounds". Organizers asked

Beirut residents to place a lit candle on their balconies or in their windows in commemoration of those killed. The event was initially to be held at the port, but was moved after the air quality around the site was deemed too poor after fires there earlier this month. On Saturday night, Lebanese-born British singer-songwriter Mika headlined another concert streamed online to fundraise for relief aid after the blast. — AFP



Lebanese singer Fadia Tomb El-Hage performs with a choir at a concert for the victims of August's deadly Beirut blast.



Candles light-up pictures of victims of August's deadly Beirut blast during a commemoration concert.



Choir singers perform at a concert for the victims of August's deadly Beirut blast.

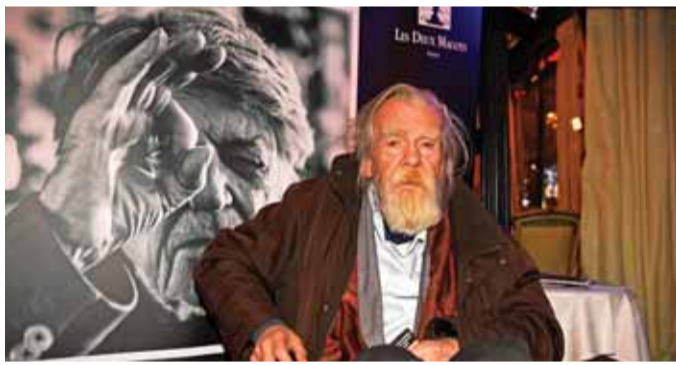


Lebanese singer Fadia Tomb performs with a choir at a concert for the victims of August's deadly Beirut blast.

## BRITISH-FRENCH ACTOR AND 'BOND' VILLAIN MICHAEL LONSDALE DIES

Michael Lonsdale, the British-French actor with a far-ranging film and theatre career but most widely recognized as the villain opposite James Bond in "Moonraker", died on Monday aged 89, his agent told AFP. Lonsdale, who was bilingual, chalked up more than 200 roles over a six-decade career, equally at ease in experimental arthouse productions as in big-budget crowd-pleasers. With his silky yet imposing voice and a distinctive goatee, Lonsdale often served up memorable performances that stuck with viewers even when only in minor roles. His agent, Olivier Loiseau, said he had died at his home in Paris, the city where he was born on May 24, 1931, to an English military officer and a French mother.

Arguably the highlight of his career came when he played a Trappist monk in "Of Gods and Men" in 2010. Based on true events, the film tells the story of



In this file photo taken on December 09, 2019 French actor and director Michael Lonsdale attending a tribute to French movie director Jean-Pierre Mocky at Les Deux Magots cafe in Paris. — AFP photos

seven French monks who were murdered after being kidnapped from their monastery in Algeria in 1996 during the country's civil war. For the role Lonsdale won his first and only Cesar

award-France's version of the Oscars- for best supporting actor in 2011. Yet for millions of people he was the sadistic industrialist Hugo Drax in the 1979 Bond film "Moonraker" starring Roger



This file photo taken on January 31, 2011 in Vincennes, east of Paris shows French actor Michael Lonsdale arrives to receive an award in the actor category for his performance in "Des hommes et des Dieux" movie during the Henri Langlois film award ceremony .

Moore, with a plan to destroy Earth's population with nerve gas while he escaped into space. — AFP

## Appeal after five Bond guns stolen in London

Police launched a fresh appeal Monday for witnesses after five guns used as props in James Bond films were stolen during a burglary in a London suburb. One of the deactivated firearms—a yellow-handed Llama pistol featured in 2007 movie "Die Another Day"—was recovered in a field in the days after the March 23 theft from a house in Enfield. But the other four remain missing, including the Walther PPK used by Roger Moore in a "View to a Kill" as he pursues Grace Jones up the Eiffel Tower, before she jumps off with a parachute. London's Metropolitan Police issued new security camera footage showing a vehicle parked near the scene of the crime, apparently on reconnaissance, and urged any witnesses to come forward.



A handout photograph shows a yellow-handed Llama pistol, which featured in James Bond 007 movie "Die Another Day", which has been recovered by police following a burglary in London.

"In scenes reminiscent of a James Bond movie you can even see the flash of a camera from the occupant engaged in the surveillance," Detective Inspector Paul Ridley said in a statement. "I believe these individuals were involved in the crime, it was only a matter of minutes prior to the raid." He said the firearms were "very distinctive" and the owner was "devastated" at their loss, particularly as they were due to be showcased as part of a national exhibition. Another gun stolen was the Revolver Smith and Weston 44 Magnum with wood grips featured in "Live and Let Die"—the only one in the world where the whole gun is finished in chrome. Also stolen were the Beretta "Cheetah" and "Tomcat" pistols used by Halle Berry in "Die Another Day". — AFP

## Lost at sea: Surfboard drifts 8,000 km from Hawaii to Philippines

When big wave surfer Doug Falter lost his board in a wipeout in Hawaii, his best hope was for a local fisherman to pick it up. He never imagined it would be found more than 8,000 kilometers (5,000 miles) away in the southern Philippines. More than two years after watching his pale blue custom-shaped board disappear in the huge swell of Waimea Bay, Falter was alerted via social media that it had been found near the remote island of Sarangani. And the new owner-local primary school teacher and aspiring surfer Giovanne Branzuela was happy to give it back to him. "When I saw the picture of it, I couldn't believe it, I thought it was a joke almost," Falter, 35, told AFP via Zoom. "I was certain that the board would never

be found again."

Branzuela, who bought the badly weathered surfboard from his neighbour a couple of months ago for 2,000 pesos (\$40), said fishermen had found it floating in the sea in August 2018 — six months after Falter lost sight of it. They thought it may have fallen off a passing yacht and sold it to Branzuela's neighbor for a few dollars. Despite months drifting across the Pacific Ocean, the name of the board's shaper, Hawaii-based Lyle Carlson, was still visible on the now-yellowish surface. Curious, Branzuela looked him up on Facebook and sent him a photo of the board. Carlson shared the picture on Instagram, tagging Falter. "It turned out it's a surfboard from Hawaii. I couldn't believe it myself,"

award-France's version of the Oscars- for best supporting actor in 2011. Yet for millions of people he was the sadistic industrialist Hugo Drax in the 1979 Bond film "Moonraker" starring Roger

### Surfing videos

The pair have been chatting on Facebook and Falter plans to visit the small island to retrieve his board after coronavirus travel restrictions are lifted. "That board meant so much to me because of my accomplishments on it," said Falter, a commercial photographer who took up surfing about 15 years ago in Florida before moving to Hawaii. "It was my first big wave surfboard custom shaped for myself. I surfed it on the biggest days I've ever surfed in my life",

he said, including the 2016 Eddie Aikau big wave surf contest in Waimea Bay when the swell was 20 meters (60 feet) high.

Falter said he wants to give Branzuela a beginners surfboard in exchange for his and show him how to catch waves around Sarangani and neighboring Balut island. In the meantime, Falter shares short YouTube videos on surfing basics and is raising money to send supplies to Branzuela's school. "It's an excuse for me to go to the Philippines and visit and basically complete the story," said Falter. "I think it would be a great ending to... teach him how to surf." — AFP



This combination image of two handout photographs show, at left, a picture taken by Brent Bielman on October 18, 2015 of surfer Doug Falter posing with his surfboard in Hawaii, and at right, an undated picture taken in 2020 courtesy of Giovanne Branzuela showing Branzuela posing with the same surfboard on Sarangani island in the Philippines. — AFP



This undated handout photo shows Filipino teacher Giovanne Branzuela (left) posing with his surfboard, once owned by big wave surfer Doug Falter who lost it while surfing in Hawaii, along with his village mates on Sarangani island in the Philippines.



## Sports

## Photo of the Day



Jaun Roose performs during the longest slackline walk in Tartu, Estonia. — Photo taken from [www.redbullcontentpool.com](http://www.redbullcontentpool.com)

## Jordan buys NASCAR team, Bubba Wallace to be driver

LOS ANGELES: Basketball icon Michael Jordan announced Monday he has purchased a NASCAR Cup series charter team and recruited trailblazing black driver Bubba Wallace to race for the new outfit next season. Jordan, widely regarded to be the greatest player in NBA history with an estimated net worth of \$1.6 billion, will be the majority owner in the new franchise with veteran racer Denny Hamlin as minority partner.

"Growing up in North Carolina, my parents would take my brothers, sisters and me to races, and I've been a NASCAR fan my whole life," Jordan said in a statement. "The opportunity to own my own racing team in partnership with my friend Denny Hamlin, and to have Bubba Wallace driving for us is very exciting for me." Jordan, who also owns the Charlotte Hornets NBA team, said he hoped his ownership could bring new audiences to the white-dominated world of NASCAR and boost

involvement of minorities. "Historically, NASCAR has struggled with diversity and there have been few black owners," Jordan said.

"The timing seemed perfect as NASCAR is evolving and embracing social change more and more. In addition to the recent commitment and donations I have made to combat systemic racism, I see this as a chance to educate a new audience and open more opportunities for black people in racing," Wallace, the only black driver in NASCAR, will spearhead the team behind the wheel. The 26-year-old had confirmed earlier this month that he would not race again for Richard Petty Motorsports. Wallace has spoken out against racism repeatedly this year in the wake of George Floyd's killing in Minneapolis, and in June called on NASCAR chiefs to ban the Confederate flag from racetracks used on the circuit.

The flag has long been a staple at NASCAR tracks in the sport's southern US heartlands, but it remains a symbol of slavery and racism for many. NASCAR later banned displays of the flag at its races. Wallace was involved in controversy in June, after his team reported that a noose had been found hanging in the team garage at Talladega Superspeedway. A subsequent investigation by the FBI determined Wallace had not been the victim of a hate crime and that the noose was a pull-down rope on a garage door that had been there since 2019. — AFP

## Two in custody in Tour de France doping probe

MARSEILLE: French police detained two people on Monday as part of an investigation into suspected doping at this year's Tour de France in the Arkea-Samsic team, prosecutors announced. The probe is the first significant one in several years for the repeatedly scandal-hit tour which wrapped up on Sunday in Paris with a victory for 21-year-old Tadej Pogacar, who became the youngest winner in more than a century.

In a statement, prosecutor Dominique Laurens in the southern city of Marseille said that an investigation was being carried out into a "small part" of Arkea-Samsic, without specifying who had been placed in custody. Laurens added that the two people had "many health products including drugs in their personal belongings, but also and above all

a method that can be qualified as doping". The general manager of the French team, Emmanuel Hubert, told AFP he was supporting his riders.

"But if it turned out that at the end of the current investigation, elements came to confirm the truth of doping practices, the team would immediately dissociate itself from such acts and would take the necessary measures without delay," he said. A source familiar with the matter told AFP that the searches had targeted several riders including Colombia's Dayer Quintana, brother of team leader and former Giro d'Italia winner Nairo Quintana, as well as members of the medical team. French daily Le Parisien reported that the two in custody were a doctor and physiotherapist.

The probe will come as a huge disappointment to organizers just a day after positive headlines about the against-the-odds organization of the race and the last-minute drama that saw Pogacar seize victory on his first Tour de France. Many had predicted the Covid-19 pandemic would prevent the riders making it the 3,400 kilometers from the Mediterranean city of Nice to the French capital. — AFP

# A's clinch division after Astros' loss

## Rockies down Giants; Royals beat Cardinals 4-1

NEW YORK: Marco Gonzales pitched eight scoreless innings and the host Seattle Mariners defeated the Houston Astros 6-1 Monday night, allowing the idle Oakland Athletics to clinch the American League West title. Mariners rookie Evan White hit a three-run homer, his seventh of the season, while Gonzales (7-2), a left-hander who was 0-5 with a 7.22 ERA in eight previous appearances against the Astros, allowed seven hits, walked one and struck out six. It was just Seattle's third victory in 27 games against Houston over the past two seasons. The Mariners (24-30), who played their previous five "home" games in San Francisco and San Diego because of hazardous air quality due to wildfires in the Pacific Northwest, pulled within three games of the Astros (27-27) for second place in the AL West. The Astros hold the tiebreaker, however, because they've already clinched the season series between the teams.

### Reds 6, Brewers 3

Eugenio Suarez hit a go-ahead, two-run homer in the sixth inning and Luis Castillo won his fourth straight start as host Cincinnati continued its late-season surge by defeating Milwaukee. In what was an early pitcher's duel between Castillo (4-5) and Milwaukee's Brandon Woodruff (2-5), all of the game's runs were scored on homers. The Brewers' Jedd Gyorko went deep in the fifth, but Suarez put Cincinnati (28-27) ahead 2-1 with his long ball an inning later. Curt Casali added a solo home run in the eighth, and Mike Moustakas' three-run blast put the game out of reach later in the frame for the Reds, who have won eight of nine to move above .500 for the first time since Opening Day. Jace Peterson hit a two-run homer for Milwaukee in the ninth.

### Braves 5, Marlins 4

Third baseman Austin Riley had a crucial run-scoring double and made a late game-saving defensive play

to help Atlanta hang on to defeat visiting Miami and trim its magic number to win the National League East to three. Riley doubled home two runs to cap a four-run first inning and put the Braves ahead to stay after the Marlins scored three runs in the top of the inning. He helped save the game with his glove in the eighth when he snared a 110-mph liner from Starling Marte with the bases loaded to preserve the lead. The Marlins scored three times in the first inning on RBI singles from Aguilar, Brian Anderson and Garrett Cooper.

### Rays 2, Mets 1

Nate Lowe hit the decisive solo homer, and six Tampa Bay pitchers combined on a four-hitter to move closer to clinching the American League East with a win over host New York. The win by the Rays, coupled with an 11-5 loss by the second-place New York Yankees to the Toronto Blue Jays, reduced Tampa Bay's magic number for clinching the division to one. The Mets (24-30) edged closer to being eliminated from playoff contention after wasting another brilliant outing by two-time reigning NL Cy Young Award winner Jacob deGrom, who took the loss despite tying a career high by striking out 14 over seven innings.

### Royals 4, Cardinals 1

Maikel Franco drove in two runs and scored a third run as host Kansas City defeated St. Louis. Josh Staumont (2-1) picked up the win for the Royals. Staumont threw two innings of hitless relief. Greg Holland picked up his sixth save in as many chances. Adam Wainwright (5-2) took the loss after running into trouble in the sixth. The inning began with the game tied at 1-1, but he threw 32 pitches and allowed two runs in that inning before leaving with two outs and the bases loaded.

### Rockies 7, Giants 2

German Marquez pitched six one-run innings for

his first win since Aug. 4, and visiting Colorado scored early and often against San Francisco ace Johnny Cueto en route to a critical victory in the opener of a four-game series. Marquez (3-6) was staked to a 2-0 lead before even taking the mound, then took a three-hit shutout into the bottom of the fifth inning, by which time the advantage had expanded to 7-0. He allowed five hits with one walk and three strikeouts in his second victory of the season over the Giants. Cueto batted home a run in the fourth to make it 4-0 before the Rockies busted the game open with a three-run fifth. Cueto was charged with seven runs. He walked three and struck out four.

### Nationals 5, Phillies 1

Asdrubal Cabrera and Brock Holt had two hits apiece, Juan Soto walked twice and host Washington took advantage of three errors to defeat Philadelphia. Nationals starter Anibal Sanchez gave up four hits and one run in five innings. Sanchez (3-5) struck out six, walked four and threw 105 pitches. Washington won its second game in a row while the Phillies dropped their second straight. Rookie Alec Bohm reached base three times with a single, walk and a hit by pitch for the Phillies. Philadelphia starter Zack Wheeler (4-1) tossed 113 pitches in 5 2/3 innings and allowed five hits and three runs, two earned.

### Blue Jays 11, Yankees 5

Rookie catcher Alejandro Kirk was 4-for-4 with a double and a home run, Vladimir Guerrero Jr. had a triple and two doubles with three RBIs, and Toronto blasted visiting New York at Buffalo. Kirk entered the opener of a four-game series with two singles in 10 major league at-bats in five games, but left hitting .429 with his first career homer. Randal Grichuk added a solo homer and two RBIs for Toronto. Mike Tauchman had a three-run double for the Yankees. Starter Michael King (1-2) allowed five runs, five hits and one

walk with six strikeouts in 2 2/3 innings.

### Cubs 5, Pirates 0

Visiting Chicago scored all its runs with two outs to back a combined four-hitter in a shutout win over lowly Pittsburgh. Kyle Schwarber doubled twice, including a two-run shot in the eighth, for the Cubs, who ended a two-game slide. Jon Lester (3-2) was perfect through three and pitched six scoreless innings. Pittsburgh has lost 13 of its past 14. Chicago third baseman Kris Bryant left in the second because of right lower oblique tightness. He took an awkward swing and received brief medical attention, then grounded out. He was later replaced by David Bote in the bottom of the third inning.

### Indians 7, White Sox 4

Carlos Santana belted a go-ahead two-run homer and Jose Ramirez went deep for the fifth time in five games to lift host Cleveland past Chicago. The Indians, who have won four of their past five games, can clinch a postseason berth with another win Tuesday over the White Sox. Cesar Hernandez hit an RBI single in the second inning and scored on Frammil Reyes' sacrifice fly in the seventh for the Indians. Eloy Jimenez launched a two-run homer and Jose Abreu had a two-run single for the White Sox, who fell to 2-5 versus Cleveland this season. Chicago saw its lead atop the American League Central trimmed to 1 1/2 games over Minnesota.

### Angels 8, Rangers 5

Jared Walsh hit a grand slam to highlight a seven-run fourth inning, and Los Angeles took three of four from Texas with the victory in Anaheim, Calif. Walsh, a rookie first baseman, is hitting .375 in September with eight home runs and 23 RBIs. Isiah Kiner-Falefa and Derek Dietrich homered, and Nick Solak had three hits and scored twice for the Rangers. — Reuters

## stc celebrates Amir Cup championship

KUWAIT: stc, the official sponsor of the Kuwaiti Football Association (KFA) and its initiatives for the 2019-2020 period, celebrated the most exclusive football championship in Kuwait, the "Amir Cup", held under the patronage of His Highness the Amir. The Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs, His Excellency Mohammad Al-Jabri (Attending on behalf of the Amir), speaker of the Kuwaiti National Assembly, Marzouq Al-Ghanim, CEO of stc, engineer Maziad Bin Nasser Alharbi, and president of KFA, Sheikh Ahmed Youssef Al-Sabah, concluded the Amir Cup with an honoring ceremony after the final match, in recognition of an exciting and challenging season.

As the official sponsor of the Amir Cup, representatives from the Kuwait

Telecommunications Company in Kuwait, stc, led by Alharbi, participated in the crowning of the Al-Arabi Club as champions of the Cup, after winning the final match against Kuwait Sporting Club with a score of 2-1 in favor of Al-Arabi. Kazma Sporting Club players were also honored for taking third place in the Amir Cup.

On this occasion, Alharbi presented a painting by local artist Abrar Al-Zankawi from the team at stc to HE Mohammad Al-Jabri who accepted the token of appreciation on behalf of HH the Amir of Kuwait. Engineer Maziad Bin Nasser Alharbi, CEO of stc, expressed his happiness for the ongoing role stc has played as an official sponsor of the KFA championships. He pointed out that the Amir Cup holds a special place in the heart, especially bearing the name of HH the Amir as a supporter of this great tournament.

Alharbi praised the diligent efforts made by KFA president, Sheikh Ahmed Youssef Al-Sabah, and the members of the association, to organize the local football season, and achieve the expected successful outcome witnessed during the closing ceremony of this widely viewed and followed championship in Kuwait. He added

that stc's sponsorship of the Amir Cup stems from the basic values the Company draws on which include promoting fair and positive competition, good sportsmanship, ethical principles, and integrity, values that apply to all aspects of life.

Alharbi said, "We are proud of the role we are playing in driving and supporting a sport that is not only popular and widely followed in Kuwait, but the world. stc will continue to support various sporting initiatives, especially tournaments and sports that promote healthy competition and good sportsmanship. We firmly believe that participating in competitive sports and fitness activities aids in building character, developing morals, and promoting a healthier lifestyle through frequent exercise, a belief that we also encourage amongst our work teams."

Alharbi added, "stc will continue its efforts in supporting the local sports community and other physical activities, firmly believing in the added value and benefits such initiatives bring to the younger generation. Promoting a healthier and active lifestyle is a priority that we not only encourage the younger generation to adapt, but also the work teams within the



Company." He concluded, "In line with our digital transformation strategy, we aim to continue developing innovative communication solutions and platforms that complement the strength of our 5G networks, serving the entertainment needs of our individual and corporate customers. stc is keen to support and encourage pioneering projects and activities across various sectors, which definitely includes

the sports industry." It is worth mentioning through its influential and supporting role in the local sports scene, stc aims to actively be engaged in activities that encourage individuals of all ages and nationalities to adopt a healthier lifestyle. This dynamic runs parallel to one of the Company's social responsibility pillars, which promotes health awareness and practicing regular physical activities.



Sports

# IPL's foreign stars laud the Indian young guns

## De Villiers hits fifty as Bangalore trump Hyderabad

DUBAI: Overseas stars including Australia's white-ball captain Aaron Finch praised young Indian talent in the IPL after batsman Devduti Padikkal smashed a half-century for Royal Challengers Bangalore. The 20-year-old left-handed opener proved his worth for Virat Kohli's team with a 42-ball 56 that set up an opening Indian Premier League win for last year's wooden spooners in Dubai on Monday.

Bangalore trumped Sunrisers Hyderabad, led by David Warner, and Padikkal's confidence and flair did not go unnoticed by his opening partner Finch. "Dev is a brilliant young player," Finch told reporters in a virtual press conference. "I think he

has shown over the last couple of years in Under-19 cricket, domestic cricket, how talented he is and how destructive he can be at the top of the order, so I loved opening with him. "He is such an exciting young player. My advice is just play your natural game, if you are feeling it against a particular bowler keep going."

South African veteran AB de Villiers also contributed with a 30-ball 51 for Bangalore, who are searching for their maiden IPL title. De Villiers too was impressed with Padikkal and the new crop of players who have made an early impression in the 53-day tournament. "Very competitive, the young

players coming and looking like international players is really exciting to watch," said de Villiers. "Padikkal is a shy and quiet guy but I don't have to say much really, he looks like a really good talent."

Warner's team, winners of the 2016 IPL, have also fielded up-and-coming Indian talent in former U-19 skipper Priyam Garg and allrounder Abhishek Sharma. Garg attempted a horrific scoop shot on his IPL debut only for the ball to hit his helmet grill and land on the stumps as he was bowled for 12. But Warner advised the youngsters to carry on playing their natural game. "Exciting times for Indian cricket and I can't wait to see what the young players pro-

duce," Warner said after his team's loss.

"There were three bizarre dismissals, but I encourage them to keep playing the way, not think too much about it. We will rely on our senior players to guide those guys in the middle. "Play your natural game and the that's the only way you can learn." Teenage leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi also had a good outing with Kings XI Punjab on Sunday when he returned impressive figures of 1-22 from his four overs. Kings XI lost the game to the Delhi Capitals in a super over but Bishnoi's exploits with the ball earned him rich praise from pundits including former Indian captain Sunil Gavaskar. —AFP

## Lightning level Stanley Cup finals; Dallas Stars defeated

LOS ANGELES: The Tampa Bay Lightning held off a rally by the Dallas Stars to level their Stanley Cup final series with a 3-2 victory on Monday. A first period scoring blast featuring goals from Brayden Point, Ondrej Palat and Kevin Shattenkirk set up the win for Tampa Bay, beaten 4-1 in Saturday's finals opener in Edmonton. Joe Pavelski pulled a goal back for Dallas in the second period on a power play before Mattias Janmark added a second in the third period for the Stars.

Tampa Bay goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy finished with 27 saves, including 17 made during a ferocious Dallas onslaught in the second period. "This was an emotional game," Lightning forward Anthony Cirelli said. "There were ups and some downs. It's always good to come out with the win. "I thought we did a pretty good job of weathering the storm there. Whenever you can come out with a victory is a positive for us, so we'll take some video, we'll look at some good and the bad things, and move on."

Russian winger Nikita Kucherov was the architect of Tampa Bay's first period scoring blitz, providing two assists as his team scored three times in just 3min 53 seconds. Point and Palat scored Tampa Bay's opening two goals on power plays. "We had some good looks in the first game, we just couldn't score," Kucherov said. "I think we just stuck to what we have to do, keep it simple, shoot the puck at the net, get those rebounds. "Just keep it simple, that's the key to our success today and fortunately we got two goals today," he said. Dallas coach Rick Bowness, mean-



EDMONTON: Jamie Benn #14 and Tyler Seguin #91 of the Dallas Stars converge on Andrei Vasilevskiy #88 of the Tampa Bay Lightning in Game Two of the 2020 NHL Stanley Cup Final on September 21, 2020. — AFP

while, bemoaned his team's error-strewn first period that allowed Tampa Bay to take control of the contest.

"They won the first, we won the second," Bowness said. "But you can't be doing what we did in the last half of that first period. It's very simple to explain. "The penalties got us in trouble, no question. We had a lot of unforced turnovers," he said. The Lightning

are seeking to add a second title to the one they captured in 2004. They fell in six games to Chicago in the championship series in 2015. This year's Stanley Cup finals are being held at a neutral site with no fans in attendance after the season was halted earlier this year due to the coronavirus pandemic. Game three in the best-of-seven series takes place today. —AFP

## Red Bull Flick: The Kuwait Championship underway

KUWAIT: Red Bull is excited to announce that Red Bull Flick, the online Counter-Strike: Global Offensive (CS:GO) tournament, will expand into the GCC. The anticipated Kuwait tournament will take place on October 9th and 10th, 2020. Kuwait will have a total of 128 teams entering, and 256 total players, over a 2-day period in October. Other Gulf countries hosting their own Red Bull Flick include the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Oman. The winners of each respective tournament will be eligible to win cash prizes in the amount of KD 400.

The top 2 country teams will also play in the Red Bull Flick EU Pro Invitational. Red Bull Flick is sure to attract both professional, avid semi-pro players, and amateurs to enter in the team-based battles. There are 5 new maps that have been built just for the occasion. Practice on these maps is highly encouraged for teams who wish to develop their own personal strategies. As of publication, signups are open and players are encouraged to enter in the tournament. Teams consist of two players.

Counter-Strike first launched 20 years ago and was a driving factor in the first-person shooter genre, where it was played alongside such games as Halo and others. Currently, the Valve and Hidden Path Entertainment game has moved on to a free-to-play model, where revenue is generated via sales within the game. The game is still played by professional esports athletes and weekend warriors alike, although this is a version of the game that very few will know firsthand.

The Red Bull Flick rules are not the standard garden variety, where teams must either defend or eliminate depending on the side. In Red Bull Flick, teams must hold the middle ground for a specific amount of time for each round. Barring that, they must hold the designated area for longer than the opposing team to claim their victory. When a team has 2 round wins against another team, the match is finished, and the winning team moves on to the next position in their brackets.

Other rules specific to Red Bull Flick are that both teams start on opposite sides of the map, all teams have the same weapon respawns for fairness, and the only advantage is the availability of a single AWP spawn in a difficult to reach and very risky spot. Rounds are played until the timer runs out. What has players and teams most enthusiastic is that any team can win it all. Due to the game rules and new maps, this has become a brand new game of CS:GO. The advantage will always go to the team that can react and play well together. To find out more about Red Bull Flick, visit @RedBullKuwait on Instagram and Twitter, and @RedBull on Facebook, or visit redbull.com/flickkuwait



News in brief

### Premier League goal spree

LONDON: The Premier League set a new record for the highest number of goals in a single round of matches on Monday as Manchester City's Gabriel Jesus scored the milestone 44th against Wolves. After 39 goals were scored across Saturday and Sunday's eight games, City, Wolves and Aston Villa all netted on Monday to surpass the previous Premier League best of 43. In the 20-team Premier League era, 43 goals were scored in a single game-week across February 5 and 6, 2011. Jesus left it until the very last moment to set the record when he scored in stoppage-time of City's 3-1 win at Wolves. Earlier in the day, Aston Villa had beaten Sheffield United 1-0. Tottenham's 5-2 rout of Southampton followed Saturday's wins for Everton, 5-2 against West Bromwich Albion, and Leeds, 4-3 against Fulham, with six more added as Leicester beat Burnley 4-2. —AFP

### Barcelona's Vidal joins Inter

MADRID: Inter Milan have completed a deal to sign Arturo Vidal from Barcelona for 1 million euros (\$1.17 million), the clubs announced yesterday. "Barcelona and Inter Milan have reached an agreement for the transfer of the player Arturo Vidal," Barca said in a statement. "The Italian team will pay FC Barcelona 1 million euros in variables." After joining in 2018, Vidal played 96 games for the Catalans and scored 11 goals, helping them win La Liga in his first year in Spain. But the 33-year-old was seen as expendable by the club after their dreadful end to last season, with Barca president Josep Maria Bartomeu admitting players would have to leave before new ones could come in. Vidal will be reunited with Antonio Conte at Inter, the coach he played for at Juventus between 2011 and 2015, before joining Bayern Munich and then Barca. —AFP

### PSG submit Neymar video

RIO DE JANEIRO: Paris Saint-Germain have sent French football authorities a video that some lip-reading experts say confirms Marseille defender Alvaro Gonzalez used a racial slur against Neymar, leading to an on-pitch brawl, Brazilian media reported. A week after PSG's 1-0 loss to their arch rivals ended with Neymar slapping Gonzalez on the back of the head - triggering a melee that ended with five players sent off - Brazil's Globo Esporte said the Brazilian superstar's club had submitted video of the preceding minutes to the league "to attempt to prove that Neymar was the victim of racism." Brazilian news site UOL said Monday it had confirmed the information. Three Brazilian lip-reading experts interviewed by Globo TV Sunday agreed that Gonzalez had called Neymar "mono" - "monkey" in Spanish - just before the brawl, after watching the footage from French broadcaster Telefoot. —AFP

### NFL fines teams, coaches

LOS ANGELES: Three NFL teams and their head coaches were hit with fines totaling more than \$1 million for failing to wear face coverings, reports said Monday. The NFL Network reported that the Denver Broncos, San Francisco 49ers and Seattle Seahawks had each been fined \$250,000 for breaching safety protocols set up to combat the threat of Covid-19. Broncos coach Vic Fangio, 49ers head coach Kyle Shanahan and Seahawks head coach Pete Carroll were also fined \$100,000 each for failing to wear masks. Fangio, Shanahan and Carroll were all seen not wearing mandated face coverings during their respective games at the weekend. The NFL's disciplinary action came a week after the league warned teams in a memo to follow safety protocols regarding Covid-19 measures or risk "accountability measures." —AFP



**14** A's clinch division after Astros' loss; Royals beat Cardinals 4-1



**14** Jordan buys NASCAR team, Bubba Wallace to be driver



**15** Lightning level Stanley Cup finals; Dallas Stars defeated



WOLVERHAMPTON: Wolverhampton Wanderers' Mexican striker Raul Jimenez (left) watches his header go past a diving Manchester City's Brazilian goalkeeper Ederson to score a goal during the English Premier League football match between Wolverhampton Wanderers and Manchester City on September 21, 2020. Manchester City won the game 3-1. —AFP

# Manchester City make winning start

## Guardiola salutes 'incredible' Foden

WOLVERHAMPTON: Pep Guardiola labeled Phil Foden as "incredible" after Manchester City survived a scare to start their Premier League title challenge with a 3-1 win against Wolves on Monday. City's delayed start to the campaign - due to their involvement in last season's Champions League - had allowed Liverpool to build a six-point lead over them before they had even kicked a ball. Guardiola's side could not afford to slip up at Molineux if they wanted to keep pace with the champions and they raced into a two-goal lead before half-time thanks to Kevin De Bruyne's penalty and Foden's cool finish.

City's swaggering first half gave way to an anxious spell as Wolves dominated after the interval and they had to cling on after Raul Jimenez got one back before Gabriel Jesus sealed the points in stoppage time. Foden's goal was a welcome morale boost in his first match since the midfielder was sent home in disgrace, along with Manchester United's Mason Greenwood,

after the pair invited local women into the England team's hotel.

The breach of coronavirus protocols after England's Nations League match in Iceland was publicly condemned by City, but the 20-year-old retains Guardiola's trust. "For the goal and in the second half Foden played incredibly well, he helped us keep the ball," Guardiola said. While City equaled Aston Villa's record of winning 10 consecutive opening fixtures to a top-flight season, there is little doubt Liverpool remain the Premier League's preeminent force for now.

But Guardiola was delighted to open with a victory given the shorter than usual pre-season. "We could not run much because we are tired in our legs but in general we did a good game," he said. "The period that we are in, the situation that we had this last two weeks, I expected some moments where we suffer but in general we controlled it well. "It was a good performance. We know how difficult it is in this stadium. "Sometimes we

need more time to get to our best condition but it was a good start to come here and win."

It feels like a crucial season for City and Guardiola as they look to regain the title they won in 2018 and 2019. Guardiola says he needs to "deserve" an extension to his City contract rather than just be handed one as he enters the final year of his current deal. After finishing 18 points behind Liverpool and suffering a shock Champions League quarter-final defeat against Lyon, City need to push the champions harder this term and the early signs were encouraging.

### Tense finale

It was De Bruyne, showing no signs of relaxing after being voted PFA Player of the Year last season, who took the responsibility of driving City forward and in the 20th minute he prised open the Wolves defense. The Belgium midfielder's burst into the Wolves area drew a rash lunge from Romain Saiss and referee Andre Mar-

riner awarded a penalty that De Bruyne converted with ease. City were beaten by Wolves twice last season, but this was Guardiola's team at their imperious best and they struck again with a slick move in the 32nd minute. Gabriel Jesus laid off to De Bruyne and his perfectly-weighted pass found Sterling, whose precise cutback teed up Foden to slot home from 12 yards.

De Bruyne had a chance to make it three from Jesus's pass, but for once he couldn't apply the finishing touch as Rui Patricio saved well. Totally out-classed in the first half, Wolves were much improved after the break and there were worrying signs for Guardiola as he surveyed his creaking defense. Daniel Podence turned to fire just wide and he threatened again with a chip over City keeper Ederson that just cleared the crossbar. Jimenez set up a tense finale when he met Podence's cross with a powerful header in the 78th minute, but Jesus netted deep into stoppage-time as his shot deflected in off Conor Coady. —AFP

## Al-Arabi grab Amir Cup

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The football season came to an end with the final match of HH the Amir Cup, which was won by Al-Arabi Football Club after defeating Kuwait 2-1 in extra time on Monday evening. Kuwait took control of the match from the first whistle and Kuwait's Abdallah Al-Buraiki was able to score their first and only goal in the 26th minute.

Attacks and counter attacks continued in the second half until the 83rd-minute when Al-Arabi's Sidric Henry was able to score the equalizer - making it a 1-1 draw. The match went into extra time and there was no score until the very last minute when Al-Arabi's substitute Ali Khalaf scored the winning goal.

The road to the final match was not easy for both finalists. Kuwait's semi-final was not easy and had to be decided by penalty kicks. Al-Arabi meanwhile beat Tadhamon in the first round, then Burqan in round eight. They had a tough time in the semi-final when they met Yarmouk and ended in a goalless draw in both regulation and extra time. The match ended in a penalty shootout.

Al-Arabi now equal Al-Qadisiya in the number of HH the Amir cup wins (16 each). Meanwhile, Kuwait won it 14 times, Kazma 7, Salmiya and Yarmouk twice and Fahaaheel once. This marks the 58th Edition of HH the Amir cup which was launched in the 1961-1962 season. Information Minister, State Minister for Youth Affairs Mohammad Al-Jabri represented HH the Deputy Amir, Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah was in attendance during the match along with Parliament Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanim and other dignitaries.



## Djokovic wins fifth Rome title

ROME: Novak Djokovic claimed a record 36th Masters crown on Monday, beating Argentine Diego Schwartzman in the final of the Italian Open. The world number one came through 7-5, 6-3 in just under two hours to move ahead of Spanish rival Rafael Nadal (35) in the number of Masters titles. Serb Djokovic won a fifth Rome title, and first since 2015, in the warm-up clay-court tournament for next week's French Open. Nine-time Rome winner Nadal, the defending

champion, fell in the quarter-finals to eighth-seed Schwartzman.

Djokovic had been unbeaten this season before his US Open disqualification for hitting a line judge with a ball in frustration. The 33-year-old has won four trophies from five events in 2020 - the Australian Open, Dubai, Cincinnati, which was hosted in New York, and Rome. It was the 10th Rome final for Djokovic who has lost three times since his last victory, including last year to Nadal. Schwartzman, 15th in the world, took Djokovic's first two service games to lead 3-0. But Djokovic rallied for his fifth win over the Argentinian, to extend his record to 31 wins out of his 32 matches this year. —AFP

## AC Milan win league opener

MILAN: Zlatan Ibrahimovic scored twice as AC Milan got their Serie A campaign up and running with a 2-0 win over Bologna on Monday. Ibrahimovic, who turns 39 next month, showed he has lost none of his goalscoring skills having also netted last week against Irish side Shamrock Rovers in the Europa League. "If I had been 20 years old I would have

scored two more goals," said the Swede of his display.

"I'm like Benjamin Button, born old, but I'll die young. Seriously, the team has worked well: you can see we're not at 100 percent yet, but it was important to start well." Ibrahimovic grabbed the opener in the 35th minute, rising higher than Danilo to get his head to a Theo Hernandez cross, and celebrated in front of the 1,000 spectators allowed into the San Siro for the first time since the coronavirus pandemic-mostly invited frontline health workers who had toiled during the worst of the crisis. —AFP