



**3** PM says Kuwait stands alongside Lebanon, urges int'l cooperation



**5** New York governor urged to quit after damning harassment report



**8** German startups ride boom in mini satellite launchers



**16** De Grasse wins 200m gold after epic McLaughlin show



# MoH reports major decline in coronavirus indicators

## Government says shisha to be allowed after 17-month ban

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** Health Ministry Spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said all indicators related to the coronavirus pandemic in Kuwait dropped substantially this week compared to last week. He said the number of new coronavirus cases has dropped by a significant 28.3 percent, the number of active cases have declined by 25.5 percent, the number of coronavirus patients in hospitals slid by 18.4 percent and the number of patients in intensive care units was 8.4 percent lower.

The infection rate compared to the number of PCR tests also shrunk by 2.23 percent this week compared to last week, and yesterday registered 6.8 percent, which is still high by international standards. The rate should be below 5 percent. The ministry of health yesterday reported 851 new cases, bringing the total number of coronavirus cases detected by Kuwait since the outbreak of the pandemic to over 400,000 cases.

The ministry said the number of patients in hospitals dropped to only 814, and those in intensive care units went down to 267 patients, while the

number of active cases declined to 9,748. Last week, the government decided to end all closures in the country except gatherings and weddings and lifted all restrictions on commercial activities.

Citing informed sources at the Cabinet, Al-Jarida Arabic daily reported yesterday that cafes can offer shisha after a ban that lasted almost 17 months. The newspaper also quoted Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah as saying that expats who have been fully vaccinated in Kuwait can leave for high-risk countries and return to Kuwait easily.

Expats who have been vaccinated outside

Kuwait must upload the electronic vaccination certificate to the health ministry website and the certificates will be verified within five working days. A green color will appear on the Immune application and these expats can return to the country, the minister added.

Meanwhile, MP Ahmad Al-Azemi yesterday criticized the health minister for "failing" in the vaccination campaign, claiming the minister could not convince all people to take the vaccine, and is now trying to impose it on them, committing a violation of the constitution.

## Lebanese protest impunity a year on from deadly blast

**BEIRUT:** Thousands of grief-stricken Lebanese yesterday marked a year since a cataclysmic explosion ravaged Beirut, protesting impunity over the country's worst peacetime disaster at a time when its economy was already in tatters. Not far from a solemn remembrance service being held at the "ground zero" site of the blast, a group of protesters scuffled with riot police near the entrance to parliament, whose members have been accused of stalling a probe into the disaster.

Police fired tear gas, water cannons and rubber bullets at demonstrators lobbing stones, firecrackers and Molotov cocktails, in clashes which the Red Cross said left more than 50 injured. Mournful tunes rang out above central Beirut, as crowds walked towards the dockside, many brandishing posters demanding accountability over the disaster.

On August 4, 2020, a stock of ammonium nitrate

fertilizer haphazardly stored at the city's port exploded and left swathes of the Lebanese capital looking like a war zone. What went down as one of the largest non-nuclear blasts in history killed at least 214 people, levelled entire neighborhoods, irreparably scarred the nation's psyche and deepened the country's economic abyss.

At the clock struck 6:07 pm, the exact time of the blast, thousands observed a minute's silence on the empty highway running past the obliterated port, the ruins of its grain silos basking in the evening sunshine. Sandra Abras, 43, said she had come to pay respect to the victims after she was lucky to survive the explosion, but her home was ravaged in the blast.

"We weren't able to return home for a month and a half... We fixed it with our own money," she said, adding she suffered strong headaches for months after the event. Lawyers, doctors and engineers also joined in to pay tribute to those who perished in the blast, whose shockwave was felt as far away as Cyprus.

Port workers were buried under gutted grain silos in the explosion, commuters crushed to death and residents lacerated by supersonic shards of glass bled out in their homes.

Continued on Page 7



BEIRUT: Protesters stand next to a fire along a main street during clashes with security forces near the parliament yesterday, on the first anniversary of the blast that ravaged the capital's port and the city. — AFP

### News in brief

#### Indonesia hits 100,000 deaths

**JAKARTA:** Indonesia's coronavirus death toll topped 100,000 yesterday as the country struggles to control the spread of the Delta variant. Southeast Asia's biggest economy has now detected Delta in dozens of regions since it was first found in the archipelago in June. Scores of Indonesians are dying at home, unable to access hospital care or medical oxygen supplies as health care facilities are stretched to the limit. — AFP

#### Iran COVID cases top 4 million

**TEHRAN:** COVID infections in Iran surged again yesterday, hitting a new one-day record for a third straight day and taking total cases to more than four million. Iran registered 39,357 new cases in the 24 hours to yesterday, taking the total since the pandemic started to 4,019,084, the health ministry said. It recorded 409 deaths over the same period taking the total in Iran to 92,194. — AFP

#### Lightning kills 16 in Bangladesh

**DHAKA:** Several lightning bolts hit a Bangladesh wedding party within a few seconds yesterday, killing 16 people and injuring the groom, officials said. The group had just left a boat at the riverside town of Shibganj to take shelter from the thunderstorm when the lightning struck, a government administrator for the town said. The bride was not with the wedding party, Sakib Al-Rabby told AFP, confirming 16 people died as several bolts struck within a few seconds of each other. — AFP

## UK agency says 'hijack' of ship off UAE is over

**DUBAI:** The suspected hijacking of a ship in the Gulf of Oman has ended and the vessel is safe, a British maritime security agency said yesterday, days after a deadly attack on a tanker in the region. Oman yesterday named the vessel as the Panama-flagged Asphalt Princess, an asphalt and bitumen

tanker, and said it had deployed aircraft and naval ships to the area.

Since February, Iran and its archenemy the Zionist entity have been accused of engaging in a "shadow war", in which vessels linked to each nation have come under attack in waters around the Gulf in tit-for-tat exchanges. It follows a July 29 reported drone attack off Oman on the Zionist-linked MT Mercer Street tanker that left two dead, and which the United States and the Zionist entity blamed on Iran, but which was denied by Tehran.

An Omani maritime security source said yesterday the Asphalt Princess had been involved in "a hijacking incident in international waters". "The

Royal Air Force of Oman is carrying out sorties near the area, while the Royal Navy of Oman deployed a number of ships from its fleet to help secure international waters in the region," the source said, quoted in a defense ministry statement.

"Boarders have left the vessel. Vessel is safe. Incident complete," United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) tweeted, without elaborating. The shipping industry intelligence site Lloyd's List reported that armed men had boarded the Asphalt Princess and ordered it to sail to Iran. The UKMTO said the "potential hijack" of the ship took place 60 miles east of UAE emirate of Fujairah. — AFP

Continued on Page 7

## 3 decades on, 'human shields' want answers

**LONDON:** More than three decades may have passed since they were held as human shields by Saddam Hussein in Iraq, but those caught up in the ordeal still want answers. Passengers who were taken off British Airways Flight 149 in Kuwait on Aug 2, 1990 want the UK government to admit liability, apologize and release a secret report about what really happened.

A new book, "Operation Trojan Horse", claims the authorities in London used the flight to deploy nine military intelligence officials in Kuwait and knew the civilians risked capture. Author Stephen Davis said the plane landed despite Britain receiving US intelligence announcing the Iraqi invasion three hours and 45 minutes beforehand and the control tower in Kuwait turning away all other flights that night.

Shortly afterwards, Iraqi jets pounded the runway with bombs before tanks and troops surround-



LONDON: Journalist and author Stephen Davis poses with his new book Operation Trojan Horse outside the Frontline Club on Aug 2, 2021. — AFP

ed the airport as Kuwaiti defenses capitulated. Some of the 367 passengers and crew who were taken off the Kuala Lumpur-bound jet spent more than four months in captivity. They were placed at sites throughout Iraq thought likely to be targeted by a Western military coalition.

One of them, Barry Manners, 55, was travelling with his then-boyfriend to Malaysia at the time. He said in London this week that the "conspiracy of silence" about what happened had destroyed his faith in authority. "It's the antithesis of every value you were taught, the whole essence of Western

Continued on Page 7

## WHO wants halt on COVID vaccine booster shots

**GENEVA:** The WHO yesterday called for a moratorium on COVID-19 vaccine booster shots until at least the end of September to address the drastic inequity in dose distribution between rich and poor nations. World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus urged the countries and companies controlling the supply of doses to change course immediately and prioritize less wealthy states.

The UN health agency has for months raged against the glaring and growing imbalance, branding it a moral outrage. The Zionist entity last month began rolling out a booster shot for the over-60s, while Germany said Tuesday it would start offering third doses of the two-shot Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines from September. — AFP



# Kuwait's Amir receives Crown Prince, Speaker, Prime Minister



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. — Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. His Highness the Amir also received National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem

and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince received Speaker Ghanem and His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled yesterday at Bayan Palace. — KUNA

## Foreign Minister receives letter from UAE FM



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah receives the letter from the UAE Ambassador to Kuwait Matar Al-Neyadi. — KUNA

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah received a letter yesterday from United Arab Emirates (UAE) Foreign Minister Sheikh

Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahyan on boosting bilateral relations in all fields. The letter was handed over by the UAE Ambassador to Kuwait Matar Al-Neyadi during a meeting with Sheikh Dr Ahmad at the Ministry. — KUNA

# REWARD YOURSELF THIS SUMMER



**0% INTEREST**  
**0 DOWN PAYMENT**  
FOR 5 YEARS

**PRADO**  
SAVE UP TO KD 1,847

**FORTUNER**  
SAVE UP TO KD 1,357

COMPLIMENTARY  
SERVICE PACKAGE 50,000 KMS OR 30 MONTHS\*  
REGISTRATION AND 3RD PARTY INSURANCE

5-YEAR WARRANTY UNLIMITED MILEAGE  
24/7 MUSAADA ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE

VISIT YOUR NEAREST TOYOTA SHOWROOM.

IN COOPERATION WITH:  
**بنك بويان**  
Boubyan Bank



MOHAMED NASER ALSAYER & SONS EST. CO. W.L.L.  
A SUBSIDIARY OF ALSAYER HOLDING.

1803803  
toyotakuw

\*Whichever comes first - does not include taxes. The vehicle image displayed is for illustrative purposes only. Some colors and/or features may not be available.

Subject to credit evaluation and approval. Terms and conditions apply. © 2021 Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc.



## Local

# Kuwait Premier calls for int'l cooperation to support Lebanon

## Kuwait stands alongside Lebanon a year after port blast

KUWAIT: Lebanon and its people are one of Kuwait's top priorities, the Gulf state's prime minister said, calling on all countries to stand by Lebanon as it faces political, economic and security instability. His Highness Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah made that statement as he chaired the Kuwaiti delegation at the third international conference to support Lebanon yesterday.

The online conference was called for by French President Emmanuel Macron and UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres. The Kuwaiti delegation included Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for the Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and Assistant Foreign Minister for Arab World affairs Ambassador Fahad Al-Awadhi. In his speech at the event, His Highness Sheikh Sabah conveyed the greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and His Highness' wishes for a successful conference for the benefit of Lebanon.

Encouraging dialogue between all Lebanese parties is the best way to achieve stability in the country and form a balanced government in the light of the law, he noted. The Kuwaiti Premier also called for activating international initiatives to sup-

port the country financially in the face of the current economic crisis. Meanwhile, His Highness said that the meeting comes in the first anniversary of the Beirut port explosion, adding that the Lebanese people are still suffering the impact of the disaster to this day.

Kuwait was one of the first countries to aid Lebanon immediately after the explosion, pledging \$30 million to reconstruct the damaged areas, while also sending food aid and medicines on airplanes, His Highness affirmed. Kuwait had also supported Lebanon throughout the past decades through projects executed by the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) since 1966 until now. The projects included health, education, transportation, reconstruction and other fields. Moreover, Kuwait provided financial support to Lebanon to face the needs of Syrian refugees, who Lebanon host, said His Highness Sheikh Sabah. Kuwait is also working on fulfilling its loan program, pledged during the Paris conference to support developmental sectors in Lebanon, while the country also supported Lebanon's health sector in the face of the coronavirus, he added.

Kuwait's Prime Minister reiterated his coun-



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah (center) chairs the Kuwaiti delegation at the third international conference to support Lebanon yesterday. — KUNA

try's stand alongside Lebanon a year after a devastating port blast left much of its capital city in ruin. "We meet today a year after the Beirut port blast to demonstrate our support for the Lebanese people who have suffered a lot," the Kuwaiti prime minister said. On the talks, he said

it was a "show of solidarity" to prove the international community's support for Lebanon. A powerful port blast rocked the Lebanese capital Beirut a year ago, causing large-scale destruction in a country already in the throes of its worst economic crisis in decades. — KUNA

## Kuwait eyes closer economic ties with US, UK

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Finance Minister and State Minister for Economic Affairs Khalifa Hamada held talks yesterday with the US and UK's ambassadors as part of efforts to forge closer trilateral economic relations. The minister's talks with Alina Romanowski and Belinda Lewis, individually, focused on efforts to cushion the economic blow from the COVID pandemic, in addition to matters of mutual concern, said a Kuwaiti foreign min-

istry statement. The British envoy commended Kuwait for the steps the country has taken towards broad reforms and its efforts to establish an increasingly diverse economy, added the statement. The US diplomat's talks with the Kuwaiti minister centered on similar issues, chief among them economic and financial reforms and efforts to give impetus to small and medium-sized development projects, it said. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Finance Minister and State Minister for Economic Affairs Khalifa Hamada meets US Ambassador to Kuwait Alina Romanowski. — KUNA photos



Kuwait's Finance Minister and State Minister for Economic Affairs Khalifa Hamada meets UK Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis.

## Residents vaccinated in Kuwait can travel easily to high-risk countries: Minister

KUWAIT: Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah said the health system faces a number of challenges in the coming period. He said the most notable challenge is returning to school, in addition to variants of the virus.

"Indicators are optimistic towards the return to normal life, as the number of people infected with the coronavirus is on the wane, including hospital in-patients and those in ICUs," Al-Jarida daily wrote yesterday in a report quoting the health minister. "This goes along with the increased vaccination rates due to efforts by the health ministry to surround Kuwait with a fortified fence of precautionary measures to safeguard citizens and residents despite a barrage of criticism."

About residents from high-risk countries, Sheikh Dr Basel said they can leave Kuwait and return easily as per health protocols, including that they should have two doses of an approved vaccine in Kuwait. As for those who were vaccinated abroad,



Dr Basel Al-Sabah

their certificates must be approved online through the health ministry website within five days. Only then can they enter the country.

Sheikh Basel said the current pandemic situation around the world is not stable and the virus has spread all over the globe. He insisted WHO is amazed with Kuwait's performance in dealing with the pandemic, particularly PCR tests that reach 16,000 swabs daily. He said it is necessary to comply with health protocols to protect against the virus and its variants, most important of which is getting vaccinated, maintaining social distancing and avoiding gatherings.

the prosecution.

Public Authority for Manpower inspectors, in coordination with residency detectives, are focusing on arresting those reported absconding to face legal action, Al-Qabas reported quoting authority sources. They said the tripartite committee's activities will be expanded by inspecting companies that employ those who are not under their sponsorship. As for trading in residencies, sources said the labor protection sector receives complaints with regards to getting a residency permit in exchange of money, as cases will be investigated and referred to concerned authorities.

Sources said 175 suspects employing illegal workers and selling residencies were arrested during the first half of this year, including owners of businesses and mandoubs. They said the Public Authority for Manpower and the Interior Ministry suspended more than 2,200 files for companies involved in selling residencies.

decision to regulate the collection of traffic fines from citizens and residents. "Accumulated fines are estimated at millions of dinars, particularly as there are large amounts owed by violators who are now dead or imprisoned, in addition to many residents who left the country for good," the source noted.

Meanwhile, sources said among the proposals is to have special offices at border outlets to collect fines and link the customs department and the interior ministry to stop any vehicle from leaving if it has traffic violations, especially as there is no law that bans citizens from traveling if they have violations on their record. The sources said the traffic department is also studying the possibility of sending an SMS alert to a violator immediately after registering the violation.

## 2,500 fake companies closed during pandemic

KUWAIT: The coronavirus pandemic enabled the Public Authority for Manpower and the Interior Ministry, along with other government agencies, to uncover around 2,500 bogus companies since the start of the pandemic and close their files, A local daily reported yesterday. The partial and total curfews revealed the extent of suffering the iqama trade caused and the abuse of absconding and violating laborers by making them work on a daily basis, which called for mobilizing government agencies to start closing the files of violating companies, arrest those involved and send them to

## Kuwait mulls travel ban to force traffic fines' payment

KUWAIT: The interior ministry plans to issue a decision banning residents from traveling unless they pay their traffic fines, in addition to linking the ministry with other government agencies to halt the processing of any transactions of citizens and residents who have traffic violations.

A source said this procedure is carried out in all GCC countries, so the traffic sector is contemplating presenting a proposal to issue a

Our new Pharma.C app gives priority to you and your baby's well-being. Download now to order Skincode and all the care products you need.

pharma.c

DOWNLOAD NOW

Available on the App Store

GET IT ON Google Play



**Kuwait Times**  
Established 1961  
The First Daily in The Arabian Gulf

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT  
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF  
ESTABLISHED 1961

Founder and Publisher  
**YOUSUF S. AL-ALYAN**

Editor-in-Chief  
**ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYAN**

EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432  
ADVERTISING : 24835616/7  
FAX : 24835620/1  
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 163  
ACCOUNTS : 24833199 Extn. 125  
COMMERCIAL : 24835618

P.O.Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.  
Email: info@kuwaittimes.com  
Website: www.kuwaittimes.net

# Fish still too expensive as buyers eye auctions' return



KUWAIT: Several photos showing fish on display at the fish market in Souq Sharq yesterday. — Photos by Ben Garcia

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Auctions of fresh fish are expected to resume soon; possibly as early as Sunday as per a recent government decision, although no definite date has been announced according to officials at the fish market in Souq Sharq. The auctions were halted in February as part of preventive measures to fight the spread of COVID-19. This reduced the supply of fish to the market. A decision was issued by the health ministry and Kuwait Municipality to stop auctions and instead allow selling of fish by quota to vendors, supermarkets and cooperatives.

"We implemented stricter measures at that time. We reduced the number of stalls selling fish; we reduced the number of people allowed access to the fish market and we even implemented a no-vaccine no-entry policy," the official said.

"Hopefully soon, we will begin the auction again."

Recently, there were reports of shortages of fish supplies at the market, but according to the official, this is a normal occurrence every summer. "The number one reason is that there are fewer fishermen available, as many go back to their countries. Many of our fishermen are from Egypt, India and Pakistan, and they need to take leave, so the catch is reduced in summer," the official said. "But they are coming back soon and auction will return soon too. Secondly, fish coming from Iran and Pakistan goes directly now to supermarkets and grocery stores," he added.

Some customers yesterday complained fish is expensive nowadays all over Kuwait. "I come to the fish market knowing it's a bit cheaper here, but this is not the case now," said Cecile, a Filipina customer. "It's even more expensive here than the supermarkets.



We need a balanced diet, so I buy fish at least every week. Next time I'll buy from my nearby grocery store as prices are the same," she added.

Farouq from Pakistan was searching for his favorite whitefish at the market, but none were available. "I settled for shrimps, but it is also very expensive. Prices were KD 3 or KD 4 last year, but now they're KD 5 to KD

7, an increase of around 100 percent," he rued.

Kuwait's Cabinet had announced during its weekly meeting Monday that auctions of all types can resume starting Sunday, August 8. Health protocols must be followed, while attendance will be restricted to people vaccinated against COVID-19, the Cabinet said in a statement.



## Osman, Bofain join DHAMAN's management

KUWAIT: Health Assurance Hospitals Company (DHAMAN) announced reinforcing its executive body with new appointments in senior management, which is part of the company's strategy to develop its business during the coming stage through focusing on operational plans of facilities.

Bassam Osman was named for the position of Chief Financial Officer (CFO). With nearly 30 years of professional experience, Osman's career leadership positions at a number of Kuwaiti and international companies and corporations in the fields of investment, healthcare, audit and financial affairs. He will head all matters related to planning and implementing DHAMAN's strategy in the finance, accounting, treasury and other fields.

In addition, Salah Bofain has been appointed as Corporate Director of Administration and Facility Management Services. Having held senior management positions during over 25 years in energy and industrial sectors, Bofain will lead administrative services and facilities management throughout DHAMAN. Currently, DHAMAN includes a workforce of professionals and leaders in medical, technical and administrative fields as per international standards relevant to healthcare.



Bassam Osman

Salah Bofain

## CBK's BIS membership: boost to global monetary stability

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait's (CBK) membership in the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) added momentum to Kuwait's weight in global monetary policies and outlining frameworks of monetary stability in the wake of economic turmoil caused by the coronavirus pandemic. CBK attended BIS annual general meeting in June, making Kuwait the 63rd member thus joining other members to formulating international monetary and banking supervision policies.

Established 91 years ago, BIS is the oldest international financial institution and has been playing a number of key roles in global economy, from settling reparation payments imposed on Germany following World War I, to serving central banks in their pursuit of monetary and financial stability. With the escalation of political and military tensions in late 1930s, BIS played a key role in transporting gold of central banks from Europe

to safe warehouses in New York. BIS supported central banks in strengthening monetary and financial stability, particularly following World War II when the world changed course towards re-engineering global financial order, and coordinate among central banks over international criteria.

BIS is affiliated with the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision, which develops global supervision and practices criteria. CBK, through its membership, contributes to these criteria and is active within BIS to coordinate cyber-flexibility. BIS is owned by central banks, which develop financial and monetary policies as well as supervision criteria. BIS members represent 95 percent of the global gross product. CBK Governor Dr Mohammad Al-Hashel, in remarks during the BIS June meeting, said CBK membership was in line with pursuing its goal to strengthen relationships with international financial institutions, and to fortify its role in developing monetary and prudential policies. The BIS, he said, provides central banks a forum for dialogue and broad international cooperation to pursue global monetary and financial stability. It also provides a platform for responsible innovation and knowledge sharing, and in-depth analysis and insights on core monetary and macro-prudential policy issues. — KUNA



## NBK honors 'Online Hackathon' winners

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) strives to provide top-notch digital services to its customers by continuously developing all its digital channels. In this context, the bank honored the winners in the 'NBK Online Hackathon', organized in partnership with COD-ED academy, with the aim of delivering new ideas and innovations to develop in NBK mobile banking.

The prizes were distributed to the winning teams in a ceremony organized by NBK, in the presence of the bank's jury panel Mohammed Al-Othman, Head of Consumer Banking Group, Nikolaos Sfikas, Head of Group IT, Mehmet Darendeli, Head of Group Strategy, Mohammad Al-Kharafi, Head of Group Operations and Ahmad Marafi, CODED CEO and Co-Founder, and Jason Jiang, General Manager of Huawei.

Mohamed Al-Othman, Head of Consumer Banking Group at National Bank of Kuwait presented the prizes to the winning team named 'Olympus' which ranked first and received KD 2,500 prize, whereas 'Coffee Addicts' and 'ta git' teams came second and third, respectively, and received valuable prizes from Huawei.

In this Hackathon held from 24 to 26 June, 2021 saw the participation of 25 teams of FinTech programmers, of which 15 teams completed their projects successfully with ready-to-present functional prototypes, which were evaluated and three winning teams were announced.

On this occasion, Mohamed Al-Othman said: "We are keen to build strong relationships with the digital community and Kuwaiti youth, in line with our endeavors to maintain digital excellence as a key objective of all our strategies and operations."

"This competition witnessed introducing many innovative ideas that support our strategic digital transformation goals, and reflect Kuwaiti youth's efforts to achieve financial inclusion goals, and promote the saving culture."

Othman emphasized that NBK will continue to provide cutting-edge digital products and services, as part of the bank's endeavors to offer its customers a richer banking experience. On a related note, NBK's Digital Office received the Best Financial Innovation Lab Award in Kuwait for 2021 in the annual survey conducted by the international Global Finance magazine, based on the input from a large panel of experts, analysts, consultants and corporate executives around the world.

**Kuwait Times**  
ESTABLISHED 1961  
THE FIRST DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF

STAY CONNECTED



- Read Kuwait Times now on your phone for **FREE**
- Send Subscribe to **+965 944 88888**
- Enjoy the first daily paper in Kuwait on your phone

P.O. Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait

Tel: 24833199 - 24833358 - 24835616/7 | Fax: 24835620 - 24835621

E: info@kuwaittimes.net





Afghanistan's elite special forces pushed to the brink

## West must drive 'nail in coffin' of Iran clerical state: Shah's son

Page 6

Page 7



KABUL: An Afghan security personnel gestures yesterday as he stands guard at the site a day after a car bomb explosion. —AFP

# Taleban claim massive Kabul bombing

## Defense minister targeted • Afghan forces defend besieged cities

**KABUL:** The Taliban yesterday claimed responsibility for a huge bomb attack in Kabul targeting the defense minister, as the insurgents fought for control of a string of besieged cities across the country. The bomb-and-gun attack on Defense Minister Bismillah Mohammadi Tuesday was one of the biggest in Kabul for months, bringing violence to the capital after intense fighting in the south and west of the country.

The Afghan and US militaries have carried out air strikes against the insurgents to push them back, and the Taliban said the Kabul attack was a response to that. "The attack is the beginning of the retaliatory operations against the circles and leaders of the Kabul administration who are ordering attacks and the bombing of different parts of the country," Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said in a statement on social media.

It represents a major escalation by the Taliban, who have largely refrained from large-scale attacks in the capital in recent years after starting talks with the United States on troop withdrawal. The first bomb exploded in the center of Kabul, sending a thick plume of smoke into the sky, AFP correspondents reported.

Less than two hours later, there was another loud blast followed by smaller explosions and rapid gunfire, also near the high-security Green Zone that houses several embassies, including the US mission. The minister was safe and Afghan forces repelled the attackers, but at least eight people were killed, according to interior ministry spokesman Mirwais Stanikzai.

Mohammadi later said it was a suicide car bomb attack targeting his house. A security source said several attackers stormed a lawmaker's house after setting off the car bomb and shot at the residence of the minister from there. Security forces had cordoned off the scene of the attack yesterday as troops inspected the buildings and cars damaged by the blasts. Rubble covered the area while there were bloodstains on some of the floors.

"The Taliban justified this attack as the 'start of retaliatory attacks' against government personnel for their 'indiscriminate bombings'," Ibraheem Bahiss, a consultant with International Crisis Group, told AFP. "However, it is equally possible that the Taliban has been caught off guard by the prevalence of anti-Taliban sentiments in Afghanistan's urban centers," he added. There was little

respite in Kabul early yesterday after a blast injured three people, according to police.

### 'No way to escape'

The Taliban threat came after the Afghan military launched a counterattack against the insurgents in the southern city of Lashkar Gah. The military had asked people to leave the city on Tuesday as they prepared for their offensive. Resident Saleh Mohammad said hundreds of families had fled as fighting erupted between the two sides, trapping many in the crossfire. "There is no way to escape from the area because the fighting is ongoing. There is no guarantee that we will not be killed on the way," Mohammad said. "The government and the Taliban are destroying us."

The insurgents have taken control of vast swathes of the countryside and key border towns, taking advantage of the security vacuum left by the withdrawal of US forces. The Taliban are now targeting cities, with fierce fighting for a week around Herat near the western border with Iran, as well as Lashkar Gah and Kandahar in the south.

"Those families which had financial support or a car

have left their homes. The families who cannot afford to be obliged to stay in their own homes as we are," resident Halim Karimi told AFP. "We don't know where to go or how to leave. We are born to die." The loss of Lashkar Gah, the capital of southern Helmand province, would be a massive strategic and psychological blow for the government.

### 'War crimes'

Meanwhile, Human Rights Watch accused the Taliban of "summarily" executing detained soldiers, police and civilians with alleged ties to the Afghan government in areas they had recently seized. The rights group said it had also obtained a list of 44 people who were killed by the Taliban in the town of Spin Boldak, which the insurgents captured last month along the border with Pakistan.

"Taliban commanders with oversight over such atrocities are also responsible for war crimes," Patricia Gossman, associate Asia director at HRW said in a statement. Washington and London have also accused the insurgents of committing atrocities that may amount to "war crimes" in Spin Boldak. —AFP

## China restricts overseas travel to curb outbreak

**BEIJING:** China yesterday tightened overseas travel restrictions for its citizens as part of efforts to contain rising coronavirus cases, after reporting its highest number of infections in months. The movement of people is coming under more restriction inside China - with localized transport closures and stay-at-home orders in places in some cities - and beyond China's borders.

China had previously boasted of its success in crushing COVID-19, with hard lockdowns in the early stages mixed with tight controls of its borders, but mass testing campaigns have uncovered Delta variant infections across the country. The latest outbreak is threatening to undo the country's economic rebound and return to normal life with nearly 500 domestic cases reported since mid-July.

Local governments have tested entire cities and locked down millions, with the official figures on Wednesday revealing 71 new infections - the most since January, but still a low caseload despite the outbreak spreading to dozens of cities. The outbreak, which began when an infection among passengers on a flight from Moscow spread to airport cleaners in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, has exposed

weaknesses in the country's already strict border containment measures.

China's immigration authority yesterday announced it would stop issuing ordinary passports and other documents needed for exiting the country in "non-essential and non-emergency" cases. That does not yet mean a blanket overseas travel ban for the Chinese public. Immigration official Liu Haitao told a press briefing that those who "have real needs for studying abroad, employment and business" will still have their documents issued upon verification. Foreign crews on hundreds of ships have been stopped from disembarking and changing shifts at Chinese ports. The central government has also ordered localities to cut off public transport and taxis in and out of areas hit by the outbreak, the transport ministry said at the same press conference.

### Mass testing

Wuhan, where the virus first emerged in 2019, reported its first local infections in over a year this week and said Tuesday it was "swiftly launching" testing of all 11 million residents. Long lines of residents waited at outdoor testing stations in the summer heat Tuesday, fanning themselves with paper fans while workers in hazmat suits took throat samples. In Beijing, where the city government reported three new virus cases yesterday, authorities blocked entrances to a compound where one of the patients lived, while residents reached over fences to receive parcels from delivery drivers.

Nanjing has tested its 9.2 million residents three times



WUHAN: A worker receives a nucleic acid test for COVID-19 at the dining hall of a car parts factory yesterday. —AFP

after shutting down gyms and cinemas and closing off residential compounds. And the tourist destination of Zhangjiajie in central Hunan province, where infected travelers who had been in Nanjing attended a theatre performance, abruptly announced Tuesday that no one would be allowed to exit the city after it emerged as an infection hotspot. Meanwhile, Shanghai is investigating a Delta case detected in an airport worker this week. Authorities said on Wednesday the infection was not linked to other domestic cases and that they suspected the worker had been exposed after removing protective equipment while in a "contaminated area". —AFP

## Turkey saves power plant from wildfires

**MILAS, Turkey:** Rescuers used helicopters and water cannon yesterday to beat back fires encircling a Turkish power plant in the second week of deadly blazes testing the leadership of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. More than 170 wildfires have scorched swathes of Turkey's southern coast and killed eight people since breaking out east of the Mediterranean vacation hotspot Antalya last Wednesday and then spreading west.

The blazes have destroyed pristine forests and thousands of cattle. Their location around Turkey's main vacation destinations have also dented government hopes of a tourist-driven revival of the fragile economy. The European Union's satellite monitoring service said their "radiative power" - a measure of the fires' intensity - "has reached unprecedented values in the entire dataset, which goes back to 2003".

The Turkish government appears to have been rattled by the scale and ferocity of the flames. Its media watchdog on Tuesday warned broadcasters that they may be fined if they continue showing live footage of the blazes or air images of screaming people running for their lives. Erdogan himself has been subjected to days of ridicule on social media for tossing out bags of tea while touring one of the affected regions under heavy police escort.

The opposition further accuses the powerful Turkish leader of being too slow to accept offers of foreign assistance - including from regional rival Greece - and failing to properly maintain firefighting planes. Erdogan prepared to mount a political counterattack in a national television interview scheduled for yesterday night. Much of the latest public fear and anger has been directed at a fire that has been threatening the hills around a power plant in the Aegean Sea holiday resort town of Milas.

### 'Very serious war'

An AFP team in Milas saw Turkish workers dig trenches around the plant to keep the flames away. Turkish helicopters and two firefighting planes from Spain dumped sea water and fire retardant on the surrounding hills and rows of scorched or burning residential buildings. A group of locals watched the battle unfold from the relative safety of the beach.

Most of the flames appeared to have been extinguished and only white plumes of smoke rose from the back of the hills yesterday afternoon. "The local security forced asked us to evacuate the village but we never left. We stayed where we were," a local electrician who agreed to be identified only as Ersoy told AFP. "I did not think of running away. Had I thought of fleeing, there would be nobody to put out or contain the fire," he said.

The main opposition party in control of the local mayor's office said hydrogen tanks used to cool the plant had been emptied and filled with water as a precaution. Erdogan's office blamed the very first blazes near Antalya on arsonists that pro-government media linked to banned Kurdish mili-



MILAS, Turkey: People on a beach watch blazes spreading up a hill in the Aegean coast city of Oren in the holiday region of Mugla on Tuesday. —AFP

tants waging a decades-long insurgency against the state. But more and more public officials now link them to an extreme heatwave that has dried up water reservoirs and created tinderbox conditions across much of Turkey's south.

Experts warn that climate change in countries such as Turkey increases both the frequency and intensity of wildfires. Turkey's Agriculture and Forestry Minister Bekir Pakdemirli said temperatures in the Aegean city of Marmaris reached an all-time record of 45.5 degrees Celsius this week. "We are fighting a very serious war," the minister told reporters. "We need to keep our morale and motivation high in this war. I urge everyone to be patient." —AFP

## NY gov urged to quit after damning harassment report

**NEW YORK:** US President Joe Biden joined leading Democrats Tuesday in calling on powerful New York Governor Andrew Cuomo to resign after an independent investigation concluded that he sexually harassed multiple women. Cuomo, who drew praise nationwide for his early pandemic response, denied inappropriate conduct and resisted immediate calls to quit after the probe found he harassed current and former New York state employees. But his position was looking increasingly untenable late Tuesday after Biden and House speaker Nancy Pelosi said the three-term governor should step down and state lawmakers moved to impeach him. "I think he should resign," Biden told reporters in Washington. The explosive report detailed allegations by 11 women that paint a "deeply disturbing yet clear" picture of a pattern of abusive behavior by Cuomo and his senior staff, state Attorney General Letitia James said, announcing the findings.



Andrew Cuomo

It was not clear if the governor would face criminal prosecution, with James saying the investigation was "civil in nature," but US media reported that the district attorney's office in state capital Albany had opened an investigation. The five-month investigation "concluded that Governor Andrew Cuomo sexually harassed multiple women and in doing so violated federal and state law," James told a news conference. She said Cuomo engaged "in unwelcome and non-consensual touching and making numerous comments of a suggestive sexual nature that created a hostile work environment for women." The investigation also found that Cuomo and his senior team took retaliatory action against at least one former employee for coming forward with her story, she added.

Cuomo issued an unequivocal denial. "I never touched anyone inappropriately or made inappropriate sexual advances," he said in a pre-recorded televised statement. "I am 63 years old. I have lived my entire adult life in public view. That is just not who I am. And that's not who I have ever been." And he suggested that resignation was not on his mind, saying: "What matters to me at the end of the day is getting the most done I can for you. And that is what I do every day." —AFP



## International

# West must drive 'nail in coffin' of Iran clerical state: Shah's son

## Pahlavi believes clerical state that toppled his father is on the brink of crumbling

WASHINGTON: Reza Pahlavi, the son of Iran's last shah, believes the clerical state that toppled his father is on the brink of crumbling. What Iranians need now, he says, is stronger support from the West. As ultraconservative Ebrahim Raisi was sworn in Tuesday as the eighth president of the Islamic republic, Pahlavi, who lives in exile near Washington, pointed to an election turnout rate of 48.8 percent, the lowest since the 1979 revolution, as well as demonstrations first triggered by serious water shortages. "Is the regime fragmented, is it fragile, is it bordering on the precipice? Yes it is, but like anything else, if you throw them a lifeline, they'll catch a second breath and survive a bit," he told AFP in an interview. "We have an opportunity to put the final nail in the coffin. And we're not asking the world to do that for us; the people of Iran want to do it, but they need some help."

He said Western nations should support technology to circumvent internet restrictions in Iran, disinvest from the state and develop a "strike fund" to support workers who wage nonviolent civil disobedience. Pahlavi, like many others, has spoken before of the regime crumbling. But he insisted this time was different as forces are "just killing people," including "young people who are thirsty and seeking their rights."

"This isn't a response that shows confidence or stability. It's like a last effort to put out the flames," he said.

### 'Slap in the face'

Pahlavi described Raisi, born six weeks after the prince in 1960, as a "butcher" and "perhaps one of the darkest and most sinister individuals that the Islamic Republic has ever produced." As a prosecutor, Raisi is linked to the mass executions of Marxists and other leftists in 1988. "What's the most shocking to us is not so much how (Iranian) people are responding, but it's rather Western democracies, of whom we had the most expectation, seem to be stabbing the people in the back," Pahlavi said.

He pointed to the decisions, notably of the European Union, to attend the inauguration as "almost like a slap in the face, to say the least," by legitimizing Raisi. US President Joe Biden's administration, while criticizing Raisi on human rights, engaged in months of fruitless indirect talks with the previous, more moderate administration of Hassan Rouhani on reviving a 2015 nuclear accord.

### 'Symbol above the fray'

Sporting a crisp suit with a lapel pin the shape of



WASHINGTON: Reza Pahlavi, son of the last Shah of Iran, poses for a picture during an interview with AFP in Washington, DC, on Tuesday. — AFP

Iran bearing the imperial-era lion emblem, Pahlavi speaks with a relaxed smile, and in exile has pursued passions for nature photography and playing drums. His priorities do not include restoring the 2,500-year-old monarchy. Social media footage in recent years have

shown demonstrators voicing nostalgia for the Pahlavi dynasty, an era when oil-producing Iran was rapidly developing and enjoyed warm relations with the West, although few see a groundswell of support for monarchists. Pahlavi said he was "republican in nature" and that Iranians should decide whether they need a "symbol above the fray"—who could be elected rather than inheriting a throne.

The position could be "something totally new that still is true to the spirit and the fabric and the culture of a nation, but it is adapted to today's rules of democracy and self-governance," he said.

Pahlavi voiced hope for a conference soon of the Iranian opposition and said the future should eventually be decided by a constituent assembly of "secular, democratic forces." Pahlavi said he is not advocating regime change led by the US military—an idea that has little support in Washington as it seeks to exit Afghanistan and Iraq. But he said the United States needs a dialogue with the opposition.

"We're not saying don't talk to Islamic Republic. You need to have a channel of communication for the sake of diplomacy, we all understand that," he said. "But thinking that those who are part of the problem are going to offer you a solution is madness." — AFP

## Zionists fire into Lebanon following alleged rocket fire

BEIRUT: Zionist gunners fired three rounds of artillery into south Lebanon yesterday in what they claimed in retaliation for rocket attacks, the Jewish army said, at a time of rising tensions between the Jewish state and Iran.

"For the third time within two hours, the IDF (army) struck along the Lebanese border," the military said in a statement, adding that artillery forces "struck in Lebanese territory in response to the rockets fired at Jewish territory earlier today." There were no immediate reports of casualties on the Lebanese side. The Zionist army said three rockets were fired from Lebanon into Jewish territory, though one fell short of the border. The others struck near the northern town of Kiryat Shmona, where air raid sirens sent residents into bomb shelters. Medics of Magen David Adom, Zionist equivalent of the Red Cross, said four people were treated for "stress symptoms".

The United Nations peacekeeping force in the border region, UNIFIL, urged "maximum restraint" after the exchange of fire on the day marking a year since an explosion at Beirut's port devastated

swathes of the Lebanese capital and killed more than 200 people. Head of mission Major General Stefano Del Col urged the two sides "to cease fire and to exercise maximum restraint to avoid further escalation, especially on this solemn anniversary". UNIFIL said in a statement, adding that it would investigate.

The statement came shortly after Zionist Defense Minister Benny Gantz said he had met with military leaders and "instructed the officials to deliver a firm message to UNIFIL following the attack".

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said he and Gantz had been "briefed" on developments and were overseeing Zionist response. Gantz said the government would "not allow the social, political and economic crisis in Lebanon to turn into a security threat to Zionist entity."

### 'No reason for panic'

Kiryat Shmona mayor Avichai Stern told army radio sirens that went off "in the middle of the day with no warning". Stern said firefighters were extinguishing a brushfire caused by rockets and that bomb shelters would be opened if needed.

"There is no reason for panic," Stern said. "We are ready for any scenario." The exchange of fire comes days after Zionists and other states accused Iran of carrying out an apparent drone attack on an Jewish-linked tanker off Oman that killed two crew members, and hinted at possible retaliation. Iran denied the allegation and warned it would "respond to any possible adventurism." — AFP



KIRYAT: Zionist regime's self-propelled howitzers fire towards Lebanon from the northern Jewish town of Kiryat Shmona yesterday. — AFP

## ASEAN names top Brunei diplomat as Myanmar envoy

YANGON: The Association of Southeast Asian Nations yesterday appointed an envoy to Myanmar after a months-long delay in diplomatic efforts to resolve the coup-hit country's political crisis. ASEAN's foreign ministers said in a joint statement, delayed by internal wrangling, that they welcomed the appointment of Brunei Second Foreign Minister Erywan Yusof as the bloc's special envoy.

Member state Myanmar has been in political chaos since the military junta ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's government in February, accusing it of fraud during 2020 elections. More than 900 people have since been killed in the junta's brutal crackdown on dissent, according to a local monitoring group.

ASEAN, which operates on a premise of consensus and non-interference, has been under global pressure to help resolve the crisis. Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing attended an ASEAN meeting in April that led to a "consensus statement" that called for an immediate end to violence and a regional special envoy. ASEAN's joint communique said the envoy's task will include "building trust and confidence" and he will have "full access to all parties concerned".

Yusof has already made one trip to Myanmar for ASEAN since the coup, on June 4, where he met with

Min Aung Hlaing. The appointment of an envoy is expected to clear the way for ASEAN to send emergency aid to help authorities cope with a severe Covid-19 outbreak.

Britain last week warned that half of Myanmar's population of 54 million could become infected within two weeks, and the UN estimates that only 40 percent of health facilities are able to function. Min Aung Hlaing has promised to hold elections and lift a state of emergency by August 2023, extending a timeline given shortly after the coup. — AFP



YANGON: In this file photo, protesters prepare to burn the flag of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) grouping, as they take part in a flash mob demonstration against the military coup in Yangon. — AFP

## South Sudan's VP Machar deposed by party: Rival leaders

JUMA: South Sudan's vice president Riek Machar has been ousted as head of his party and its armed forces, say rival leaders who accused the rebel-turned-politician of no longer representing their interests. Machar, a pivotal figure in South Sudan's bloody road to independence and subsequent civil war, was deposed following a three-day gathering of senior SPLM/A-IO leaders in the country's far north, the party's military wing said. Its chief of staff, First Lieutenant General Simon Gatwech Dual, was declared interim leader of the opposition movement that governs the troubled country in a shaky alliance with former enemies.

It is unclear what the putsch means for Machar, a wily leader who survived years of bush warfare, close attempts on his life and stretches in exile. The military wing said Machar had "completely failed" to show leadership and greatly weakened the party's position in the post-war coalition government formed between the warring sides in early 2020.

Machar had engaged in a years-long "policy of divide and rule" and favored nepotism over unity or advancing their cause, according to a statement signed by the SPLM/A-IO military leadership and dated August 3. "As a result, the meeting saw there was no option rather than to come up with the decision and finally prompted to declare the denouncement of Dr Riek Machar Teny Dhergon from the chairmanship of the SPLM/A-IO," the statement said.

### Political disunity

AFP has sought comment from Machar's spokesman in Juba. He served as vice president in South Sudan's first post-independence government alongside his old rival, President Salva Kiir.

But the pair fell out and Machar was sacked two years later. Troops loyal to each man turned their guns on each other, and South Sudan descended into five years of horrific bloodshed.

In 2018 — after a string of failed peace accords and violated ceasefires—a fresh truce paused the fighting that left nearly 400,000 South Sudanese dead. Under that arrangement, Machar entered another unity government as deputy to Kiir in February 2020. But distrust lingered and cracks soon appeared, as key provisions of the peace accords went unfulfilled. As the process drifted Machar faced growing opposition within his own ranks, with top cadres complaining they had lost out under the power-sharing arrangement struck with the ruling party. The political disunity comes as South Sudan faces economic disaster and its worst hunger crisis since independence, with tens of thousands of people enduring famine-like conditions in the world's youngest nation. — AFP

## Police officer killed in incident outside Pentagon

WASHINGTON: A police officer was killed at the Pentagon's mass transit terminal Tuesday in an incident that forced the lockdown of the US military headquarters, the Defense Department said. Employees in the Pentagon building in Arlington, a suburb of Washington, were ordered to shelter in place for more than an hour after gunfire erupted in the bus and subway station just yards (meters) from the entrance.

Officials said the site was secure 90 minutes after the incident but declined to explain what happened.

"The incident is over, the scene is secure, and most importantly there's no continuing threat to our community," said Woodrow Kusse, chief of the Pentagon Force Protection Agency, which patrols the iconic five-sided building. Kusse said there were "several injuries" but would not provide details or confirm reports that



NIEDERZISSEN, Germany: Sascha Hurtenbach, director of the waste management center in Niederzissen, western Germany, stands at the waste site. — AFP

## After historic floods, Germany grapples with mountains of debris

BERLIN: Near the villages devastated by historic floods in Germany last month, waste centers are struggling to sort a pile equivalent to a whole year's worth of refuse. "There's not been anything like it in Germany," Sascha Hurtenbach, director of the waste management center in Niederzissen, tells AFP, while behind him diggers work to reduce the size of the mounds of debris. "At the moment, we have about 35,000 tons of waste taken from the disaster zone here, and we've already taken the same amount to a landfill," Hurtenbach says.

"There's still a lot of debris sitting there."

The waste site in Niederzissen sits about 20 kilometers (12 miles) from the Ahr valley, where, on the night of July 14, the river burst its banks and the waters turned into a torrent. The villages along the Ahr, a tributary of the Rhine, were ravaged by the high waters and dozens of residents died.

Along the roads that lead to the valley, the mud has turned to dust and convoys of dump trucks have replaced the tourists that used to come here to enjoy the once picturesque surroundings. The remains of a broken life—washing machines, dishwashers, sofas, fridges, chairs—are piled one on top of another in the center at Niederzissen. They bear witness to the size of the catastrophe that left at least 186 people dead in the west of Germany. "We're full," says Hurtenbach. "We can no longer accept any more than what leaves during the day." At the peak of the clean-up operation, a lorry was arriving at the site in Niederzissen every minute.

And yet, what they have sorted so far is just the start. Construction materials, tree trunks and branches are still waiting to be taken away outside the houses affected by the floods. About 170 workers have been deployed to try to clear it all, more than four times the normal staffing. The site itself is operating seven days a week, but it is constrained by the availability of lorries to take waste on to landfill sites or specialized recycling centers. "I don't know how long we can last," Hurtenbach says. Of the 130,000 residents his center provides services for, only 30,000 have been directly affected by the floods. "For the others, we still need to empty their bins and pick up their waste as normal." — AFP

the officer was stabbed and died from his injuries, and that the attacker was shot dead.

"This fallen officer died in the line of duty, helping protect the tens of thousands of people who work in and who visit—the Pentagon on a daily basis," Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said in a statement.

"He and his fellow officers are members of the Pentagon family, and known to us all as professional, skilled and brave." Austin said the investigation into the incident is continuing and said it should "proceed unimpeded and without speculation." Subway services were temporarily suspended and buses headed to the station were diverted to other stops.

Scores of police gathered outside the George Washington University Hospital in Washington where the officer was taken. "The Pentagon currently is on lockdown due to an incident at the Pentagon Transit Center. We are asking the public to please avoid the area," the Pentagon's security force tweeted after the incident took place at about 10:37 am (1437 GMT). Arlington County emergency services said they encountered "multiple" people needing treatment at the scene, without providing any more information.—AFP



## International

# Afghanistan's elite special forces pushed to the brink

## Govt forces face intense Taliban test as foreign troops leave

**HERAT:** Trained by the United States and equipped with state-of-the-art gear, Afghanistan's special forces are its frontline weapon against the Taliban, but reduced American military support has stretched them to breaking point. With the US troop presence in Afghanistan effectively over, an accelerated Taliban offensive has gobbled up vast tracts of rural territory and laid siege to cities held by government forces.

The speed and scope of the campaign have placed enormous strain on the elite units, who have been constantly shuttled to hot spots where regular forces have buckled under the Taliban assault.

The head of Special Operations Command, Major General Haibatullah Alizai, says sharply diminished US air support has hindered operations. "It's more challenging these days. While we are fighting in most areas, on some frontlines, it is getting difficult. But we have no choice—it's our country," Alizai told AFP. The brutal killing of an elite group of special forces in June, after reinforcements failed to materialize, was a stark illustration of how squads can swiftly find themselves isolated and overrun.

### 'Never lost a battle'

Sporting night-vision goggles, US-made rifles and other modern combat equipment, Afghanistan's special forces stunned the Taliban when they first emerged in 2008. Their American trainers hailed them as a force to be reckoned with that could, eventually, help the Afghan government eradicate the Taliban and speed a US exit. "The special operations in Afghanistan have been uniquely created in our own image," Todd Helmus, a RAND Corporation analyst who spent time with soldiers on the ground in 2013, told AFP.

"They're very good. They're very well trained. They know how to shoot, move, and communicate."

In a country where training for local soldiers has often been rudimentary, drills for special forces were intense: 14 weeks of marksmanship, squad tactics, air assault, and live-fire exercises. Private contractors played a role. A now-expired online job ad by US defense giant Raytheon sought candidates to "organise, man, equip, and train" the Ktah Khas (KKA) — one of the most elite special forces divi-

sions made up of army, police, and intelligence agency units. Within a decade their numbers had ballooned—precise figures are classified, but two security sources told AFP there were around 56,000 special forces across the army, police, and intelligence services.

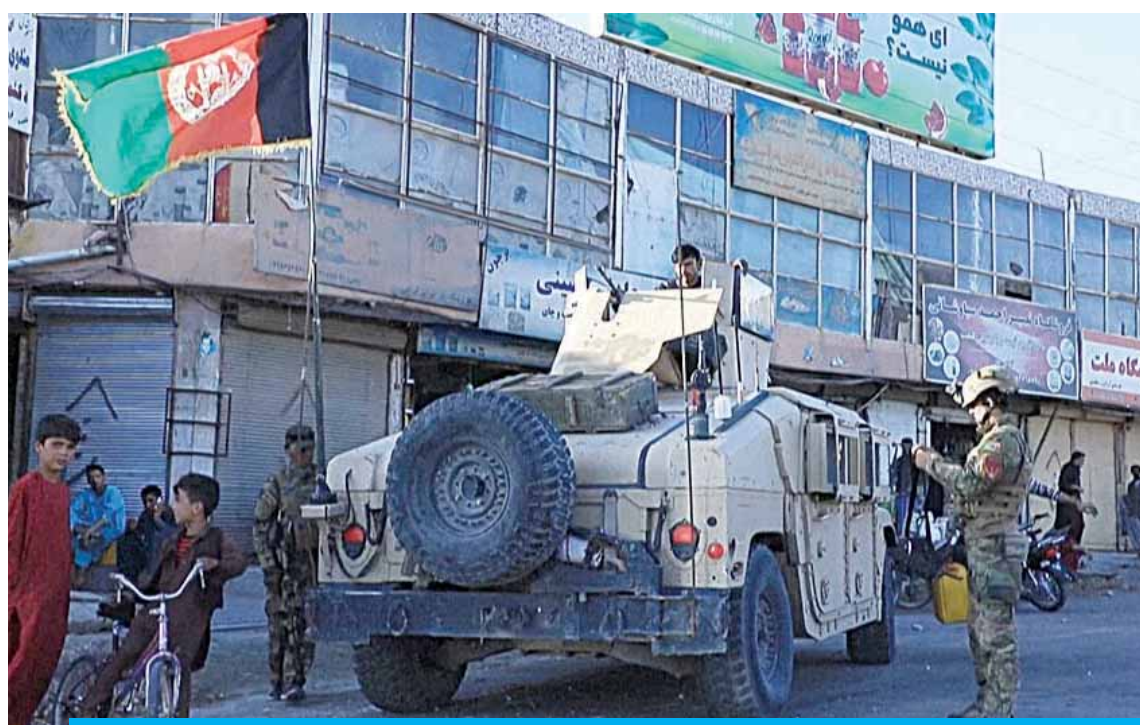
"These brave soldiers have never lost a battle. And they never will," then-commander of US forces in the country General John Nicholson said in 2017, the same year the elite unit grabbed headlines for its role in the killing of Abdul Hasib, the head of the Islamic State group in Afghanistan.

But while Major General Alizai told AFP they are now trained by other Afghans, analysts argue the special forces were always overly dependent on foreign assistance—from intelligence gathering to logistics—leaving them fundamentally vulnerable to a US and NATO pullout. "We're seeing the failure of that policy, now there's a natural recognition that obviously we need to train these units to fight on their own, so they don't need us anymore," RAND's Helmus said.

### 'Abandoned'

With the US withdrawal nearly complete, the elite units have become a last line of defense against sweeping Taliban advances. "The only thing that's degrading the Taliban's progress right now are the special forces and the air force," Vanda Felbab-Brown, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, told AFP. "And they are being overused, they are just being parachuted from one crisis area to another—suppressing the fire without putting out the fire."

Recent rapid deployments have defended Qala-i-Naw, the first provincial capital attacked by the Taliban since foreign forces began their pullout in May, as well as southern Kandahar and western Herat, to prevent the fall of provincial capitals there. In these hot spots, special forces have often found themselves over-stretched and without local reinforcement. In June, a unit of around two dozen special forces — sent to reinforce a flagging local defense—was overwhelmed by the Taliban in the northern province of Faryab. Footage posted online appeared to show them being executed after surrendering. Among those killed was Major Sohrab



**HERAT:** This video screen grab from AFPTV shows Afghan special forces patrol the streets of Herat as the Taliban continue a series of offensives against urban areas in Afghanistan Tuesday. —AFP

Azimi, a rising star in the Afghan army whose death prompted an outpouring of public anger over perceived military incompetence.

Taliban territorial gains have raised doubts about the Afghan military's strength with foreign troops all but gone—a showdown between two very different forces in which experts say morale could be as decisive as equipment and personnel. It is not a conventional military engagement, but one that pits a large army—raised and equipped by a super-power—against a smaller but well-supplied jihadist group backed by narco-dollars.

The United States has poured tens of billions of dollars into Afghanistan's defense forces, providing modern weapons and high-tech equipment, including night-vision goggles, attack helicopters, armored vehicles and surveillance drones.

With more than 300,000 personnel—police included—it is bigger and more advanced than the Taliban, who are mainly a guerrilla infantry with no air force. UN monitors estimated last year the insurgents had between 55,000 and 85,000 fighters. But numbers alone do not tell the whole story.

The Taliban mainly use weapons found easily in war-torn Afghanistan or procured from the black market, such as variants of the AK-47 assault rifle and other Soviet-designed arms. They have also captured Western-made weapons and equipment from the Afghan military, and have allegedly received material and advisory support from regional powers such as Iran and Pakistan. "The style of fighting they employ is a lot less logistically intensive," said Jonathan Schroden, a counterterrorism expert at the military think tank CNA. —AFP

## Ghana's #FixTheCountry protesters take to streets



**ACCRA:** A woman carries a placard during #fixthecountry protest in Accra, Ghana, yesterday. —AFP

**ACCRA:** Several thousand protesters marched in Ghana's capital Accra yesterday in the latest rally against President Nana Akufo-Addo's government under the slogan "#FixTheCountry". Dressed in red and black and chanting patriotic songs, protesters waved placards declaring "Corruption breeds poverty" and "Fix our education system now" as they marched in the city center. Yesterday's rally was the most recent anti-government protest since March, when a top court dismissed the main opposition party's challenge to Akufo-Addo's reelection late last year.

Akufo-Addo won a second term with only a small majority in parliament. But the Ghanaian leader has since been under pressure as the West African country struggles with economic troubles worsened by the coronavirus pandemic. "Nana Akufo-Addo, we're suffering. Do something for us. Nothing is working," said Frederick Koomson, a 28-year-old mobile-phone seller. "The government must wake up." Ghana is often applauded as one of the stable democracies in a region troubled by political strife and jihadist violence. But last year's tightly contested vote heightened political tensions.

With the economy hit hard by the pandemic, the government has introduced new taxes and high fuel prices have also hiked the cost of some basic goods and services. Lead by social media activists, the #FixTheCountry protest on Twitter has been highlight-

ing economic problems and government management. "If the political authorities will not fix this country, we want to tell them that we are capable of destroying their career because we brought them to power," said Fatima Mensah, a 35-year-old activist.

Some criticized Akufo-Addo's project to build a new \$200-million (169-million-euro) national cathedral, a pledge he says he made after his 2016 election victory.

Ghanians have been asked to make a voluntary \$16 monthly donation to help finish it by 2024. "Why do we waste time on unnecessary ventures and leave the most important issues?" asked Aboagye Dacosta, a shoe shiner. In May, police blocked a planned protest citing coronavirus restrictions. For yesterday's march, the police chief had guaranteed its safety, organizers said after meeting him. Many of yesterday's protesters were wearing face-masks. The main opposition party National Democratic Congress (NDC) last month rallied several thousand people in the capital. The NDC called both of last year's presidential and parliamentary election flawed and an "attack" on Ghana's democracy. In March, the Supreme Court dismissed a challenge by the electoral runner-up, NDC's John Mahama, who had asked for a rerun of the December 7 vote.

Akufo-Addo, from the New Patriotic Party (NPP), won 51.59 percent of the ballot ahead of Mahama, with 47.36 percent, according to official figures. —AFP

## 3 decades on, 'human shields'...

Continued from Page 1

society," he told AFP. Another, Margaret Hearn, 65, said: "I trusted British Airways. It makes you very angry. Luckily, I came out of it, but no thanks to them."

Reliving his time as a hostage, Manners, a landlord, said he befriended his captor, an engineer at Dukan Dam in northern Iraq, but constantly worried about food shortages and that the guards would be ordered to shoot prisoners. "You refuse to believe you're going to be released - you have these false dawns and it's debilitating," he said at the launch of Davis' book.

Manners burst into tears upon returning to London, after more than four months in captivity, but suffered from deteriorating mental health after his partner died in 1992. "There were times when nihilistic thoughts became

so intrusive. There was no joy in the world," he said. "It's difficult to know how much was bereavement and how much was trauma from Iraq - the two were a toxic combination."

Hearn was moved from Kuwait to Basra, Baghdad and two detention facilities in the Iraqi desert during five weeks of captivity. A photograph of her two young children always triggered tears, she recalled, but said boredom gradually replaced terror. "I was numb - you stop feeling things. You can't keep up that intensity of fear and worry," she added.

Hearn recalled detainees bonding with friendly guards through games of football, videos and food - in contrast to the "horror story" of assaults, mock executions and starvation Davis claims were inflicted on some prisoners. "We were just a gift to Saddam. I dealt with it by putting it in a box and not looking at it again," she said. "I never want to feel that frightened again."

Cardiologist Richard Balasubramanian, 49, was held for two weeks under house arrest in a Kuwaiti hotel. The Malaysian authorities organized evacuations, offering Balasubramanian an escape thanks to his

half-Malaysian family - but only after two scorching 20-hour bus journeys across the desert to Jordan. "It was surreal, scary, almost like you weren't there. We felt guilty about leaving the people who stayed behind," he recalled. "I lost my youth in Kuwait. I'm much more anxious for it. That joyous, carefree element I had before - I lost that."

Davis is supported by a former diplomat at Britain's embassy in Kuwait, who also claims senior politicians bypassed normal channels to force through an ill-conceived plan to move intelligence personnel. A two-hour delay to take-off at London's Heathrow Airport - supposedly due to air conditioning problems - allowed British staff to board at the last minute, Davis said. He added that the prime minister at the time, Margaret Thatcher, lied to parliament and BA threatened crew and passengers to hush up the affair. BA declined to respond to AFP's request for comment. The airline and Britain's defense ministry have always denied accusations of negligence, conspiracy and a cover-up. —AFP

## UK agency says 'hijack' of ship...

Continued from Page 1

as it headed towards the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's busiest waterways.

Richard Meade, editor of Lloyds List, told The Times that "armed forces" had boarded the vessel and had been "directing it towards Iran". British and US naval operations were monitoring the situation, Lloyd's List added. But Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said Tuesday that the "reported 'incidents' in the Persian Gulf and broader region appeared utterly suspicious". "Reaffirming our strong commitment to regional stability

and maritime security, Iran stands ready to offer assistance in case of any maritime accidents," Khatibzadeh added.

Washington short of assigning blame for the latest episode, but State Department spokesman Ned Price said there had been "a very disturbing pattern of belligerence from Iran". White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said the United States was in close touch with Britain over the "deeply concerning" incident.

While Iran has denied any involvement in last week's blast on the Liberian-flagged MT Mercer Street, the US and the Zionist entity both say an Iranian drone caused the explosion. Two crewmembers, from Britain and Romania, died on the MT Mercer Street, which is managed by prominent Zionist billionaire Eyal Ofer. Yesterday, Zionist Defense Minister Benny Gantz urged ambassadors in Jerusalem to "hold Iran accountable for its actions".

He named a senior Iranian in the elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps he said was responsible for attacking the tanker and other strikes. "Saeed Ara Jani is the Head of the IIRGC's UAV (unmanned aerial vehicle) Command. This is the man that is personally responsible for the terror attacks in the Gulf of Oman," Gantz said.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has vowed a collective response against Iran over the Mercer Street tanker incident, which he called a "direct threat" to freedom of navigation. The tensions come as Iran on Tuesday inaugurated the Islamic republic's eighth president, the ultraconservative cleric and prosecutor Ebrahim Raisi. He succeeded Hassan Rouhani, who sought to repair relations with the West, and whose administration unsuccessfully sought to negotiate a revival of a nuclear accord with the United States. —AFP

## Lebanese protest impunity a year...

Continued from Page 1

With public animosity running high against the political class, officials kept away from the remembrance service. At the march a year later, protesters clad in dark hooded robes paraded a mock guillotine. "My 'government' killed my people, took our homes and turned our city to dust," one woman's sign read.

Wafaa Karam, 37, mourned her brother, a nephew and a cousin, all firefighters killed last summer after they rushed to extinguish the fire that sparked the blast. "We want the truth," she said. The country's already reviled political class has hidden behind its proclaimed immunity to

avoid prosecution, stalling the lead investigating judge's work at every turn. Jeffrey Chartouni, a worker at the port's grain silos, said he wanted justice for his seven colleagues killed. "The security officials, the government, the customs, of course they all knew," the 32-year-old said.

Since the blast, the country has sunk deeper into economic crisis. With more than half the population now living under the poverty line, an international donor conference collected \$370 million in urgent aid for Lebanon yesterday, exceeding a \$350 million target. Former colonial power France pledged \$118 million and the United States promised \$100 million, at the latest conference to drum up humanitarian aid.

Amnesty International has accused the Lebanese authorities of "shamelessly obstructing" justice, while Human Rights Watch accused them of "criminal negligence". On Monday, relatives of blast vic-

tims called on authorities to lift immunity within three days, warning they were willing to "break bones" in upcoming protests.

According to foreign and Lebanese intelligence reports seen by AFP, hundreds of tons of fertilizer were carelessly stored in the same warehouse as tons of fireworks and rolls of detonating cord, among other dangerous materials. Lebanon's parliamentarians - some of whom have been nicknamed the "nitrate deputies" on social media - are ignoring intense international pressure and threats of sanctions.

The political class has also yet to agree on a new cabinet to replace the one that resigned after the explosion, a key condition to unlock any financial assistance to the cash-strapped state. Lebanon's descent into chaos had already started before the port blast, with a bankrupt state trapping people's savings in banks and the national currency nosediving on the black market. —AFP



# Business

THURSDAY, AUGUST 5, 2021

## German startups ride a boom in mini-launchers for small satellites

### Private sector space race, a challenge to SpaceX and Co

**AUGSBURG:** Car-manufacturing powerhouse Germany is rushing to join the private sector space race as it looks to ride a boom in mini-launchers for small satellites and compete with major US firms such as SpaceX.

Three projects in particular are making Germany a serious player in the race to provide mini-launchers for the increasing number of small satellites which observe the Earth and provide connectivity for the internet of things and smart vehicles. At the end of July, German company Rocket Factory Augsburg (RFA) carried out a first successful test of its "RFA One" rocket, igniting the engine for eight seconds at its development site in Kiruna, Sweden.

The rocket's "staged combustion" system is used by Elon Musk's SpaceX and Jeff Bezos's Blue Origin, but is yet to be rolled out in Europe. According to RFA's operational director Joern Spurmman, it allows "30 percent more payload to be put into orbit".

Another German firm, Baden-Wuerttemberg based Hylmpulse, has also made waves with a 20-second engine test on the Shetland Isles in May, using a candle-wax-based fuel to maximise efficiency.

"Our technology is advanced enough to serve the mini-launcher market," said Hylmpulse co-founder Christian Schmierer. Isar Aerospace, which is run from just outside Munich by three directors in their thirties, is yet to carry out its first engine test, but is the most well-financed of the three.

Backed by investors such as the Swiss bank Lombard Odier, venture capitalists HV Capital and holding company Porsche SE, the startup has amassed more than 150 million euros (\$180 million)

in funding, and is hoping to launch its "Spectrum" rocket for the first time in 2022.

#### Satellite taxis

Isar Aerospace predicts that the mini-launcher market will grow to "more than 30 billion euros by 2027, with small and medium-sized satellites making up around a third of it". Weighing only a few hundred kilograms, these small satellites are tiny compared to the machines of up to 10 tons which are sent into orbit by the European Space Agency's Ariane rockets. "A large rocket is like a long-distance bus which drops all its passengers at the same stop. A micro-launcher works like a taxi, placing the satellites exactly where the client wants them," explained Christian Schmierer of Hylmpulse.

According to Isar Aerospace founder Daniel Metzler, the smallest ones will be little more than "boxes of around 10 centimeters, weighing just one kilogram (2.2 pounds) and orbiting the Earth at 28,000 kilometers per hour." Reducing size and maximizing efficiency also means lowering costs.

"In time, we will be able to load 1.3 tons of material for five million euros, a price significantly lower than the competition at 3,850 euros per kilo," said RFA.

#### Henry Ford moment

The three German startups are aiming to eventually assemble a fleet of 20 to 40 partially reusable rockets, guaranteeing dozens of launches per year. Subcontractors in the automobile industry, many of whom are looking to diversify away from combustion engine vehicles, will provide engine parts for the rockets. "We want to create a Henry Ford moment for



**AUGSBURG, Germany:** A mechanic checks the cables on a tank of a rocket upper stage at Rocket Factory Augsburg in Augsburg, southern Germany. —AFP

space travel," said Spurmman, in reference to the American industrialist who revolutionized the production of cars in the early 20th century.

Yet Germany is far from the only country eyeing this lucrative market. SpaceX already puts mini-satellites into orbit in collaboration with NASA, while American rival Rocket Lab is among the pioneers of commercial extra-terrestrial flights. China is also active

in the sector, while there are half a dozen serious projects in Europe, including in Spain and the UK.

"The reliability of the different economic models will be a central question in the next three to five years," said Carla Filotico of German space industry consultants SpaceTec. The "consolidation of the sector" would probably leave some companies by the wayside, she added. —AFP

## Racial employment divide continues in recovering US economy

**WASHINGTON:** As vaccines help quell COVID-19 cases, millions of Americans have gone back to work-but fewer Black and Hispanic workers are being rehired, entrenching persistent inequalities in the United States. The divides are fueled by long-running employment discrimination, experts say, worsened by unique, virus-related disruptions that have left many jobseekers unable to find work they can get to, or feel safe doing.

"We haven't actually addressed those underlying power disparities in the economy," said Kate Bahn, director of labor market policy with the Washington Center for Equitable Growth. After skyrocketing to 14.7 percent in April 2020 when business restrictions to stop the virus from spreading were at their tightest, the US unemployment rate dropped to 5.9 percent in June, according to the Labor Department. But the gains were not shared equally: the jobless rate for Black workers was 9.2 percent and for Hispanics 7.4 percent, compared with 5.2 percent for whites.

The racial and ethnic employment gaps in the world's largest economy were present even when unemployment was at record lows before the pandemic. In Washington, the issue is receiving renewed attention from President Joe Biden, who has put forth massive spending plans he says will help reshape the economy and make it more inclusive. And the Federal Reserve has pledged to keep interest rates low for longer to increase hiring of racial minorities—something that took nearly a

decade following the 2008 global financial crisis.

"We all do better when the pie is bigger, and you get the pie bigger by being aggressive about this," William Spriggs, chief economist of the AFL-CIO trade union federation, told AFP.

#### 'Fixed disparity'

The Labor Department is due to release the latest employment report on Friday, which some economists expect will show the economy gaining over one million jobs in July, lowering the unemployment rate to 5.6 percent as more businesses reopen. The June data showed unemployment for white women was five percent, despite losing jobs last year at about the same rate as Black workers, who have seen much slower rehiring. The trend is similar for Hispanics.

"There is a fixed disparity between Blacks and whites in terms of being rehired," Spriggs said. A higher share of Black women are looking for jobs than white women, but large and small companies nationwide nonetheless complain they cannot find people fill open positions, especially skilled workers.

"These employers are all yelling we can't find workers, we can't find workers. Black women are more available and yet they're not hiring them," Spriggs said. "It's discrimination. Until we get serious about discrimination in hiring and discrimination in labor force, we just can't advance."

Scholars blame the disparity on factors that push Black and Hispanic workers into jobs that pay less and often put them most at risk of contracting COVID-19.

#### Virus still a threat

Walter L. Simmons, president and CEO of non-profit Employ Prince George's, which serves a mostly Black and Hispanic county outside

VDIK said. The slump is the first after four consecutive months of increasing registrations of new cars.

"The hoped for market recovery is still far off," said Peter Fuss, a partner at EY. "Despite the economy growing well and the fact only a few restrictions on public and economic life remain in place, the uncertainty is still large, particularly in light of the increasing case numbers and the sluggish vaccination campaign." The global shortage of semiconductors, which has been felt acutely by car manufacturers, is also a factor.

The effects of the chip crunch could also have a "significant impact" in the second half of the year, according to Fuss. The growth in the sale of electric vehicles slowed to 52 percent in July, in comparison with almost 300 per cent in June. Electric models represented 11 percent of all those sold, or 25,464 units in total. Hybrid car sales increased by 33 percent year on year, according to the KBA. —AFP



**WASHINGTON:** Reporters raise their hands after US President Joe Biden speaks about COVID vaccinations in the East Room of the White House in Washington, DC, Tuesday. —AFP

Washington, said the ongoing pandemic disruptions are keeping some people from taking jobs, or even looking for work. Bus and ride-sharing services have not yet returned to normal, meaning many jobseekers often cannot get to work. Childcare also has been curtailed, so working parents have to figure out what to do with their children.

Many people in Prince George's county live with extended family, and may be reluctant to take a job where they risk infection, Simmons said—a fear that has grown more acute as the highly-infectious Delta variant spreads. "Those are three areas we're seeing that nobody really has an answer for. They're just saying come back to work," Simmons said in an interview.

For now, jobless workers are able to survive off of expanded unemployment benefits authorized by the federal government, which pay some low-wage workers more than their previous jobs. —AFP



**DUISBURG:** An aerial view of new cars for sale at the harbor of Duisburg, western Germany. The German car market experienced a 25 percent drop in July 2021. —AFP

## US private hiring slows sharply in July to 330,000

**WASHINGTON:** Private hiring by American firms slowed sharply in July to 330,000, with dramatically lower gains in the construction and leisure and hospitality sectors, according to payroll services firm ADP. The result was far smaller than economists had expected and less than half of the 680,000 positions gained in June, which could be a worrisome sign ahead of the government's monthly jobs report due out Friday.

"The labor market recovery continues to exhibit uneven progress, but progress nonetheless," ADP chief economist Nela Richardson said in a statement. As pandemic restrictions have eased, allowing businesses like hotels and restaurants to reopen, the hard-hit leisure and hospitality sector has been hiring workers at a brisk pace since March, but the ADP report showed a gain of just 139,000 jobs last month — the biggest of any sector by far but less than half of June's figures. In recent weeks, rising infections from the fast-spreading Delta variant of COVID-19 have created uncertainty and caused some areas of the United States to again put in place mask-wearing rules. "The slowdown in the recovery has also impacted companies of all sizes. Bottlenecks in hiring continue to hold back stronger gains, particularly in light of new COVID-19 concerns tied to viral variants," Richardson said. "These barriers should ebb in coming months, with stronger monthly gains ahead as a result." In the dominant US services sector, hiring slowed in the trade, transportation and utilities professions, and in healthcare and education, while manufacturing added just 8,000 jobs and construction 1,000 following four months of double-digit gains. Economists are projecting employment gains of over 900,000 and as much as a million in the key Labor Department report, and though the ADP data are not always in sync with the official figures, the big miss could foretell weak monthly hiring overall. Rubeela Farooqi of High Frequency Economics noted the weakness in the ADP report, but said "job growth is set to pick up over coming months as the factors that are restraining labor supply presently — health concerns, child-care, supplemental unemployment benefits — ease." —AFP

## German car sales slump in July

**HAMBURG:** Sales of new cars in Germany were down significantly in July compared to the same month last year, official data showed yesterday. A total of 236,393 new cars were registered last month in Europe's largest car market — 25 percent fewer than during the same month last year, the KBA transport authority said. New registrations in July last year were particularly high due to an extra work day and the effects of a sales tax reduction, designed to counter the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic, the VDIK car importers' federation said in a press release.

Nonetheless, the figures represent the second lowest month for new car sales in Germany since 1991, the

## Belgium swoops on counterfeit cigarette gang

**BRUSSELS:** Belgian customs officers yesterday mounted their biggest-ever operation against counterfeit cigarette production, swooping on 10 illegal sites and making at least 40 arrests.

International gangs have turned

Belgium into a production hub for fake cigarettes, falsely packaged as leading brands and sold tax-free to smokers in neighboring countries, particularly Britain.

In a non-descript industrial park in Aartselaar, on a main road into the port city of Antwerp, officers arrested 18 men in a pre-dawn raid in an unmarked warehouse. The suspects, from eastern Europe, lived in a ramshackle dormitory inside the plant, working shifts to dry tobacco then pass it through cigarette-rolling machines. Some were

sleeping in their bunks when the armed officers burst in while others were running the machines.

They were led off in handcuffs as senior officers arrived with reporters. "While this depot was working 24 hours a day, the workers never left the plant, so as not to alert the neighborhood," said Florence Angelici, spokeswoman for the Belgian finance ministry in charge of the customs service.

Behind her, a partitioned section of the warehouse featured messy bunks, overflowing suitcases and signs of a

hastily abandoned breakfast. "They slept here, worked here, ate here, took their showers—they didn't leave for weeks, even months," she said. A vast stock of cigarettes was ready for shipment, apparently to Britain, with packages resembling popular Richmond and Marlboro brands and printed with standard UK health warnings in English. In total four production sites were found, alongside six more sites used for logistics, to shred raw tobacco or to store supplies like cigarette paper, filters and glue.

Some of the plants were in northern Belgium, in Tongeren, Eeklo and Frasnes-lez-Anvaing—close to the port and allegedly serving the gang's markets in Britain, France and the Netherlands. Officials processing the vast haul estimated they had seized tens of millions of cigarettes falsely branded as Marlboro, Richmond, Prince or Regina. The raids brought the number of illegal cigarette production sites closed down in Belgium so far this year to seven, more than the five raided in all of 2020. —AFP



## Business



The all-new EQS from Mercedes-EQ at The Avenues Mall.



# Al Mulla Automobiles hosts event to showcase new EQS from Mercedes-EQ

The all-new EQS merges passion for electromobility with a focus on luxury

**KUWAIT:** Al Mulla Automobiles Co, a member of Al Mulla Group and the sole authorized distributor of Mercedes-Benz in Kuwait, held a private roadshow event for the all-new EQS from Mercedes-EQ at The Avenues Mall.

The special event was organized to give invited guests a sneak peek at the EQS prior to its official arrival to Kuwait. The company utilized this occasion to give its esteemed guests a broad overview of the EQS, as well as a personalized tour of the vehicle and its features that make it the pinnacle of progressive luxury and technology in the electric vehicle category.



The event was attended by the CEO of Al Mulla Group Talal A Al Mulla, Imad Al-Flayhan, Managing Director of Automotive Group, along with the Director of Al Mulla Automobiles, Mercedes-Benz Kuwait, Steve Brown and members of the Al Mulla Group Board, and its respective senior executives.

Commenting on this occasion, Talal A Al Mulla, CEO of Al Mulla Group stated: "We are very excited to host this road show event for the new EQS from Mercedes-EQ. The EQS is one of the most highly anticipated new vehicles from Mercedes-EQ, as it is the first to use the new architecture for electric

vehicles in the progressive luxury and executive segment at Mercedes-Benz. The EQS will allow customers to fully benefit from all the advantages of an all-electric architecture with respect to space and design. At Al Mulla Automobiles, we are always delighted to offer our valued client base exclusive events that provide them with early access to the most sought-after vehicles. We hope to host many similar events in the near future."

The EQS is the first all-electric luxury sedan from Mercedes-EQ. With it, Mercedes-EQ is redefining the electric vehicle sector and pioneering the progressive luxury segment. The EQS is also the first model to be based on the modular architecture for luxury and executive-class electric vehicles. Fusing technology, design, functionality and connectivity, the EQS delights both drivers and passengers.

#### Aerodynamic design

Although the EQS is a close relative of the new S-Class, it is built on an all-electric architecture. This completely new concept, part of a drive towards progressive luxury, made a rigorous purpose design possible: with its one-bow lines and cab-forward design with fast-back, the EQS is clearly distinguishable from vehicles with combustion engines even at first glance. The design philosophy of Sensual Purity, combined with progressive luxury, is reflected in generously sculpted surfaces, reduced joints and seamless transitions (seamless design)

#### Electric efficiency of the next generation

With a range of up to 770 kilometers (WLTP) and an output of up to 385 kW, the powertrain of the EQS also meets every expectation of a new progressive, and luxury sedan in the S-Class segment. The EQS marks the launch of a



new generation of batteries with significantly higher energy density. The larger of the two batteries has a usable energy content of 107.8 kWh.

The EQS can be charged with up to 200 kW at fast charging stations with direct current. Power for up to another 300 kilometers (WLTP) is recharged in just 15 minutes. At home or at public charging stations, the EQS can be conveniently charged with up to 22 kW using the on-board charger.

#### Intelligent interior

The MBUX Hyper Screen is the absolute highlight of the car's interior. This large, curved screen unit sweeps almost from A-Pillar to A-Pillar. Three screens and appear to merge into one. The 12.3-inch OLED display for the front passenger gives him or her their own display and control area. The entertainment functions are only available while the car is being driven in accordance with the country-specific legal regula-

tions. Mercedes-EQ range relies on an intelligent, camera-based locking logic: if the camera detects that the driver is looking at the front passenger display, it is automatically dimmed. As an exceptionally intelligent vehicle, the EQS features up to 350 sensors, depending on the equipment. These record distances, speeds and accelerations, lighting conditions, precipitation and temperatures, seat occupancy as well as the driver's blink of an eye or the passengers' speech. This wealth of information is processed by control units that, controlled by algorithms, make decisions at lightning speed. They are the brains of the car, so to speak. The new EQS can expand its capabilities based on new experiences, and is highly capable of learning thanks to artificial intelligence (AI).

Navigation with Electric Intelligence plans the fastest and most convenient route, including charging stops, based on numerous factors and reacts dynami-

#### Groundbreaking and reliable: The assistance systems of the EQS

The latest generation of driver assistance systems include numerous driver support functions, such as the new, microsleep warning from Attention Assist. It analyses the driver's eyelid movements through a camera on the driver's display (only in conjunction with MBUX Hyper Screen). The assistance display within the driver's display shows the operation of the driving assistance systems in a full-screen view. The revolutionary Digital Light headlamp technology (standard from Advanced Plus equipment level) enables guide markings or warning symbols to be projected onto the road. Two new assistance functions display the start of the cooperative lane change and provide a warning/direction instruction if Lane Keeping Assist or Blind Spot Assist detect a hazard. Digital Light has a light module with three extremely powerful LEDs in each headlamp, whose light is refracted and directed by 1.3 million micro-mirrors. The resolution is therefore more than 2.6 million pixels per vehicle.

To register your interest and to get the latest news regarding the new EQS from Mercedes-EQ please visit Al Mulla Automobiles Mercedes-Benz showroom in Al Rai, Mercedes-Benz Boutique in The Avenues.





# AUB reports a net profit of \$298.6m

## A return on average equity of 13.8% for six months ended 30 June 2021

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank B.S.C. (AUB) reported a net profit attributable to its equity shareholders of \$138.9 million for Q2/2021, which represents a 13.9 percent increase over the Q2/2020 reported profit of \$122.0 million driven by an increase in net interest income and lower level of provisioning. The Basic and Diluted Earnings per Share were US 1.2 cents in Q2/2021 versus US 1.0 cents in Q2/2020. Comprehensive income attributable to the owners of the bank for Q2/2021 was \$162.9 million (Q2/2020: \$194.3 million, -16.1 percent). Net interest income was \$214.7 million in Q2/2021 (Q2/2020: \$192.9 million, +11.3 percent) and total operating income was \$261.2 million in Q2/2021 (Q2/2020: \$256.8 million, +1.7 percent).

AUB reported a net profit attributable to its equity shareholders of \$298.6 million for the first half of year 2021 which represents a 1.7 percent increase over the H1/2020 reported profit of \$293.4 million mainly driven by an increase in net interest margins and lower provisioning requirements given the exceptional precautionary provisions raised in H1/2020 to adjust with the heightened levels of macro-economic and sectoral risks following the out-break of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Basic and Diluted Earnings per Share in

H1/2021 were US 2.8 cents, compared to US 2.7 cents in H1/2020. Comprehensive income attributable to the owners of the bank for H1/2021 was \$337.8 million (H1/2020: \$157.3 million, +114.7 percent). Net interest income for H1/2021 was \$421.7 million (H1/2020: \$406.7 million, +3.7 percent) primarily due to improved spreads, reduced liquidity premia and stable market conditions. Total operating income for the H1/2021 was \$552.2 million (H1/2020: \$575.6 million, -4.1 percent).

The group's equity attributable to owners at 30 June 2021 increased by 4.8 percent to \$4.2 billion (31 December 2020: \$4.0 billion). Return on Average Equity for H1/2021 increased to 13.8 percent (H1/2020: 13.6 percent). The AUB Group's total assets as at 30 June 2021 marginally increased (+1.0 percent) to \$40.5 billion (31 December 2020: \$40.1 billion) reflecting prudent balance-sheet growth compatible with prevailing operating environment in its main markets. Return on Average Assets was sustained at 1.6 percent for H1/2021 (H1/2020: 1.6 percent).

The non-performing loans ratio was lower at 2.5 percent (31 December 2020: 2.6 percent) with specific provision coverage of 83.9 percent (31 December 2020: 85.9 percent). Provision coverage levels are calculated on a cash provision basis

excluding the value of the substantial additional non-cash (real estate and securities) collaterals available against non-performing loans.

The cost to income ratio for H1/2021 was 27.9 percent (H1/2020: 27.4 percent) reflecting AUB's entrenched intelligent spend approach and the impact of the operational efficiencies achieved and digitization initiatives as part of the AUB group's overall transformation plan.

The AUB Chairman, Meshal Al-Othman, commented "Global and regional economies are showing signs of recovery encouraged by the progressive roll-out of vaccines for COVID-19. Uncertainty remains due to the risk of new mutant waves and their implications on different countries which are gradually opening up the free movement of people locally and internationally. Against the backdrop of the still evolving pandemic, AUB achieved very satisfactory performance in the first half of 2021 and is carefully planning its next steps



Meshal Al-Othman

for the balance of the year".

He added, "Despite the continuing general volatility, the AUB group took important steps in advancing its strategic agenda by increasing its stake in AUB Egypt from 85.5 percent to 95.7 percent through a share tender offer and through raising a very successful heavily oversubscribed \$600 million Additional Tier -1 Capital issue at AUB Kuwait."

Ahli United Bank (AUB) is a leading pan-regional financial services provider, incorporated in Bahrain in May 2000. It offers a full range of retail, commercial and private banking and wealth management services, both conventional and Sharia-compliant, across the MENA region and the UK. AUB operates through its Bahrain head office and its subsidiaries in Kuwait, Egypt, Iraq, and the UK as well as its associates in Oman and Libya; and branch in the UAE (DIFC).

The key shareholders of AUB are the Public Institution for Social Security, Kuwait (18.86 percent stake) and Social Insurance Organization, Bahrain (10.01 percent stake). AUB's strong performance has earned it a string of prestigious local and regional accolades over the years, including: "Best Bank in the Middle East" by The Banker (2006, 2016) and by Euromoney (2007, 2012).

## KIB reports KD 2.2 million profit for first half of 2021

KUWAIT: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) announced its financial results for the first six months of 2021, achieving KD 34 million of operating income, compared to KD 29 million recorded at the end of the same period last year with a growth of 16 percent, a reflection of the bank's stable financial performance during this period. The financial results highlight that KIB continues to enhance its competitive edge in the banking and financial sector, whilst seeking to maintain growth across its key financial indicators and preserving the stability of its financial returns. KIB also remains committed to strengthening its financial position as a key player in the capital markets and to developing and expanding its financing footprint on the local, regional and international level.

Accordingly, during the first half of the year, KIB reported a net profit attributable to Shareholders of KD 2.2 million compared to KD 103k in the similar period of 2020.

Commenting on the Bank's financial results, the Bank's Chairman, Sheikh Mohammed Jarrah Al-Sabah, stated that KIB's financial statements have shown that the Bank's assets grew by 5 percent to reach almost KD 2.9 billion, comparable to KD 2.7 billion at the end of June 2020. This growth was the



Sheikh Mohammed Jarrah Al-Sabah

Raed Jawad Bukhamseen

creditworthiness, KIB continues to be committed to providing high-quality, Sharia-compliant financing and financial advisory services, designed specifically to respond to the fast-paced and ever-changing needs of KIB customers. He also noted that KIB is actively striving to contribute to the sustainable growth and development of infrastructure.

Al-Jarrah further pointed to KIB's eagerness when it comes to taking part in investment opportunities, deals and prominent financial transactions, a reflection of KIB's growing investment banking capabilities on a local and regional level. He said "We seek to play an active role in the investment landscape and the capital market, both in Kuwait and the GCC, through the issuance of high-level sukuk, which have become an important part of the global finance market, as it offers solutions to face a range of challenges posed by the current economic situation".

In this context, Al-Jarrah mentioned that KIB recently acted as a Joint Lead Manager in the



diversification objectives."

Elaborating further, Bukhamseen noted that the Sukuk contributed to strengthening KIB's long-term financing base and increasing the capital ratios in accordance with (Basel 3) standards, which was reflected in the capital adequacy standard ratio to reach 20.53 percent significantly exceeding the minimum levels required by the Central Bank of Kuwait. Fitch Ratings assigned KIB Sukuk a long-term credit rating of "A-", and a long/short-term credit rating of "A+/F1" for the Bank's Sukuk program.

Bukhamseen also mentioned that, Fitch Ratings, in its report issued in May 2021 has affirmed KIB's Long-term Issuer Default Rating (IDR) at 'A+' and viability rating (VR) at 'bb-', with a negative outlook.

Concluding both their statements, Al-Jarrah and Bukhamseen lauded the collective efforts of KIB's employees and praised the performance of the entirety of the Bank's team as they continued to drive towards delivering the best-in-class banking services to customers, especially during these challenging times. They both stressed that these efforts contributed to maintaining the confidence of shareholders and customers in the Bank's ability to achieve excellent financial results and perform its role effectively, adding: "We look forward to achieving further growth in shareholder returns in the next period, and expand our customer base by continuing to offer an exceptional banking experience to our customers."

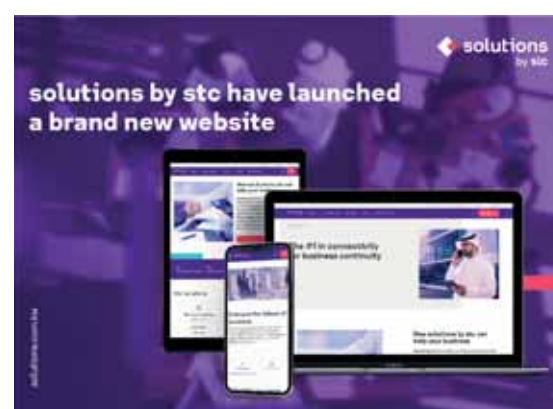
\$600 million perpetual Tier 1 Sukuk issuance for Ahli United Bank (AUB), alongside several regional and international banks and financial institutions. On his part, Vice Chairman and Chief Executive Officer at KIB, Raed Jawad Bukhamseen, said: "KIB achieved growth in its financial position during the second quarter of 2021, with total assets reaching nearly KD 2.9 billion at the end of the second quarter of this year. Distribution rates on depositors' accounts recorded good annual returns by the end of the second quarter of this year, reflecting the Bank's success in achieving its profitability and

fixed and mobility customers by taking advantage of the services offered by stc. These include SMEs, large enterprises, corporates within the oil & gas sector, as well as government entities. B2B customers will gain access to a wide variety of products coupled with the latest offers in the Kuwaiti market to support their diverse business functions.

In terms of the solutions showcased on the new business website, solutions by stc added pre-defined bundles catering to different market segments, as well as options to customized packages based on customer preference. The website will also include a product list for customers to select from with lead forms that can be filled for specific solutions, in which the requestor will be contacted by a customer service agent. Service visits can also be arranged through the site with the option to be contacted by solutions by stc's pre-sales team. Customers experiencing any difficulties while using the website can use the live chat option or request further assistance under the contact us section.

solutions by stc stated that the new website aims to further enhance the quality of service provided to its valued customers while granting seamless access to the range of solutions offered under its extensive product line. These solutions include connectivity options including fixed or wireless services, 5G technology through stc, ICT, Cloud, IoT, IT, and cyber security. Developed with simplicity in mind, the highly responsive platform will allow users to seamlessly navigate through the various offerings with minimal loading periods and manage their accounts securely and with ease.

Launching the new website also falls in line with solutions by stc's commitment to deliver modern



technological platforms that elevate the user and service experience, now accessible through (www.solutions.com.kw). When developing the platform, solutions by stc used a design thinking model to identify the core needs of its customers and deliver based on those needs, similar to the one its users when introducing new concepts to the market.

Following the launch of the new business website, solutions by stc will continue to enhance the UI/UX experience, while updating the offering line to reflect the latest bundles and solutions introduced by the Company. Additionally, solutions by stc will continue searching for innovative methods in both digital and cloud-based solutions that can be applied to existing applications to satisfy the growing demand for personalized solutions. Through its one-stop business model, solutions by stc will continue to offer the latest technologies introduced in the tech-world, serving as the preferred gateway to its customers through digital innovation.

## KIPCO to raise its capital through a rights issue

KUWAIT: KIPCO - the Kuwait Projects Company (Holding) - announced that it intends to raise its issued and paid up capital from KD 200,000,000 to KD 264,000,000 through a rights issue. KIPCO's Board of Directors met yesterday and approved the rights issue, subject to completing procedures required by the regulatory authorities. The rights issue will be open to existing shareholders, offering 640,000,000 shares at a price of 125 fils per share (including the nominal value of 100 fils per share and the issuance premium of 25 fils). Faisal Al-Ayyar, KIPCO's Vice Chairman (Executive), said: "As our core businesses continue to grow through new investments and acquisitions, KIPCO seeks to support this by raising its own capital. Subject to business requirements, our financial services' businesses will be completing rights issues this year after obtaining regulatory approvals. KIPCO's capital increase will ensure the healthy growth of our core companies and will contribute to maintaining a balanced capital structure."

## Pinoy Fiesta 2021, a celebration of Philippine foods at LuLu Hypermarket

KUWAIT: LuLu Hypermarket, the largest retailer in the region and recognized as being among the most powerful retailers in the world, launched its much-awaited Pinoy Fiesta 2021- an annual celebration of the best of foods from the Philippines. The week-long promotion which runs from 4 to 10 August at all outlets of LuLu Hypermarket in the country, highlights the Philippines as a major new global gastronomic destination, and features high-quality branded food products from the country at very special prices.

Large cut-outs and posters of popular tourism and heritage sites, traditional buildings and iconic structures of the Philippines that are prominently displayed at the foyer in all outlets of the hypermarket, add allure to the food festival while also promoting tourism to the island nation.

Among the popular brands on offer at amazing prices are food products from such well-known brands as Alaska, Blue Bay, Century, Datu Puti, Delmonte, Ding Dong, Fibisco, Fiesta Pinoy, Hobe, Jack N Jill, Julfran, Ligo, Lily S, Mama Sita's, Monde, Mother's Best, My San, Newton, Oishi, Silver Swan, and Ufc among others. Pinoy Fiesta 2021 is proving to be a perfect platform that showcases the variety and extensive range of Philippines' food and cuisine. The week-long festival, which celebrates the best of Philippine foods, is part of LuLu Hypermarket's continuing commitment to introduce shoppers in Kuwait to the tantalizing tastes and flavors of international foods and cuisines.

By consistently bringing high-quality food products and other goods from around the world, and offering them to shoppers in Kuwait at amazingly competitive prices, LuLu Hypermarket has further entrenched its position as the shopping destination of choice for discerning customers in the country.



## solutions by stc launches its all-new business website

KUWAIT: solutions by stc, the specialized business arm of Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, announced the launch of its all-new business website featuring a new look and feel, as well as innovative features that complement the one-stop-business experience for B2B customers.

solutions by stc released a statement indicating that the new website is designed with the objective of delivering a world-class experience for customers, meeting their diverse business needs through improved access to a variety of solutions. The Company applied the latest cutting-edge technology, innovative online tools, and the best practical methods when developing the website to ensure a seamlessly well-rounded journey for users. The navigation features have been redefined to accommodate the business account management tools to execute actions with great efficiency and reliability. This will allow users to conveniently manage their own services on a simple and responsive platform without having to visit a branch or contact a customer service agent.

Launching the new website came as a natural progression following the rebranding of Qualitynet to solutions by stc. Additionally, the growth in solutions by stc's customer base encouraged the development of a revamped platform that caters to both



Lifestyle | Features

## Boffin Barbie: Toy creator honors vaccine co-creator

Toy giant Mattel said yesterday it hoped to "inspire the next generation" after creating a model of its iconic Barbie doll in honors of Sarah Gilbert, co-creator of the Oxford/AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine. Gilbert said she found the news "very strange" but hoped "children who see my Barbie will realize how vital careers in science are to help the world around us. "My wish is that my doll will show us children careers they may not be aware of, like a vaccinologist."



An undated handout picture shows Sarah Gilbert posing with a Barbie doll in her image. — AFP

The toy company created models in honors of five other women in the sciences: US healthcare workers Amy O'Sullivan and Audrey Cruz, Canadian campaigner Chika Stacy Oriuwa, Brazilian researcher Jaqueline Goes de Jesus, and Australian medic Kirby White. "Barbie recognizes that all frontline workers have made tremendous sacrifices when confronting the pandemic and the challenges it heightened," said Lisa McKnight, senior vice president of Barbie and dolls at Mattel.

"To shine a light on their efforts, we are sharing their stories and leveraging Barbie's platform to inspire the next generation to take after these heroes and give back. "Our hope is to nurture and ignite the imaginations of children playing out their own storyline as heroes." — AFP

## Jessie Cave's heartbreaking costume fittings

Jessie Cave says she is terrified of fittings after a costume director implied she needed to lose weight. The 34-year-old actress refused to name the project but admitted the actions of the costume director left her deeply hurt and upset when they grabbed her stomach to indicate the need to drop some pounds. She told The Observer: "It was just horrible. And I laughed. You're like: 'Oh, you're hurting me. Actually, it's fine.' That kind of stuff stays with you. Now I go into the costume fitting for any job and I'm terrified. I'm prepared to be told something unkind. You're treated like a different type of thing; you're not somebody with feelings who has thought about what pants they're going to wear that day because they're going to be seen. "Now when they're nice to me, and they are sensitive to how I may be feeling about my body, or that I may be breastfeeding or whatever, I almost cry. "I've definitely considered losing weight - and when I have lost weight, I tend to get a part. I mean, it's not rocket science. But I eat healthily, I'm a normal-sized woman, and I'm still regarded, probably, as a fat actress." Jessie is best known for playing Lavender Brown in the 'Harry Potter' films but admitted she never felt she was the right fit for the role. She said: "I was not a right fit for the industry at that time. Lavender Brown is conventionally pretty, no glasses, small. By the time I went back to do the last film, I had gained a bit of weight and I wasn't that person anymore."



John Cena attends the Warner Bros. premiere of 'The Suicide Squad' at Regency Village Theatre in Los Angeles, California. — AFP photos



Cast and crew including Nathan Fillion, Storm Reid, Margot Robbie, John Cena, James Gunn, Michael Rooker, Jai Courtney, and Daniela Melchior attends the Warner Bros. premiere of 'The Suicide Squad' at Regency Village Theatre in Los Angeles, California.

## 'The Suicide Squad' seeks redemption for DC supervillains-and director

When James Gunn was asked to direct the next DC superhero film, he didn't pick an icon like Superman, Batman, or Wonder Woman. He chose the rag-tag group of Z-list villains known as "The Suicide Squad." Gunn's R-rated romp brings back familiar faces like Margot Robbie's Harley Quinn in a sequel-of-sorts to the near-identically named 2016 "Suicide Squad"-which saw anti-heroes join deadly US government missions to shave time off their prison terms. And then there are some more obscure newcomers... like Polka Dot Man. "I literally put into Google, 'who is the dumbest super villain of all time?' And Polka Dot Man always came up near the top," said Gunn. "Being able to take a character like that and then give him heart was fun for me," Gunn told a recent virtual press event for the film, out Friday. Gunn's approach to choosing his gallery of expendable rogues might at first seem

unlikely to inspire confidence among money-counting Warner Bros executives. Even David Dastmalchian, the actor playing him and a self-avowed comic book nerd, initially "had no freaking clue who Polka Dot Man was."

But the first film's success suggests that plumbing the comic book world's depths for less-than-mainstream characters does not hurt in terms of movie popularity. The original "Suicide Squad" shrugged off poor reviews to take almost \$750 million at the global box office. Like the first film, "The Suicide Squad" has its share of big-name actors-Will Smith and Jared Leto have moved on, but are replaced by John Cena, Idris Elba and Sylvester Stallone, who appears as the voice of a half-man, half-shark. According to Elba, playing Bloodsport-a "character that wasn't as well-defined as a personality"-allowed the actors more freedom. "It was 'let's find a character who's obscure,

who we can build as our own cinematic creation for Idris," agreed Gunn.

### 'Take risks'

The film's blend of risk-taking and redemption mirrors the path of its director. Gunn, a cult director and writer who penned Zack Snyder's "Dawn of the Dead" 2004 re-make, hit the mainstream with Marvel's wildly popular "Guardians of the Galaxy" films. But he was unceremoniously fired by parent company Disney in 2018 when old tweets emerged in which he made crude jokes about the Holocaust, AIDS and rape. Warner swooped in to poach Gunn for their rival DC superhero films.

After apologies and a groundswell of support from Hollywood collaborators including Chris Pratt, Gunn is back on board with Marvel too-he is set to direct 2023's "Guardians of the Galaxy 3." "You don't expect people to have your back...

that was an eye-opener for me," Gunn told the New York Times recently. "When Warner Bros. comes to me on the Monday after it happens and says, we want you, James Gunn, you think, wow, that feels good to hear." Describing "The Suicide Squad" as a "Dirty Dozen" style war film blended with dark comic book humor, Gunn told journalists that he had "felt the responsibility to take risks" and avoid using "the same boring three-act structure every time."

Indeed, the film features a 200-foot pink starfish as a primary villain. "It does seem like big movies are the ones that people are going to see in theaters" as the pandemic eases, he added. "If they don't continue to take risks and change and try new things, then people aren't going to want to be coming to the theaters."-AFP



(From left) Joel Kinnaman, James Gunn, Margot Robbie, and John Cena attend the Warner Bros. premiere of "The Suicide Squad" at Regency Village Theatre.



Actress Storm Reid arrives for the premiere of "The Suicide Squad".

## Kors 'never dreamed' of his fashion success

Michael Kors "never dreamed" he would be as successful as he has been. The 61-year-old fashion designer created his eponymous clothing company 40 years ago and admitted that he never thought it would be a worldwide brand. He told WWD: "40 years in, to see men and women around the world wearing my designs - in a million years, I never dreamed. Toronto was my idea of a foreign city. But, of course, at the time, I thought 30 was old. So it's all relative." Kors and his husband Lance LePere have spent the summer "revenge traveling," in Greece and Italy and attending live shows in New York to make up for the COVID-19 lockdown last year. He said: "We're doing it all. We've seen 'Springsteen on Broadway,' which was spectacular and exciting to see him back, and we did

Shakespeare in the Park just the other night. It's a precarious time, but I think there's real pent-up excitement and desire to be together, communal. Community - [shows] are all about that, fashion's all about that. I know women who are just excited to be able to put on a pair of heels and get out and get dressed." Michael recently celebrated his milestone 40 years in the industry with a dinner co-hosted by Lizzie Tisch and Naomi Watts. Tisch said: "He's highly enjoyable. The fact that he's been in business - specifically that business - for 40 years is quite an accomplishment."



## Khloe Kardashian planning to get a pet cat for True

Khloe Kardashian wants to get her daughter True a pet cat to help her settle into their new home. The 'Keeping Up with the Kardashians' star and her three-year-old girl are due to move into their new pad in the coming months, but Khloe has never had a pussy before, so she's been researching "good kitten rescues" in Los Angeles and asked her followers for some advice. But as a dog person, who was heartbroken when

her "fur baby" Labrador, Gabbana, passed away in January 2018, when she was pregnant with True, Khloe has admitted she will probably end up getting a kitten and a pooch. The Good American co-founder tweeted: "My fur baby Gabbana passed away when I was 6 months pregnant. Emotionally, I wasn't ready for another fur baby. But now that True is getting older I figured I would get her a dog once we got settled into the new house. I desperately miss my Goober, it's been over 3 years and I'm finally ready. I know a dog would be a great addition to our home. Butttt Miss True has a love for cats and wants a cat. I have never owned a cat before. I don't know anything about cats. I've been researching for weeks (literally). I've been trying to persuade her to

get a dog but she's not falling for it. Soooooo does anyone know of any good kitten rescues in Los Angeles." The 37-year-old reality star continued: "I have a few more months until I move. So I'm trying to look into shelters and still do a little more research until then. I'm sure a move can be a little jarring for a three year old, so I'm trying to get the kitten around move-in time so True is excited for the new house." And when one follower suggested she should get both a dog and a cat, she replied: "I have a feeling I may end up doing both. I know how much I miss Gabbana. Not that I want to replace her but I loved that connection with my dog. So maybe I'll get her a cat and me a dog LOL."



## Hugh Jackman gets a nose biopsy

Hugh Jackman has undergone a biopsy on his nose. The 52-year-old actor - who has been treated for skin cancer six times in the past - has revealed he underwent a minor medical procedure after his "amazing" dermatologists spotted something "irregular" on his hooter during his routine check-up earlier this week. Taking to his Twitter account on Monday, he said: "I just went to see Lisa and Trevor, my amazing dermatologist and doctors. They saw something that was a little irregular so they took a biopsy, getting it checked. So if you see a shot of me with this on, do not freak out. Thank you for your concern. I'll let you know what's going on but they think it's probably fine." The 'Greatest Showman' star previously called himself an "idiot" for not wearing sunscreen when he was younger and has advised his fans to take precautions to prevent themselves from being exposed to the harmful rays of the sun. He said: "Don't be like me. Wear sunscreen, I'm the idiot who didn't wear sunscreen at all. "I have English parents but it doesn't matter actually what skin type you



are, everyone is susceptible and you know, just be smart. "It's the most preventable disease in the world so do not take my example or you can take my example now and wear sunscreen." Hugh was first diagnosed with basal cell carcinoma in 2013 and has had check-ups every three months since. He explained in 2015: "It's the new normal for me. My doctor says I'll likely have more, and if that's your cross to bear in life, you should be so lucky. It's always a bit of a shock just hearing the word cancer. Being an Australian it's a very common thing. "I never wore sunscreen growing up so I was a prime candidate for it."





This picture shows a member of the Yunnan Forest Brigade monitoring a herd of migrating elephants from the command center in Daqiao in southwest China's Yunnan province. — AFP photos



This picture shows members of the Yunnan Forest Brigade operating a drone to monitor a herd of migrating wild Asian elephants at the command center in Daqiao.

## WITH DRONES AND BANANAS, CHINA COAXES WAYWARD ELEPHANTS HOME

First the entire village is shooed indoors, its power supply is cut, and finally bananas and other elephant treats are dumped on the opposite side of town to coax the unwanted guests to pass through. So goes the routine welcome ceremony for China's wayward herd of 14 wild elephants, whose wandering ways have sparked an unusual operation aimed at steering them home across steep, winding, and often populated terrain.

The group left its home range far south near the Laos border 16 months ago for a grand food tour across rich farmland bursting with corn, sugarcane, bananas and dragon-fruit in southeastern Yunnan province. The Chinese public has delighted in the elephants' antics, including parading down city streets, guzzling grain alcohol and dozing en masse in a field.

### Jumbo task

But it's a jumbo task for the three dozen Yunnan forestry firefighters charged with shepherding the elephants safely home-tracking night-moving animals that can disappear into thick forest and trek up to 30 kilometers (18 miles) a

day. It's the furthest north that China's wild Asian elephants have travelled in recorded times, said Yang Xiangyu, a task force leader. "Before this, we only saw elephants in the zoo or on television," he said. Alarmed officials formed the task force in May, as the elephants neared Kunming, the regional capital.

Using drones to keep tabs on the animals, they sleep out in the subtropical air or in their vehicles. On a recent morning team members stood before a large-screen TV in a temporary village headquarters as front-line colleagues beamed back the day's first images. As white clouds parted, unmistakably elephantine gray-brown outlines appeared down in a forest clearing near a village, their trunks probing around for a final snack before bedding down during the daytime heat. They stir again around dusk, and their trackers move with them. When they approach a village, loudspeakers and door-to-door checks urge locals to shut themselves in, preferably upstairs, out of reach of the hungry visitors.

Power supplies are cut to prevent the elephants from electrocuting themselves

or sparking fires, and vehicles are parked across roads behind the herd or on side routes to keep them moving forward, preferably south. Once through, their new location is plotted, the weary task force redeploys and the circus resumes the following dusk.

### Smart and deadly

The elephants have dazzled their chaperones with their intelligence. A mature female leads, always finding the best path toward food and water or the safest point across a stream, Yang said. They use tree branches gripped in their trunks to help comrades scratch a hard-to-reach itch, swat bugs, or seemingly draw designs on the ground. Mud is employed as sunscreen, they may fashion a crude "sunhat" out of vegetation, and their dexterous trunks can turn on a faucet, open a door, or lift covers off water wells for a drink, Yang said.

There are three juveniles, two born during the odyssey, officials said. Adult elephants have been seen using their huge bulk to crush down traffic guardrails so the youngsters can clamber over them.

China's state-controlled media has cast them as the lovable protagonists in a national lesson on conservation. But the elephants, which can weigh up to four tons and sprint as fast as Usain Bolt, are also extremely dangerous, particularly if they sense a threat to their young. Two of them who earlier broke for home trampled a villager to death in March, said Chen Mingyong, a Yunnan University elephant-behaviour expert attached to the task force. The fatality appears not to have been reported. "This needs to be faced squarely. The Asian elephant is a wild beast and we have to keep a safe distance," Chen said. Media are kept away from the animals on safety grounds.

### Mystery migration

Why the elephants began their trek remains a puzzle. Possible explanations include tighter competition for resources due to an increase in wild elephants in their home range. Climate change may also be subtly affecting their habitat, Chen said, or fluctuations in the earth's electromagnetic field could have thrown off their finely-tuned navigational sense, or they

may have simply taken a wrong turn. Researchers are particularly stumped over why the skilled navigators made a nearly straight beeline for Kunming before angling back south a couple months ago. Elephants typically circle around in their hunt for food, Chen said.

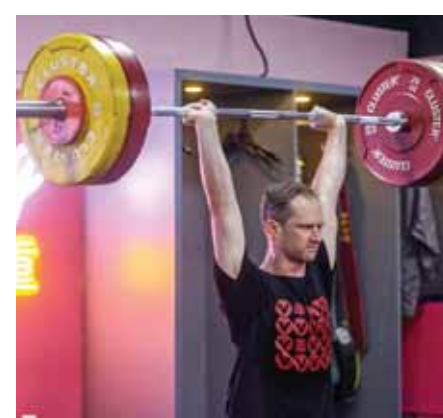
"There have been many behaviors for which we previously have not had sufficient data." They've travelled more than 700 kilometers, Yang said, and though now pointed homeward, still have several hundred more to go. And the smart foodies appear to be slowing, unwilling to rush through the cornucopia ripening around them in the summer sun, Chen said. But cool autumn weather is expected to eventually hasten them home, a bittersweet prospect for Yang and his team, who have become attached to the gate-crashers. "As soon as (trackers) see the elephants on our monitors, they feel very happy despite the hard work and toil," he said. — AFP



This photo shows a weightlifter competing at Venus Weightlifting gym in Shanghai. — AFP photos



This photo shows weightlifter Lu Siyao competing at Venus Weightlifting gym.



This photo shows weightlifter James Brennan competing at Venus Weightlifting gym.

## 'Problematic' Greenland polar bear may be shot

A polar bear in Greenland may be shot dead next time it endangers people after several close encounters, including one where it bit the hand of a documentary team member, authorities said. The attack on the documentary team near an army base comes as the autonomous Danish Arctic territory experiences a record heatwave and as polar bears wander further for food. Early on Monday, while the sun does not set in summer at this latitude, the bear poked his head through a poorly closed window of a research station where the documentary team was staying about 400 meters from the small base of Daneborg. A Danish Arctic military unit based in Greenland said the bear bit the hand of one of the three male team members before they used warning pistols to force the animal to flee.

Transported first to Daneborg, the injured documentary maker had to be evacuated to Akureyri, a town in Iceland. Already blamed for five incidents until now, the bear returned again later in the morning and then again overnight Monday to Tuesday when it broke a window of the research station before fleeing. "The local authorities have from now on categorized the bear as 'problematic,' which allows for it to be shot dead, if it returns," the Danish military unit said. The incident comes as the northeast of Greenland experiences a heatwave, with a new record temperature of 23.4 degrees Celsius (74.2 Fahrenheit).

Experts say the retreat of the ice pack, the hunting ground of the polar bear, forces them to stay on land more often and they find it harder to find food and sustain a species already considered vulnerable. Although still rare, the close encounters with humans are increasing as bears more frequently approach inhabited areas in their search for food, environmental protection officers say. A study that appeared in July 2020 in the publication Nature Climate Change warned that polar bears faced extinction around 2100. They currently number around 25,000 individuals. — AFP

## China's amateur weightlifters fight 'short, fat' stigma

In a Shanghai basement gym, amateur weightlifters strain under two loads: the steel bars and plates that they lift, and a stigma rooted in the Chinese belief that the sport leaves its practitioners stunted and fat. Even as China once again dominates weightlifting at the Tokyo Olympics, amateurs back home face misunderstanding. "You see athletes with big butts, big legs, red faces, lifting on the platforms at the Olympic Games," said Gabriella Qu, founder of Venus Weightlifting in Shanghai. "That's the moment people say, 'That's not very nice. That's not the image I want to put on myself.'" Especially for women practitioners in China where physical beauty is typically equated with slender fragility-weightlifting is strongly looked

down upon. Xu Weiya, 28, who was inspired to start lifting by her husband, a competitive amateur weightlifter, said her parents had "a lot of comments" about her new hobby.

### 'Not for you'

"My mother said to me, weightlifting athletes are all short and buff, so this sport is not for you," Xu said, citing a commonly held belief that "girls shouldn't do this type of exercise." Qu, 32, a weightlifter and coach herself, says she opened Venus Weightlifting in 2015 partly to help address such misconceptions by increasing awareness of the sport as a form of healthy exercise. China currently racking up its usual pile of weightlifting gold medals in

Tokyo is a superpower in the sport, its athletes often selected for body type and groomed from a young age by a rigorous state-run sporting program.

But the sport's availability to the "normal person" remains limited, with relatively few venues, Qu said. "What most people know about weightlifting comes mainly from watching the Olympics," said Lu Siyao, 28, Xu's husband. "These athletes are chosen especially for their body types," Lu said, adding that at elite levels more muscle mass per square inch on a person's frame usually wins the day. But that leaves many spectators to judge the sport only through its top-tier competitors, he said. "But for us amateurs, our bodies are already set in this way," he adds. "No

matter how much we train, we cannot shrink ourselves or make our legs shorter."

Still, many at Venus Weightlifting hope China's Olympic glory will eventually foster a sense of pride and make people more open to the sport. Asked if she worries about the negative stereotypes, Xu, one of many female weightlifters at Venus, says she prefers to ignore traditional social expectations. "Weightlifting does not make us short and fat. We can only become more healthy and more fit from it," she said. "And we should realize that beauty does not come only in one form." — AFP



This photo shows weightlifter James Brennan competing at Venus Weightlifting gym in Shanghai.



This photo shows Gabriella Qu (center), the founder of Venus Weightlifting gym, cheering for weightlifters at Venus Weightlifting gym in Shanghai.



## Sports

## Japan's Yosozumi wins battle of the teens for Olympic skateboarding gold

TOKYO: Japan's Sakura Yosozumi won the women's park competition to maintain the hosts' stranglehold on Olympic skateboarding yesterday and stop Kokona Hiraki and Sky Brown becoming the Games' youngest-ever gold medalists.

The 19-year-old opened the final with a flowing run featuring two 540s, with her 60.09 points proving enough for victory ahead of teammate Hiraki, 12, and Brown, 13. "This medal feels unreal — it feels like a dream," said Yosozumi, as she celebrated at a sun-baked Ariake Urban Sports Park on Tokyo Bay. "I hope skateboarding is going to be very popular in Japan because of the strong performances of the Japanese team," she said, adding: "Now I want to go back home and eat some delicious food."

Despite missing the title Hiraki, who scored 59.04, achieved the rare feat of winning an Olympic medal before her 13th birthday — the first to do so since French rower Noel Vandermotte in 1936. Japan-born Brown, who became Britain's youngest Olympic medalist, threatened to snatch a dramatic win with a flawless closing routine but she was awarded 56.47 points to take bronze.

"It was unbelievable," Brown said of her medal-winning run. "Even right now it feels like a dream. It's insane. I'm so happy and so thankful and so proud of every one of the other girls, too." There was heartbreak for world number one Misugu Okamoto, who missed a medal when she fell on all

three runs in the final to finish fourth.

## New audiences

Japan also snapped up the men's and women's street titles and they have bagged five of the nine medals so far as skateboarding makes its Olympic bow. Skateboarding is one of four debut sports aimed at reaching new audiences and in an ultra-young field, only eight of the 20 competitors were out of their teens. The podium had a combined age of 44.

Both Brown, at 13 years and 28 days, and Hiraki (12 years and 343 days) were bidding to break an 85-year-old record to become the youngest champions in Olympic history. They had a shot at bettering American diver Marjorie Gestring, who won 3m springboard gold aged 13 years and 268 days at the 1936 Games in Berlin.

For Brown it completes a comeback just over a year after a horrific fall in training left her with skull fractures and a broken wrist and hand. The accident would have ruled Brown, just 11 at the time, out of the 2020 Olympics if they had not been postponed for a year over the coronavirus pandemic. "Everyone did amazing, everyone was doing so good, I'm so proud of everyone," she said yesterday, paying tribute to her friend Yosozumi. "Just being on the podium with my really good friend is just insane." Brown, born to a Japanese mother and a British father, opted to compete for Britain in 2019, saying the team offered a more relaxed approach. —AFP



TOKYO: (From left) Silver medalist Japan's Kokona Hiraki, gold medalist Japan's Sakura Yosozumi and bronze medalist Britain's Sky Brown pose on the podium of the women's park final during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at Ariake Sports Park Skateboarding in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

## Horror plunge made me stronger, says record-breaking Brown

TOKYO: Skateboarder Sky Brown, 13, said a life-threatening accident only made her stronger as she became Britain's youngest Olympic medalist yesterday — and set her sights on doubling up with surfing in 2024. Brown, just 11 at the time, suffered skull fractures and a broken wrist and hand in June 2020 when she took off for an air and plunged into the gap between two half-pipes, landing on her head.

The Japan-born skater, who has said her helmet saved her life, was urged to give up the sport but just over a year later she claimed bronze as skateboarding makes its Olympic debut. Brown admitted there was a time when she did not know if she would skate at the Olympics, but that ultimately the "accident made me stronger".

"I didn't know if I would skate really. My parents were saying 'Don't skate, do something else,'" she said at Tokyo's Ariake Urban Sports Park, her bronze medal around her neck. "But

I'm so happy to be here. I honestly feel like the accident made me stronger."

Brown, aged 13 years and 28 days, was in line to break an 85-year-old record as the youngest Olympic champion, attempting to lower the mark set by American diver Marjorie Gestring, who won 3m springboard gold aged 13 years and 268 days in 1936.

The Briton was not even the youngest skater on the podium after the women's park event — Japan's Kokona Hiraki took silver at 12 years and 343 days, behind her gold-winning teammate Sakura Yosozumi, 19.

Brown is already eyeing more glory at the Paris Olympics in 2024, when she hopes to compete in both skateboarding and surfing. "Maybe, I really hope so, I'm definitely going to try (to compete in) surfing," she said. Brown, however, may face a roadblock with the surfing contested in Tahiti, nearly 10,000 miles (16,000 kilometers) from the French capital.



TOKYO: Britain's Sky Brown competes in the women's park final during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at Ariake Sports Park Skateboarding in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

## 'You've got it, Sky'

In an unusually close-knit sport, Brown disclosed how encouragement from gold-medalist Yosozumi, a close friend, helped her recover from two falls in the final and secure her redemptive bronze. "Sakura said, 'You've got it Sky, I know you're

going to make it', and that really made me feel better," said Brown, who twice failed attempting a kickflip indy. "I was a little nervous but I'm happy to be here and honestly, I just wanted to land my trick. I didn't really care what place I got, I wanted to land my trick." —AFP

## Syrian Olympic table tennis player, 12, to get China training

TOKYO: Syrian table tennis player Hend Zaza, the youngest athlete at the Tokyo Olympics at just 12, has been invited by China to learn from the undisputed masters of the sport, Chinese media says. Zaza, who shot to fame overnight in her war-torn country last year by qualifying for Tokyo, was well beaten 4-0 by Austria's Liu Jia in the preliminary stage. That brought her Olympics to an early end, but now Zaza looks like she will be heading to China — who have won men's and women's singles gold so far in Tokyo — as early as next month for training.

Zaza was invited by the Chinese Olympic

Committee, the country's state broadcaster CCTV said, quoting her as saying: "I look forward to training abroad so that I can make continuous progress and realize my championship dream. Of course, first of all, I hope to reach the level of Chinese players. My dream is to be as strong as Chinese players and I look forward to going to China and receiving the same training as them."

Zaza had to overcome serious adversity to reach the Olympics, where she carried the Syrian flag in the opening ceremony. Syria's civil war has killed around 500,000 people, displaced millions, and ravaged infrastructure since it started in 2011 with the repression of anti-government protests. "The conditions where I trained in Syria were a very hard thing to me, I wished for a different floor. We didn't have such tables nor such preparations," Zaza said previously. Zaza was the youngest Olympian since 11-year-old Romanian Beatrice Huziuc competed in figure skating at the 1968 Winter Olympics. —AFP



TOKYO: Syria's Hend Zaza eyes the ball as she serves to Austria's Liu Jia during their women's singles preliminary round table tennis match at the Tokyo Metropolitan Gymnasium during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo on July 24, 2021. —AFP

## Olympics struggles for youth appeal despite new sports

TOKYO: The Tokyo Olympics has added skateboarding, surfing and sport climbing to attract a younger demographic, but even a medal rush hasn't been enough to win over some Japanese youngsters. Skateboarding resumed yesterday after Yuto Horigome, 22, won the sport's first ever gold for Japan and 13-year-old Momiji Nishiya became the nation's youngest Olympic champion with victory in the women's event.

And Japan once again struck gold, with Sakura Yosozumi taking the women's park top spot next to teammate Kokona Hiraki, 12, with silver. But for Emiya Ajsaka and his classmates, watching Olympic sport on TV is not a priority. "No one is really talking about the Olympics around me," the 13-year-old told AFP as he played football with friends at a park near some Tokyo 2020 venues.

"I'm more likely to be watching YouTube, hanging around with my friends and playing video games," he said, adding that he only plans to watch Olympic soccer matches on TV. "The World Cup was much more fun, wasn't it?" he said to his friends, who nodded in agreement.

Long before Japan began to rack up medals including a surfing silver and bronze, opinion polls showed younger generations were less interested in the Olympics. Around 63 percent of respondents in their 20s said they were "somewhat or very" interested in the Games, compared with around 85 percent of those in their 60s, according to a 2019 survey by the research unit



SAPPORO: Supporters of 12-year-old Japanese skateboarder Kokona Hiraki, the youngest Japanese Olympian, watch a live viewing organized by her supporters in Sapporo yesterday, during the women's park skateboarding event at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. —AFP

of public broadcaster NHK.

"I don't dislike the Olympics, but for me, the Olympics isn't that high in my priorities, and I don't feel so compelled to watch it live," Ryo Kawasaki, a 24-year-old web engineer, said at a bouldering gym in Tokyo. "If I have days off, I look for places for a trip and a hot spring or go out to watch movies. And then if I have extra time, I might take a look at the Olympics."

Munehiko Harada, president of Osaka University of Health and Sport Science, thinks the coronavirus pandemic is "one factor behind the low interest among young people." It forced the historic one-year postponement of the event, and means that most competitions are being held without spectators — wiping out young people's chances of watching their favorite sport live.

## 'Not paying attention'

Kosei Fujiwara, a 13-year-old junior high school student, said the decision to go ahead with the Olympics despite the pandemic had turned him against the Games. "It's wrong to invite a lot of people from around the world to Tokyo where infections are spiking," Fujiwara said as he played basketball with his friends. "If there were no pandemic, I would have supported the Olympics."

Interest in sports among younger generations remains relatively high, especially with a renewed interest in keeping active during COVID-19 lockdowns, Harada said. "But in terms of the Olympics, their interest is clearly low... partially due to the variety of entertainment options available to young generations," said the professor in sports marketing. —AFP

## 'Very lucky': Tokyo 2020's expert volunteers from overseas

TOKYO: In order to volunteer at the Tokyo Olympics, Tsan Wong from Hong Kong and his wife Rever Yau are spending around \$5,000 on flights, evening meals, and mandatory hotel quarantine back home. Under virus rules, the army of overseas volunteers that are usually part of an Olympics has largely been scrapped.

And it is only those with specialist expertise, such as former Commonwealth fencing champion Wong, who have been able to come from abroad to volunteer. Strict "bubble" rules confined the pair to their hotel and the fencing venue, where Wong managed the warm-up zone and Yau worked as an information coordinator. "Some fencers and coaches are very tense before the competition. I understand what they are thinking, so I try and help them relax," Wong, 55, told AFP.

Wong is president of Hong Kong Fencing School, where gold medalist Edgar Cheung Ka-long trained as a teenager, though he did not get to see Cheung's winning bout from behind the scenes. But despite the conditions, and having to take a month off work, Wong has no regrets. "I really enjoy it here," he said. "Even though they gave me a rest day, I didn't rest. They have a nine-day competition, and I worked nine days."

Hundreds of keen volunteers had hoped to travel from abroad to work at Tokyo 2020, but most were told they could not attend when overseas spectators were banned in March. So hockey enthusiast Bruce Danbury, who has helped at many tournaments including previous Olympics, feels "very lucky and very privileged" to be in Tokyo. Usually, he's part of a big group of British volunteers — but this time, "it's just me," the 45-year-old told AFP.

## 'Worth going'

"It's given me so much, so it's great to put a little back into the sport where I can," he said. "I just look at it as quite an expensive holiday, but working 15 hours a day instead of sitting on a beach." Danbury's job is technical, looking after pitch irrigation to make sure the playing surface is consistently in top condition. "It's a really special opportunity to be involved in an Olympic Games, and being at my third one in a row brings home how amazing these athletes are," he said.

British volunteer Miranda Staveley also brings specialist knowledge to the Games, and when a horse risked overheating at an Olympic equestrian event, she knew exactly what to do. "You have to cool the horse down really quickly when they stop, because it's so hot. It's really dangerous," said the 32-year-old, who has competed in equestrian sports since childhood.

She grabbed a bucket of iced water and washed down the horse, which went on to complete the cross-country course — and even won a bronze medal. "Because I'm extremely horsey, I could step into that role really easily," said Staveley, whose day job is in IT.

She volunteered as an equestrian jump judge in London and Rio, but costs and quarantine uncertainties meant she nearly did not make it to Tokyo when the Olympics were postponed by the pandemic.

"I hadn't been planning on going, because I didn't think it was going to happen, to be honest," she said. But helping at crucial moments, meeting other specialists and training Japanese volunteers has made it "definitely worth going", she added. —AFP



## Sports

# Cuba win boxing gold again as Briton refuses to wear silver

**TOKYO:** Cuba's Arlen Lopez won his second Olympic gold medal yesterday as he taught Ben Whittaker a boxing lesson in Tokyo — the disconsolate Briton refusing to wear his silver medal and putting it instead in his pocket.

The 28-year-old Lopez was the aggressor throughout but he was surprisingly only a split-points winner in the final of the men's light-heavy-weight.

Lopez, who won middleweight gold at the Rio 2016 Olympics, fell to his knees and banged on the floor when he was named the victor, while Whittaker quickly left the ring with his hands over his face. After receiving his gold medal, Lopez put his fingers to his lips, a gesture he said was towards "those who were against me or thought that I would not be able to make it or lacked motivation".

His delight was in stark contrast to the 24-year-old Whittaker, who cut a devastated figure at the medal ceremony, trudging to the podium with his hands in his pockets and placing his medal in his tracksuit pocket rather

than around his neck.

When reporters took photographs of the medalists, an unsmiling Whittaker stood awkwardly apart from the others and limply held his silver in his hand. "At the time I should have taken it on the chin and put the beautiful silver medal around my neck and just smiled," he said later. "I did not want silver, I lost the gold, so to me it's failure, so I am not going to celebrate silver at the moment."

It had all been so different at the start. Whittaker jugged his way into the ring at Kokugikan Arena, better known as the home of sumo, Japan's national sport. But the more experienced Lopez had the Briton dancing to his tune from the first round, stalking Whittaker around the ring.

Lopez beckoned his opponent to him, feeling that Whittaker was being too defensive, and a member of the British squad in the mostly empty arena shouted at his team-mate to "show no respect". Lopez, a former world champion in middleweight, led through two rounds of the scheduled three on

the judges' scorecards and the only surprise was that he was not awarded the bout on unanimous points. Cuba, a powerhouse of Olympic boxing, have now won two of the three gold medals in the sport so far in Tokyo. The other went to Japan.

## More disappointment

In the women's competition yesterday, there was also disappointment for India's Lovlina Borgohain in the welterweight semi-finals. She was well beaten by Turkey's flamboyant Busenaz Surmeneli, who will face China's Gu Hong in the final for gold on Saturday.

The 23-year-old Borgohain will still take home bronze, equaling the achievement of India's trailblazing "Magnificent" Mary Kom, a London 2012 bronze medalist and national treasure back home. But like Whittaker, Borgohain was not celebrating. "I've just lost the match now and definitely not feeling good at this time," she said. "Not feeling good as I was sure, 100 percent, to get the gold medal." — AFP



**TOKYO:** (From left) Silver medalist Britain's Benjamin Whittaker, gold medalist Cuba's Arlen Lopez, bronze medalists Russia's Imam Khataev and Azerbaijan's Loren Berto Alfonso Dominguez celebrate with their medal on the podium after the men's light heavy (75-81kg) boxing final bout during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Kokugikan Arena in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

## Storm could reduce Olympic women's golf to 54 holes

**KAWAGOE:** The Tokyo Olympics women's golf tournament could be cut to 54 holes, organizers said yesterday, because of an approaching tropical storm due to hit Kasumigaseki Country Club at the weekend.

"We have notified the players that we may have to be forced to reduce to a 54-hole competition," International Golf Federation official Heather Daly-Donofrio told a media briefing at the course in Saitama prefecture yesterday evening.

"We will not change tomorrow's schedule. We will play 18 holes as scheduled tomorrow. We will play another 18 holes on Friday and then we will continue to track this tropical system and see what Saturday brings."

Daly-Donofrio said the idea of playing extra holes over the next two days to complete four rounds by Friday had been explored, but the extreme heat meant it was not feasible. "The health and safety of our players and caddies is first and foremost," Daly-Donofrio said.

Lexi Thompson's caddie, Jack Fulghum, had to pull out during yesterday's opening round with heat exhaustion on a day where the thermometers topped 36 Celsius. Similar temperatures are forecast for today and tomorrow with high humidity seeing the heat index exceed 44C yesterday.

"In an ideal world we would make (the cut to 54 holes) before they tee off in their third round, so the players know what they are playing for, but it's all going to depend on that forecast and what we are seeing from our meteorologists. We hope the storm veers and goes off and then we can play our final round cleanly on Saturday."

The men's tournament last week was interrupted several times on the opening two days because of heavy rain and dangerous lightning. The second round was not completed until Saturday morning.

The women's tournament is scheduled to finish Saturday but could be extended another day, weather permitting, Daly-Donofrio confirmed, but there is no option to extend past Sunday's Olympics closing ceremony. However, the weather forecast for Sunday is even worse than Saturday. Sweden's Madelene Sagstrom has a one-shot lead going into today's second round after an opening five-under 66. — AFP

## Biles says will cherish challenging Tokyo Olympics

**TOKYO:** Simone Biles says she will always "cherish this unique Olympic experience" despite her time in Tokyo being derailed by a psychological condition known as 'the twisties'. Biles withdrew during last week's team competition, suffering from an inability to orientate herself in mid-air.

She subsequently pulled out of the all-around final, and the first three apparatus finals, returning to claim bronze in Tuesday's closing beam. With team silver Biles leaves Japan with two minor medals, a far cry from the four golds and bronze from Rio five years ago.

"Not at all how I imagined or dreamed my second Olympics would go but blessed to represent the USA," she said in a post on Instagram. "I'll forever cherish this unique olympic experience. Thanks everyone for the endless love and support. I'm truly grateful - leaving Tokyo with 2 more Olympic

## Britain's Dujardin sympathizes with Biles: 'Success is hard'

**TOKYO:** Britain's most-decorated female Olympian Charlotte Dujardin has spoken of her sympathy for struggling US gymnast Simone Biles following her own battle with mental health problems earlier in her career.

The 36-year-old dressage rider took her Olympic medals tally to six in three Games with two bronze medals in Tokyo. That moved her one ahead of retired British rower Katherine Grainger — though track cyclist Laura Kenny could equal or even surpass Dujardin in Japan. Dujardin felt immense pressure after securing double gold at the 2012 London Olympics, laying bare her struggles in her 2018 autobiography "The Girl on the Dancing Horse".

"Depression was not something I'd ever really understood," she wrote, saying she wanted to "hurt herself because she felt such pain". She said she punished herself by not eating, losing nearly two stone (13 kilograms) in weight.

Dujardin suffered her traumatic episodes after the London Games but Biles's struggles were evident to the watching world during the gymnastics competition in Tokyo. She stood down during the women's team final last week, struggling with the "twisties", a potentially dangerous condition meaning gymnasts lose the ability to orientate themselves in mid-air. The US star, 24, subsequently pulled out of a series of individual events, only returning for the beam final on Tuesday, in

which she took bronze.

medals to add to my collection isn't too shabby! 7 time Olympic medalist."

The 24-year-old's pursuit of five gold medals to equal the women's record of nine was all but ended when she baulked in mid-air on her opening vault in the team competition, as the 'twisties' struck. The disconnect between brain and body, with the consequent loss of spatial awareness, is a potentially lethal cocktail for a gymnast somersaulting at high velocity off a vault backwards.

Reflecting on her comeback heroics behind Chinese duo Guan Chenchen and Tang Xijing, Biles told NBC: "(The bronze) means more than all the golds because I've been through so much the last five years and the last week while I've even been here. "It was just... it was very emotional," she said. And I'm just proud of myself and all of these girls as well."

She added: "I didn't really care about the outcome. I was so happy that I made the routine and then I got to compete one more time." Social media was alight with heartfelt congratulations. "Congratulations @Simone\_Biles... the most important medal @Tokyo2020 @Olympics" tweeted Nadia Comaneci, who entered Olympic folklore at the 1976 Montreal Games with a

which she took bronze.

## 'No turning back'

Dujardin, who had to battle back from a fractured skull in 2009, said she could sympathize with Biles, who won four Olympic golds at the 2016 Rio Games. "It is hard being successful," she told AFP by phone from the stables she shares with mentor Carl Hester in southwest England. "It is a hard place to be with the pressure and the expectation. Those are quite hard things to have on your shoulders all the time."

Dujardin has faced further challenges, including breaking up after a 13-year relationship with her fiancé Dean Golding two years ago. "I have to say having the right people around you supporting you gets you through," she said. "You just have to make sure you never get to the point of no turning back. I am talking about ending your career, not anything else, and that you feel you cannot do it anymore. But with the right people it can help to prevent that."

Since returning home, Dujardin has been celebrating with friends and family who were unable to support her in Tokyo because visitors are barred from attending due to coronavirus restrictions. The rider, who also won a gold in Rio, is still getting used to her new position as the most-decorated British female Olympian, at least for now.

"It was a wow moment," she said. "I cannot quite believe it. It is hard to really quantify what I achieved. I did not realize it until the media kept asking 'what does it feel like' and I went 'oh my God!' — that with the second bronze I had beaten someone as legendary as Katherine Grainger's record was unreal and you get such a thrill out of it." — AFP



**TOKYO:** USA's Simone Biles gets ready to compete in the artistic gymnastics women's balance beam final of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at Ariake Gymnastics Centre in Tokyo on Tuesday. — AFP

'Perfect 10' score. "Not enough words to express how proud I am of you Simone!!!" coach Cecile Landi posted. — AFP



**TOKYO:** Bronze medalist Britain's Charlotte Dujardin riding Gio poses after the medal ceremony for the dressage grand prix freestyle individual finals during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Equestrian Park in Tokyo on July 28, 2021. — AFP

## From Rio teen to Tokyo, Ashok puts women's golf on map in India

**KAWAGOE:** Aditi Ashok was the youngest player at the 2016 Olympics when she made women's golf into headline news in India by shooting back-to-back 68s to be tied eighth on six-under par after 36 holes. Five years later, the world number 200 is near the top of another star-studded leaderboard at the Tokyo Games, tied second with world number one Nelly Korda after yesterday's first round.

Women's golf was virtually unknown in India before Ashok's Olympic exploits. "A lot of people were trying to figure out what golf was, so that they could understand how I was playing and if I had a chance to win a medal," she told reporters at Kasumigaseki Country Club yesterday after her opening four-under par 67.

Ashok faded in Rio during the final two rounds to finish 41st, but her days of

being anonymous in a country of 1.3 billion people were over. "For the next six months to a year everybody remembered and recognized me from the Olympics," she said. "Even though I won like three European Tour events after that, people still remember me as the girl who did well at the Olympics."

This time around she says she is more prepared for Olympic competition, and the attention it brings from back home. "Last time I was a rookie basically. I just finished my high school exams and then I was at the Olympics," Ashok said after a round containing five birdies and just one blemish at the 18th. "Playing on the LPGA Tour the last five years makes you way better as a player than I was at Rio.

## Mum's the caddie

"I didn't finish as well as I wanted to last time, but just seeing the effect that it

had on golf in India was inspiring and that's kind of what motivated me for this one as well." Ashok recalled how she started playing golf, not a common pursuit for girls growing up in Bangalore like her.

"Me and my parents started playing golf at the same time," recalled Ashok. "We used to have breakfast at this restaurant that overlooked a golf driving range and so we wanted to walk in and try it out. So that's what got me started."

Ashok had her dad as caddie in Rio, and this time round it is her mum, Mash. "Last time I had my dad on the bag, so the experience was just so incredible I was like 'I want to have my mum next time' and I made good on that promise," said Ashok. The impact of her first two rounds at the Rio Olympics were, she admitted, "quite big".

"My social media following just blew up, basically. I think I had like 400-500 followers Twitter and Facebook and jumped to like 14,000, I think overnight." So what does she think would happen were she to win a medal this time?



**KAWAGOE:** India's Aditi Ashok watches her drive from the 9th tee in round 1 of the women's golf individual stroke play during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Kasumigaseki Country Club in Kawagoe yesterday. — AFP

"Women's golf is not really on the radar of sports or people in India," she said. "The Impact would be huge."

"I think it would go to like hundreds of thousands for sure," said Ashok. "Yeah, it would be really big." — AFP





## De Grasse wins first post-Bolt Olympic 200m after epic McLaughlin show

**TOKYO:** Andre de Grasse upstaged Noah Lyles to claim the first men's 200m gold of the post-USain Bolt era yesterday, as Sydney McLaughlin obliterated her own world record to claim a thrilling victory in the women's 400m hurdles.

The stage for the 200m final at Tokyo's Olympic Stadium had been set up by McLaughlin's epic duel with American teammate Dalilah Muhammad. McLaughlin, 21, surged past Muhammad just meters from the line in a baking hot morning session to win in 51.46sec, slicing a whopping 0.44sec off her previous mark of 51.90sec set at the US trials in June. "It's just iron sharpening iron," McLaughlin said. "You need somebody who's going to push you to your best and that's what we do so well. Every time we step on the track it's always something fast."

De Grasse had set the fastest qualifying time for the 200m, an event recently dominated by Jamaican sprint legend Bolt, who had won golds in Beijing, London and Rio between 2008-16. And the 26-year-old Canadian finally came good on the promise he has shown on the track, having won 200m silver and 100m bronze in Rio before laying out his store in Tokyo with a second bronze in Sunday's blue riband track event.

De Grasse was fast out of his blocks and drove through to the line, clocking a national record of 19.62 seconds for gold. "I have been waiting for this moment, been training hard for this moment," he said. "I went back after the 100m and I felt disappointed. I said to myself 'I just got to go and get it (gold)'."

American Lyles, long touted as Bolt's most likely successor, had to be happy with bronze in 19.74sec as teammate Kenny Bednarek claimed silver in a personal best of 19.68sec. The third US runner in the field, 17-year-old Erriyon Knighton, came in fourth (19.93).

### Kenya secure men's 800m

Emmanuel Korir ensured Kenya's grip on the men's 800 meters continued by leading Ferguson Rotich home for a 1-2 finish for the east African powerhouses. Korir, who succeeds injured two-time champion David Rudisha as gold medalist in the event, timed 1:45.06, Rotich taking silver ahead of Poland's Patryk Dobek.

There was glory, and another bronze, for Poland in the men's hammer as Wojciech Nowicki's best of 82.52 meters secured gold. Norway's Eivind Henriksen claimed silver, with four-time world champion Pawel Fajdek taking bronze.

Elsewhere on the track, there was a first ever



**TOKYO:** Canada's Andre De Grasse crosses the finish line to win the men's 200m final during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Olympic Stadium in Tokyo yesterday. —AFP

Olympic gold for an Ugandan woman as Peruth Chemutai outstripped the field to win the 3000m steeplechase. The 22-year-old timed 9min 01.45sec, with American Courtney Frerichs claiming silver and Kenyan Hyvin Kiyeng bronze. "After my fifth place at the world championships in Doha, I knew a medal would be possible if I run a good race," said Chemutai.

Dutch runner Sifan Hassan's bid for an unprecedented Olympic distance treble remains on course after she eased into tomorrow's 1500 meters final by winning her semi-final. The newly-crowned 5000m Olympic champion — who also has the 10,000m in her sights — will face a challenge to make it two out of two titles as Kenya's defending champion Faith Kipyegon awaits her.

### Injury heartbreak for 'KJT'

There was drama in the heptathlon as British

world champion Katarina Johnson-Thompson pulled up with a right calf injury in the final event of the first day, the 200m. It left reigning Olympic champion Nafi Thiam of Belgium, third overnight, in prime position to defend her title in today's second day of competition which features the long jump, javelin and the 800m.

Canada's Damian Warner was in pole in the men's decathlon, with fancied French rival Kevin Mayer, the world record holder, in fifth. Warner, 31, registered 10.12sec in the 100m, 8.24m in the long jump, 14.80m in the shot put, 2.02m in the high jump and 47.48sec in the 400m for an overnight total of 4,722 points.

Australian Ashley Moloney sat second on 4,641pts, with Canadian Pierce Lepage third on 4,641 and Mayer still in the hunt on 4,340 ahead of a second day of action featuring the 110m hurdles, discus, pole vault, javelin and 1500m. —AFP

## Belarus Olympic athlete stops over in Vienna before Poland refuge

**VIENNA:** Belarusian Olympic athlete Krystsina Tsimanouskaya arrived in Austria yesterday en route to Poland, where she is expected to take refuge after saying she feared for her life if forced to return home. The 24-year-old sprinter has been at the center of a diplomatic drama in the middle of the Games since seeking protection from Tokyo 2020 staff on Sunday, saying her team was trying to bundle her onto a plane after she publicly criticized her coaches.

In an unexpected twist yesterday the athlete made a last-minute switch and decided not to board her flight to Warsaw, which has offered her a humanitarian visa, instead taking a plane to the Austrian capital. The Austrian Airlines flight arrived at Vienna airport shortly after 3:00 pm (1300 GMT) yesterday. A VIP van followed by two police vehicles were waiting to escort Tsimanouskaya from the plane.

"According to our information, she is scheduled to head to Warsaw this evening," an Austrian foreign ministry spokesman told AFP, although the ministry added that should she "want to make an asylum application in Austria, she can of course count on our support".

Tsimanouskaya had entered the airport in Tokyo surrounded by a phalanx of security, wearing a yellow facemask and with the pink ends of her hair visible in a bun. She declined to speak to media gathered at her gate, but waved as she rounded the corner towards her plane.

Before travelling she had been sheltering in the Polish embassy in Tokyo for the past two nights after calling for international help, and activists have said she will go to Warsaw. Belarus has been wracked by political upheaval and a crackdown on dissent after disputed elections that returned strongman Alexander Lukashenko to power last year.

Tsimanouskaya was one of more than 2,000 Belarusian sports figures who signed an open letter calling for new elections and for political prisoners to be freed. But her trouble in Tokyo came after she posted on her Instagram, criticizing her coaches for entering her into a race without informing her first.

Her husband has fled to Ukraine and yesterday the Polish government said he had also been given a humanitarian visa. The pair are expected to meet up in Poland, a staunch critic of Lukashenko's regime and home to a growing number of dissidents.

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said Tuesday he had spoken to the "courageous" Tsimanouskaya, who is "currently well taken care of and safe". "I assured her that she can count on the support and solidarity of Poland," he wrote on Facebook.

### Dissident found hanged

The International Olympic Committee has said it will investigate Belarus's Olympic team, but activists have called for the country's Olympic committee to be suspended and its athletes to compete as neutrals. Spokesman Mark Adams said Wednesday that the IOC had received a report from Belarus's Olympic committee, which was "being evaluated". And he said the IOC has opened a disciplinary commission "to establish facts in this case".

NGO Global Athlete said Tsimanouskaya's "alleged kidnapping... is yet another example of the alarming athlete abuse occurring in Belarus". Lukashenko and his son Viktor have been banned from Olympic events over the targeting of athletes for their political views.

Shortly before the Tokyo Games, Lukashenko warned sports officials and athletes that he



**NARITA:** Belarus athlete Krystsina Tsimanouskaya (center) walks through Terminal 1 before boarding her Vienna-bound flight at Narita International Airport in Narita, Chiba Prefecture, outside Tokyo yesterday. —AFP

expected results in Japan. "Think about it before going," he said. "If you come back with nothing, it's better for you not to come back at all." The alleged attempt to return Tsimanouskaya to Belarus has prompted condemnation, with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken accusing Minsk of "another act of transnational repression".

In power since 1994, Lukashenko sparked international outrage in May by dispatching a fighter jet to intercept a Ryanair plane flying from Greece to Lithuania to arrest a dissident on board. The Olympic saga came as police in Ukraine said a missing Belarusian activist, whose NGO helps his compatriots flee the country, had been found hanged in a park in Kiev.

Police said they had opened a murder probe and would pursue all leads including "murder disguised as suicide", while activists accused authorities of "an operation... to liquidate a Belarusian who presented a true danger to the regime". The United Nations has called on Ukrainian authorities to conduct a "thorough, impartial and effective investigation" into the death. —AFP

### Tokyo Olympics medals won yesterday

**Artistic Swimming - Duet**  
GOLD - Russian Olympic Committee  
SILVER - China  
BRONZE - Ukraine

**Athletics - Women's 400m Hurdles**  
GOLD - McLAUGHLIN Sydney - United States of America  
SILVER - MUHAMMAD Dalilah - United States of America  
BRONZE - BOL Femke - Netherlands

**Athletics - Women's 3000m Steeplechase**  
GOLD - CHEMUTAI Peruth - Uganda  
SILVER - FRERICHS Courtney - United States of America  
BRONZE - KIYENG Hyvin - Kenya

**Athletics - Men's Hammer Throw**  
GOLD - NOWICKI Wojciech - Poland  
SILVER - HENRIKSEN Eivind - Norway  
BRONZE - FAJDEK Pawel - Poland

**Athletics - Men's 800m**  
GOLD - KORIR Emmanuel Kipkurui - Kenya  
SILVER - ROTICH Ferguson Cheruiyot - Kenya  
BRONZE - DOBEK Patryk - Poland

**Athletics - Men's 200m**  
GOLD - de GRASSE Andre - Canada  
SILVER - BEDNAREK Kenneth - United States of America  
BRONZE - LYLES Noah - United States of America

**Boxing - Men's Light Heavy (75-81kg)**  
GOLD - LOPEZ Arlen - Cuba  
SILVER - WHITTAKER Benjamin - Great Britain  
BRONZE - ALFONSO DOMINGUEZ Loren Berto - Azerbaijan  
BRONZE - KHATAEV Imam - Russian Olympic Committee

**Cycling Track - Men's Team Pursuit**  
GOLD - Italy  
SILVER - Denmark  
BRONZE - Australia

**Equestrian - Jumping Individual**  
GOLD - MAHER Ben - Great Britain  
SILVER - FREDRICKSON Peder - Sweden  
BRONZE - van der VLEUTEN Maikel - Netherlands

**Marathon Swimming - Women's 10km**  
GOLD - CUNHA Ana Marcela - Brazil  
SILVER - van ROUWENDAAL Sharon - Netherlands  
BRONZE - LEE Kareena - Australia

**Sailing - Men's Two Person Dinghy - 470**  
GOLD - Australia  
SILVER - Sweden  
BRONZE - Spain

**Sailing - Women's Two Person Dinghy - 470**  
GOLD - Great Britain  
SILVER - Poland  
BRONZE - France

**Skateboarding - Women's Park**  
GOLD - YOSUZUMI Sakura - Japan  
SILVER - HIRAKI Kokona - Japan  
BRONZE - BROWN Sky - Great Britain

**Weightlifting - Men's +109kg**  
GOLD - TALAKHADZE Lasha - Georgia  
SILVER - DAVOUDI Ali - Iran  
BRONZE - ASAAD Man - Syria

**Wrestling - Men's Greco-Roman 67kg**  
GOLD - GERAEI Mohammadreza - Iran  
SILVER - NASIBOV Parviz - Ukraine  
BRONZE - STAEBLER Frank - Germany  
BRONZE - ELSAYED Mohamed Ibrahim Elsayed - Egypt

**Wrestling - Men's Greco-Roman 87kg**  
GOLD - BELENIUK Zhan - Ukraine  
SILVER - LORINCZ Viktor - Hungary  
BRONZE - KUDLA Denis Maksymilian - Germany  
BRONZE - DATUNASHVILI Zurabi - Serbia

**Wrestling - Women's Freestyle 62kg**  
GOLD - KAWAI Yukako - Japan  
SILVER - TYNBYBEKOVA Aisuluu - Kyrgyzstan  
BRONZE - KOLIADENKO Iryna - Ukraine  
BRONZE - YUSEIN Taybe Mustafa - Bulgaria

# Classifieds

## Hospitals & Clinics

<b>Sabah Hospital</b>	24812000	<b>Clinics</b>		<b>Industrial Shuwaikh</b>	24814764
<b>Amiri Hospital</b>	22450005	<b>Kalzen center</b>	25716707	<b>Qadsiya</b>	22515088
<b>Maternity Hospital</b>	24843100	<b>Rawda</b>	22517733	<b>Dasmah</b>	22532265
<b>Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital</b>	25312700	<b>Adaliya</b>	22517144	<b>Bneid Al-Gar</b>	22531908
<b>Chest Hospital</b>	24849400	<b>Khaldiya</b>	24848075	<b>Shaab</b>	22518752
<b>Farwaniya Hospital</b>	24892010	<b>Kaifan</b>	24849807	<b>Qibla</b>	22459381
<b>Adan Hospital</b>	23940620	<b>Shamiya</b>	24848913	<b>Ayoun Al-Qibla</b>	22451082
<b>Ibn Sina Hospital</b>	24840300	<b>Shuwaikh</b>	24814507	<b>Mirqab</b>	22456536
<b>Al-Razi Hospital</b>	24846000	<b>Abdullah Salem</b>	22549134	<b>Sharq</b>	22465401
<b>Physiotherapy Hospital</b>	24874330/9	<b>Nuzha</b>	22526804	<b>Salmiya</b>	25746401

## WANTED

### PART-TIME MANDOOP

To liaison with relevant ministry to complete all certification for marine boats. Some experience required, also required tug boat captain, engineer, seaman.

send email: kwmarinejob@gmail.com  
call: 98762300

## EMERGENCY 112



## McLaughlin lights up Olympic track as Japanese teen wins skateboard gold

**TOKYO:** Sydney McLaughlin obliterated her own world record to win Olympic gold in the women's 400m hurdles yesterday as Japanese teenager Sakura Yosozumi maintained the hosts' stranglehold on the skateboarding competition.

Canadian sprinter Andre de Grasse powered to gold in the men's 200m final, completing a long journey back from injury and illness after taking silver behind Usain Bolt in 2016. And in cycling, Italy won the men's team pursuit for the first time in 61 years, breaking their own world record to beat Denmark in a thrilling final at the Izu Velodrome.

At the Olympic Stadium, McLaughlin powered home in 51.46 seconds, with defending champion Dalilah Muhammad claiming silver in 51.58 after another classic duel between the two dominant American hurdlers. It repeated the feat of Karsten Warholm, who took a huge slice off the world record in the men's race just 24 hours earlier.

The 21-year-old McLaughlin's blistering time bettered her world record set at the US trials in Oregon in June, when she ran 51.90sec. "I saw Dalilah ahead of me with one to go," said McLaughlin. "I just thought 'run your race'. The race doesn't really start till hurdle seven. I just wanted to go out there and give it everything I had."

De Grasse claimed his first major championship gold medal, racing home in 19.62sec with Kenny Bednarek of the United States second in 19.68 and reigning world champion Noah Lyles taking bronze (19.74). "I've been waiting for this moment, I've been training hard for this moment," said De Grasse, finally delivering on his promise after suffering hamstring problems and a bout of mononucleosis following his breakthrough in Rio.

Canada's Damian Warner ended the first day of the decathlon in top spot, with fancied French rival Kevin Mayer in fifth after complaining of back problems. Defending champion Nafi Thiam of Belgium



**TOKYO:** USA's Sydney McLaughlin competes to win the women's 400m hurdles final setting a new world record during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Olympic Stadium in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

tops the heptathlon standings with four events gone. British world champion Katarina Johnson-Thompson's medal hopes are over after she pulled up with a calf injury in the 200m.

Dutch star Sifan Hassan took the next step in her bid for an unprecedented treble, easing into the 1500m final two days after winning the 5,000 title. Emmanuel Korir led home compatriot Ferguson Rotich for a Kenyan one-two in the men's 800m final, ahead of Poland's Patryk Dobek. Rotich said: "In Kenya we are progressing despite the challenges of the pandemic. In the last year, most of us, we didn't train well. There was the coronavirus and now we're coming back."

Poland's Wojciech Nowicki bagged gold in the

men's hammer. Norway's Eivind Henriksen claimed silver, with four-time world champion Pawel Fajdek, another Pole, taking bronze. There was a first ever Olympic gold for a Ugandan woman as Peruth Chemutai won the 3000m steeplechase, with American Courtney Frerichs collecting silver and Kenyan Hyvin Kiyeng bronze.

### Teen skateboard battle

Away from the athletics, Yosozumi won the women's park skateboarding event to stop compatriot 12-year-old Kokona Hiraki and Britain's Sky Brown, 13, becoming the Games' youngest-ever gold medalists.

The 19-year-old Yosozumi carved up the Ariake Urban Sports Park with a flowing opening run in the final, and her 60.09 points proved enough for victory ahead of Hiraki and Brown. "This medal feels unreal — it feels like a dream," said Yosozumi, as she celebrated at a sun-baked Ariake Urban Sports Park. "I hope skateboarding is going to be very popular in Japan because of the strong performances of the Japanese team," she said, adding: "Now I want to go back home and eat some delicious food."

In a sport making its Olympic debut, Japan also snapped up the men's and women's street titles earlier in the Games and they have now bagged five of the nine medals so far. In the first round of the women's golf tournament, world number one Nelly Korda carded a four-under-par 67 to sit just one shot behind leader Madelene Sagstrom of Sweden.

The searing temperatures forced US star Lexi Thompson's caddy to pull out with heatstroke and organizers said the tournament could be cut to 54 holes because of an approaching tropical storm due to hit this weekend. Away from the action, all 12 members of the Greek artistic swimming team are in isolation after five tested positive for coronavirus in the first cluster detected at the Games. — AFP



Tokyo Olympics medals table after yesterday's events (G = Gold, S = Silver, B = Bronze, T = Total):

	G	S	B	T
China	32	22	16	70
United States	25	31	23	79
Japan	21	7	12	40
Great Britain	15	18	15	48
Australia	15	4	17	36
Russian Olympic Committee	14	21	18	53
Germany	8	8	16	32
France	6	10	9	25
Italy	6	9	15	30
Netherlands	6	8	9	23
South Korea	6	4	9	19
New Zealand	6	4	5	15
Cuba	5	3	4	12
Hungary	4	5	3	12
Canada	4	4	7	15
Brazil	4	3	8	15
Czech Republic	4	3	1	8
Switzerland	3	4	5	12
Poland	3	3	4	10
Croatia	3	3	2	8
Sweden	2	5	0	7
Taiwan	2	4	5	11
Georgia	2	4	1	7
Denmark	2	2	3	7
Norway	2	2	1	5
Jamaica	2	1	2	5
Iran	2	1	1	4
Slovenia	2	1	1	4
Ecuador	2	1	0	3
Greece	2	0	1	3
Uzbekistan	2	0	1	3
Kosovo	2	0	0	2
Qatar	2	0	0	2
Spain	1	4	5	10
Romania	1	3	0	4
Venezuela	1	3	0	4
Ukraine	1	2	8	11
Kenya	1	2	2	5
Hong Kong	1	2	0	3
Slovakia	1	2	0	3
South Africa	1	2	0	3
Serbia	1	1	4	6
Austria	1	1	3	5
Indonesia	1	1	3	5
Belgium	1	1	1	3
Ethiopia	1	1	1	3
Uganda	1	1	1	3
Philippines	1	1	0	2
Tunisia	1	1	0	2
Turkey	1	0	5	6
Ireland	1	0	2	3
Zionist entity	1	0	2	3
Belarus	1	0	1	2
Estonia	1	0	1	2
Fiji	1	0	1	2
Latvia	1	0	1	2
Bermuda	1	0	0	1
Morocco	1	0	0	1
Puerto Rico	1	0	0	1
Thailand	1	0	0	1
Armenia	0	2	1	3
Colombia	0	2	1	3
Dominican Republic	0	2	1	3
Kirghyzstan	0	2	1	3
India	0	1	2	3
Mongolia	0	1	2	3
Portugal	0	1	2	3
Bulgaria	0	1	1	2
Nigeria	0	1	1	2
San Marino	0	1	1	2
Jordan	0	1	0	1
Namibia	0	1	0	1
North Macedonia	0	1	0	1
Turkmenistan	0	1	0	1
Kazakhstan	0	0	4	4
Azerbaijan	0	0	3	3
Egypt	0	0	3	3
Mexico	0	0	3	3
Argentina	0	0	1	1
Finland	0	0	1	1
Ghana	0	0	1	1
Ivory Coast	0	0	1	1
Kuwait	0	0	1	1
Malaysia	0	0	1	1
Syria	0	0	1	1

## Australia ready to take down USA in basketball semis

**SAITAMA:** NBA stalwart Patty Mills says Australia have bottled up all their previous Olympic failures and plan to let them loose against the United States in their crunch basketball semifinal today. The world's third-ranked team, known as the "Boomers", have been trying to finish on the Olympic podium since the Melbourne Games in 1956 but have yet to make it despite contesting the bronze medal match four times.

That is despite boasting some of the best players in the world, playing in the top leagues. But San Antonio Spurs' Mills, at his fourth Olympics, believes the time is now right to snap the run, despite needing to beat the Kevin Durant-led three-time defending champions to stay on track.

"We're well experienced," he said when asked why this Australian team could do what no other had managed. "We've been to this stage many a time and haven't crossed the line. But we've bottled those experiences up, and I think we're well prepared for this moment and for this stage to make the next step."

"There's a togetherness and a camaraderie within the extended group and a focus that is sharp on what we're trying to achieve here," he added. "And that collective unit together, it's powerful. It's a culture thing, it's an Australian spirit thing, it's doing it for the greater good, and we understand who we're doing it for."

They may never have a better chance, with the USA showing signs of weakness, crashing to defeat in two exhibition games in the lead-up to the Olympics, including a 91-83 loss to the Boomers. Gregg Popovich's then fell in their Tokyo opener to France — their first defeat at an Olympics since 2004 — before finding their groove, culminating with a battling 95-83 win against Spain to set up the Australia clash.

### Rest and recover

In contrast, the undefeated Boomers have looked sharp, and ruthlessly dismantled Argentina 97-59 in their quarter-final, with Mills topping the stat sheets with 18 points and four assists. Fellow veteran Joe Ingles, also at his fourth Olympics, said winning gold was the only thing that mattered. "We've had one goal in mind, to win a gold medal and leave here with that, and this is a little bit of a stepping stone to what we want to achieve," said the Utah Jazz forward after the Argentina win. "We'll rest up, recover and watch the film and we're obviously well aware of who we're against (USA). The biggest thing for us now is the recovery side of it." Today's clash will bring Mills up against his long-time San Antonio coach Popovich, but friendships will be put aside. "He's obviously meant a great deal to me for a very long time, a decade. It's fair to say he's helped shape me to who I am today, on the court and off the court," said Mills. — AFP



**SAITAMA:** Breanna Stewart #10 of the USA Women's National Team dribbles the ball during the game against the Australia Women's National Team during the 2020 Tokyo Olympics yesterday at the Super Saitama Arena in Saitama, Japan. — AFP

## USA crush Australia to set up Serbia Olympic women's basketball semis

**SAITAMA:** Breanna Stewart scored a game-high 23 points as the United States crushed Australia yesterday to set up an Olympic women's basketball semifinal against Serbia as the Americans close in on a seventh consecutive title.

Brittney Griner added another 15 points and A'ja Wilson 10 in the 79-55 rout against the world's number two team. They will meet Serbia tomorrow after the European champions and Rio bronze medalists swept past China 77-70.

Meanwhile, hosts Japan won a thriller against Olympic debutants Belgium 86-85 to set up a last-four showdown with 2012 silver medalists France after they edged 2016 runners-up Spain 67-64. It was never going to be easy for Australia to take down the US, who have now won 53 Olympic games in a row.

The incredible streak began with the 1992 bronze-medal decider and includes a record six straight gold medals and four victories in Tokyo. So dominant are the US that they have won eight out of the past nine Olympic titles, with the only blemishes a silver medal behind the Soviet Union at the inaugural tournament in 1976 and bronze in 1992.

"I thought we came out and played inspired basketball on both sides of the ball," said US coach Dawn Staley. "We played with an incredible desire to advance and it was just contagious." Looking ahead to Serbia, she added: "They played inspired basketball, and that is a scary thing."

The only team to consistently come close to challenging the US team this century have been Australia, who have contested three gold medal games against them. But they were never in the contest at Saitama Super Arena.

Led by WNBA stars Sue Bird, Diana Taurasi and Sylvia Fowles, the US set the tone with a 15-0 run in a

first quarter during which Australia nailed just four of 14 field goal attempts. The Opals' shooting woes stretched into the second term as the US galloped to a 48-27 halfway lead, with Seattle Storm forward Stewart nailing 20 of them.

### 'Trending upward'

That blew out to 68-39 heading into the final stretch and there was no way back for Australia. "Knowing this was the knockout game, win or go home, we wanted to be our best," said Stewart. "We are trending upward. There is more business to be done."

Marine Johannes poured in 18 points as France got the better of Spain in a nail-biting finish, with Gabby Williams adding 11 points and making three of four free throws inside the final 90 seconds. Earlier, towering forward Jelena Brooks drilled 18 points to help Serbia get past China.

Sonja Vasic added 16 and Ana Dabovic chipped in 13 to book their second Olympic semi-final in only their second appearance. "We never quit, and we play the hardest when we are down. We showed today we can find energy," said Dabovic. "This is a great success for a small country."

Serbia qualified for their debut Games at Rio in 2016, where they beat Australia by two points in the quarters but succumbed to Spain in the semis, before downing France to win bronze. A three-pointer from Saki Hayashi with 15 seconds left put Japan through to the last four for the first time ever after a tense game against Belgium. Yuki Miyazawa sunk 21 points, but Rui Machida was the star with 14 assists while chipping in 10 points. Japan's best Olympic finish before now was their fifth place at the 1976 Games in Montreal. — AFP