

# Friday Times

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V O L V O

## Preserving and protecting Kuwait's maritime heritage

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## Local

## What comes next?



JUST KIDDIN', SERIOUSLY

By Sahar Moussa

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The global coronavirus pandemic threw us all straight into a panic, and more than a year and a half later, many have still not recovered. Millions have died, lost their loved ones, lost their jobs, their homes, and their livelihood. Others have been stranded in third countries or stuck in their homelands without work.

Now we begin to see (insha'Allah) some light at the end of the tunnel. Now we begin to hope that we are nearing the end of this saga and that life may return to something akin to normal.

But even if we are able to resume work and life 100 percent, and even if we are able to travel freely and to gather in groups, life will not be back to normal for those who have lost everything.

So how can we get past it? How can we start to envision the future?

For working adults, we spend most of our life in the office with colleagues. So the first thing we can do is be kinder and more supportive of each other. We can acknowledge those we have lost due to whatever circumstances and we can support and encourage those who remain. We can listen and grieve for the past year and a half. And when that is done, start talking about the future.

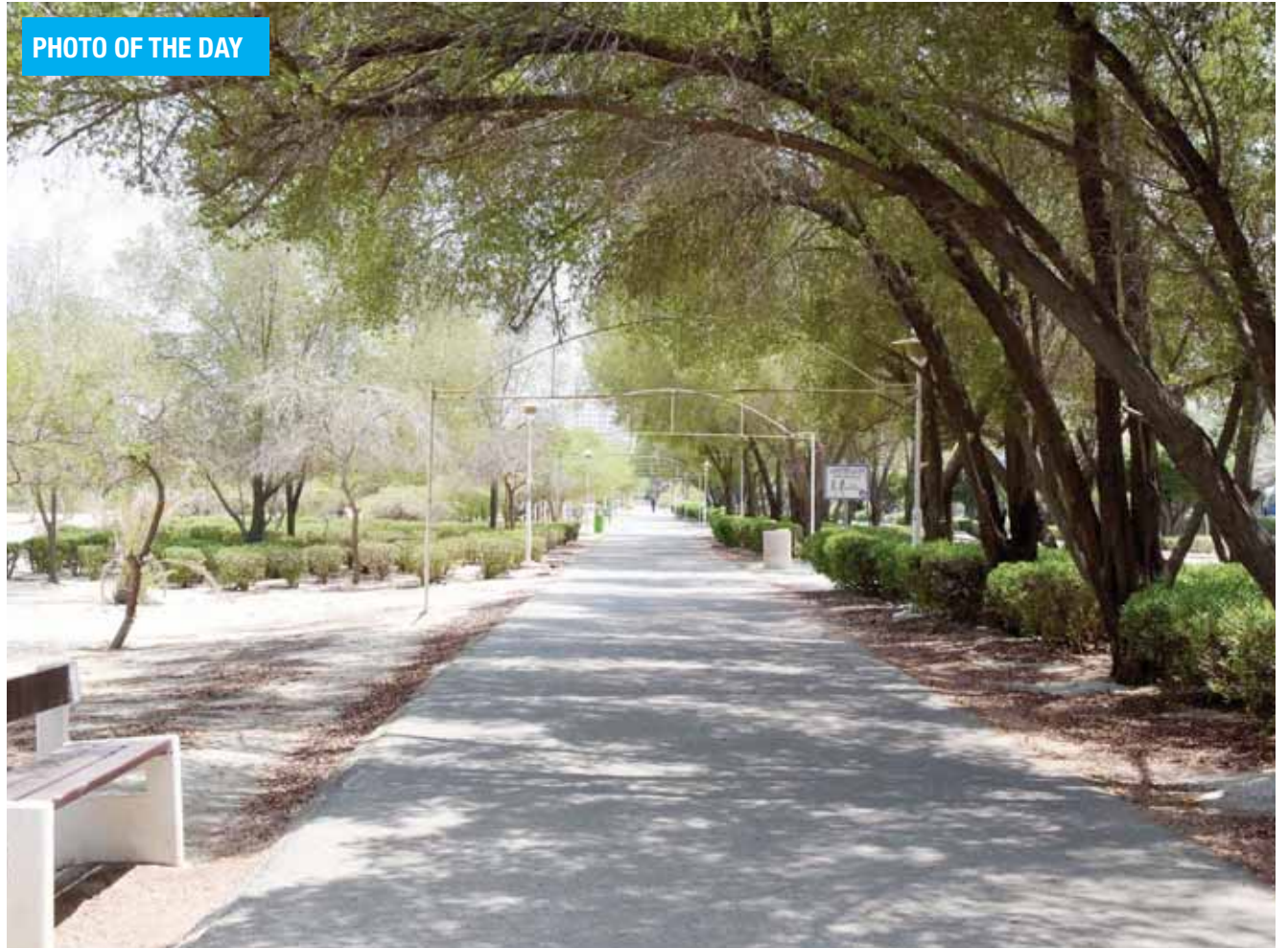
The future is what we make it and if we cannot envision it, if we cannot see beyond our current strained and difficult circumstances, we will never be able to build a better future.

This can be done in myriad and simple ways. We can use vision boards or set goals - short, medium and long term. Someone who wants to go back to school and earn a degree might see themselves now, in their mid-twenties, as too old and lament how much time they've lost and how long it would take them to return to school and finish. But time passes whether we pursue our goals and dreams or not, so isn't it better to work for them? We can develop SMART goals - Specific, Measurable, Accountable, Realistic and Time-bound - and work towards them. The future is unknowable and there will likely be many road blocks and detours and challenges. But only when one attempts to build something is there any chance of turning a wish into fulfillment.

For the foreseeable future, the majority of us will be in a constant fight to find a new normal, new jobs, new homes, a new reality that we can live with. This feels unfair and unjust, especially after these endless months of lockdown, curfews, closures and life constricted.

But as cliché as it sounds, when God closes a door, He opens another one. It is hard not to think of your family's sense of security or not grieve about your losses or feel anxious about what the future holds - but we must not give up. We must find other ways to reinvent ourselves and our world; to be realistic, confident and positive that we can build a better future for ourselves and our children.

## PHOTO OF THE DAY



KUWAIT: A photo taken from the Mishref walkway. (To have your picture featured in the Kuwait Times' 'Photo of the Day' section, please send your high resolution, unedited photos to local@kuwaittimes.com, along with the full name and Instagram account)

## Don't let your guard down



KAFFEEKLATSCH

By Shakir Reshamwala

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Life seems to be on the mend. Yes, the health situation in Kuwait nowadays makes one wax lyrical, as optimism - and not the coronavirus - is in the air. The turnaround has been fairly swift from only a few months back, when Kuwait was ravaged daily by thousands of new COVID cases and tens of deaths. The bad old days of lockdowns, curfews and closures had returned as the Delta variant menaced the country.

But things seem to be looking up now. Despite all the shortcomings regarding the implementation of health measures, there has been a return to a semblance of normality. After a slow start with a waiting period of months, around 100,000 messages are sent out daily for appointments at more than 100 vaccination centers. Nearly 70 percent of the country has been vaccinated, the magic rate when "herd immunity" supposedly kicks in.

New COVID cases and deaths are at an all-time low.

People have also returned to work. The airport is open to all. Schools are set to reopen next month after more than a year of students sitting at home, plodding their way through arduous Zoom sessions. Malls and cafes are back in business. Even shisha - which looked headed for extinction - has made a comeback.

But before we get all tipsy on this euphoric change of fortune, the situation in some neighboring countries - where new records for infections and deaths are set daily - should be a sobering reminder that the virus is still a raging beast. Even countries with a high percentage of fully vaccinated people are seeing a worrying rise in cases, prompting some to reintroduce health restrictions. Caution is the need of the hour here.

Also, it wouldn't hurt to continue wearing a mask, maintain a distance with others and avoid gatherings. A little bit of common sense is all that's needed to remain safe.

## Local

## Returning unvaccinated 12-17 year olds face uncertainty

**KUWAIT:** Until now, it is unclear from the government's side if unvaccinated children between the ages of 12-17 will be allowed to enter Kuwait. Some residents stranded abroad with their families are working to try and return, including bringing their under age children with them back to Kuwait. In India, Egypt and other nations, however, vaccinations for those under 18 years of age may not yet be available. This creates a problem for residents who want to return. Kuwait began vaccinating 12-15 year olds midsummer.

There are unconfirmed reports that Kuwait will allow under 18s who are not vaccinated with a negative PCR test to come but they will be required to quarantine at home until they complete the quarantine period or meet the negative PCR requirements. Parents can register their unvaccinated children under the 'exemption - minors below 18 unaccompanied passenger' space in the Mosafer app. But this is unconfirmed information and there has been no official government statement in this regards.

A local report yesterday had hinted at concerns that some Kuwait-based Egyptian families are having while they are currently spending their summer break in Egypt. The report published by Al-Qabas Arabic daily yesterday indicates that those families are highly worried over the fate of their children, particularly those between the ages of 16 and 18.

For now, Egypt is still studying whether to vaccinate children under 18 against COVID-19. Amal Arafah, a teacher at Kuwait's Ministry of Education who is spending her holiday in Egypt, said there are more than 100 families suffering because they have children aged between 16 and 18, noting that they cannot register their children to take vaccines in Egypt, and at the same time do not want to travel back to Kuwait without them.

Nearly a month and a half before the start of the in-campus school year on October 3rd, Kuwait had re-allowed commercial flights with Bangladesh, Egypt, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka on Wednesday after the six countries were restricted in light of COVID-19 restrictions. The decision was made in a Cabinet meeting which underlined that flights with these countries would be subject to measures identified by Kuwait's ministerial coronavirus emergency committee. Meanwhile, Kuwait also announced that incoming travelers who were administered unapproved COVID-19 vaccines were required to take one more shot of one of four government-approved vaccines to enter the country.

The decision comes as the Kuwaiti government announced new conditions and regulations that will allow passengers who have obtained unapproved vaccines, including Sinopharm, Sinovac and Sputnik V, to enter the country, the Government Communication Center said in a statement via its Twitter account. The Kuwaiti government only recognizes Pfizer-BioNTech, Oxford-AstraZeneca, Moderna, and the single-shot Johnson & Johnson as approved vaccines against the virus. Earlier regulations, namely for arriving passengers to obtain two shots of the approved vaccines or one shot of Johnson & Johnson, still stand, according to the decision.

People vaccinated inside Kuwait are asked to show their vaccination certificates as soon as they arrive in Kuwait via the "Immune" and "Kuwait Mobile ID" apps, it added. However, passengers vaccinated out of the country should submit their documents, containing their names as written in their passports, the vaccine make, the date of immunization, the administering body and the QR code for these documents to be verified electronically, it explained. In case of the absence of the QR code, the documents can be uploaded via the Ministry of Health's link, it made clear. — KUNA



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# Preserving and protecting Kuwait's maritime heritage

'Historical boats on display at Marine Museum'



#### Baghlah

Baghlah was used for cargo purposes from the 19th century up to the 1960s. Baghlahs were built in many Kuwaiti and Omani ports and were the pride of the Kuwaiti merchant fleet. They were mostly used to transport dates and Arabian horses to India, carrying wood and other cargo on their way back to all Gulf ports.

— Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By Ben Garcia

The Marine Museum at Radisson Blu Hotel was founded by late Abdul Husain Mohammed Rafie Marafie as a tribute to Kuwait's maritime heritage. It has a display of traditional dhows and collections of various seafaring objects. The Marafie family, owners of Radisson Blu Hotel, wish to preserve this legacy, once the main sources of livelihood of many Kuwaiti families prior to the discovery of oil. The Radisson Blu Hotel itself was conceptualized and modeled on the famous boats of Kuwait.

The maritime museum houses traditional boats, with some built according to the sizes and standards of the original boats previously used. Wooden dhows have a long tradition in the Arabian Gulf and are part of the history and tradition of this region. For centuries, these boats cruised the Gulf carrying goods and foodstuff for people living in the area. Even drinking water has been carried by dhows.

Visitors to the museum can experience the authentic feeling of ancient seafaring. The Marine Museum opened in 2000, together with the commemoration of Al Hashemi II, the majestic dhow anchored at Radisson

Blu Hotel. The Marine Museum is located opposite the Al Hashemi II, which is now used to host conferences, seminars, weddings and many other events.

Al Hashemi II holds a Guinness World Record as the largest wooden dhow ever built. The Marine Museum is open to visitors and can be accessed through the Radisson Blu management. Visitors are advised to call Radisson Blu Hotel ahead of time for an appointment. The museum is open from 9 am to 5 pm.

## Local

### Abreej

The abreej, a medium-sized dhow, was used as cargo carrier in the region. Modern and powerful engines were installed in many of them in the 1960s. It was the most common dhow in the Arabian Gulf.



### Shasha

This is one of the oldest and most popular type of boats, used by native fisherman around 1,000 years ago. The boat was oar-driven and carried a maximum of two people. It was entirely made from date palm fronds tied with coir to form a point at bow and stern.



The Al-Hashimi 2 model



### Pearling boom

This was one of the most popular type of pearling crafts in Kuwait. It was originally designed by Kuwaitis. This vessel was used only for pearling during the pearling season from mid-May to mid-September.

## Local

**Sambuk**

This typical vessel of the Red Sea was one of the most common and numerous among larger deep-sea trading dhows of the Gulf, Oman and Saudi Arabia. The design of the sambuk reflects the European influence of the 16th century and is the forerunner of other dhows such as the baghlah and ganjah.

**Batteel**

The batteel was used as a flagship of the pearling fleet. It also played a significant role as a trading ship in Kuwait until the baghlah emerged and replaced it. The batteel had very slender lines and was characterized by its ornate stern emblem. It is the most outstanding among Arab vessels in appearance.

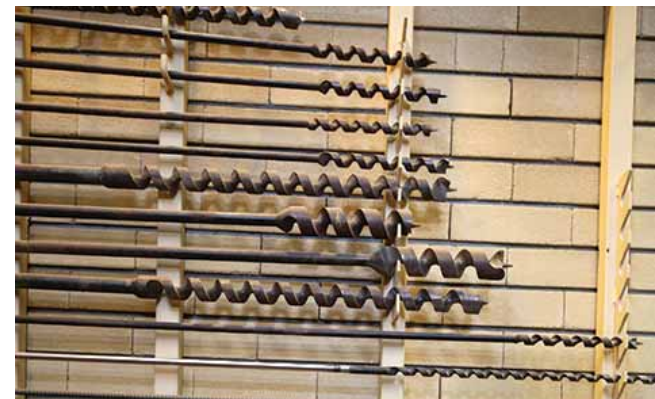
**The boom**

It is a type of deep-sea sailing ship similar to the boom Safar. This type of boom was used by Kuwaiti merchants for long voyages, for example to carry bulky cargo from India and Africa to Kuwait. Most booms had two masts, but some of the larger ones had three. The double-ended boom was cheaper to build than the more elaborate transom-sterned baghlah or ghanjah, hence it still withstands the test of time. The image of the boom appears on the Kuwaiti currency and government emblems. The Mohammedi II, the largest sailing boom ever, was built in India in 1916 and could carry up to 6,000 men (480 tons).

**Water boom**

The water boom is a true Kuwaiti dhow. Its design evolved as a result of Kuwait's growing demand for fresh water. As Kuwait grew, the water provided by the few scattered wells was no longer sufficient for the increasing population. In 1925, the first water boom sailed to the Shatt Al Arab river in Iraq and brought back barrels filled with fresh water.

The front side of Kuwait Marine Museum



Traditional accessories used by ships

# 1st



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## Local

# Qatari Amir receives Kuwait's Foreign Minister, discuss regional, int'l developments



DOHA: Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim Al-Thani meets Kuwait's Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah. — KUNA photos



Qatari Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammad Al-Thani meets Kuwait's Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah.

DOHA: Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim Al-Thani received in Doha yesterday Kuwait's Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Mohammad Al-Sabah and discussed with him regional and international developments. Sheikh Dr Ahmad

conveyed greetings of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, wishing Sheikh Tamim good health and for the Qatari people further progress and prosperity. Sheikh Tamim and Sheikh Dr Mohammad also discussed ways of further boosting bilat-

eral relations and cooperation. Meanwhile, Qatari Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammad Al-Thani held talks with Sheikh Dr Ahmad and discussed with him regional and international developments, as well as bilateral ties. — KUNA

## Kuwaiti activists talk 'deep gratification' from philanthropy

KUWAIT: Although workers and activists in the realm of relief and humanitarian aid often put themselves in hard and tiring conditions, they share a common sense of deep gratification for relieving people in difficulty. On the occasion of the forthcoming World Humanitarian Day which was marked yesterday, Kuwaiti traveller and humanitarian activist Youssef Al-Rashed said that many of his tourist trips turned into humanitarian missions particularly in impoverished regions in Africa.

It had dawned on him, he recalled, when he saw a group of barefoot children, barely covering their bodies with worn fabrics, rushing to him when he was eating mandarins, asking him to share the fruits. Deeply touched, Rashed raised within hours donations worth KD 5,000 (nearly \$16,000) via Instagram and carried out a relief campaign for the impoverished children themed "children's delight." Rashed said he had experienced deep sense of gratification that overtook his fatigue in the relief effort.



KUWAIT: Traveler Youssef Al-Rashed in one of his volunteer trips. — KUNA

Mariam Al-Jarallah, founder of the 'wanas' voluntary team, believes that it is the duty of each person to dedicate some efforts and time to help out those in need. She believes that securing education is the best form of humanitarian assistance for those deprived of means to go to schools. Anwar Al-Hasawi, the Deputy Chairman of Kuwait Red Crescent Society, said the society has carried out a long chain of humanitarian missions since its establishment in 1966.



Founder of the 'wanas' voluntary team Maryam Al-Jarallah (right) during one of her volunteer trips in Zanzibar.

The World Humanitarian Day falls this year amid ongoing efforts to combat the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), he said, noting volunteers' arduous tasks of reaching those in need for treatment or vaccination. The State of Kuwait has granted abundant medical aid to low-income countries to face this scourge. The annual occasion is an opportunity to boost awareness of humanitarian work globally and honor those who have given sacrifices for delivering humanitarian aid, he says. — KUNA

## Kuwaiti firefighters leave after fighting wildfires in Turkey

ISTANBUL: A delegation of Kuwaiti firefighters left Turkey yesterday after assisting in fending off raging wildfires. Kuwaiti ambassador to Turkey Ghassan Al-Zuwawi expressed his gratitude to the Kuwaiti firefighting team for their "tremendous efforts". He added that he received many calls from the Turkish side expressing their happiness on His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's instructions by donating six engines and equipment to Turkey, which reflects the strong relations between both the countries.

The commander of the Kuwait fire team colonel Ahmad Al-Rasheedi had announced on Wednesday that Kuwaiti firefighters successfully concluded their mission in Turkey, hoping that these



ISTANBUL: Members of the Kuwaiti firefighters' delegation pose for a group photo before leaving Turkey yesterday after assisting in fending off raging wildfires. — KUNA

incidents would not happen again. The Kuwaiti delegation handed Turkish officials instructions for using engines and equipment that are capable of operating a fire station. They included fire pumps and large-capacity water transport equipment. Turkish officials

thanked Kuwait for helping put out the fires and for the donation, assuring the strong relations between both the countries. Kuwait sent a team of firefighters to Turkey to help fight forest fires that killed at least eight people and injured scores others. — KUNA



## Local

# Kuwait's Prime Minister visits ports, inspects Clean Fuel Project

## Cabinet mulls new development ventures

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah yesterday made a visit to Abdullah and Ahmadi ports to witness the Clean Fuel Project and control rooms. This took place after his visit to the Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) headquarters earlier yesterday, where he attended a presentation on the Clean Fuel Project. During the presentation, His Highness the Prime Minister listened to the demonstration of the project, its latest developments and completion percentages.

The Kuwaiti Cabinet had studied, in its extraordinary meeting on Wednesday, a series of new development projects and ordered state agencies to take all required measures to do their utmost efforts to speed up pace of development across the state. The Cabinet instructed the its Fatwa and Legislation Department, the Central Agency for Public Tenders, the Ministry of Electricity and Water, Ministry of Finance and the Kuwait Municipality to form internal special teams to accelerate launching and implementation of development projects while showing full compliance to relevant legal frameworks and the state audit bureau's recommendations, said Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Dr Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohamad Al-Sabah in a statement following the Cabinet meeting.

The Cabinet expressed appreciation of the Municipal Council for its unanimous approval of

the proposed investment and development plans for four locations at the Sheikh Jaber Causeway. It hailed the council's cooperation to execute development projects of the Kuwait 2035 Vision. The Cabinet also discussed a recommendation from its economic committee on putting up a tender for a project to implement and manage Al-Abdali economic zone and ordered the Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority (KDIPA) to go ahead with and put up the tender.

### Subbiya investment

The Cabinet went to discuss a proposal regarding an initial study for a modern exhibition-hosting venue at Subbiya region with the Kuwait International Fair company tasked with the matter. The company are tasked with conducting a study on the feasibility, expected revenues and deadline and requirements of the project, having been given 3-6 months to complete the role. Given the diverse landscape of Kuwait's northern Subbiya region, the Cabinet discussed plans to transform the area into a recreational location catering to all age groups, in addition to a platform for entrepreneurs and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The plans include forming special lots that would allow food trucks and stalls to operate in an effort to boost local businesses, while moviegoers will be able to enjoy their favorite films in a drive-in cinema that will spring up in the area. The Cabinet



**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah is given a demonstration yesterday during his visit to the Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) yesterday. —KUNA

tasked the national SMEs fund and Kuwait's municipality to take the measures needed to ensure the timely completion of these projects.

In addition, the Cabinet studied the public service committee's recommendations on the unified government application of electronic services 'SAHEL' and the measures taken by the Public Authority for Civil Information, in coordination with the relevant bodies, in this matter. The Cabinet lauded efforts made in this regard to launch appli-

cation as soon as possible in a way that will simplify the measures, and facilitate duties of the staff and services of the beneficiaries. It also approved a decree on appointing Yousef Al-Fadhala as chief executive officer of the central authority for addressing the status of bedoons (stateless) and referred it to His Highness the Amir. Moreover, the ministers discussed the political affairs in light of the ongoing developments on the political arena on Arab and international levels. — KUNA



**KUWAIT:** Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Sibi George presents a memento to acting director of Kuwait's Public Authority for Manpower Dr Mubarak Al-Jafour. — KUNA

## India ready to provide more domestic workers

**KUWAIT:** India is ready to provide more domestic workers as it wishes to increase the number of its manpower in the Gulf state, Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Sibi George said. The envoy made his statement during a meeting yesterday with the acting director of Kuwait's Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) Dr Mubarak

Al-Jafour, in which they discussed ways of cooperation regarding the Indian community in Kuwait. The authority said in a press statement that they discussed ways of strengthening ties and a memorandum of understanding between the two sides. Jafour expressed his gratitude to the Indian ambassador for the assistance provided to the Indian community, and George affirmed that both parties are keen on joint cooperation regarding the Indian labor. There were 319,333 Indian domestic helpers in Kuwait as of December 31, 2020 according to official statistics, making up 47.8 percent of the total domestic workers' population of 668,615.

## Kuwait expands COVID vaccination sites to include new location

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait has expanded its list of designated sites to get COVID-19 shots, naming the headquarters of its agriculture and fisheries authority in the southern Wafra region as the latest location, the health ministry said on Wednesday. The new center, which has the capacity to accommodate up to 5,000 people, will be serving Wafra residents only, said ministry spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad, adding that the facility is

equipped with an emergency ward and 14 other special units. Kuwait has seen new COVID-19 cases drop dramatically as its vaccination campaign picks up speed, with officials saying the country is likely to achieve herd immunity as early as next month.

Kuwait's daily coronavirus cases had increased by 237 to 407,376 on Wednesday as deaths increased by two to 2,397. The number of people hospitalized with the virus stood at 398 as of Wednesday, with 182 of them in intensive care units, Dr Sanad said, revealing that another 5,944 were receiving regular treatment. Another 642 people were cured of the virus within the same period, raising total of recoveries to 399,035, he said. Some 9,900 swab tests were conducted over the same period out of a total of 3,631,090, he revealed. — KUNA



The new vaccination center in Wafra.



Evacuees from Kabul touch down in UAE on way to Britain

## New Zealand says it has solved COVID-19 outbreak 'puzzle'

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This handout photo released by the Arabic Twitter account of the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" yesterday shows a Taliban delegation led by the head of the negotiating team Anas Haqqani (C-R) meeting with former Afghan government officials including former president Hamid Karzai (C-L) at an unspecified location in Afghanistan. —AFP

# Taliban foe's son vows resistance

## Defiant protesters wave Afghan flags

**KABUL:** Defiant protesters waved Afghan flags at scattered rallies yesterday to mark the country's independence anniversary, as the son of the nation's most famous resistance fighter vowed to take up arms against the newly returned Taliban regime.

Tens of thousands of people have tried to flee Afghanistan since the hardline Islamist militants swept into the capital on Sunday, completing a stunning rout of government forces after a two decade insurgency. Taliban leaders have repeatedly vowed not to take revenge against their opponents, while seeking to project an image of tolerance. But memories of the Taliban's brutal regime of the 1990s—which saw music and television banned, people stoned to death and women confined to their homes—have caused panic about what lies ahead for Afghans.

In the capital Kabul, a group of men and women unfurled the black, red and green tricolour national flag on the country's independence anniversary. Social media also showed a crowd cheering a man shimmying up a pole in another neighbourhood, before tying the flag at the top.

But the Taliban—who have raised their own black and white standard over government buildings—have already signalled they will not stand for any challenges, breaking up a flag-waving rally in Jalalabad on Wednesday with gunfire. Stronger signs of defiance were also starting to emerge. Ahmad Massoud, the son of Afghanistan's most famed anti-Taliban fighter, yesterday said he was "ready to follow in his father's footsteps", as he rallied his forces in the Panjshir Valley northeast of Kabul—the country's last holdout. "The Taliban doesn't control the whole territory of Afghanistan,"

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told reporters of Massoud's resistance. Massoud is the son of Ahmed Shah Massoud, the famed anti-Soviet and anti-Taliban resistance leader assassinated in 2001, two days before the September 11 attacks on the US.

### A situation worse than death'

The United States, meanwhile said the militants were reneging on pledges to allow Afghans who worked with foreign governments out of the country. "We have seen reports that the Taliban... are blocking Afghans who wish to leave the country from reaching the airport," Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman told reporters.

She added that "all American citizens, all third-country nationals and all Afghans who wish to leave" should be able to do so without harassment. "I am desperate to leave, I have bad memories of their regime," a 30-year-old who worked for a foreign NGO and tried but failed to reach Kabul airport told AFP.

Unconfirmed reports on social media say several people have been killed as US forces and the Taliban-separated by an unofficial no-man's land—struggle to contain the desperate throngs of people trying to get on flights out of Kabul. "I went to the airport with my kids and family... the Taliban and Americans were shooting," said one man who until recently had worked for a foreign NGO. "Despite that (the shooting) people were moving forward just because they knew a situation worse than death awaited them outside the airport."

The United States said it has airlifted out nearly 5,000 US citizens and Afghans, while France, Britain and other nations have also organised evacuation flights.

### 'The system has changed'

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid has said the new regime would be "positively different" from their 1996-2001 stint. But the rebrand was hard to believe for many, with women largely staying off the streets, and journalists—and those who have worked with Western governments and organisations—saying they are terrified.

Their rule then was infamous for an ultra-strict interpretation of sharia law, featuring deaths by stoning, girls being banned from school and women from working in contact with men.

Yesterday, an Afghan woman journalist made a desperate social media plea after she was barred from entering the TV station where she worked. "The male employees... were allowed to enter the office, but I was told that I couldn't continue my duty because the system has been changed," news anchor Shabnam Dawran said, adding that "our lives are under threat".

The United States ultimately led the invasion of Afghanistan to topple the Taliban because they continued to provide sanctuary for Al-Qaeda after the September 11 attacks. The Taliban have continued to edge towards establishing a government, with co-founder Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar returning from exile and other senior figures meeting ex-president Hamid Karzai and other former government officials. Yesterday the Taliban acknowledged the nation's independence day recalling the defeat of the British empire in three wars as well as the Russians following their decade-long occupation that ended in 1989. "It is a matter of great pride for Afghans that their country is on the verge of independence from the American occupation today," a spokesman tweeted. —AFP

## International

# Recorded COVID deaths pass 100,000 mark in Iran

## Tighter regulations coincided with commemoration of Ashoura

**TEHRAN:** Recorded deaths from COVID in Iran passed the 100,000 mark yesterday, the health ministry said, amid tighter restrictions nationwide to contain the spread of the virus.

In the past 24 hours, 31,266 people tested positive for coronavirus and 564 died, the ministry said. That brought total infections since the pandemic started to 4,587,683, and deaths to 100,255. Iranian health officials have acknowledged that the ministry's figures almost certainly understate the real toll but even they make Iran much the worst-hit Middle Eastern country.

Since late June, Iran has seen what officials have called a "fifth wave" of infections, the country's worst yet, which they have largely blamed on the more contagious Delta variant of the virus. Daily infections have hit record high several times this month.

"Infections and hospitalisation numbers have stabilised in 14 provinces ... but fatalities are expected to be on a relatively rising trajectory in coming days," deputy health minister Iraj Harirchi told Iran's ISNA news agency Wednesday. The latest measures, which are in force nationwide, include a ban on private travel between provinces until August 27 as well as the closure until Saturday of govern-

ment buildings, banks and non-essential shops.

Yesterday, ISNA reported that some motorists have got round the restrictions by taking the bus and using trucks to transport their cars to tourist destinations like Gilan province on the Caspian Sea coast.

Authorities have repeatedly blamed rising infection numbers on "unnecessary travel" and citizens flouting health protocols.

### 'Special circumstances'

The tighter regulations coincided with the run-up to the Shiite commemoration of Ashoura yesterday, when the faithful normally flock to mosques and other venues for mourning rituals and other gatherings.

But the restrictions did not apply to processions held out in the open.

"The people's behaviour (at the) events can decide the fate and future of corona in the country," Harirchi said.

Iran has avoided imposing a full lockdown on its 83-million-strong population, instead resorting to piecemeal measures such as temporary travel bans and business closures. Iran launched a vaccination drive in February but it has progressed slower than authorities had planned.

spiritual leaders. For the faithful, religious devotion far outweighs any concerns about COVID infection. Even though only a little over five percent of Iraqis have been fully vaccinated against COVID, pilgrims insisted they had no need of masks, counting on divine providence to protect them. "Our belief protects us," said one unmasked pilgrim, who had travelled to Karbala from the southern city of Kut.

"We're not bothering with masks, because our faith in Imam Hussein protects us from everything," said the pilgrim, who gave his name only as Dholam. Another unmasked pilgrim, Kamel Mohammed, from the southern city of Basra, said he too was trusting in God.

"I have great faith in God," he said. "I follow the example of Imam Hussein." Large crowds of pilgrims began gathering around Imam Hussein's golden-domed mausoleum in the heart of the city from Wednesday evening. Drummers banged out the rhythm, as the faithful chanted prayers and poems commemorating Hussein's martyrdom.

Before the pandemic, the main Shiite pilgrimages in Iraq were among the largest religious gatherings in the world, and there have been concerns they could act as super-spreading events. Indian health officials have said that the Hindu pilgrimage of Kumbh Mela, an event held every three years that drew millions to the Himalayan city of Haridwar in January, may have helped fuel a surge in infections earlier this year. —AFP



**TEHRAN:** Iranians commute past shuttered stores at Valiasr square in the capital Tehran, at the start of renewed restrictions for 5 days to mitigate the spread of the COVID pandemic. —AFP

Choked by US sanctions that have made it difficult to transfer money abroad, Iran says it has struggled to import vaccines.

On Wednesday, President Ebrahim Raisi appealed to China and Russia to increase their vaccine deliveries to Iran. —AFP

## No masks as Iraq pilgrims ignore COVID on Ashoura

**KARBALA:** Masks were almost nowhere to be seen yesterday as hundreds of thousands of pilgrims thronged the Iraqi shrine city of Karbala for the Shiite commemoration of Ashoura, ignoring COVID fears. Pilgrims numbers were down on the millions who attended before the pandemic took hold, and there were only a few pilgrims from outside Iraq, most from neighbouring Iran or from Pakistan.

Ashoura commemorates a defining moment in the birth of the Shiite branch of Islam that is the majority faith in both Iraq and Iran. It marks the killing of the Prophet Mohamed's (PBUH) grandson, Imam Hussein, by troops of Caliph Yazid in 680 AD in the Karbala desert. Pilgrims traditionally walk to Karbala, sleeping in roadside camps set up along the way, in summer temperatures that regularly top 45 degrees Celsius (113 degrees Fahrenheit).

In the run-up to Ashoura, mourning rituals are also held in Shiite cities and neighbourhoods across Iraq. In Karbala, the most zealous flagellated themselves with flails or blades until their heads and backs were raw and streaming with blood, a practice frowned on by Shiite

## Hezbollah says Iran fuel tanker to sail to Lebanon

**BEIRUT:** Hezbollah chief Hasan Nasrallah said yesterday a tanker would set off from Iran "within hours" to bring desperately needed fuel supplies to Lebanon, in defiance of US sanctions. Many questions remain about how the shipment would reach its stated destination, where acute and growing fuel shortages have forced hospitals, businesses and government offices shut amid a crippling economic crisis.

But the move, prohibited by US sanctions on Iran's oil industry, could drag Lebanon into the covert naval war between Tehran and Israel. Nasrallah dared Iran's foes to stop the shipment. "The vessel, from the moment it sails in the coming hours until it enters (Mediterranean) wa-

ters, will be considered Lebanese territory," he said during a televised speech to mark the Shiite Muslim commemoration of Ashoura.

"To the Americans and Israelis, I say: it's Lebanese territory." He said a first ship would bring fuel for "hospitals, manufacturers of medicine and food, as well as bakeries and private generators." He said more vessels would follow to address shortages that have ground Lebanon to a halt. Neither the Iranian nor the Lebanese governments have confirmed the paramilitary organisation's claim.

Nasrallah did not specify where or how the shipment would reach Lebanon and be offloaded. Lebanese energy expert Laury Haytayan said major questions hung over the shipment, including the amount to be delivered, who would pay, where the boat would dock and whether the details of the transaction had been disclosed to the Lebanese government. "It is a possibility that these tankers will go to Syria and shipments will be refined there," Haytayan said. —AFP

## International

# New Zealand says it has solved COVID-19 outbreak 'puzzle'

## 'We're all prepared for cases to get worse before they get better'

**WELLINGTON:** New Zealand reported a breakthrough yesterday in tracing the source of a COVID-19 outbreak that plunged the nation into lockdown, with Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern saying it should help "stamp out" the virus.

Health officials have been trying to determine how an Auckland man contracted the coronavirus this week, ending a six-month run of no community cases in New Zealand.

Tests showed the man had a version of the Delta strain found in Australia, and Ardern said investigations narrowed down the origin to a person who arrived from Sydney on August 7.

She said the traveller had been in quarantine and hospital since touching down, indicating the virus had not been in the community as long as initially feared. "We believe we have uncovered the piece of the puzzle we were looking for," Ardern told reporters.

She said finding the outbreak's source also increased the "ability to circle the virus, lock it down and stamp it out".

Case numbers grew by 11 overnight to a total of 21, she said.

Ardern ordered a three-day national lockdown—New Zealand's first in 15 months—when the first case emerged on Tuesday, with Auckland and nearby Coromandel facing restrictions for a week.

"We're all prepared for cases to get worse before they get better, that's always the pattern in these outbreaks,"

she said. But she said there were grounds for cautious optimism "because we believe it wasn't here for long before it was found".

The infected traveller arrived from Sydney on a so-called "red zone" flight, arranged to bring back New Zealanders stranded when Wellington suspended a trans-Tasman travel bubble due to multiple outbreaks in Australia.

The person tested positive two days later and was hospitalised a week after that. Officials said it was still unclear how the virus spread into the community and 1,000 close contacts of positive cases were being assessed.

A decision is due today on whether the three-day lockdown will be extended or end by Saturday.

### 'Covid zero' strategy

New Zealand has adopted a policy of eliminating the virus in the community, rather than containing it, which has resulted in only 26 deaths in a population of five million.

Neighbouring Australia has been pursuing a similar "COVID zero" strategy, but is struggling to contain outbreaks of the Delta variant.

Health authorities yesterday urged mass COVID testing for an entire Outback town in far western New South Wales, where an outbreak that began in Sydney two months ago is spreading.

The area is grappling with Australia's first significant outbreak in Aboriginal communities, with specialist mili-



WELLINGTON: New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern speaks about COVID-19 on the first day of a snap national lockdown, during a press conference in Wellington yesterday. —AFP

tary health teams deployed this week to boost sluggish vaccination efforts.

Early in the pandemic, Wilcannia's roughly 750 residents put up signs on the town's limits asking travellers not to stop-fearing the virus could obliterate an already vulnerable community, where more than 60 percent identify as Indigenous. —AFP

## Mexico's Caribbean coast braces for Hurricane Grace

**CANCUN, Mexico:** Hurricane Grace made landfall along Mexico's eastern Yucatan peninsula yesterday, clocking winds of 80 miles (130 kilometers) per hour as the National Hurricane Center warned of a "dangerous storm surge" in the area. The center said in its last update that the Category One hurricane — the lowest on the five-level Saffir-Simpson scale — was 10 miles from the town of Tulum on Mexico's Caribbean coastline.

On Wednesday, as the Hurricane approached Mexico ground flights and forced tourists in some hotels along the Riviera Maya to hunker down overnight in storm shelters.

At least 124 flights to or from Cancun were canceled, the city's mayor, Mara Lezama, said on Twitter.

"Hotels in Tulum have been evacuated and the tourists taken to various hotel shelters," said Carlos Joaquin, governor of the southeastern state of Quintana Roo.

Another 125 people from neighboring municipalities were also evacuated, while sea crossings

to nearby islands were suspended and ports were closed, he said on Twitter.

After it has crossed the Yucatan, the storm was expected to move over the southwest Gulf of Mexico before lashing the eastern states of Veracruz and Tamaulipas.

Grace was "expected to bring strong winds and a dangerous storm surge" to parts of the Yucatan, according to the NHC.

"Heavy rainfall from Grace will likely result in areas of flash and urban flooding, and will also be capable of producing mudslides," it said.

The storm surge will be accompanied by "large and destructive waves" near the coast, the NHC warned.

Businesses on the Riviera Maya boarded up windows, while fishermen and tour operators hauled their boats onto land and tourists soaked up the final hours in the sun.

At supermarkets in Cancun, some residents stocked up on food in preparation for the storm's arrival, although the authorities called on people to avoid panic buying.

"We don't know what it will be like," said 41-year-old housewife Hortencia Rodriguez. "With Wilma we didn't prepare and we were hit hard," she said, referring to a Category 5 hurricane that pummeled Cancun in 2005. Authorities in Quintana Roo set up 85 shelters for people who needed refuge from the storm. —AFP

## Cuban dissident leader Ferrer sent back to prison

**HAVANA:** A Cuban court has revoked the conditional release of leading dissident Jose Daniel Ferrer, ordering him to see out the remaining four years of a prison sentence, an ally said on Wednesday.

Ferrer was one of a number of well-known dissidents arrested on July 11 during unprecedented anti-government protests in 40 towns and cities across the island nation. The subsequent government crackdown left one dead, dozens injured and hundreds arrested.

Ferrer had been on conditional release since February, when he was due to start a sentence of four years and six months for having attacked a fellow dissident. But that conditional release—in which he was ordered to end his political activities—has now been revoked and he must see out the remainder of his sentence, fellow dissident Manuel Cuesta Morua told AFP.

Cuesta Morua, the vice-president of the opposition platform the Council for the Democratic Transition of Cuba, led by Ferrer, was also arrested on July 11 but released a few days later.

"His arrest reflects a double fear (on the part of authorities): (firstly of) his civic leadership, many citizens were waiting for him in the streets there in Santiago de Cuba (where he was detained) on July 11," said Cuesta Morua.

And secondly of "his participation in an organization like the Council." Cuesta Morua said another Council leader from Matanzas in the west of the country, Felix Navarro, had also been arrested, and has contracted COVID-19.

"It's an attempt to strike us down," he added. Ferrer, 51, was one of 75 political prisoners sentenced to 25 years in 2003 as part of the Black Spring wave of repression unleashed by authorities. He was released in 2011, alongside 130 other political prisoners, following mediation by the Catholic Church. In August 2011, he founded the Patriotic Union of Cuba (UN-PACU), one of the most active opposition organizations in a one-party state that bans opposition parties. —AFP

## International

# Mother who lost four sons on quest to find Mexico's missing

## More than 76,000 disappearances reported since 1968

**MEXICO CITY:** Maria Herrera's life fell apart when first two and then another two of her sons disappeared. Now she dedicates her life to the search for them — and thousands more missing in violence-wracked Mexico.

Jesus Salvador, then 24, and Raul Trujillo, 19, vanished in August 2008 after going to trade gold in Guerrero, a southern state plagued by cartel turf wars. Two years later Gustavo, 28, and Luis Armando, 25, went missing in the eastern state of Veracruz, another hotspot for criminal gangs working with corrupt police.

Both had helped with the search for their brothers while criss-crossing the country for their work as part of the family's gold trading business. Asking too many questions can be deadly in Mexico and one theory is that corrupt cops got rid of the pair after they realized they were searching for missing persons.

Their mother, now 72, has turned to any authority willing to listen and spent her savings on private detectives to investigate what she considers to be "forced disappearances." "The real criminals are in power," Herrera said in her small house in the State of Mexico, which she has left countless times to tour the country with photos of her children and to support other families to do the same.

Still, she holds out hope "that our voice is heard, that it resounds and that society unites and wakes up," said Herrera, who is assisted in her quest by her husband and four other children. Because of her tenacity, she has been hailed as a "hero" by the Mexico office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

### 'I felt helpless'

More than 76,000 disappearances have been reported in Mexico since 1968, according to a national registry of the missing. Nearly 98 percent of them have happened since 2006, when the government deployed the military in the war on powerful drug cartels, triggering a spiral of violence.

Since then there have been more than 300,000 murders, which the government blames mostly on organized crime. According to Human Rights Watch, the militarized strategy has re-

sulted in widespread rights violations including enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions.

Herrera has given up hope of finding her four missing sons alive, but she wants to find their remains to achieve some sort of closure. "I was hoping that I would find my children. But when — far from finding them and feeling the joy of being together — another two disappeared, that's when I felt helpless and thought I have no choice but to help others," Herrera said.

"Now we scream. They turned us into wild animals because when they touch your cubs, you defend them with your life," she said. In 2011, during talks between victims and the government, she rebuked then-president Felipe Calderon for his strategy against drug trafficking, "My children were honest and hard-working boys and they were victims of your war," she screamed.

### 'Living in fear'

Disappointed with the response of the government, in 2013 Herrera and her other children created a network bringing together search organizations from around the country. In 2016 they helped to launch a national search brigade that has discovered clandestine graves in several parts of Mexico, where criminals often bury their victims in hard-to-reach places.

"I never imagined it would come to this. I was a happy woman selling clothes," said Herrera, whose mother taught her from an early age to help those in need. She receives daily calls from families of the disappeared asking for guidance.

Since 2008 she has assisted thousands of people searching desperately for missing relatives — both through official channels and in the field. She has learned how to hammer metal rods into the ground to release the smell of decaying flesh, and to work painstakingly with picks and shovels to avoid damaging bones.

Despite now being a recognized figure, she too worries for her safety. Being a human rights defender in Mexico "is the most difficult thing there is because you are just living in fear that at any moment they will silence you." —AFP

and local vigilantes the following day. Northwest and central Nigeria have been terrorised by criminal gangs who raid villages, stealing cattle, kidnapping for ransom and burning homes after looting supplies.

The gangs — believed to hole up in Rugu forest, which straddles Katsina, Kaduna, Zamfara and Niger states — have been increasingly attacking schools, seizing students to extort ransom from parents. According to the UN, some 950 students have been kidnapped across Nigeria since December.

While most of the hostages have been released after negotiations, some are still being held. More than 100 pupils of an Islamic seminary kidnapped from the town of Tegin in May in central Niger state are still in captivity.

Kidnappings are just one of the challenges facing Nigeria's security forces, who are battling a grinding Islamist insurgency in the northeast and separatist tensions in parts of the south. On Wednesday, authorities in central Plateau state said five people were killed and four were missing in an attack on an Irigwe Christian farming community in Bassa district.

The killings, which occurred despite a round-the-clock curfew, were believed to be reprisals after last Saturday's slaughter of 25 Fulani Muslims by suspected Irigwe youths. President Muhammadu Buhari, a former military leader first elected in 2015, has faced criticism for his government's inability to end the security crisis. —AFP



**HUITZUCO DE LOS FIGUEROA, Mexico:** File photo shows, Mexican Maria Herrera, who looks for four missing sons, holds their portraits during a march as part of the activities of the fourth National Search Brigade, in Huitzuc de los Figueroa, Guerrero state, Mexico. —AFP

## Spain arrests Moroccan over migrant tragedy

**MADRID:** Spanish police said yesterday they had arrested a Moroccan man over the deaths of 14 migrants who perished while trying to make the crossing from Morocco to the Canary Islands.

The 43-year-old is suspected of being one of two men who captained the boat, which spent two weeks adrift before it was rescued by a merchant ship earlier this month, police said in a statement.

Of the 47 passengers on board the boat, 10 died during the attempted crossing and four fell into the sea and drowned during the rescue operation, which took place in rough weather, it added.

Police said the migrant boat ran out of fuel, as well as water and food, just three days after it departed from Morocco at the end of July for Spain's Canary Islands.

"The majority of migrants started to drink seawater. Over the following days, people began to die on board, and their bodies were thrown into the water," the statement said.

Police investigations determined that one of the suspected captains of the boat died during the attempted crossing, while the other was at a migrant reception centre in the Canaries with the rest of the surviving passengers where he was arrested.

The man faces charges of human trafficking and involuntary manslaughter. Migrant arrivals on the Atlantic archipelago have surged since late 2019 when increased patrols in the Mediterranean dramatically reduced crossings there.

At its shortest, the sea crossing from the Moroccan coast is around 100 kilometres (65 miles), but strong currents make it very dangerous. The vessels used are often overcrowded and in poor condition, adding to the risks.

Last year 23,023 migrants reached the Canary Islands, eight times more than in 2019, interior ministry figures show. During the first seven months of this year, 7,531 migrants reached the Canaries, more than twice as many as the same period in 2020. —AFP

## Gunmen kidnap nine students in northern Nigeria

**KANO:** Gunmen have snatched nine pupils of an Islamic seminary in northern Nigeria's Katsina state, police said yesterday, in the latest of a string of school abductions. Motorbike-riding assailants, known locally as bandits, seized the children in the village of Sakki on Tuesday as they were heading home after school, said state police spokesman Gambo Isah.

"Nine pupils were abducted," Isah told AFP, adding that the police were on the trail of the kidnappers. "All efforts are being made to rescue the children," he assured. Local residents however said eight pupils and a teacher were taken.

"The bandits came to the school around 6:00 pm (1700GMT) and forced the eight pupils and their teacher on motorcycles and zoomed off into the bush," resident Muntari Nasiru told AFP. Last December, bandits kidnapped more than 100 children of another Islamic seminary in nearby Baure village but the hostages were rescued by residents

## International

# Desperate Afghans trapped in Kabul airport no-man's land

## Many do have visas for a foreign destination

**KABUL:** Thousands of Afghans were packed yesterday between Taliban checkpoints and a US-imposed ring of steel around Kabul's main airport, desperate to get aboard any flight out following the return of the hardline Islamist group.

Even more were mobbing foreign embassy compounds in the capital, as rumours spread that visas were up for grabs or safe passage on offer at least as far as the airport.

Unconfirmed reports on social media say several people have been killed as US forces and the Taliban struggle to contain the desperate throngs on their respective sides of an unofficial no-man's land.

"I went to the airport with my kids and family... the Taliban and Americans were shooting," said one man who until recently had worked for a foreign NGO.

"Despite that, people were still moving forward (to get in) because they knew a situation worse than death awaited them outside the airport." There have been chaotic scenes since the weekend, when the Taliban drove unopposed into the capital after a two-week lightning offensive that capped a simmering 20-year insurgency.

Distressing pictures and video have emerged of people desperately trying to get aboard any flight leaving — even resorting to climbing on a US military Hercules as it rolled down the run-

way for take-off.

Some semblance of order has been restored, but thousands have been left stranded between the Taliban and US lines — clinging to an unrealistic hope that they will be let in and evacuated. Many do have visas for a foreign destination — and say they were promised evacuations — but they simply can't get in.

"I spoke to my friend who is there and he has a letter from Spain saying he can leave with them, but when he tries to go to the gate they threaten to shoot him," a man who asked not to be identified told AFP.

"The Spanish people tell him if he gets inside, he will be ok, but he can't get inside."

The Taliban have provided official escorts for some foreign embassies — taking their nationals as well as Afghans — and they are being allowed in by the Americans.

But even that journey — which can take several hours for just a few kilometres (miles) is fraught with heartbreak.

"There were people beating on the windows of the bus, trying to get inside," said a woman who made it through on Wednesday. "The Taliban with us fired in the air to chase them away."

There was desperation near the diplomatic enclave as well Thursday, as thousands clamoured to get the attention of anyone at now largely deserted embassies.

"I was told that if I get my name and my de-



**TORREJON DE ARDOZ AIR BASE:** A group of Afghan nationals wait on the tarmac after disembarking from a first Spanish Air Force Airbus A400M carrying Spaniards who still remained in Afghanistan. —AFP

tails and my phone on a paper to the French embassy they will take me," said one man.

Hundreds of people sat on pavements begging for scraps of paper or to borrow a pen to do the same. Washington said Wednesday the Taliban were reneging on pledges to allow Afghans who worked with the United States and its allies out of the country.

"We have seen reports that the Taliban... are blocking Afghans who wish to leave the country from reaching the airport," Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman told reporters.

"We expect them to allow all American citizens, all third-country nationals and all Afghans who wish to leave to do so safely and without harassment." — AFP

## Forty-seven killed in Burkina Faso deadly jihadist attack

**OUAGADOUGOU:** Burkina Faso's president declared three days of national mourning from yesterday after suspected jihadists killed 47 people, including 30 civilians, in an attack in the north of the country.

The attack was the latest bloodshed in an area plagued by Islamist violence.

The assault Wednesday near the town of Gorgadji also left 14 soldiers and three militia volunteers dead, the communications ministry said.

The soldiers and militia had been "guarding civilians setting off for Arbinda," another town in northern Burkina. In an ensuing gunbattle, security forces killed 58 "terrorists" and put the rest to flight, according to the government. Nineteen people were also wounded, it said. "Rescue and relief operations are continuing," it said.

The area is in the notorious "three-border" zone where Burkina Faso meets Mali and Niger, a focus of the jihadist violence that plagues the wider Sahel region of west Africa.

It was the third major attack on Burkinabe soldiers in the past two weeks, including one on August

4 near the Niger border which killed 30 people, including 11 civilians.

President Roch Marc Christian Kabore declared three days of national mourning for the victims of the latest attack, according to an official decree.

Flags would be flown at half-mast from public buildings and festivities banned during the period, it said. Burkina Faso, a poor country in the arid sub-Saharan Sahel region, has since 2015 been battling increasingly frequent and deadly attacks by jihadist groups affiliated with the Islamic State group and Al-Qaeda. On June 4-5, gunmen killed at least 132 people, including children, in the northeast village of Solhan, Burkina's deadliest attack in the history of the insurgency.

Raids and ambushes have been concentrated in the north and east close to the borders with Mali and Niger, both of which have also faced deadly violence by jihadists.

These attacks along with inter-communal violence have left more than 1,400 people dead and forced 1.3 million to flee their homes, according to official estimates. Along with central Mali, the vast, arid "three-border" region straddling Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso has become the worst-hit area in the jihadists' Sahel campaign.

Militants linked to Al-Qaeda emerged in northern Mali in 2012, prompting French military intervention. After being scattered, the jihadists regrouped and spread to neighbouring countries. — AFP

## DR Congo army says it has taken strongholds of rebel coalition

**BUKAVU:** DR Congo's army says it has seized the "last strongholds" of a rebel force after several days of fighting in the troubled eastern province of South Kivu. The clashes erupted in the province's highlands on August 12, when the military said it had responded to attacks by a coalition of the Makanika, Twigwaneho and Ngumino armed groups.

The groups consist of members of the Banyamulenge community — Congolese Tutsi with distant origins in neighbouring Rwanda. In Fizi territory, "the army has recovered all the villages formerly occupied by the rebels, including the last strongholds of these armed groups led by the deserter Colonel Michel Rukundo, alias Makanika," army spokesman Captain Dieudonne Kasereka said Wednesday.

He claimed a "victory of the FARDC" — the armed forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo — and said calm had been restored in the area. "Among these villages are Muranyva, Shakira, Maramara and Kamombo, which fell to the FARDC between Saturday and Monday after heavy fighting," he said. "Makanika and his followers fled to Bijabo forest" after burning down a number of houses, Kasereka reported. Rubibi Saint-Cadet, representing civil society groups in Minembwe, said the clashes had "caused massive population displacement" into the bush and the forest. "We are issuing an SOS to the authorities and humanitarian organisations to come to their aid," he said. The army has not released updated casualty figures from the fighting since on Saturday declaring that 18 rebels had been killed and 48 wounded, while seven soldiers were killed and eight wounded. — AFP

## International

# Evacuees from Kabul touch down in UAE on way to Britain

## Thousands desperate to get aboard any flight

**DUBAI:** Britain's operation to evacuate its nationals and protected individuals stepped up yesterday, with planes landing in Dubai before passengers travel on to the UK. At Dubai's Al-Maktoum airport, a Royal Air Force transport plane carrying evacuees from Afghanistan took off around 1040 GMT with another batch of UK-bound passengers due in from Kabul shortly afterwards, an AFP correspondent reported.

Dozens of people, many with large rucksacks, waited at one of the airport's departure gates ahead of boarding what they hoped will be a flight to safety. Three children wearing traditional Afghan dress ran in circles around a woman dressed in black.

British embassy staff and airport employees in bright yellow vests stood at the gate giving instructions to the waiting group. Back in Kabul, thousands of Afghans packed between Taliban checkpoints and a ring of steel around the country's main airport, desperate to get aboard any flight out following the return of the Taliban.

Distressing pictures and videos have emerged of people desperately trying to get aboard any departing flight, even resorting to climbing on a US military aircraft as it rolled down the runway for take-off. "We haven't sent out a single empty plane," British Defence Secretary Ben Wallace told Sky News, adding that unfilled seats had been allocated to NATO allies.

Wallace has said 2,000 Britons and Afghan employees will be called by Britain to leave Afghanistan in the coming days. But the government has faced questions over where the evacuees will be taken when they land in Britain.

London has said that evacuations will continue as long as the United States continues to undertake its own evacuation operations at Kabul airport. Some 306 UK nationals, and around 2,000 Afghans have left for Britain under the government resettlement



**DUBAI:** Evacuees from Afghanistan sit in a hall upon their arrival at Al-Maktoum International Airport in the United Arab Emirates yesterday. Britain's operation to evacuate its nationals and protected individuals stepped up, with planes landing in Dubai before passengers travel on to the UK. — AFP

programme, Wallace said.

"The UK government's ambition is for the new Afghanistan citizens' resettlement scheme to resettle 5,000 Afghan nationals who are at risk due to the current crisis, in its first year," the British

government said in a statement Wednesday.

The United Arab Emirates has become a hub for evacuations from Afghanistan, with French authorities using its capital Abu Dhabi as a stepping stone to transfer its nationals back to France. — AFP

## Taliban vow to ban heroin

**PARIS:** Heroin production has boomed in Afghanistan in recent years, helping fund the Taliban, and experts say they will struggle to wean themselves off the profitable trade despite their promise to do so. Speaking Tuesday at a first press conference since taking power, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid promised that the new government would not turn the world's leading producer of opium into a fully-fledged narco-state.

"We are assuring our countrymen and women and the international community, we will not have any narcotics produced," Mujahid told reporters in Kabul.

"From now on, nobody's going to get involved (in the heroin trade), nobody can be involved in drug smuggling." But the anti-heroin rhetoric-like similar pledges to respect human rights and media freedom-are seen by analysts as part of efforts by the new Taliban leaders to show a more moderate face in order to secure international backing.

The vast majority of the world's opium and heroin comes from Afghanistan, with production and exports centred in areas controlled by the Taliban, which has taxed the drugs heavily dur-

ing their 20-year insurgency. It has become a key resource for the group and they could struggle to ban it, said Jonathan Goodhand, an expert in the international drugs trade at SOAS University of London.

"Drugs will bring out a set of tensions in the movement," he predicted. On one hand, "they want to create this image of themselves as more moderate and more open to engagement with the West and they realise drugs is one of way of doing this," he said.

But on the other, any repression would hit farmers in the Taliban political heartlands of Helmand and Kandahar provinces in particular. "It's going to struggle to take a very aggressive approach to drugs," he added.

### Near-monopoly

In his premier press conference, Mujahid pleaded for "international assistance" to provide farmers with alternative crops to poppies, the source of sap that is refined into morphine and heroin. The appeal for international aid might prompt hollow laughs from people who worked in the coalition of NATO forces, NGOs and UN workers over the last 10 years that tried in vain to break Afghanistan's reliance on poppy farming.

The United States spent around \$8.6 billion (7.4 billion euros) from 2002 to 2017 in its doomed effort to combat the drugs trade, ac-

ording to a 2018 report from the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan (SIGAR).

Those efforts included paying farmers to grow wheat or saffron, investing in transport links, as well as spraying defoliants on crops and bombing refining facilities. At each step, they found themselves thwarted by Taliban fighters who controlled the main poppy-growing regions and derived hundreds of millions of dollars from the industry, according to US and Afghan government estimates.

Farmers in Taliban-controlled areas would often come under pressure to plant poppies from local warlords and fighters, investigations have found. As a result, the country has a near-monopoly on opium and heroin, accounting for 80 to 90 percent of global output, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

The amount of land planted with poppies hit a record high in 2017 and has averaged around 250,000 hectares in the last four years, roughly four times the level of the mid-1990s, UN figures show.

### 'Too tied up'

The narcotics policy of the new government will affect global heroin prices, with repercussions for Western countries and their addicts, as well as Russia, Iran, Pakistan and China—all major smuggling routes but also huge markets for

Afghan drugs. In recent years, traffickers have also discovered that a plant commonly found in Afghanistan called ephedra can be used to create a key component of methamphetamine, better known as "crystal meth".

Still, spokesman Mujahid vowed Afghanistan would be a "narcotics-free country" moving forward. It's not the first time the fundamentalist group has vowed to outlaw the trade. Production was banned in 2000, just before the group was overthrown by US-led forces.

Gretchen Peters, the American author of the book "Seeds of Terror: How Heroin Is Bankrolling the Taliban and Al-Qaeda", said the Taliban's previous ban on poppy cultivation was tactical. "They were under immense international pressure," she said. "It was a ploy because they had so much stored up. They made a huge amount of money once the price shot up by 10 times." "They are not going to get rid of the drug trade because they are too tied up with it." "Afghanistan cannot survive without opium. It is simultaneously killing Afghanistan while also keeping a huge number of people alive," she said, referring to the income the industry provides to poor farmers.

Being in control of the country will offer the Taliban access to airlines, the state bureaucracy and banks which could be used to facilitate drug smuggling and money laundering, she explained.

"I have no doubt they will exploit it." — AFP

## International

# Afghan woman news anchor stopped from working after Taliban takeover

## Female journalists have been targeted by the militants

**KABUL:** An Afghan woman journalist has said she was barred from working at her TV station after the Taliban took control of the country, and pleaded for help in a video posted online. Wearing a hijab and showing her office card, well-known news anchor Shabnam Dawran said “our lives are under threat” in the clip on social media. Under the Taliban’s regime from 1996 to 2001, women were excluded from public life, girls could not attend school, entertainment was banned and brutal punishments were imposed.

Female journalists have also been targeted by the militants in a wave of assassinations in recent months leading up to their takeover of the country. However, since seizing power in a lightning offensive the Taliban have claimed women will have rights, including to education and work, and that the media will be independent and free.

One Taliban official even sat down for a one-on-one interview with a woman journalist on TV to press the point. But Dawran, who has worked as a journalist for six years in Afghanistan for state-owned broadcaster RTA, said this

week she was barred from entering her office while male colleagues were allowed in. “I didn’t give up after the change of system and went to attend my office, but unluckily I was not allowed despite showing my office card,” she said in the video. “The male employees, those with office cards were allowed to enter the office but I was told that I couldn’t continue my duty because the system has been changed.”

Dawran then pleads with viewers, saying: “Those who are listening to me, if the world hears me, then please help us as our lives are under threat.” Among those to share the footage was Miraqa Popal, an editor at Tolo News, a 24-hour channel in Afghanistan. “Taliban didn’t allow my ex-colleague here in @TOLONews and famous anchor of the State-owned @rtapashto Shabnam Dawran to start her work today,” Popal wrote in a tweet on Wednesday that was shared thousands of times. In a tweet on Tuesday, Popal posted a picture of a woman news presenter on Tolo, with the caption: “We resumed our broadcast. —AFP



**KALAQATA, Afghanistan:** This file photo shows residents of the northeastern Afghan village of Kalaqata in Takhar province fleeing the frontline area as US fighter planes bomb Taliban positions nearby. —AFP

## Son of assassinated anti-Taliban fighter asks US for weapons

**WASHINGTON:** The son of Afghanistan’s most famed anti-Taliban fighter says he has the forces to mount an effective resistance, but called on the United States to supply arms and ammunition to his militia. In an op-ed published Wednesday in The Washington Post, Ahmad Massoud said “America can still be a great arsenal of democracy” by supporting his fighters. “I write from the Panjshir Valley today, ready to follow in my father’s footsteps, with mujahideen fighters who are prepared to once again take on the Taliban,” he said. His father Ahmad Shah Massoud, known as the Lion of Panjshir, led the strongest resistance against the Taliban from his stronghold in the valley northeast of Kabul until his assassination in 2001.

Famed for its natural defenses, the redoubt tucked into the Hindu Kush mountains never fell to the Taliban during the civil war of the 1990s, nor was it conquered by the Soviets a decade earlier, and is now Afghanistan’s last remaining holdout. Hoping to follow in his “father’s footsteps”, Massoud said he has been joined by former members of the country’s special forces and soldiers from the Afghan army “disgusted by the surrender of their commanders”. Social media images show Afghanistan’s defiant vice president Amrullah Saleh meeting with Massoud, and the duo appear to be assembling the first pieces of a guerrilla movement to take on the Taliban. “But we need more weapons, more ammunition and more supplies,” Massoud said.

Tens of thousands of people have tried to flee Afghanistan since the hardline Islamist militants swept into the capital on Sunday, completing a stunning rout of government forces and ending two decades of war. Nearly 6,000 people—including US citizens and Afghans—have been evacuated by the US military, with the government urging the Taliban to allow safe passage for people to flee. Massoud said the Taliban poses a threat beyond Afghanistan’s borders. —AFP

## Five promises the Taliban have made in Afghanistan

**KABUL:** The Taliban have tried to reassure fearful Afghans—and a wary international community—that this time around they will be “positively different”, but their reputation precedes them and few trust the group. Here are five promises the Taliban have made—and their record on the issues:

### Women will have rights, but...

The Taliban are “committed” to the rights of women, who will be able to work and study, the group’s spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said Tuesday. But he stressed at every mention of women that their rights will be determined by Islamic law. That has always been interpreted by the Taliban’s ultra-conservative leadership. The last time they were in power, from 1996 to 2001, they brutally suppressed women’s rights. Girls were banned from going to school, and women were largely barred from public life—allowed out of the house only when covered head-to-toe in a burqa and accompanied by a male relative. Women accused of violating these rules were given harsh punishments—including being stoned to death for adultery. Even after they were toppled by US-led forces in 2001, women suffered similar restrictions in the areas under Taliban control. The militants have threatened and attacked women activists, journalists, MPs and even educators for two decades.

### Pardons for all?

The Taliban have insisted that they have forgiven all that fought against them—including government officials, the police and the armed forces. But many are skeptical because of their record with amnesty announcements, and tens of thousands of Afghans have tried to leave the country since the Taliban victory fearing reprisals. During their first regime, Taliban fighters killed political opponents and also massacred civilians and religious

minorities. In recent months, the Taliban have been accused of murdering surrendering forces and civilians. The UN human rights chief said there were reports of possible war crimes.

### Security for embassies, foreign organizations

The Taliban have tried quickly to reassure foreign governments and organizations that their embassies, offices and personnel are safe—one Russian diplomat said the situation was already better than under the previous administration. The Taliban, however, have a poor record when it comes to protecting foreign personnel and missions. In 1996, they entered a United Nations compound where former president Najibullah had been granted refuge, dragged him out to kill him and hang the body from a post. And two years later, when they captured the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif, they raided the Iranian consulate, killing nine diplomats and a journalist.

### No use of Afghan soil against other countries

A core point of the troop withdrawal deal Washington signed with the Taliban last year was that they will not allow militant groups to operate out of Afghanistan. US-led forces toppled the first Taliban regime because it had refused to give up Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda after the September 11, 2001 attacks. The group has stressed that it is going to honor that commitment, reiterating after taking over that other nations will face no threats. However, a UN Security Council monitoring report released in June said the Taliban and Al-Qaeda remain close.

### No more drugs

The Taliban have promised that they will end the narcotics industry in Afghanistan, one of the world’s hubs for the production and trafficking of drugs such as heroin. It may take some doing, especially if their new government does not have the same access to financial reserves and foreign aid that have sustained Afghanistan’s fragile economy for two decades. And despite their claims to the contrary, UN monitors say the illicit drugs industry has been one of the biggest sources of revenue for the Taliban, bringing in hundreds of millions of dollars, according to estimates published last year. —AFP



## International

# Hong Kongers plead guilty to 'national security' charge over sanction calls

## More than 130 people been arrested under the law

**HONG KONG:** Two Hong Kongers accused of being part of a group that campaigned for international sanctions against China pleaded guilty under the city's national security law yesterday in a case that is linked to jailed pro-democracy media tycoon Jimmy Lai. China imposed the sweeping security law on Hong Kong last year to wipe out dissent after the financial hub was rocked by huge and often violent democracy protests. More than 130 people, including many of the city's best-known democracy advocates, have since been arrested under the law.

Democracy activist Andy Li, 31, and paralegal Chan Tsz-wah, 30, admitted to a charge of "colluding with foreign forces to

endanger China's national security" yesterday. Prosecutors said they were part of a group that organized the publishing of adverts and articles in overseas newspapers calling for sanctions against China. Both were in custody ahead of their plea.

Little has been heard in open court about the case against the duo but they are part of a group of people linked to jailed pro-democracy media tycoon Lai who faces the same national security charge. Authorities have accused Lai, 73, of running a "criminal syndicate" that lobbied for international sanctions against China over its crackdown in Hong Kong. At yesterday's hearing, prosecutors read out a summary of the allegations against the two defendants.

In it, they accused Lai and his American aide Mark Simon of being "masterminds and financial support behind the scene and at the highest level of the syndicate". Chan allegedly delivered Lai and Simon's instructions to Li. Simon left Hong Kong last year and has previously described the prosecution against Lai and others as a political witch hunt against Beijing's critics. In an email to AFP, he said he believed Li and Chan "are making statements under great duress, with questionable legal representation, and with Andy still having charges in China over his head". Lai's popular newspaper Apple Daily closed down in June after authorities used the security law to freeze its assets over the content of

the tabloid's reporting.

Li was one of 12 Hong Kongers who made a failed attempt to flee the city by speedboat for Taiwan last summer. They were intercepted by the Chinese coast guard and held in detention until their conviction at a closed hearing for illegal border crossing. The group were eventually returned to Hong Kong custody. Charges of Li and Chan assisting offenders over the fugitives case have been shelved by the prosecution as the pair pleaded guilty to the collusion offences. The pair were remanded back into custody following their plea with the next hearing scheduled for January next year. The case against Lai and his co-accused has yet to come to court. —AFP

## Three dead, four missing in Malaysian floods



YAN BESAR, Malaysia: Debris is seen in Yan, Malaysia's Kedah district yesterday, a day after floodwaters swept down a mountain. —AFP

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Three people were killed and four others are missing after floodwaters swept down a mountain in northern Malaysia and surged through villages, authorities said yesterday. Water packed with mud, rocks and logs hit settlements close to Mount Jerai on Wednesday, leaving streets and houses swamped and washing away cars. Properties in the two affected districts suffered severe damage while some people were left trapped inside their houses, emergency workers said. "I grew up in this village and this is the first time I've seen such an incident," one local resident, Salwa Mohamad Isa, told state news agency Bernama.

"Bridges and roads collapsed, cars washed away and

people dying." Forty people have been evacuated from their homes to community centers, and the search and rescue operation is continuing. Local NGOs said clearing of forests and mining in the environmentally sensitive area could have played a role. "All these destructive activities in this fragile ecosystem have to be stopped urgently," they said in a statement. But a senior official has denied that logging caused the floods, instead blaming the intensity of the downpours. Flash floods are common in tropical Malaysia. But scientists say climate change increases the risk and intensity of flooding from extreme rainfall, because a warmer atmosphere holds more water. —AFP

## 3 dead, 50 wounded in bomb targeting Shiites in Pakistan

**LAHORE, Pakistan:** At least three people were killed and 50 others wounded when a bomb explosion ripped through a Shiite Muslim procession in central Pakistan yesterday, officials said. Security was high as the religious minority marked Ashura during the holy month of Muharram, a flashpoint for sectarian violence in previous years. "We have confirmation of three dead and 50 injured from the blast at the procession site," said a senior government official in the city of Bahawalnagar, in Punjab province. Social media videos showed bleeding victims lying on a road being assisted by members of the public. A local police officer, Kashif Hussain, also confirmed the death toll to AFP.

"The nature of the explosion is not yet clear as a team is still collecting evidence from the scene," he said. Authorities have suspended mobile phone services in major cities as a security measure during Ashura processions. Residents in many urban centers were experiencing signal jams yesterday. The streets leading to procession routes were also blocked. Ashura commemorates the killing of the Prophet Mohammed's grandson Hussain at the Battle of Karbala in 680 AD—the defining moment of the religion's schism and the birth of Shiite Islam.

The procession later resumed and people continued with the ceremonies, the officials said. Sectarian violence—in particular by Sunni hardliners against the Shiites who make up roughly 20 percent of Pakistan's 220 million people—has erupted in fits and bursts for decades in Pakistan. Anti-Shiite militant groups have bombed shrines and targeted Ashura processions in attacks that have killed thousands. Hussain is equally revered by Sunnis, but hardliners oppose the public mourning of his martyrdom. —AFP

## International

# Scandal-plagued Malaysian party poised to win PM race

## King will pick next PM based on parliament support

**KUALA LUMPUR:** A scandal-plagued Malaysian party looked set yesterday to regain the country's leadership that it lost at landmark elections three years ago, after the last prime minister resigned this week. Muhyiddin Yassin quit Monday after a turbulent 17 months in office when allies withdrew support, and amid mounting anger at his government's handling of a worsening coronavirus outbreak. With an election ruled out due to the pandemic, the king will pick the country's next leader based on who commands majority support in parliament. Ismail Sabri Yaakob, who was deputy premier in Muhyiddin's coalition, has received the backing of most lawmakers, one of his supporters, MP Ahmad Maslan, said on Twitter.

The 61-year-old is a long-time member of United Malays National Organization (UMNO), and if his victory is confirmed it means the party will reclaim the premiership. UMNO was the lynchpin of a coalition that ruled Malaysia for six decades until losing power in 2018 amid a storm of corruption scandals. The party had already regained a foothold in power as part of the coalition that collapsed this week, but Muhyiddin himself is from a different group.

"People who voted for change in 2018 will not

be looking favorably to his appointment, and it will be an unelected appointment," said Bridget Welsh, a Malaysia expert from the University of Nottingham. "So you will see polarization continue." Lawmakers supporting Ismail Sabri met the king at the national palace to confirm their support for him. An official announcement is expected Friday after a meeting of the country's royals. UMNO was booted out of power after becoming embroiled in myriad graft cases, notably the 1MDB scandal.

Billions of dollars were looted from sovereign wealth fund 1MDB in a fraud involving ex-leader Najib Razak, and spent on everything from a super-yacht to pricey artwork. Najib has been convicted and sentenced to 12 years in jail, although he remains free pending an appeal. Analysts have warned that UMNO regaining the premiership could have implications for Najib's case, and for several other MPs facing corruption charge. But Muhyiddin, whose coalition is backing Ismail Sabri, warned their support was conditional on him picking cabinet ministers who "have integrity... and are not facing criminal charges".

Meanwhile, the other main contender for the premiership, long-time opposition leader



**KUALA LUMPUR:** Malaysia's Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin waves as he arrives at the National Palace in Kuala Lumpur, as he was expected to quit after just 17 months in office. —AFP

Anwar Ibrahim, looks set to lose out. Following the 2018 polls, a reformist alliance headed by Mahathir Mohamad took power. But that gov-

ernment collapsed last year amid infighting, paving the way for Muhyiddin to take power without a vote. —AFP

## Singapore YouTuber charged with sex offences after online claims

**SINGAPORE:** A Singapore YouTube star was charged yesterday with offering teenage boys cash for sexual services, after facing misconduct allegations on social media. Dee Kosh gained popularity for his shows, which are often just him chatting to the camera or friends, and was also well known as a DJ at a local radio station. But last year social media users accused the 32-year-old of asking them for sexual favors and to send nude pictures in private messages, with some posting screenshots. The YouTuber, real name Darryl Ian Koshy, faced seven charges when he appeared in court yesterday, local media reported.

He allegedly offered boys aged 15 to 17 money in exchange for sexual favors, they said. He is also accused of making obscene films, and possessing obscene videos. Koshy, who has 367,000 subscribers on YouTube, faces a lengthy jail term and hefty fines if convicted. Police said they launched a probe after receiving reports of a man allegedly offering money in exchange for sexual services. Police said they "take a tough stance against sexual crimes, particularly those that target vulnerable victims such as the young".

He was placed on leave from the radio station after the investigation began. In a statement posted on Instagram last year, Koshy denied some of the allegations but admitted "some truth" in the accusations. He admitted that his text conversations with a 15-year-old were "problematic" and "inappropriate" but said there was no intent to groom the minor. —AFP

## Sole surviving Khmer Rouge leader denies role in genocide

**PHNOM PENH:** The last surviving senior Khmer Rouge leader denied responsibility for genocide committed more than 40 years in Cambodia during his closing remarks yesterday to an international tribunal. Under the ultra-Maoist Khmer Rouge regime led by "Brother Number 1" Pol Pot, some two million Cambodians died from overwork, starvation and mass executions from 1975-1979. Khieu Samphan—one the secretive regime's few public faces—was sentenced in 2018 by a UN-backed court to life in prison for genocide committed against ethnic-minority Vietnamese. But his lawyers have argued since Monday in daylong appeal hearings that the tribunal had taken a "selective approach" to witness testimony to convict him.

"I categorically refuse the accusation that I had the intention to commit the crimes," the 90-year-old said yesterday at the end of the hearings. "I have never committed them." The three-year trial, which ended in 2017, included the testimony of more than 100 witnesses who described in chilling detail the abuses and mass murders committed against Cham Muslims and ethnic Vietnamese. Khieu Samphan claimed he was not part of the killing machine that exterminated nearly a quarter of Cambodia's population rejecting in forceful closing statements the label of "murderer".

But the court sentenced him to life in prison—alongside "Brother Number 2" Nuon Chea who died in 2019 — for genocide and a litany of other crimes, including forced marriages and rapes. The pair were previously handed life sentences by the court in 2014 for crimes against humanity over the violent forced



**PHNOM PENH:** This photo shows ex-Khmer Rouge head of state Khieu Samphan in the courtroom during his appeal against life imprisonment for his role in the genocide committed by the regime, at the ECCC. —AFP

evacuation of Phnom Penh in April 1975, when Khmer Rouge troops drove the population of the capital into rural labor camps.

Whatever the verdict to his appeal on genocide charges may be, Khieu Samphan said yesterday his fate was already sealed. "No matter what you decide, I will die in prison," he said. "I'm judged symbolically, rather than by my actual deeds as an individual." The verdict for the appeal is expected to come in 2022. —AFP

Friday Times

# LIFESTYLE

FRIDAY, AUGUST 20, 2021

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## China villagers learn to live with the elephant in the room

See Pages 20-21

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This photo shows an elephant at Wild Elephant Valley, a nature reserve for wild elephants that also features elephant-themed shows for tourists, in Xishuangbanna in southwest China's Yunnan province. — AFP  
.....



This photo shows elephants during a show at Wild Elephant Valley, a nature reserve for wild elephants that also features elephant-themed shows for tourists, in Xishuangbanna in southwest China's Yunnan province. — AFP photos



A conservation worker (left) walking behind an elephant as it walks in a forest in the Asian Elephant Breeding and Rescue Centre in Xishuangbanna.



This photo shows a conservation worker standing near elephants as they eat in a forest in the Asian Elephant Breeding and Rescue Centre.

# CHINA VILLAGERS LEARN TO LIVE WITH THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

**M**a Mingliang rarely encountered wild elephants while growing up in southwestern China, after centuries of hunting and deforestation nearly eradicated them. Today, the 42-year-old village chief barricades his community to keep them out. A wandering herd of Asian elephants has captivated China for more than a year with a remarkable trek northwards through farms and cities hundreds of kilometers from their normal range in Yunnan province.

But an elephant in the street is now a common sight for residents of the animals' home territory on the Myanmar-Laos border, where a recovering elephant population is being squeezed into ever-shrinking habitat, leading to more conflict with humans. The tension is immediately apparent in Ma's village in Xishuangbanna, a subtropical prefecture the size of a small country where China's elephant population congregates. The neatly ordered homes of the little community, called Xiangyanqing, climb up a gently sloping hillside, dotted by signs promoting human-elephant "harmony" and encircled by a steel fence separating it from adjacent jungle. The village of rubber-tappers is entered through a wide steel gate that clangs shut at night, when hunger activates the elephants.

the village in lockdown until the potentially dangerous trespassers wander out, usually after raiding fruit and vegetable gardens. "Things used to be harmonious before. But there is conflict now," Ma said dryly. Ironically, successful conservation is partly to blame. Asian elephants, which range across South

and Southeast Asia, were nearly exterminated within China, leaving only around 150 in Xishuangbanna by the 1980s.

Conservationists say a 1988 hunting ban and strict protection of a sprinkling of fragmented elephant reserves has turned things around. With no natural enemies, the popula-

tion has doubled to more than 300 and counting. "Compared to when we were kids, there are more baby elephants in the herds now," Ma said. Weighing up to four tons, they consume as much as 200 kilograms (440 pounds) of food daily. Increasingly, filling up means a raid on a local farm. Elephants inflict an estimated 20 million yuan (\$3 million) in annual economic losses.

The devoured crops and damaged homes in Xishuangbanna are the prefecture's biggest source of insurance claims, said Zhang Li, an ecology professor at Beijing Normal University involved in elephant conservation policy. And they killed at least 41 people between 2013 and 2019, Zhang said. Many more are injured each year. Attacks, typically by protective mothers or volatile lone young males, can resemble grisly crime scenes. State media reports on recent cases describe victims being trampled by the surprisingly fast-moving beasts and bludgeoned or throttled by their strong trunks, leaving bones shattered, skulls cracked, and bodies gruesomely dismembered.

## Habitat loss

Communist Party media portrays the 14 wandering elephants-now pointed homeward after an 18-month odyssey-as lovable symbols of China's conservation success. But Chinese scientists say growing habitat loss is



This photo shows an elephant statue (top center) lit up at night as people crowd a night market in Jinghong in southwest China's Yunnan province.

## 'There is conflict'

Still, they regularly find their way in, putting



A vendor displaying wooden elephants figures for sale at a night market in Jinghong in southwest China's Yunnan province.



An elephant "kissing" a woman during a show at Wild Elephant Valley.



An elephant lifting a woman for a photograph during a show at Wild Elephant Valley.

part of the problem. Authorities have been forced to address safety risks. Xishuangbanna in 2019 installed a high-tech grid covering hundreds of square kilometers that uses stationary cameras to relay elephant sightings to a command center, which sends out warnings to communities.

The drill: get indoors, hide upstairs out of reach, and don't approach the beasts or use firecrackers to drive them off, which may anger them. Throughout Xishuangbanna, statues and other imagery celebrate its leading residents-while stressing giving them a wide berth. Villagers are adapting. For decades, Lu Zhengrong's hilltop farming settlement grew rice, corn and other staples, but years of elephant raids prompted a shift. "The wild elephants became too troublesome and numerous, so we've switched to growing what they don't eat, like tea or rubber," Lu said.

That, however, is accelerating habitat loss,



People feeding elephants at Wild Elephant Valley.

said the ecologist Zhang. Surging demand for rubber and tea has caused plantations to steadily expand into lands traditionally roamed by elephants but which lack official state protection, squeezing them into protected but increasingly isolated pockets. Inevitably, they roam out.

**'We need balance'**

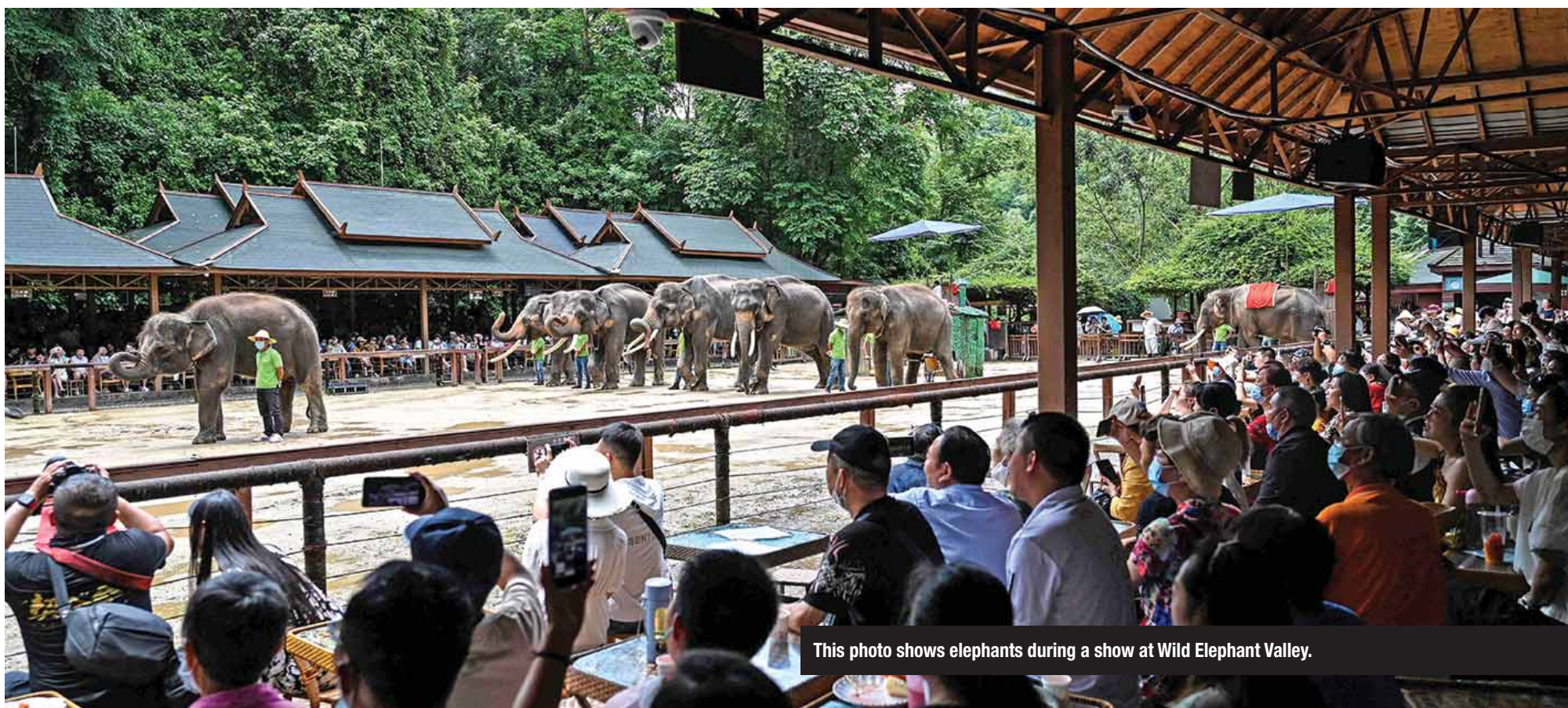
Exactly why the 14 wanderers made their mammoth trek northward remains a mystery. But Zhang said "loss and fragmentation of their habitat may be the root cause," exacerbated by competition for wild food sources as elephant numbers increase. Things may worsen as climate change is projected to further reduce habitat, he added. China is devising a new national park system to bolster habitat protection for key species like pandas and tigers. A Xishuangbanna elephant national park has been proposed by Chinese scientists, but it faces a key obstacle.

A viable park would require the expensive and politically tricky task of reclaiming farmland and relocating hundreds of thousands of residents to link up pockets of habitat. Until then, residents must live with the elephants. "I can't say we like it," said Lu. "But



This photo shows advertisements with images of elephants near a nature reserve.

we need balance between this animal and people. We have to protect them." — AFP



This photo shows elephants during a show at Wild Elephant Valley.

## Lifestyle | Feature



British-Belgian pilot Zara Rutherford, 19, poses before taking off for a round-the-world trip in a light aircraft, in bid to become the youngest to fly solo round-the-world in Wevelgem. — AFP photos

## TEENAGER TAKES TO THE SKIES ON ROUND-THE-WORLD RECORD BID

**T**eenage pilot Zara Rutherford took her ultralight sports plane into the skies on Wednesday on the first leg of a 52-country, five-continent flight around the world. The intrepid 19-year-old British-Belgian dreams one day of becoming an astronaut, but for now her goal is to become the youngest woman to circumnavigate the planet flying solo. The first leg was a short hop

Honduras, Saudi Arabia and Myanmar. While not the youngest pilot to fly around the world solo—an 18-year-old Briton, Travis Ludlow, completed the trip in July—Rutherford is the youngest woman to attempt the feat.

“I’m really hoping to encourage girls and young women to go into aviation and STEM—science, technology, engineering and mathematics,” she said before takeoff. “Growing up,

father, a former British air force pilot—have planned the adventure carefully, notably by setting up in advance the necessary authorizations to fly into many different national airspaces. Crossing the Atlantic will be the first big challenge, she says, but the long trek over Siberia to Mongolia will also see her often far from civilization if she gets into difficulties. “I didn’t sleep very well, I’m quite nervous but I’m really excited,” she told AFP. “Right now, I’m feeling a bit of disbelief. I think I will only start realizing that I have actually started when I have landed in the UK.”

Family, friends, journalists, airport staff and the town mayor turned out at Kortrijk Wevelgem Airport to see her off—an emotional moment for her proud Belgian mother, Beatrice De Smet. “Obviously I have a lot of

mixed emotions. I’m a mum and my heart beats harder when I see her leaving like this, and with all this attention that adds to the stress, it’s not easy for her,” De Smet said as the tiny plane disappeared into the grey Flanders sky. “But I’m extremely proud, not just of the flight that she’s going to undertake, but of the mission that lies behind it, to inspire little girls to follow their dreams and to reach for the stars.” If everything goes according to plan, Rutherford will be arriving back in Belgium on November 4, her feet back on the ground but her eyes riveted on another horizon as she looks to pursue her engineering studies. — AFP



Belgian-British pilot Zara Rutherford (right) talks with her father former pilot of RAF Sam Rutherford (left) before taking off for a round-the-world trip in a light aircraft.



Belgian-British pilot Zara Rutherford, talks with her mother Beatrice De Smet (left) before taking off for a round-the-world trip.

across the Channel from her Belgian home town of Kortrijk to England. Her three-month voyage will then take her over oceans, deserts and the vast Siberian wilderness.

She will try to avoid daunting main air hubs—apart from New York’s busy JFK airport—in her tiny 325-kilogramme (717-pound) Shark UL prop plane, and touch down instead on smaller airports and airfields for overnight rests and refueling. She will be on her own for flights lasting five to six hours. She has secured permission to visit countries including Greenland,

I didn’t see many women in those fields and it was quite discouraging. So I’m hoping to change that.” Her aerial odyssey can be followed on Rutherford’s website, FlyZolo.com, and on the TikTok social media app. Rutherford has a satellite telephone and a radio to communicate with air traffic control in all the countries on her route, but in the cockpit she will be alone with her music and her podcasts.

There is no following plane with backup, but her support crew in Belgium—including her



British-Belgian pilot Zara Rutherford, takes off for a round-the-world trip in a light aircraft.

# Kidman quarantine exemption sparks anger in Hong Kong

Hong Kong's decision to grant Hollywood star Nicole Kidman a quarantine exemption as she films an Amazon-funded series about the lives of wealthy expats has sparked public anger. The Chinese financial hub maintains some of the strictest quarantine measures in the world, an approach that has kept virus cases low but left most residents cut off from overseas loved ones for the last 18 months. Arrivals from high-risk countries have to stay in hotel quarantine for 21 days, while lower-risk countries have seven days hotel quarantine followed by a further seven days of self-monitoring.

But Kidman, 54, has been allowed to circumvent those rules. Hong Kong's Commerce and Economic Development Bureau confirmed the Australian actress and other film crew had been granted an exemption "to carry out designated professional work". Those exempted must take three coronavirus tests over two weeks following their arrival. The



This file photo shows Australian actress Nicole Kidman arriving for the 77th annual Golden Globe Awards in Beverly Hills, California. — AFP

city's tabloids have closely followed Kidman's appearances in Hong Kong since touching down last Thursday in a private jet from Australia, including shopping two days after her arrival and later filming in the city's Sai Wan district. Kidman has been announced as

an executive producer on "Expats", a show based on a 2016 book by Janice YK Lee about the gilded lives of three American women in the city.

Social media has since filled with comments by expats and local Hong Kongers over Kidman's quarantine exemption-and the decision to film a series about the city's wealthy foreign elite at a time when China is purging dissent in the financial hub. "Right then, that's it. My Mum is changing her name to 'Nicole Kidman' and I've just sent my Gulfstream G650 to pick her up," @webbhk, an account popular with expats, wrote on Twitter. "I'm going to make a movie about her visit to HK. It's called, imaginatively, 'My Mum Visits Hong Kong'," the account added. A popular support group on Facebook for people quarantining in Hong Kong also filled with angry comments about how many local and foreign residents have been unable to see relatives overseas for nearly two years because of the rules.

Elizabeth Quat, a pro-Beijing lawmaker, said she had "concerns over the quarantine exemption granted by the government to actress Nicole Kidman" and that she had "received quite a number of complaints from Hong Kong residents". Quat added that she had asked health officials to address a legislature committee on the issue on Friday. While quarantine exemptions can be made for some senior executives, they are rare. HSBC's chairman Mark Tucker just completed the full three weeks of quarantine for arrivals from Britain. Kidman's exemption came just days after Hong Kong tightened its quarantine rules for multiple countries, throwing the travel plans of many into disarray towards the end of the summer holidays and sparking a shortage of hotel rooms. — AFP

## Wolverine meets Bogart in Jackman sci-fi 'Reminiscence'

Hugh Jackman helped pioneer the superhero sequels that dominate modern megaplexes, but the former "X-Men" actor leapt at the chance to star in something more rare these days—a totally original sci-fi from a major studio, in "Reminiscence." The Warner Bros film, out on Friday, comes from the creators of TV smash hit "Westworld," and imagines a dystopian near-future Miami in which a rising ocean has flooded the streets. All but the wealthiest live a precarious existence huddled on crime-infested islands and waterlogged back alleys, and the only "super-

power" on show is a technology that allows paying customers to revisit cherished memories from better days in vivid detail.

"Hey, I'm not one to lecture about sequels, I did nine movies playing Wolverine! But I do think audiences want something fresh and something new," Jackman told AFP. In the film, which has shades of "Minority Report," Jackman plays a scientist running one such backstreet memory lab. His life gets turned upside down when a mysterious woman arrives with a seemingly straightforward request for help remembering where she left her keys. The movie was written and directed by Lisa Joy, who along with husband Jonathan Nolan created the similarly dystopian sci-fi/Western "Westworld." "It was a challenge and it would not have been made had it not been for Hugh's support of this film," said Joy. "I'm a first-time feature director, and I had an original (movie) that I wanted to get made that involved sinking Miami!"

"To take that leap of faith, I think I was really bolstered when Hugh jumped in and said 'well I believe in her.'" Her husband Nolan—a producer on "Reminiscence"—also has previous form exploring the darker side of our memories, penning neo-noir thriller "Memento," which was directed by his famous brother Christopher and hit the festival circuit in 2000. That same year saw Jackman's first turn as Wolverine in "X-Men," a film credited with launching Hollywood's superhero era, and paving the way for wildly popular Marvel movies like "Avengers: Endgame" that have smashed box office records. Jackman's nine "X-Men" films grossed more than \$4 billion in total worldwide, including three spin-off movies for Wolverine. While "Reminiscence" is a long way from Jackman's Marvel comic-book adaptation days, its writer-director has described the protagonist as "a P.I. of the mind—think Wolverine meets Humphrey Bogart." —AFP

## 'Predator' R. Kelly groomed girls for decades, trial hears

Prosecutors described R. Kelly as a "predator" who used his fame to groom minors for sex, as an accuser told the opening day of his much-anticipated New York trial Wednesday the disgraced R&B star used to slap her for violating his "rules." The Grammy-winning artist-wearing a gray suit, purple tie and glasses-sat silently, his head down at times as the prosecution laid out a pattern of violent abuse inside the Brooklyn federal courtroom. Assistant US Attorney Maria Cruz Melendez described Kelly as "a man who for decades used his fame, his popularity and a network of people at his disposal to target, groom and exploit young girls, boys and women for his own sexual gratification."

The 54-year-old is charged with racketeering, sexual exploitation of a child, kidnapping, bribery and forced labor between 1994 and 2018. He denies the charges, but faces between 10 years and life in prison if convicted on all counts. The trial, expected to last a month, finally got underway after a delay of more than a year caused by the coronavirus pandemic. The government's first witness, identified as Jerhonda, said Kelly would film their sexual activity when she was 16, below the age of consent. The now-28-year-old said the musician said he was going to "train me how to please him sexually." Her testimony came after prosecutor Melendez said Kelly's celebrity status meant he "had his pick of young fans" and that he hoarded his victims "like objects." During opening statements, she said he used "every trick in the predator handbook," approaching minors, grooming them



In this file photo R. Kelly holds his three Grammy Awards in New York at the 40th annual Grammy Awards. — AFP

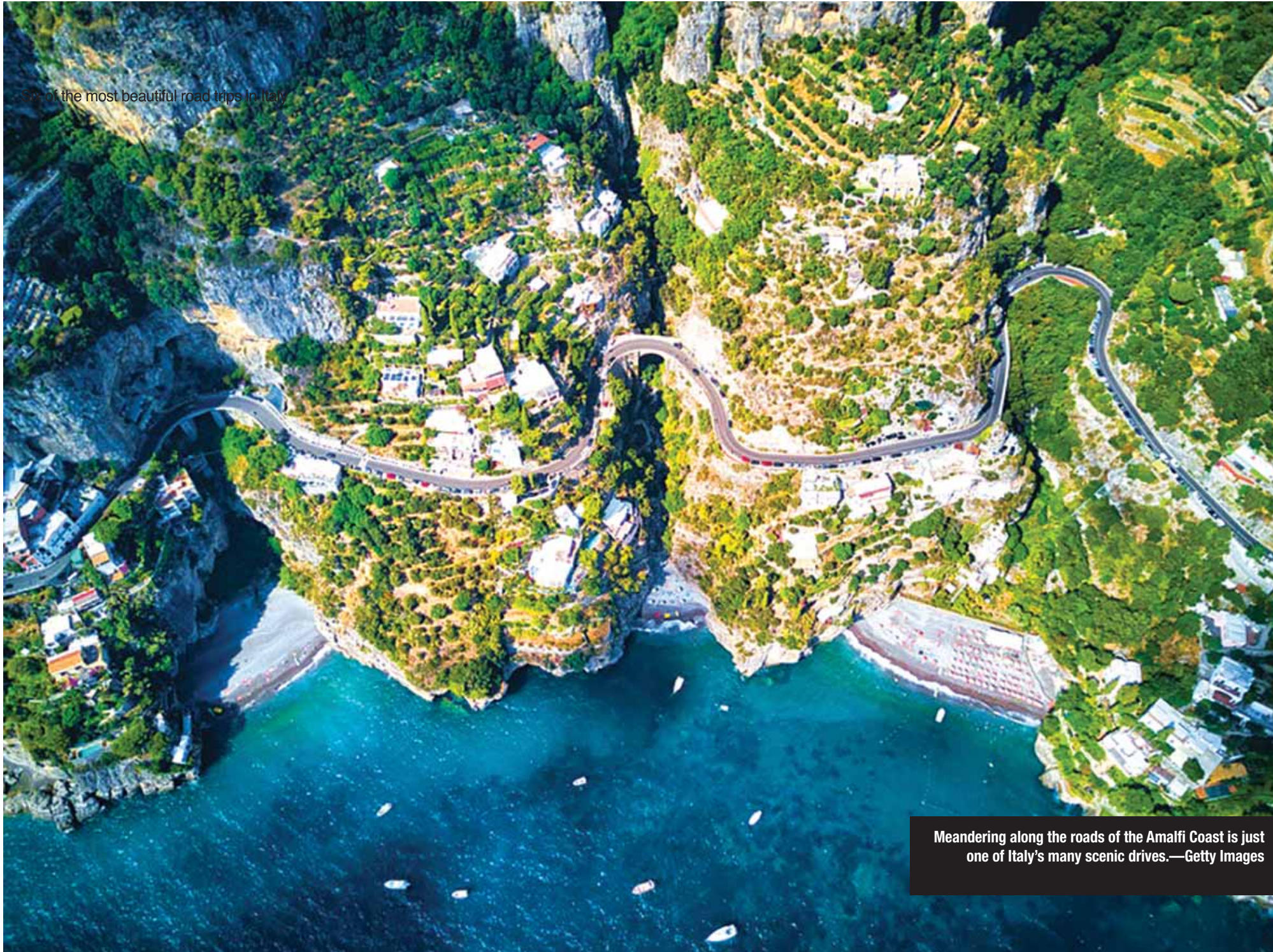
and their families with promises he could help their careers before sexually abusing them.

Melendez added that the singer used bodyguards, drivers, runners, lawyers and accountants to cover up crimes. He bribed his victims by photographing and filming them having sex with him and then threatening to release the tapes, she said. Kelly "exacted cruel and demeaning punishments" to those who violated demands, including "violent spankings and beatings," the prosecutor added. For decades, the musician born Robert Sylvester Kelly has faced accusations, including making child pornography, sex with minors, operating a sex cult and sexual battery. Despite the unsettling claims and several out-of-court settlements, the singer known for hits like "I Believe I Can Fly," "Bump 'N Grind" and "Ignition (Remix)" maintained a staunch fan base, continuing to tour worldwide. His career began to crumble in January 2019 after the release of the explosive docuseries "Surviving R. Kelly," which renewed focus on the R&B luminary's checkered history in a post-#MeToo era. —AFP



In this file photo actor Hugh Jackman speaks at the 20th Century Fox "X-Men: Days of Future Past" panel during Comic-Con International 2013 at San Diego Convention Center. — AFP

Six of the most beautiful road trips in Italy



Meandering along the roads of the Amalfi Coast is just one of Italy's many scenic drives.—Getty Images

# Six of the most beautiful road trips in *Italy*

By Duncan Garwood

**W**ith a network of well-maintained roads that weave through a landscape of snow-capped peaks, plunging coastlines, lakes and historic towns, Italy offers plenty of epic driving. And while some routes are undeniably challenging, they all make for unforgettable experiences. Here we highlight six classic road trips, ranging from gentle Tuscan jaunts to hair-raising mountain adventures.



## Lifestyle | Travel



Journey through the stunning Tuscan countryside on a road trip from Florence to Orvieto. —Getty Images

## Touring Tuscany: Florence to Orvieto

### Start - Florence; End - Orvieto

1

Taking in two of Italy's great medieval cities, the wine treasures of Chianti, and swathes of classic Tuscan scenery, this two-day route leads from Florence to Orvieto in the neighboring region of Umbria. Whet your appetite for the road ahead by feasting on fine art and Renaissance architecture in Florence before striking south to Chianti wine country. Stop to sample the region's celebrated bistecca (steak) at L'Antica Macelleria Cecchini in Panzano. From here, follow the backroads to Siena, a stunning medieval city centered on an awe-inspiring Duomo and a 12th-century

square, Piazza del Campo. Overnight options here include the Pensione Palazzo Ravizza.

Next morning, head to Montalcino to stock up on Brunello di Montalcino, one of Italy's revered red wines. A short drive to the east, the Val d'Orcia provides quintessential Tuscan landscapes with its billowing green hills, cypress trees and hilltop towns. Lunch in Pienza, then continue, via Montepulciano, to Orvieto, a striking hilltop town famous for its remarkable Gothic Duomo.



Make pit stops at beautiful historic towns like Noto during this road trip around Sicily's southeast.—Shutterstock

## Sicily's southeast

### Start - Catania; End - Ragusa

2

Hunt Unesco-listed baroque treasures on this two-day tour of Sicily's rugged southeast. Start off by investigating Catania's grandiose historic center and brilliant fish market. After a seafood lunch, hit the road and make for Syracuse where you can trawl through ancient ruins at the Parco Archeologico della Neapolis and stroll elegant baroque streets in Ortygia. Overnight at the stylish Hotel Gutkowski.

On day two, continue to Noto, home to what is arguably Sicily's most beautiful street,

Corso Vittorio Emanuele, which is dotted with churches and charming cafes. Once you've digested this masterpiece of urban design, turn inland to Modica, a bustling town wedged into a deep canyon. Stock up on the town's famous chocolate before pushing on through the rocky hinterland to Ragusa and the handsome historic center known as Ragusa Ibla. To round the trip off on a high note, treat yourself to dinner at the Ristorante Duomo, one of Sicily's top restaurants.



The famous bridge at the Fjord of Furore is a highlight of the Amalfi coastline. — Getty Images

## The Amalfi Coast

### Start - Salerno; End - Sorrento

3

Experience Italy's most spectacular coastal scenery on this white-knuckle drive along the Amalfi Coast. From Salerno, the main southern gateway to the coast, strike west to Vietri sul Mare, a small town famous for its ceramics and the start point of the coastal road proper. From here the driving becomes more challenging as the road narrows, the curves become tighter, and the views become ever more dramatic.

After about 20km, you'll arrive in Amalfi, the coast's main hub. Stop here to look round the landmark

Cattedrale di Sant'Andrea and then head up to Ravello in the hills above. Lunch here, perhaps at the Ristorante Pizzeria Vittoria, and enjoy heady panoramas from the town's lush gardens. Next, push on to Positano, a chic, near-vertical town where colorful, steeply-stacked houses cascade down the precipitous hillsides. Beyond Positano, the route leads inland, up and across the hilly interior to Sorrento, a lively tourist hotspot overlooked by the dark, brooding bulk of Mount Vesuvius.

## Lifestyle | Travel



La Villa is just one of many pretty villages in stunning locations in the Dolomites. — Getty Images

## The Great Dolomites Road

Start - Bolzano; End - Cortina d'Ampezzo

4

The Grande Strada della Dolomiti provides some of Italy's most exhilarating driving. Running from Bolzano to Cortina d'Ampezzo, it boasts superb scenery as it snakes past craggy, saw-tooth peaks and over lofty mountain passes. From Bolzano, head eastwards towards Ponte Nova, where you'll get your first sight of the Dolomite's mighty granite peaks.

Continue on to Val di Fassa, a magnificent valley framed by forested slopes and gigantic rock summits, and up to the 2239m Passo

Pordoi. The descent from here is slow going but you're rewarded with stunning views as you corkscrew down to La Villa in the spectacularly sited Val Badia. This is serious sports country with superb winter skiing and wonderful summer hiking. From here you could push directly on to Cortina d'Ampezzo, the chic resort that marks the end of the road, but for a more relaxed trip, stop for the night at the Dolomit B&B.

## Lake Como's southern shore

Start - Como; End - Bergamo

5

Surrounded by Alpine peaks and wooded hills, Lake Como (Lago di Como) is the most picturesque of Italy's northern lakes. This leisurely one-day drive, which takes in elegant art nouveau villas and lush waterfront gardens along the lake's southern shoreline, is best undertaken in April and May when the area is awash with spring color.

The obvious starting point is the town of Como itself. Once you've explored the charming historic center and the nearby Villa Olmo, take the swooping road up to Bellagio. Stop at this charming lakeside vil-

lage to explore the grounds of neoclassical Villa Melzi d'Eril and lunch at Terrazza Barchetta. Suitably refreshed, leave your car and jump on a ferry to Tremezzo, home of the 17th-century Villa Carlotta and its spectacular gardens. Back in Bellagio, pick up your wheels and strike southeast, following the scenic lakeside road down to Lecco and on to historic Bergamo, where you can rest up at the Hotel Piazza Vecchia.



A private vehicle makes it easy to explore the towns and villages of Lake Como, including beautiful Bellagio. — Lonely Planet

## Best of Abruzzo: Rome to Sulmona

Start - Rome; End - Sulmona

6

Just over an hour's drive east from Rome, the little-known region of Abruzzo is a world apart from the big city, with wild, empty valleys and unspoiled mountain landscapes. From the capital, take the A24 autostrada to Fonte Cerreto, from where it's a twisting climb up to Campo Imperatore, a highland plain overlooked by the Apennines' highest peak, Corno Grande (2912m). Continue on to Santo

Stefano di Sessanio, a remote, semi-abandoned village high in the Parco Nazionale del Gran Sasso e Monti della Laga. If you're travelling at the weekend you can lunch here at the Locanda Sotto gli Archi, otherwise pick up picnic supplies in the village.

In the afternoon, push on to Sulmona, a graceful town set in the shadow of the Morrone massif. Famous for its delicacy confetti (sugar-coated

almonds), Sulmona makes a good base for exploring the region's rugged southern reaches, offering good accommodation at the Legacy Casa Residencia and filling food at places like Il Vecchio Muro.

— [www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)



Ensure to make a stop off at Santo Stefano di Sessanio, a remote, semi-abandoned village high in the Abruzzo hills.— Getty Images

Kids Page

Word Search

### Birthday Party

**DIRECTIONS:** Fill in the puzzle grid with the name of each item following the number and direction indicated. Use the word bank if you get stuck.

BALLOON	GAMES
BOW	GIFT
CAKE	ICE CREAM
CANDLE	MAGIC
CANDY	MUSIC
CHOCOLATE	PARTY HAT
GLOWN	POPCORN
CUPCAKE	PRIZE
FIREWORKS	PUNCH

Kids Mazes



Color It



### Find the way



### Word Scramble



#### Computer Terms Word Scramble

Help! The school computer had its memory scrambled and we need your help to get things back in order. Can you unscramble the computer terms and write the correct word on each line?

EITRRNNE	_____	KEERSAP	_____
SAEHRC	_____	UADOLP	_____
LLCORS	_____	NTERPRI	_____
BOKEDYRA	_____	IONC	_____
UNMSAERE	_____	SOTWRFEA	_____
VSIRU	_____	NLDDWOAO	_____
EVRSER	_____	SOEUM	_____
FOTN	_____	RSDAWSPQ	_____
MONORIT	_____	EACCH	_____
EENSRC	_____	YEAGBTIG	_____
HAKCRE	_____	FODRLE	_____
WSREROB	_____	OEMUDNTC	_____

### Join the dots



# Business

FRIDAY, AUGUST 20, 2021

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**32** US Fed officials expect to pull back on stimulus this year



**33** Tech in crosshairs again as Hong Kong stocks tumble



WASHINGTON: File photo shows, a woman walks past an International Monetary Fund headquarters (IMF) building in Washington, DC. The IMF will withhold funds to Afghanistan amid the uncertainty over the status of the leadership in Kabul. —AFP

## IMF stops funds to Afghanistan

### Country's reserves blocked from Taliban

**WASHINGTON:** Despite its swift takeover of the government in Afghanistan, the Taliban will not have access to most of the nation's cash and gold stocks, while the IMF announced it won't provide aid. A spokesperson for the Washington-based crisis lender on Wednesday said it had decided to withhold its assistance to Afghanistan amid uncertainty over the status of the leadership in Kabul.

"There is currently a lack of clarity within the international community regarding recognition of a government in Afghanistan, as a consequence of which the country cannot access... IMF resources," the official said. Central bank governor Ajmal Ahmad said on Twitter the Da Afghanistan Bank (DAB) had around \$9 billion in reserves, but most of that is held overseas, out of reach of the Taliban.

"As per international standards, most assets are held in safe, liquid assets such as Treasuries and gold," said Ahmad, who fled the country on Sun-

day, fearing for his safety as the Taliban swept into the capital.

The US Federal Reserve holds \$7 billion of the country's reserves, including \$1.2 billion in gold, while the rest is held in foreign accounts including at the Basel-based Bank for International Settlements, Ahmad said.

A US administration official told AFP on Monday that "any central bank assets the Afghan government have in the United States will not be made available to the Taliban." Amid reports the Taliban were quizzing central bank staff on the location of the assets, Ahmad said, "If this is true-it is clear they urgently need to add an economist on their team."

He repeated that Washington on Friday had cut off cash shipments to the country as the security situation deteriorated, which may have fueled reports the Taliban stole the reserves since

the country's banks could not return dollars to account holders.

"Please note that in no way were Afghanistan's international reserves ever compromised," and are held in accounts that are "easily audited," Ahmad said.

#### No SDRs for Kabul

The IMF's aid would include an existing \$370 million loan program, as well as access to reserves in the form of Special Drawing Rights (SDR), the lender's basket of currencies. "As is always the case, the IMF is guided by the views of the international community," the fund official said.

The International Monetary Fund has taken similar action against other regimes not recognized by a critical mass of member governments, as in the case of Venezuela. The IMF is set to distribute 650 billion in SDRs on August 23 to all eligible members,

of which Afghanistan's share was valued at about \$340 million, Ahmad said.

The IMF in June released the latest installment of the \$370 million loan to Afghanistan approved in November and aimed at helping support the economy amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The World Bank has more than two dozen development projects ongoing in the country and has provided \$5.3 billion since 2002, mostly in grants.

The status of those programs is unclear as the development lender works to pull staff out of the country. An internal memo to World Bank personnel obtained by AFP said "senior management is working around the clock to arrange an urgent evacuation of our staff and their family members."

Meanwhile, Western Union announced Wednesday it was temporarily cutting off wire transfers to the country-another vital source of cash for the people. —AFP

## Business

# Huawei exec's extradition hearing in Canada comes to a close

## We urge Canada to immediately correct its mistake, release Meng Wanzhou: China

**VANCOUVER:** Chinese Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou's fight in a Canadian court against extradition to the United States to face fraud and conspiracy charges wrapped up Wednesday after nearly 1,000 days of legal wranglings and diplomatic brawls. The daughter of company founder and CEO, Ren Zhengfei, is accused of defrauding HSBC Bank by falsely misrepresenting links between Huawei and Skycom, a subsidiary that sold telecoms equipment to Iran.

This, according to the US Justice Department, put the bank at risk of violating US sanctions against Tehran, as it continued to clear US dollar transactions for Huawei. Supreme Court of British Columbia Associate Chief Justice Heather Holmes said she will on October 21 likely set a date to deliver her ruling.

Meng, 49, is living in a Vancouver mansion on bail conditions that include a curfew and electronic monitoring, as she awaits the outcome of her extradition proceedings. If transferred to the United States for trial and subsequently convicted, Meng could face more than 30 years in a US prison.

Yesterday, China's foreign ministry said Meng's case was "entirely political" and aimed to suppress Chinese enterprises. "We urge Canada to immediately correct its mistake, to release Meng Wanzhou and allow her to return home safely as soon as possible," said foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying.

Meng's arrest in December 2018 during a stopover in Vancouver caused a deep diplomatic rift between Ottawa and Beijing, which has accused Washington of trying to crush its international tech giant Huawei.

Days later, China detained two Canadians, businessman Michael Spavor and former diplomat Michael Kovrig, in what Western nations have decried as "hostage diplomacy." Both were tried in March for espionage-charges that Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has said were "trumped up." Last week Spavor was sentenced to 11 years in prison as the final arguments in Meng's case got underway.

### 'Fraud law on its head'

In a hearing last week, Meng's lawyers rejected the US allegations against her, accused Canadian and US officials of abuse of process and called for her release. Defense lawyer Mark Sandler argued this week there was no deceit and no loss or risk of loss to HSBC, telling the court: "We have turned fraud law on its head in this proceeding."

Canadian government lawyers representing US interests in the hearing countered that the defense's arguments were best aired at a trial, and that the judge should commit Meng for extradition. To do so, Associate Chief Justice Holmes only needs to find that there is sufficient evidence to go to trial—a relatively low bar.

"No one has received a fairer extradition hearing in this country than Ms. Meng," Crown Attorney Robert Frater insisted Wednesday. Both Canadian and US authorities, meanwhile, have denied any abuse of process in the case.

### Tea house evidence

Key to the US case is a PowerPoint presentation Meng made to HSBC executives in a meeting at a Hong Kong tea house in 2013 in-



VANCOUVER, British Columbia: Huawei Chief Financial Officer Meng Wanzhou returns to British Columbia Supreme Court on August 18, 2021, in Vancouver, Canada, during her last extradition hearing. —AFP

tended to reassure them that Huawei was not engaged in activities that could cause HSBC to run afoul of US sanctions law, following reports to the contrary.

Frater said Meng's presentation was "blatantly misleading" for not disclosing the true nature of the relationship between Huawei and Skycom, calling their business relationship "controllable" but obscuring that the two companies are one and the same.

"You should have no difficulty finding dis-

honesty sufficient to make a prima facie case of fraud," he told the extradition judge. Beijing-Ottawa relations have hit rock bottom over the case and those of the Canadians held in China.

Trudeau denounced Spavor's sentence as "unacceptable and unjust," with China's foreign ministry responding by calling the Canadian premier "arrogant" and "ridiculous." Kovrig is still awaiting a sentence, but no date has been announced. —AFP

## Three former Netflix employees charged with insider trading

**WASHINGTON:** US regulators on Wednesday filed insider trading charges against five people, including three former Netflix employees, accusing them of illegally using confidential data on subscriber growth at the streaming television giant.

The Securities and Exchange Commission said the group generated \$3 million in total profits by trading on the insider information from three former Netflix software engineers. "We allege that a Netflix employee and his close associates engaged in a long-running, multimillion dollar scheme to profit from valuable, misappropriated company information," said Erin Schneider, director of the SEC's San Francisco regional office.

Joseph Sansone of the SEC's Market Abuse Unit said the

group tried to evade detection by using encrypted messaging applications and paying cash kickbacks. "This case reflects our continued use of sophisticated analytical tools to detect, unravel and halt pernicious insider trading schemes that involve multiple tipsters, traders, and market events," Sansone said in a statement.

According to the SEC's complaint, Sung Mo "Jay" Jun was at the center of a long-running scheme to illegally trade on non-public information while employed at Netflix in 2016 and 2017. Jun revealed this information to his brother, Joon Mo Jun, and a friend, Junwoo Chon, who both used it to trade in advance of multiple Netflix earnings announcements.

After Jun left Netflix in 2017, he obtained confidential Netflix subscriber growth information from another Netflix insider, Ayden Lee, according to the SEC. The SEC alleged that Sung Mo Jun's former Netflix colleague Jae Hyeon Bae, another Netflix engineer, provided the insider subscriber growth information in advance of Netflix's July 2019 earnings announcement.

The agency said the five have consented to a court settlement, which would bar them from further violations and



ARLINGTON, Virginia: File photo shows a computer screen and mobile phone display the Netflix logo in Arlington, Virginia. —AFP

impose undetermined civil penalties. Separate criminal charges were filed by the US Attorney's Office against Sung Mo Jun, Joon Jun, Chon and Lee, officials said. —AFP

## Business

# US Fed officials expect to pull back on stimulus this year

## Fed buying \$80bn a month of US Treasury debt

WASHINGTON: US central bankers expect to start pulling back on stimulus measures this year, if the economic recovery continues, according to the minutes of the July policy meeting released Wednesday. While the discussions showed some division among Federal Reserve officials on the prospects for inflation and employment, with few exceptions they see a slowdown in the massive asset purchases in coming months.

But they also recognized the challenges facing policymakers, as well as the uncertainty about the outlook amid rising COVID-19 infections driven by the



**Inflation was on track**

Delta variant, as well as the global supply chain bottlenecks hurting businesses.

The Fed slashed interest rates to zero at the start of the pandemic in March 2020 and began buying huge amounts of bonds to provide liquidity to the world's largest economy and support the recovery. As businesses shutdown nationwide, the central bank vowed to keep the stimulus measures in place until it had achieved "substantial progress"

towards its maximum employment goal and inflation was on track to hold above the two-percent target for some time.

"Most participants" at the July 27-28 meeting of the policy-setting Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) "judged that it could be appropriate to start reducing the pace of asset purchases this year," the minutes said.

The majority felt recent inflation data satisfied the central bank's objectives, and unemployment was near to doing so, after falling to 5.4 percent from 14.8 percent in April of last year. Several holdouts however urged patience and thought the first step in tapering should wait until next year,

given the Delta infections could "damp the economic recovery," the report said.

The Fed has been buying \$80 billion a month of US Treasury debt and \$40 billion of agency mortgage-backed securities. The officials recognized the uncertainty about the outlook "was quite high," given the global supply shortages caused by shipping and production constraints, which have fueled rising prices, although they have been concentrated in



VANCE, United States: File photo shows an employee works on the doors for a Mercedes-Benz C-Class at the Mercedes-Benz US International factory in Vance, Alabama. American auto assembly lines continued working last month, pushing industrial production above analysts' expectations. —AFP

a limited number of sectors.

And several officials noted the difficulty in executing the taper plan which could be misread as the first step towards raising the Fed's benchmark borrowing rate. Slowing "asset purchases should not be interpreted as the beginning of a predetermined course for raising the federal funds rate from its current level" which is a separate deci-

sion, the minutes said.

But some officials "cautioned that it could be challenging for the public to disentangle deliberations about the two tools." That communications challenge will fall largely on Fed Chair Jerome Powell, who is due to deliver a highly-anticipated speech next week to the annual central banking conference in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. —AFP

## Oil company stops supplying Lebanon with petrol

BEIRUT: A key oil company in Lebanon said yesterday it would stop supplying its gas stations with fuel amid severe shortages that have brought the crisis-hit country to a halt. Coral Oil Company, operating in Lebanon since 1926, said the "unprecedented" halt to its operations comes as its current stocks run dry. "The Coral Company apologises to the Lebanese people and to its customers for not being able to provide, for the first since it was established, petroleum to gas stations," Coral said in a statement. "When remaining stocks run out of (Coral) gas stations, they will stop servicing people's needs."

A vessel carrying additional fuel shipments has been docked in Lebanese waters for more than a week. But the nearly bank-

rupt Lebanese state has not completed the steps needed to unload the cargo, added the statement, carried by the official National News Agency.

Lebanon is grappling with an economic crisis branded by the World Bank as one of the planet's worse since the mid-19th century. The currency has lost 90 percent of its value on the black market, with more than three-quarters of the population now in poverty. On top of shortages of medicine, gas and bread, the country has been hard hit by severe fuel shortages leading to massive queues at pumping stations. Diesel shortages have aggravated power cuts which now last up to 22 hours a day, forcing shut businesses, government offices and even hospitals. —AFP

## Russia fines Google for not removing illegal content

MOSCOW: A Moscow court yesterday again fined Google for failing to remove banned content as foreign tech giants face mounting pressure in Russia. In recent months, Russia has been taking legal action against foreign tech companies for not deleting content banned by the authorities, including pornographic material or posts deemed extremist or condoning drugs or suicide.

On Thursday, the Tagansky district court slapped Google with three fines totalling six million rubles (\$80,850) for the violation, according to the official Telegram channel of Moscow courts. Earlier this week, the US company was hit with five other fines totalling 14 million rubles over the

same charges. Last month Google was fined three million rubles for breaching data storage laws.

According to the RIA Novosti news agency, Google has so far been fined 32.5 million rubles in Russia. It was the first time the company was penalised under the controversial law that requires the personal data of Russian users to be stored on servers within Russia.

Moscow has recently ramped up pressure on foreign tech companies, especially social networks, after accusing them early this year of not removing posts calling for minors to join protests in support of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny.

Facebook has been handed fines for failing to remove illegal content, while Twitter has had its service speeds in Russia throttled. In recent years, the Russian government has also been tightening control over the internet under the pretext of fighting extremism and protecting minors.

But government critics have denounced official oversight of the web as a means to stifle debate and silence dissent. —AFP



## Business

# Tech in crosshairs again as Hong Kong stocks tumble

## Tencent ended with more than three percent down

**HONG KONG:** Tech giants led losses in Hong Kong yesterday after gaming titan Tencent warned Beijing would likely expand its crackdown on the sector, while traders were also hit by expectations the Federal Reserve will start tightening monetary policy by the year's end. The Hang Seng Index tumbled 2.13 percent, or 550.68 points, to 25,316.33.

The Shanghai Composite Index shed 0.57 percent, or 19.73 points, to 3,465.55, but the Shenzhen Composite Index on China's second exchange added 0.20 percent, or 4.74 points, to 2,417.23. The sell-off in Hong Kong and Shanghai reflected a wider retreat across the world after the Fed released minutes from its July meeting showing most board members agree on tapering policy in the next few months as the economy recovers.

The move, which analysts suggest could begin in November or December, would begin chipping away at a key pillar of the rally world markets have enjoyed for more than a year. While most markets around Asia were in negative territory, Hong Kong's problems were exacerbated by renewed fears that Beijing has not finished with its regulatory moves against certain industries, most notably tech.

The sector has already had a torrid time this year as leaders look to tighten their grip on firms they consider to have gained too much power, citing antitrust and national security issues. And on Wednesday gaming firm Tencent, China's biggest company, announced relatively healthy earnings but told investors to prepare for further curbs that will likely further hit business models and earning power.

"In the near future, more regulations should be coming," President Martin Lau said. "This should be expected because the regulation has been quite loose over an industry like the internet, considering its size and the importance."

Tencent ended yesterday more than three percent down, while e-commerce behemoth Alibaba, which was the first firm to feel the heat of Chinese authorities, fell more than five percent to its lowest level since listing in November 2019.

Alibaba's HK\$162.10 end price is only a little more than half the record HK\$309.40 touched in October last year. Among other



**HONG KONG:** This photo taken on August 15, 2021 shows a vendor waiting for customers at a stall selling trousers in Hong Kong. —AFP

tech firms, Lenovo tanked 5.9 percent and AAC Technologies shed three percent.

"Tencent management noted that there was 'a lot more to come' on the regulation front across multiple segments from different regulators. This is clearly not ideal," said Bernstein analyst Robin Zhu.

However, there were also sizeable losses in other parts of the Hang Seng Index, with oil giants slammed by a plunge in oil prices that has been caused by demand concerns in light of the spread of the Delta COVID variant. PetroChina plunged 5.3 percent, CNOOC shed 1.8 percent and Sinopec dived three percent. — AFP

## S Korea court orders seizure of Mitsubishi assets over forced labour

**SEOUL:** A South Korean court has ordered the seizure of Mitsubishi's assets in the country over the Japanese industrial giant's use of forced labour during World War II, reports said yesterday.

Japan and South Korea are both democracies, market economies and US allies, but their relationship has been strained for decades as a result of Tokyo's brutal 1910-45 colonial rule over the Korean peninsula.

Around 780,000 Koreans were conscripted into forced labour by Japan during the 35-year occupation, according to data from Seoul, not including women forced into sexual slavery by Japanese troops.

In a landmark ruling in 2018, the Supreme Court ordered Mitsubishi Heavy Industries to pay compensations to a handful of the victims, but the Japanese

firm refused to follow the verdict.

And earlier this month, the surviving families of four of the victims asked the court to seize Mitsubishi's bonds in South Korea, Yonhap news agency reported.

The Anyang branch of Suwon District Court ordered the seizure of around 850 million won (US\$725,000) worth of bonds the Japanese firm owns in LS Mtron, a South Korean industrial machinery manufacturer, according to the report.

The amount covers around 80 to 150 million won ordered to be provided to each of the victims and covers losses from the delay of payment.

"We request Mitsubishi to admit the historical fact and apologise and deliver compensation to the victims," Yonhap cited the law firm representing the plaintiffs as saying.

"If Mitsubishi continues to refuse to follow court orders, we will collect its bonds from LS Mtron based on the collection order," it added.

Japan says the victims' right to sue had been extinguished by the 1965 treaty which saw Seoul and Tokyo restore diplomatic ties and included a reparation package of about \$800 million in grants and cheap loans. —AFP

## Toyota to cut Sept production by 40% as virus hits supply

**TOKYO:** Toyota said yesterday it will cut global auto production by 40 percent in September as the spread of coronavirus in Southeast Asia squeezes its supply chain. It came after Japan's Nikkei daily reported that the global chip shortage was also behind Toyota's planned reduction in new vehicles.

The world's largest automaker announced suspensions in operations at multiple Japanese plants next month due to a "parts shortage resulting from the spread of COVID-19 in Southeast Asia". "We plan to reduce our global production by some 40 percent in September, from just under 900,000 originally planned," a Toyota spokeswoman told AFP.

The Nikkei said Toyota would also

scale back production in North America, China and Europe from early September. The Japanese giant's rivals have also been forced to slow or temporarily halt production due to the chip shortage.

Microchips are essential for the electronics systems of modern cars, and have been in short supply since the end of last year. When the pandemic hit, carmakers scaled back orders and chipmakers shifted output to consumer electronics as people splurged on equipment to work and relax at home-leaving automakers in a tight situation as demand for vehicles picked up.

The chip crunch and other virus-related supply chain issues had already caused several short suspensions at Toyota's Japanese factories. The company reported a record first-quarter net profit earlier this month, with strong sales fuelled by the recovery from the coronavirus crisis. Following the Nikkei report yesterday, Toyota shares plunged 4.42 percent to 9,295 yen. — AFP

## Sports

# Osaka rallies to oust Gauff while Barty advances at Cincinnati

**CINCINNATI:** Japan's Naomi Osaka battled back to take a 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 victory over American Coco Gauff on Wednesday and advance into the third round of the WTA Cincinnati Masters. Top seed Ashleigh Barty moved on as well, bouncing back from a Tokyo Olympic first-round loss to start her pre-US Open campaign with a 6-4, 7-6 (7/3) win over Britain's Heather Watson.

Four-time Grand Slam winner Osaka is playing her first event since the Games, where she went out in the third round. Gauff had won the pair's most recent prior match in the third round of the 2020 Australian Open after losing a year earlier at the US Open.

Osaka said the early stage of the match saw her trying various things in her first match outside Tokyo since Roland Garros. "The first set was an experiment," Osaka said. "I was trying to see what was going on as I've not played that many matches. I was just examining here and trying to stay calm, trying to keep a level head."

Osaka said victory "means a lot to me, especially coming off Tokyo. She's not my favorite to play. It's very straining mentally. But this is a win I can definitely congratulate myself for." Before the Olympics, Osaka last played at Roland Garros after announcing she would reserve the right

to avoid mandatory post-match media conferences, which she said damaged her mental health. That vow lasted through a first-round stadium interview before she withdrew, going on to also skip Wimbledon.

On Wednesday, she was calm and composed in her responses to reporters. "I was wondering why was I so affected, I guess, like what made me not want to do media in the first place," Osaka said. "I'm wondering if I was scared because sometimes I would see headlines of like players losing and then the headline the next day would be like a collapse or they're not that great anymore."

Osaka will next play Jil Teichmann after the Swiss put out American Bernarda Pera 6-1, 6-4. Barty will next face two-time Australian Open champion Victoria Azarenka. "I feel good. I feel like I'm ready to play," Barty said. "I'm as close to 100 percent as I'm ever going to get. I feel comfortable and ready and excited to be playing here in Cincinnati and knowing that we're moving on to New York, one of the best tournaments and one of the best atmospheres in the world, that brings excitement."

Angelique Kerber defeated Elina Svitolina 7-5, 2-6, 6-4 while former US Open winner Bianca Andreescu of Canada lost to Karolina Muchova 6-4, 6-2 in the second round. Azarenka defeated



**MASON:** Naomi Osaka of Japan celebrates after defeating Cori Gauff 6-4, 3-6, 6-4 during Western & Southern Open - Day 4 at Lindner Family Tennis Center on August 18, 2021 in Mason, Ohio. — AFP

Alison Riske 6-2, 7-5 while fellow former Grand Slam champions Petra Kvitova and Jelena Ostapenko both won. Kvitova stopped Veronika

Kudermetova 6-2, 6-4 while Ostapenko advanced 6-7 (2/7), 5-4 when American Jennifer Brady retired. — AFP

## Halep pulls from Cincinnati event with thigh injury

**CINCINNATI:** Simona Halep withdrew from her second-round match at the WTA Cincinnati Masters on Wednesday due to a right thigh injury she suffered at the US Open hardcourt tuneup event. The fifth seed from Romania was to have faced American Jessica Pegula but pulled out after hurting herself in the previous round in a victory over Poland's Magda Linette. "After feeling a sharp pain in my right adductor during the match yesterday, I called the physio and, with heavy taping, was able to carry on and win," Halep said.

"Unfortunately, a scan this morning showed that I have a small tear in the adductor and, therefore, it would be too risky for me to play this evening. I will rest up and do everything I can to be ready for the US Open. To the fans in Cincy, it was beautiful to see you again." Pegula earned a walkover into the third round. Halep is just back on court after another injury in Rome last May that kept her from Roland Garros, Wimbledon and the Olympics. —AFP



**MASON:** Simona Halep of Romania dribbles the ball during her match against Magda Linette of Poland during Western & Southern Open - Day 3 at Lindner Family Tennis Center on August 17, 2021 in Mason, Ohio. — AFP

## Osaka says stressful world might have increased anxiety

**CINCINNATI:** Naomi Osaka remained the picture of calm answering questions on Wednesday after staging a 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 comeback victory over Coco Gauff to reach the third round of the WTA Cincinnati Masters.

The shy Japanese second seed's anxiety over attending obligatory post-match media conferences was nowhere in evidence as she explained possible reasons for her emotional crisis, which erupted three months ago when she withdrew after playing one match at Roland Garros. She said that speaking with reporters was damaging her mental health. "With everything going on in Haiti (her father's homeland) and Afghanistan, things are really crazy," the four-time Grand Slam winner said. "It's crazy for me to be in the US hitting a tennis

ball and people come and watch me play."

Osaka, who grew up in New York, sounded as if she is trying to come to grips with the mental issues that had been bothering her recently, ones that sent her away from the game from Paris until the Tokyo Olympics last month. This is her first event since she went out in the third round at the Games.

"I wonder what affected me so much and made me not want to do media. (Maybe) I was scared of bad headlines (if she lost)," she said. "I should feel like I'm winning (in life), having people come to watch me is an accomplishment. But that started not being an accomplishment for me — I was ungrateful."

Osaka said coping with COVID-19 might also have been a factor. "Some of the stress may have come from living in COVID (tennis) bubbles and not seeing (outside) people," she said. The issue flared again this week in her first Cincinnati news conference, with a straightforward query causing her to burst into tears before composing herself and getting through the session. —AFP

## Venus Williams wildcard entrant for US Open

**NEW YORK:** Seven-time Grand Slam champion Venus Williams was among the US Open women's and men's wildcard selections announced Wednesday by the US Tennis Association. The 41-year-old American, a two-time winner in New York who lifted the trophy in 2000 and 2001, will make her 15th consecutive main draw appearance and 23rd all-time start in the Flushing Meadows fortnight.

The former world number one has not missed a Grand Slam since 2013 at Wimbledon but has slid to 112th in the WTA rankings, putting her outside the direct entries into the field for the year's final Grand Slam tournament, which begins on August 30.

American CoCo Vandeweghe, a 2017 Australian and US Open semi-finalist who ranked as high as ninth in the world, also received a wildcard, as did US teens Hailey Baptiste, Ashlyn Krueger, Caty McNally and Katie Volynets. Australia's Storm Sanders was awarded a wildcard in an agreement with Tennis Australia.

On the men's side, 20-year-old Americans Jenson Brooksby and Brandon Nakashima were joined as wildcards by compatriots Jack Sock, Sam Riffice, Zachary Svajda, Emilio Nava and Ernesto Escobedo plus Australian Max Purcell. Brooksby reached his first ATP final last month at Newport and reached the Washington semi-finals two weeks ago. Nakashima was a runner-up in back-to-back events last month at Los Cabos, Mexico and Atlanta. — AFP

# Taleban return causes anguish for Afghan female football pioneer

## Gunmen sent house to house searching for enemies: Popal

**LONDON:** Afghanistan's former women's football captain Khalida Popal said she worries about the safety of the country's female players have left her unable to sleep since the Taliban returned to power. Popal, 34, was granted asylum in Denmark in 2016, and considers herself "privileged" not to have to now seek safe haven from the hardline Islamists.

The team which Popal helped create in 2007 is made up of foreign- and Afghanistan-based players, with the threat of reprisals against those still in the country high given their previous high-profile criticisms of the regime. Gunmen are already being sent house to house searching for "enemies", she said, despite the group's attempt to ease concerns of a return to brutal oppression.

Her own family in the western city of Herat have already recounted a change, she said. "Women family members of mine that have been out in the street have either been told to turn round and go home and not go to school or been beaten," she told AFP by phone from Copenhagen.

### No protection

But Popal, who is now the women's team director, said the women footballers risk far worse. "I was one of the main people in the Afghan association who founded the women's team with the purpose to stand together as women of Afghanistan and use football as an avenue of activism," she said.

"We wanted to give the message to the world and to the Taliban that we (women) are not weak, you may kill our sisters but we will show you we are with them. These are young girls who went on social media and publicly said the Taliban was the enemy. My players are now seeing that armed enemy outside their doors and windows and they are scared as to what will happen to them."

Popal described the situation as "heart-breaking" and said players were struggling to understand how they had been left by the pull-out of US-led international forces. "When they call me or send voice messages to me they are saying, 'Why have they (the West) betrayed us? Why have politicians abandoned the women of Afghanistan? What have we done wrong?'" she said.

With access to Kabul airport blocked and also unlikely the players would be accepted for immediate evacuation, Popal said help for them within the country is not evident either. "At the moment those players living in the country are moving from one spot to another," she said.

"The scary thing is nobody wants to give them protection because the Taliban are striking fear into them saying, 'If you do not give us information and identify who are against us then you and your family will be killed.'"



**LONDON:** In this file photo taken on April 09, 2018, former Afghanistan women's football captain Khalida Popal attends a training session in south London. — AFP photos

### 'The dreams are fading'

Popal said she faced sexism when she was finance officer for the national football association: some men refused to accept their pay cheques from her due to her being a woman. But she said that was nothing compared to life for women under the Taliban from 1996 until they were ousted after



### Why have they betrayed us?

the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States. The Taliban said on Tuesday they would respect women's rights and permit them to be educated and work, albeit under Sharia law. But Popal said those were "just empty, empty words".

"When they announce that it will be under Sharia law, well, we have seen what that means for women already in the past in Afghanistan and in other countries too," she added. "If they are following Sharia law then that gives no rights to women whatsoever. All these achievements and dreams (for women) are fading away."

Popal said it was hard to believe that history is repeating itself two decades on, describing it as "traumatizing to see my childhood repeating before my eyes".

"I was a child when the Taliban took over and I was told not to go outside and play in the street or go to school which was burned down by the Taliban eventually. When the Taliban started beating my father and threatening my family we left and for almost eight years we were in Pakistan refugee camps.

"Then we went back to Afghanistan as there was hope of a new Afghanistan. However, empty and fake promises were made and the country once again is left alone and back to square one, and women are without any protection." — AFP



**In this file photo taken on April 09, 2018, former Afghanistan women's football captain Khalida Popal speaks during a motivational session with young women in south London.**

## Sports

# Lucky seventh as Zverev finally wins at ATP Cincinnati

**CINCINNATI:** Olympic champion Alexander Zverev struck gold at the ATP Cincinnati Masters on Wednesday with his first victory at the US Open tuneup event in seven attempts. The German has been deep in a rut from his first appearance in 2015 at the Midwest US venue, exiting in the first round every time.

But that all changed as Zverev celebrated success with a 7-6 (7/3), 6-2 win over South African Lloyd Harris to break his duck. "I'm happy where I'm at and I'm happy to get my first win in seven years here," he said. "It's obviously a great start to the week."

The breakthrough victory was the seventh in a row for the 24-year-old. "When I came on court and they said Olympic gold medalist, it did give me goosebumps," Zverev said. "It made me a little nervous at the beginning of the match, I have to say, because it is a special feeling."

Zverev now goes up against Argentine Guido Pella, a winner over Italy's Fabio Fognini 6-1, 7-5. Top seed Daniil Medvedev, last week's Toronto champion, also advanced in a no-drama 6-2, 6-2 defeat of American Mackenzie McDonald that took just an hour for the 2019 Cincinnati champion.

Number two seed Stefanos Tsitsipas fought off Sebastian Korda for a 7-6 (7/5), 6-3 victory that took the Toronto semi-finalist into the third round. The Greek won on his second match point as Korda drove a forehand long after 97 minutes.

Tsitsipas next plays Italy's Lorenzo Sonego who beat American Tommy Paul 7-6 (11/9), 6-2. Norway's eighth-seeded Casper Ruud out-aced

American Reilly Opelka 21 to 17 on his way to a 6-7 (5/7), 6-0, 7-6 (7/4) victory. Andy Murray's wild card run ended with a 7-6 (7/4), 6-3 loss to Poland's Hubert Hurkacz.

The Scotsman, who has been struggling to re-establish himself on tour after his latest injury — a groin problem — lost the second-round contest in one and three-quarter hours to the player who knocked Roger Federer out of Wimbledon.

Murray fired a respectable 11 aces to the 17 of his ninth-seeded opponent in the first-time meeting while saving four break points. "This week was fairly positive. I played much better than at Wimbledon and the grass season," he said. "This week my body felt good, even if hardcourts are not easy on the body. Physically I was tired after some of the long rallies, but I felt fine."

The 34-year-old Briton said the only factors that would make him reconsider his comeback were "if my body doesn't feel good" or "my tennis starts going backwards." The two-time Cincinnati winner, ranked 105th, owns 14 career Masters 1000 titles, the most of any man in a field missing the "Big 3" trio of Federer, Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic — all 20-time Grand Slam champions.

Olympic silver medalist Karen Khachanov joined Murray in defeat as the Russian exited 6-7 (5/7), 6-3, 6-4 to Canada's 12th-seeded Felix Auger-Aliassime, who will face Wimbledon finalist Matteo Berrettini for a quarter-final place.

Frenchman Gael Monfils earned the 500th match win of his career as he beat Australian



**MASON:** Alexander Zverev of Germany plays a forehand during his match against Lloyd Harris of South Africa during Western & Southern Open - Day 4 at Lindner Family Tennis Center on Wednesday in Mason, Ohio. — AFP

Alex de Minaur 6-3, 7-5. Victory put the 34-year-old into the third round against sixth seed Andrey Rublev, aged just six when the Frenchman won his first ATP match in 2004.

"It was at Metz against Xavier Malisse and he retired," Monfils said. "I remember all of my

wins. I've been on the Tour a long time. I'm quite blessed in my career." American John Isner beat Italian 11th seed Jannik Sinner 5-7, 7-6 (7/4), 6-4. Former champion Grigor Dimitrov reached the third round over Kazakh Alexander Bublik 6-3, 7-5. — AFP

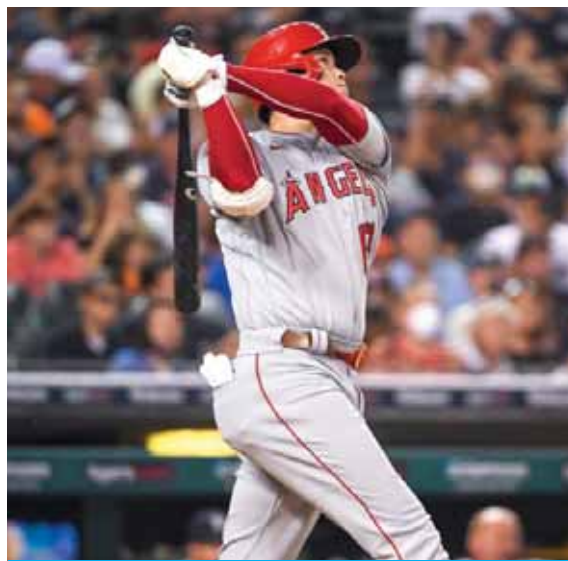
## Ohtani hurls eight innings, hits 40th homer in Angels win

**WASHINGTON:** Japanese two-way threat Shohei Ohtani smacked his 40th home run of the season and threw a Major League Baseball career-high eight innings in a Los Angeles Angels' victory on Wednesday. Ohtani, making his case for American League Most Valuable Player honors, powered the Angels past the host Detroit Tigers 3-1, including a solo homer in the eighth inning.

Ohtani's previous MLB career best on the mound was 7 2/3 innings against Tampa Bay in May 2018 and he had reached seven innings three times this year. The 27-year-old former Nippon Ham Fighters star became the first left-handed batter in Angels history to reach 40 homers, surpassing Reggie Jackson's previous lefty high total of 39 from 1982.

Ohtani needed only 90 pitches to retire 27 Tigers, 69 of which he threw for strikes. He struck out eight and did not walk a batter for the fifth time in 18 starts this season. The Angels brought in closing relief pitcher Raisel Iglesias for the ninth inning and the 31-year-old Cuban got the final three outs for his 27th save of the year.

Ohtani broke the record for most homers in an MLB season by a Japanese-born player when he smashed his 32nd homer of the campaign last month to pass the old mark set by Hideki Matsui. The first regular pitcher and



**DETROIT:** Shohei Ohtani #17 of the Los Angeles Angels hits a home run against the Detroit Tigers during the top of the eighth inning at Comerica Park on Wednesday in Detroit, Michigan. — AFP

batter in MLB since Babe Ruth a century ago could set an Angels record for homers in a season. The mark is now held by Troy Glaus with 47 homers in 2000. At 61-61, the Angels are 10 1/2 games behind Houston in the AL West division and eight games behind Oakland in the race for a wildcard playoff spot. — AFP

## Morikawa, Johnson grab Ryder Cup spots as PGA playoffs begin

**NEW YORK:** Two-time major champions Collin Morikawa and Dustin Johnson will be key players to watch this week as the US PGA Tour's FedEx Cup playoffs begin at the Northern Trust tournament. Morikawa leads the season points standings entering the three-event season finale that concludes with the Tour Championship while Johnson is the defending FedEx Cup champion.

Both Americans also have become the first to clinch berths on the US team for next month's Ryder Cup matches against Europe at Whistling Straits. A field of 125 this week at Liberty National in suburban New York will be whittled down to 70 for next week's BMW Championship in Baltimore and 30 for the Tour Championship in Atlanta. Morikawa, who won last month's British Open and last year's PGA Championship, has won twice this year to top the points chase.

"It's great to start out number one going into the playoffs. It means I was doing something right throughout the regular season. We had a couple wins, a couple top-10s — overall, it feels good. My game feels good," said Morikawa. "Not everyone has the luxury of knowing where they're going to stand coming to the Tour Championship, but I at least know I'm going to be there, I'm going to have a chance with four rounds no matter where I stand."

After taking last week off following his victory at Royal St George's and a trip to the Olympics, Morikawa plans to focus on being in peak form for the final event rather than trying to stay on a winning roll as he did last year after his first major win at the PGA. "The way I looked into the playoffs last year, I was so focused, especially after that PGA win, let's go win, win, win, and I think I was almost burnt out by the time I got to that third week," he said. — AFP

# 'Biggest ever' disability rights campaign launched before Paralympics

**TOKYO:** A global campaign aimed at ending discrimination towards the world's 1.2 billion people with disabilities kicked off yesterday spearheaded by Paralympic chiefs and backed by a broad group of international organizations. The campaign, called WeThe15, aims to "be the biggest ever human rights movement", representing the 15 percent of the world's population estimated by the UN to have a disability.

Backed by corporate muscle and bringing together organisations from the worlds of sport, human rights, policy, and arts and entertainment, the launch comes less than a week before the Tokyo Paralympics open on August 24. "We believe that it's really going to be a game-changer," International Paralympic Committee head Andrew Parsons told AFP. "The fact that the Paralympics are in Tokyo can be a platform for that. It's incredible."

The campaign aims to emulate other human rights movements such as Black Lives Matter and #MeToo, and comes with a slick visual identity based around the color purple. More than 125 landmarks around the world — from New York's Empire State Building to Rome's Colosseum — were going to be lit up in purple yesterday.

"We want to put disability at the heart of the inclusion agenda," said IPC chief brand and communications officer Craig Spence.

"There has been so much progress in recent years in terms of ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation. But disability has been forgotten about, despite the fact that it intersects those three areas."

Social media companies are also on board, and celebrities from former football star David Beckham to chat show queen Oprah Winfrey have thrown their weight behind the campaign. Prince Harry's Invictus Games Foundation is also involved. The campaign is planned to run for a decade, with each year focusing on a different aspect of discrimination faced by people with disabilities, including in employment and education.

The launch comes days before the opening of the Paralympics, which organizers say is a force for promoting the inclusion of people with disabilities and raises awareness about discrimination. The IPC expects billions to watch the Tokyo Paralympics, boosted by free-to-air coverage of the event provided to sub-Saharan African countries.

Spence said the 2012 London Paralympics — where members of the public snapped up 2.78 million tickets — changed "one in three attitudes towards disability" in Britain. He also said research showed that there were one million more people with disabilities in jobs six years after the Games than there were before.



**TOKYO:** A man walks past Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games posters on display at Tokyo Station in Tokyo yesterday. —AFP

"Clearly the Paralympics had an influence on that," he said. "That probably gave us the encouragement to deliver this campaign, because we

were able to measure the impact that the Paralympic Games has on changing attitudes towards disability and transforming society." —AFP

## First virus case reported in Paralympic Village

**TOKYO:** A first coronavirus case has been detected in the Paralympic Village, days before the Games open, organizers said yesterday as Japan battles a record wave of infections. The case involves a Games-related member of staff who is not resident in Japan, according to organizers, who did not give further details.

Organizers have so far reported 74 cases linked to the Paralympics, mostly among contractors and Games staff who live in Japan. Another six cases have been reported by local areas hosting teams for training camps. There have not yet been infections reported among athletes in the Village, which opened to Paralympians on Tuesday.

The Paralympics open on August 24, with around 4,400 athletes from approximately 160 teams set to take part. They begin around two weeks after the Olympics ended, with organizers saying they were able to prevent any major spread of infection through tough anti-virus measures.

So far 546 positive cases linked to the Olympics have been reported, and some experts have argued that holding the Games un-



**TOKYO:** People walk in front of a countdown clock for the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games five days before the opening ceremony, outside Tokyo station in Tokyo yesterday. —AFP

dermined the government's messaging on virus rules and contributed to a surge in domestic infections.

In recent days, Japan has recorded more than 20,000 daily virus cases, more than ever before, and the government has expanded and extended virus states of emergency to cover 13 regions until September 12. The measure largely shortens restaurant and bar opening hours and bans them from selling alcohol, but experts have questioned the efficacy of the restrictions with cases continuing to rise. —AFP

## Malaysian MotoGP cancelled, replaced by race at Misano

**PARIS:** The Malaysian MotoGP scheduled for October was cancelled yesterday due to COVID-19 restrictions with the Italian circuit at Misano stepping in to replace it, organizers announced. "The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting entry restrictions for Malaysia oblige the cancellation of the event," a joint statement from the sport's ruling body the FIM and promoters Dorna confirmed. This is the second year running the October 24 race in Sepang has been called off because of the pandemic. The Malaysia round of the world championship has suffered the same fate as the races this season in Thailand, Japan and Australia.

Misano has stepped in to fill Sepang's place on the calendar for what will be its second MotoGP weekend in a month, with the circuit named after the late Marco Simoncelli staging the San Marino Grand Prix on Sep-



**SEPANG:** In this file photo taken on November 3, 2019, Repsol Honda Team's Spanish rider Marc Marquez (right), Ducati's Italian rider Andrea Dovizioso (front center), and Monster Energy Yamaha's Italian rider Valentino Rossi (front left) take a corner with other riders during the MotoGP-class Malaysian Grand Prix motorcycle race at the Sepang International Circuit in Sepang. —AFP

tember 19. "The name of this event will be announced in due course," the organizers said. Frenchman Fabio Quartararo (Yamaha) leads the championship by 47 points from Francesco Bagnaia (ITA/Ducati) ahead of the British Grand Prix,

the 12th round of the 2021 season, on August 29. The Sepang cancellation means that Italian MotoGP legend Valentino Rossi's final home race before retirement will now be on October 24, instead of next month's first race at Misano. —AFP

## Sports

## Five new faces to watch in Serie A

**ROME:** Serie A has lost two of its biggest names this summer in Romelu Lukaku and Italy's goal-keeping hero Gianluigi Donnarumma, but some exciting talent has been on the move to Italy's top flight as the new season prepares to kick off. AFP Sport picks out five signings to watch in Serie A in 2021/22:

**Tammy Abraham (Roma)**

England international Abraham's move to Roma comes at a crucial time in his career, as he leaves the only club he has ever known in Chelsea for an uncertain rebuilding project in a new country under new Roma coach Jose Mourinho.

Frozen out at the European champions since Thomas Tuchel's arrival as coach and pushed further down the pecking order by the signing of Lukaku from Inter Milan, Abraham will be the first-choice striker for a team which is not only out of the Champions League but will be in the new Europa Conference League after finishing seventh in Serie A last season.

He will be expected to fill Edin Dzeko's shoes and lead the attack alongside the likes of rising star Nicolò Zaniolo, and after playing just 17 minutes in the final three months of last season this is a new level of responsibility for talented the 23-year-old.

**Denzel Dumfries (Inter Milan)**

Possibly the most intriguing signing of the summer, Dumfries shone at Euro 2020 for the Netherlands, scoring twice and putting on some impressive displays as a wing-back in Frank de Boer's team.

Inter announced the signing of Dumfries from PSV Eindhoven on the same day as Dzeko's arrival from Roma, and while Dzeko will be tasked with

filling the big gap left by Lukaku, Dumfries is charged with being the new Achraf Hakimi. How the 25-year-old Rotterdam native performs on the right flank in Simone Inzaghi's 3-5-2 system will be key to Inter's title defence, as the rest of a strong back line and midfield has remained intact.

**Marko Arnautovic (Bologna)**

The volatile Arnautovic has had a busy summer: slapped with a one-game ban for insulting a North Macedonia player during Euro 2020, before a razor-thin offside decision via VAR stopped him from putting Austria ahead against Italy at a crucial stage of their last-16 clash, eventually losing 2-1 at Wembley.

He then said goodbye to Chinese Super League side Shanghai Port after apparently asking for a pay-off to terminate a contract that reportedly earned him over 200,000 euros (\$234,000) a week. Now safely in northern Italy, the 32-year-old netted on his Bologna debut on Monday — but was on the wrong end of a nine-goal thriller with second-tier Ternana which dumped Sinisa Mihajlovic's team out of the Coppa Italia in the first round.

**Olivier Giroud (AC Milan)**

France's second-highest scorer of all time joins a stellar cast of veteran forwards in Serie A, arriving at Milan from Chelsea after playing an important role in the Blues' march to Champions League glory. Giroud will be 35 next month but shows no sign of letting up in the twilight of his career.

With fellow ageing star Zlatan Ibrahimovic out with a knee injury, Giroud has impressed in pre-season, scoring three times and looking the same bustling presence that stepped up for Chelsea on a number of key occasions.



**BELFAST:** Chelsea's English striker Tammy Abraham (right) take part in a training session on the eve of the UEFA Super Cup match against Villarreal at Windsor Park in Belfast, Northern Ireland on August 10, 2021. Abraham completed his move to Roma on August 17, 2021, the club announced. —AFP

With Milan back in the Champions League for the first time since 2013/14, a reliable presence in front of goal could be just what Stefano Pioli's team need to kick on.

**Nicolas Gonzalez (Fiorentina)**

Gonzalez joins Fiorentina as a Copa America winner with Argentina and his addition provides support for star forward Dusan Vlahovic, who has been an Inter target after scoring 21 times in Serie

A last season.

The 23-year-old played just once between February and May last term for Stuttgart, having scored six goals in 15 games earlier in the campaign, but his injury troubles did not stop the Viola shelling out 23 million euros to get the winger.

He got off to a promising start in last week's 4-0 Cup thumping of Serie C outfit Cosenza, laying on Vlahovic's tap-in opener before doubling the lead with a smart header from a corner. —AFP

## Donnarumma hopes move to PSG will make him 'stronger'

**ROME:** Italy goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma says he left AC Milan after eight years with the Serie A side for Paris Saint-Germain as he needed a change "to develop, to improve and to become stronger". The 22-year-old joined PSG on a free transfer after helping Italy to the Euro 2020 title where he was named player of the tournament. Reflecting on his time in Milan, Donnarumma told yesterday's *Corriere dello Sport*: "I stayed eight years there, it was my home, I have magnificent memories. "I'll always be a fan of the club. You can't brush aside eight years, but I needed a change to develop, improve and become stronger. I felt the need for a change of scene, for a new reality."

Donnarumma will be in competition for a place in Mauricio Pochettino's team with experienced Costa Rican Keylor Navas. "That's an extra motivation, something which intrigues me," he told the paper. Yet to make his debut for his new club he is fully aware his arrival at the Parc des Princes is expected to help PSG in their pursuit of a first ever Champions League title.

"Last season the club didn't win Ligue 1 but the real objective is the other one — the Champions League," said the 'keeper who has



**SAINT-GERMAIN-EN-LAYE:** Paris Saint-Germain's Italian goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma takes part in a training session at the Camp des Loges Paris Saint-Germain football club's training ground in Saint-Germain-en-Laye yesterday. —AFP

yet to figure in the competition. Donnarumma moved to Paris on a five-year deal. During his six seasons with the Rossoneri, the Naples-born goalkeeper made 215 appearances in Serie A along with 16 in Europa League matches and 12 in the Italian Cup (including the 2016 and 2018 finals). —AFP

## Italian Euro 2020 winner Locatelli joins Juventus

**ROME:** Italy's Euro 2020 winner Manuel Locatelli has joined Juventus on a two-year loan deal from Sassuolo, the Serie A giants announced on Wednesday. Midfielder Locatelli scored twice in five games as the Azzurri lifted the European Championship trophy in July.

Juve will have to sign Locatelli permanently in 2023 for 37.5 million euros (\$43.8 million), which includes bonuses, after his loan deal ends. The 23-year-old made his top-flight debut with AC Milan in 2016 after coming through Atalanta's academy before joining Sassuolo two years later.

"In addition to his goals, Manuel is an absolute quality and security in midfield, bringing a level of class that few have," Juve said. "The giant steps he has made in the top flight, after a period at Atalanta and Milan's youth teams, only confirms this."

He will join his Euro 2020 teammates Leonardo Bonucci, Giorgio Chiellini, Federico Chiesa and Federico Bernardeschi at the Allianz Stadium. Juventus saw their run of nine successive Serie A titles ended last season by Inter Milan.



**Manuel Locatelli**

But they are hoping to hit back under returning coach Massimiliano Allegri, who won five straight Serie A crowns from 2015-2019 with Juve. The 'Old Lady' were also given a boost on Tuesday when Cristiano Ronaldo blasted reports claiming he could return to Real Madrid.

Locatelli could make his Juve debut at Udinese on Sunday in their first league game of the season. He impressed in Italy's opening two matches of Euro 2020, but did not start again after making way when Paris Saint-Germain midfielder Marco Verratti returned from injury. —AFP

## Sports

# Inter's turbulent summer leaves Serie A crown up for grabs

**ROME:** Inter Milan kick off the new Serie A season tomorrow in the midst of fan protests and money troubles that threaten to derail their title defense before it has even begun. A dramatic summer for the champions reached its lowest ebb last week when star striker Romelu Lukaku was sold to Chelsea, a transfer that enraged not just supporters but reportedly also CEO Giuseppe Marotta and new coach Simone Inzaghi.

The Gazzetta dello Sport reported that Inter's cash-strapped Chinese owners Suning forced the sale of Belgium forward Lukaku after having already offloaded buccaneering right-back Achraf Hakimi, a key figure in their first Serie A triumph since 2010, to Paris Saint-Germain.

The club's financial problems were clear well before the league crown was claimed, and last month previous coach Antonio Conte left Inter knowing his team could be dismantled. They are still strong in key areas and have one of Italy's Euro 2020 heroes in Nicolo Barella, but the squad has certainly been downgraded.

Lukaku has been replaced with Edin Dzeko, a capable forward familiar with Serie A, but the Bosnia striker is 35 years old and scored just seven league goals last season. Dutch defender Denzel Dumfries however is an intriguing choice for the vacant spot at right-back after his exciting displays at Euro 2020. How he and Dzeko fare will be key to Inzaghi's chances at Inter after doing an excellent job on a small budget at Lazio.

## Allegri's Juve lurking

Ready to pounce will be Juventus, who have

Massimiliano Allegri back at the controls and added Euro star Manuel Locatelli to a midfield which was the Old Lady's weak point under Andrea Pirlo last season. Rumours of Cristiano Ronaldo's desire to leave Juve have not dampened enthusiasm around the team's chances as the chaos that has enveloped Inter and Allegri's return have boosted hopes in Turin of reclaiming the title from their old enemies.

Also sniffing to overtake Inter is a new cast of managers led by Jose Mourinho at Roma, who on Tuesday celebrated the arrival of Tammy Abraham from Chelsea. Mourinho was welcomed back to Italy this summer, memories of treble glory at Inter over a decade ago leaving Roma fans hoping the once Special One's star has not definitively waned.

Elsewhere Maurizio Sarri will try to bring his brand of passing football to Lazio while Luciano Spalletti has a chance to get a talent-packed Napoli back in the top four on his return to club management after two years away.

## Fans return

Supporters will finally be able to watch the unfolding drama in stadiums after the Italian government permitted clubs to open their stadiums to 50 percent capacity earlier in the month.

The decision came after clubs railed against the previous legislation which also permitted grounds to be as much as half full, but included social distancing rules which would have meant up to three quarters of places in some grounds being unavailable to fans.

German Super Cup.

He played the full 90 minutes and lifted the trophy on the pitch after Bayern striker Robert Lewandowski sealed victory with two goals. In a statement, Bayern left it open whether the Germany goalkeeper will be fit for Sunday's home league game at the Allianz Arena.

The defending champions are hunting their first Bundesliga win of the new season after drawing last Friday's opening match at Moenchengladbach. If Neuer drops out, he is set to be replaced by reserve goalkeeper Sven Ulreich, 33, who rejoined in the summer after a season at second division Hamburg. — AFP



**DORTMUND:** Bayern Munich's German goalkeeper Manuel Neuer gets medical treatment during the German Super Cup football match against Borussia Dortmund in Dortmund on August 17, 2021. —AFP



**MILAN:** In this file photo taken on January 14, 2020, Inter Milan's Belgian forward Romelu Lukaku celebrates after opening the scoring during the Italian Cup round of 16 match v Cagliari at the San Siro stadium in Milan. Romelu Lukaku returned to European champions Chelsea, seven years after his first spell at Stamford Bridge came to an end. —AFP

Italian Football Federation (FIGC) president Gabriele Gravina welcomed the move but insisted that it was simply a "first step towards our aim of having our stadiums full as soon as possible".

Last month the FIGC laid out demands to the government which as well as asking for tax relief included a request to create a 'Save Football Fund' managed by the FIGC which would re-

ceive one percent of all bets placed on any sporting event.

Another test for the league will be how its new main broadcaster DAZN performs. The streaming platform outbid Sky for the 2021-2024 rights in March and will be expected to supply coverage of Serie A to millions in a country where digital development lags behind other European countries. — AFP

## After 995 matches, Mourinho 'calm' ahead of Roma bow

**ROME:** Jose Mourinho said he was "calm" ahead of his first competitive game as Roma coach, insisting that taking charge of a team for the 996th time in his career poses little anxiety. "It's true that this will be my first official match with this club, but it will be my 996th match if I'm not mistaken so I am calm," he told Sky Sport ahead of yesterday's Europa Conference League play-off first leg at Trabzonspor.

Despite the game forming part of UEFA's new third-tier club tournament, 58-year-old Mourinho said it was a tie worthy of a greater stage. "For me, it doesn't seem like a Conference League play-off, but rather a Europa League or Champions League match because the two clubs played the Champions League a few years ago," he said.

Mourinho also said he expects great things from new 40-million-euro (\$46.8 million) signing Tammy Abraham who he bought from former club Chelsea. Abraham was signed just three days after veteran striker Edin Dzeko was shipped out to Inter Milan to replace Romelu Lukaku who completed the transfer triangle by returning to Stamford Bridge.



**ROME:** Roma's Portuguese coach Jose Mourinho gestures during a friendly football match against Raja Club Athletic at the Olympic stadium in Rome on August 14, 2021. —AFP

"Abraham doesn't have the history of Edin, who is 35, but he's won it all and he's still young, with great potential," explained Mourinho. Roma will get their Serie A campaign underway on Sunday with a home clash against Fiorentina. — AFP



## Taleban return causes anguish for female football pioneer

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