



**2** Seven killed, 17 hurt in two deadly accidents in Kuwait



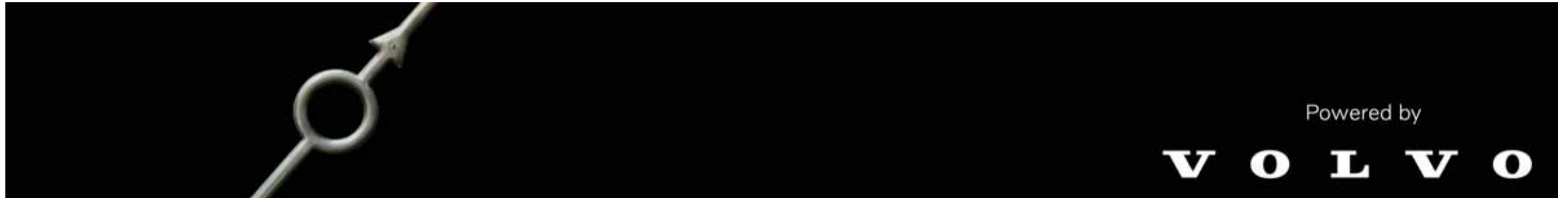
**5** Caught in the crossfire, Ethiopian ethnic minority flees to Sudan



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# Taleban co-founder in Kabul to map out govt

Thousands scramble to leave Afghanistan • Taleban block employees from work



**KABUL:** Taleban leaders gathered in the Afghan capital yesterday to begin mapping out an "inclusive government" as thousands scrambled to leave the country via a chaotic evacuation dubbed one of the most difficult airlifts in history.

A senior Taleban official told AFP that Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar—who co-founded the group—would meet jihadi leaders, elders and politicians in the coming days, stirring faint hope they may hold good on pledges to rule differently this time around. But the gathering also included top officials from the Haqqani network, a US-designated terrorist organization with million-dollar bounties on its leadership.

The Panjshir Valley remains the only holdout against the Taleban after the hardline Islamists took control of Afghanistan. Earlier this week, the son of the late, famed anti-Taleban commander Ahmad Shah Massoud had called for a new resistance. But yesterday, pro-Taleban social media feeds posted a video of Khalil Haqqani of the Haqqani network claiming Massoud's son had "declared allegiance" to the new Islamic emirate. There has been no



Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar

statement from Massoud.

Meanwhile, government employees in Kabul were blocked by Taleban militants from returning to their offices yesterday, the first day of the Afghan working week. Since the hardline Islamist group seized power six days ago, government buildings, banks, schools and universities have remained largely closed.

Only a few private firms, including telecom companies, have been operating since the Taleban swept back to power—although there have also been two public holidays since then. The blocking of employees from entering their offices came despite the Taleban announcing they would allow government staff to continue working.

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## News in brief

### Megaship heads to Asia from Suez

**CAIRO:** A super tanker that blocked the Suez Canal is heading back to Asia, authorities said, five months after it became wedged across the vital waterway and crippled world trade. The MV Ever Given had "successfully crossed" the canal after unloading its cargo in Britain and was now on its way to China, Suez Canal Authority chief Osama Rabie said on Friday. —AFP

### Biden names China, Japan envoys

**WASHINGTON:** President Joe Biden on Friday nominated career diplomat Nicholas Burns as ambassador to China and former Chicago mayor and Democratic party heavyweight Rahm Emanuel to head the embassy in Japan. The White House also announced Biden had tapped another experienced diplomat, Michael Battle, for ambassador in Tanzania. The ambassador posts require confirmation in the almost evenly divided Senate. —AFP



Nicholas Burns

### 3 militia killed by IS in Iraq

**BAGHDAD:** Three fighters from a pro-Iranian militia were killed in Iraq Friday when the Islamic State (IS) group attacked their base near Baghdad, a paramilitary and a security source said. The men belonged to the Nujaba Movement, a part of the Hashed Al-Shaabi coalition of militias that mostly back Iran. Both sources said they were killed in an attack by IS on their base in Tarmiya, north of Baghdad, with seven more fighters wounded. Formed in 2014 to back the Iraqi army in its fight against IS jihadists, the Hashed at the time controlled large swathes of the country but have since been integrated into the armed forces. —AFP

## US thanks Kuwait, partners

**WASHINGTON:** The United States on Friday extended "special thanks" to a number of countries, including Kuwait, for transiting Americans and allies from Kabul, Afghanistan "through their territories to safety". "Over the past several days, we have mobilized a global effort through diplomatic channels to evacuate US citizens, personnel from partner nations, and, of course, at-risk Afghans from Kabul," State Department Spokesperson Ned Price told reporters.

Price said during the briefing "we extend special thanks to our partners

around the globe who have been instrumental in this operation in all of its many parts." "Bahrain, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Qatar, Tajikistan, Turkey, the UAE, the United Kingdom and Uzbekistan have been or will soon be transiting Americans, or in some circumstances, others, through their territories to safety," he noted. He also listed other countries who "have also made generous offers regarding the relocation efforts for at-risk Afghans." "We deeply appreciate the support they have offered, and we are proud to partner with them in our shared support for the Afghan people," he affirmed.

"We are very encouraged that other countries are also considering providing additional support, and this is something on which we will continue to be focused." —KUNA

## 'Hell on earth': Lebanon unlivable as crisis deepens

**BEIRUT:** It wasn't a late-night craving that brought Ayla to a Beirut cafe but the air-conditioning that let her children, slouched in a sofa next to her, get some proper rest. Lebanon's energy crisis is dragging people to unlikely places in their desperate quest for life's essentials, be it fresh air, electricity, a working fridge or petrol for their cars.

"For two days, we have not had a single minute of power at home. The children can no longer sleep," said Ayla, a woman in her 30s. "Here, my kids can at least gain a few hours of rest in an air-conditioned space," she told AFP, her 8-year-old daughter curled up on the sofa, while her 5-year-old son slept on her lap.

Power cuts lasting more than 22 hours a day have become the new norm in a bankrupt country running out of literally everything, from fuel and gas to medicine and bread. Lebanon's inhabitants are also low on patience and courage, months into a seemingly bottomless economic free fall turning the country into a shell of its former self. "What we are going through is



BEIRUT: Lebanese wait in a queue outside a closed petrol station in Beirut's Hamra district Friday. —AFP

mind-blowing. We have nothing left, we are deprived of everything, even sleep," Ayla said. "This is hell on earth." In a Beirut barbershop, Ahmad has given up on waiting for the light to come back on. The 20-year-old trimmed a client's beard using his cellphone torch in the simmering summer heat. "We work in very degrading conditions," he told AFP, sweat staining his T-shirt. Others have opted to move their barber chairs onto the pavement to get direct daylight. Lebanon's economic collapse has stripped the national currency

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KUWAIT: This handout picture released by the Italian Defense press office yesterday shows passengers, who fled Afghanistan, boarding an Italian military aircraft at the Kuwait International Airport to fly to Rome. —AFP

## 7,000 evacuated to Qatar from Kabul

**DOHA:** More than 7,000 people have been evacuated from Afghanistan to Qatar, an official from the Gulf state said yesterday, as thousands scrambled to leave Kabul via chaotic evacuation operations. Qatar and the nearby United Arab Emirates have been instrumental staging posts for evacuation flights for Western countries' citizens as well as Afghan interpreters, journalists and others.

"Since the start of international operations, over 7,000 people have been evacuated from Afghanistan to Qatar," a Qatari official who declined to be identified told AFP. "At the request of NGOs, educational institutions and international media organizations, we evacuated hundreds of Afghan employees and their families, as well as female students across the country," the official said. That came "in addition to facilitating the evacuation of citizens from the United States of America, Germany and the United Kingdom, among others. Our evacuation effort is ongoing."

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# Seven killed, 17 hurt in two deadly accidents in Kuwait

## Five dead in two-bus collision; two perish in three-car crash



KUWAIT: This picture released by Kuwait Fire Force shows one of the buses involved in a deadly accident north of the country Thursday night.



The second bus involved in the deadly accident north of the country.

KUWAIT: Seven people were killed and 17 others were injured in two separate deadly accidents reported in Kuwait over the weekend. The first accident took place north of the country Thursday night when two buses collided and burst into flames, leaving five people dead and 15 others injured.

The operation room received a report on a horrific crash that led to a fire on the two buses, Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) said in a statement. A firefighting team from Jahra rushed to the site and extinguished the fire, it noted, indicating that one of the buses belongs to a logistic service

company. All passengers inside the two buses were evacuated, and the wounded were admitted to hospitals by ambulances, it made clear.

Meanwhile, a three-vehicle collision took place on Riyadh Road between Qurtuba and Yarmouk Thursday night, which left two people dead and two others injured. Fire and rescue men evacuated all passengers from the three vehicles, as the injured were rushed to hospital while the bodies were left to the coroner.

Investigations were opened into the two accidents, KFF noted.



### Buses go into flames in 'horrific' crash



Fire engines are seen on the site of a deadly accident reported on Riyadh Road.

## 'Hell on earth': Lebanon unlivable...

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of most of its value and left four out of five inhabitants below the poverty line. The slow-motion collapse of the state switched to fast-forward this month after central bank governor Riad Salameh announced an end to subsidized fuel imports.

Widespread panic ensued, with distributors scaling down fuel supply and motorists flocking to pumps ahead of price hikes. At night, endless lines of empty cars whose drivers went home for some sleep but wanted to keep their spot in the petrol station queue clog up the lightless streets of Beirut.

Most traffic lights switched off months ago, soon

followed by street lamps and shop signs, creating an eerie dystopian feel. In the morning, when drivers return to their double-parked cars to resume the wait for petrol, the mood is a mix of explosive anger and muted desperation.

"My car has been parked in a queue outside the filling station for two days but I still have no petrol," taxi driver Abu Karim told AFP from a Beirut station.

"Is there anything more degrading and humiliating than this?" he asked, other empty vehicles lined for kilometers (miles) behind him. The country's leaders—widely accused corruption and negligence—live in a separate bubble, Abu Karim said. "They lack nothing, not electricity, nor fuel and live totally disconnected from this reality." In recent weeks, employees have stayed at home or slept at work for lack of transport options. Many cafes, restaurants and stores have been forced shut by electricity and fuel shortages. Those that remain open are frequented mostly by people looking to charge their devices, or catch a few hours of rest. —AFP

## 7,000 evacuated to Qatar from...

Continued from Page 1

American officials have confirmed that evacuation operations had stalled for about seven hours Friday because the receiving base in Qatar was overcrowded. Doha will eventually settle up to 8,000 Afghans, according to the Qatari official, who stressed that many of the 7,000 people currently in Qatar were transiting to third countries. The UAE has also

become an evacuation hub, with French authorities using the capital Abu Dhabi and Britain using Dubai as transit points for their nationals and approved refugees. A total of over 8,500 people have transited the UAE so far, according to the government.

Six days after the Taliban swept to power, the flow of people trying to flee Afghanistan has continued to overwhelm the international community. Roads leading to Kabul airport have been choked with traffic, while families hoping for a miracle escape have crowded between the barbed-wire surrounds of an unofficial no man's land separating the Taliban from US and allied troops. US President Joe Biden has called it "one of the largest, most difficult airlifts in history". —AFP

## Taliban co-founder in Kabul to map...

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"I went to the office this morning, but the Taliban who were at the gate told us they have not received any orders to reopen government offices," said Hamdullah. "They told us to watch TV or listen to the radio for an announcement about when to resume work."

Six days after the Taliban swept to power, the flow of people trying to flee continued to overwhelm the international community. Roads leading to Kabul airport were choked with traffic. Families hoping for a miracle escape crowded between the barbed-wire surrounds of an unofficial no man's land separating the Taliban from US and remnants of an Afghan special forces brigade helping them. Video of a US soldier lifting a baby over a wall at Kabul airport offered the latest imagery of the utter despair, following horror footage of people hanging onto the outside of departing planes. "Please, please, please help me... where should I go, what should I do," one man, who said he worked for the US embassy in the mid-2000s, wrote on a WhatsApp group for people to share information on how to get out.

Thousands of US soldiers are at the airport trying to shepherd foreigners and Afghans onto flights,

but President Joe Biden admitted the troop presence offered no guarantees of safe passage. "This is one of the largest, most difficult airlifts in history," he said. "I cannot promise what the final outcome will be, or... that it will be without risk of loss."

The crisis has cast another shadow over the superpower status of the United States and its ability to help allies. The Taliban swept into Kabul last week, ending two decades of war. Biden and US allies were stunned at how quickly the Taliban were able to rout government forces, who surrendered en masse. The Taliban have promised "positively different" rule from their 1996-2001 stint in power, which was infamous for an ultra-fundamentalist interpretation of Islamic law.

Women were excluded from public life, girls banned from school and people stoned to death for adultery. They have vowed not to seek revenge, promising a general amnesty for anyone who worked with the US-backed government. But an intelligence document for the United Nations said militants were going door-to-door hunting former government officials and those who worked with US and NATO forces. While searching for a Deutsche Welle journalist, the Taliban shot dead his uncle, the German public broadcaster reported.

At the first Friday prayers since the Taliban's return to power, imams and guest speakers celebrated the defeat of the United States. At one Kabul mosque, gunmen flanked a cleric as he delivered a fiery speech recounting how Afghans defeated the British Empire, the Soviet Union and now the United States. —AFP

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# TIBET

## More animals, fewer sandstorms as Tibet greens

By Liu Xinyong, Lyu Qiuping, Zhai Yongguan

Dondrup, 42, still has an article he wrote over two decades ago in high school about his aspirations. "My grandma told me that 30 years ago, there were forests all around my village, and there were bears, deer and other wild animals," said Dondrup, born in a village in the city of Shannan, southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region.

Due to the destruction of vegetation, not only the number of wild animals decreased but villagers had to travel far away to get firewood, the Tibetan wrote.

"With less vegetation on the mountains, there will surely be fewer animals. Thus, I decided that in the future I want to become a forestry worker to protect our forests," the letter reads.

His dream has come true. In 2010, he began working in Shannan's forestry and grassland bureau, where he takes part in organizing tree-planting activities every year.

With continuous government investment and unremitting efforts from various sides, Tibetans are enjoying a constantly improving environment, and Tibet has become one of the regions with the best ecological environment in the world.

Samten Norbu, head of Shannan's forestry and grassland bureau, said that after the tree-planting efforts over the past decades, the city has built a 160-km green belt along the Yarlung Zangbo River.

"The environment has improved, dusty days have decreased year by year, and people's sense of happiness, gain and accomplishment is on the rise," said Samten Norbu.

Tibet had invested a total of 81.4 billion yuan (12.55 billion US dollars) in the area by the end of last year. In 2020, the forest coverage reached 12.3 percent, and the comprehensive vegetation coverage of natural grassland grew to 47 percent, according to a white paper released in May.

The improvements are witnessed and also contributed to by Paljor, 62.

Since 2004, Paljor has turned more than 400 mu (about 27 hectares) of barren and desert-like land in Shannan into a nursery garden by planting over 70 types of trees. Under the support of the local government, his nursery garden now has an annual output of about 4 million yuan, employing more than 70 full-time workers.

As the environment greens, wild animals are returning. In Paljor's nursery, roe deers are seen playing in the woods. He recalled the deers were first spotted in the garden around 2010, and there are also foxes and birds.

"Every afternoon, different kinds of colorful birds will gather in my garden, and I can hear their merry chirps," Paljor said with pride.

The biodiversity improvement came as wild animals and their habitats have been better protected. The population of the endangered black-necked cranes has increased from no more than 3,000 in the 1990s to more than 8,000 now, and



River in Shannan, southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region. — Xinhua/Zhang Jingpin

the population of Tibetan antelopes is around 300,000, the white paper said. "Thanks to favorable government policies, the vegetation

protection in my hometown is getting better and better. As a forestry worker, I'm proud," Dondrup said.

## Plateau railway propels Tibet's development to new heights



A train running on the Qinghai-Tibet Railway passes by the Nyainqentanglha Range in southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region, March 1, 2020. — Xinhua/Purbu Zhaxi

By Lyu Qiuping, Ma Zhuoyan and Liu Xinyong

Sangye Puncog, 22, never saw a train until his high school graduation tour to Lhasa, capital of southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region.

Fascinated by the "steel giant," Sangye Puncog, a Tibetan hailing from the rural Nyingchi City, was inspired to major in transportation and went on to study at Southwest Jiaotong University.

Financially aided by the government, he graduated in 2019 and is now in charge of passenger loading and unloading at the Golmud Railway Station, a railway hub in Qinghai Province neighboring Tibet.

"I didn't know I would work here when I passed through it on a train to the university," Sangye Puncog said with a smile.

In July 2006, the railway section connecting Golmud and Lhasa went into operation, marking the opening of the world's highest and longest plateau railroad -- the Qinghai-Tibet railway.

The railway, the first connecting Tibet with the rest of China, has stimulated the development of the plateau region by bringing tourists, materials, and business opportunities.

By the end of June, the railway transported 29.63 million passengers and 68.35 million tonnes of cargo from and to Tibet, according to the China Railway Qinghai-Tibet Group Co., Ltd.

Hu Xiaodi, a 57-year-old tourist, headed for Lhasa on the Z6801 train. He and five of his relatives planned to hire a car in Lhasa for a road trip in Tibet.

"Tourism in Tibet is so popular that we can hardly book enough tickets for us to the Potala Palace," said Hu, from the city of Suzhou, Jiangsu Province.

Tibet received 1.8 million tourists from home and abroad in 2005, one year ahead of the opening of the landmark rail link. It received more than 35 million tourists in 2020 despite the impact of COVID-19.

Due to the unavailability of train tickets to Lhasa because of high demand, Ma Yuxiu, who was traveling with her four-year-old daughter, had to transfer twice from Xining, the capital of Qinghai and starting point of Qinghai-Tibet railway. She was there to meet her husband, who is a crane driver and has worked at different construction sites in Tibet for three years.

"Considering that he is too busy, we have to meet him every year and travel around," said Ma, 26, adding that they have visited several destinations in Tibet like the Potala Palace and the Yambdrok Lake.

Built at an altitude of more than 4,500 meters, the Nagqu railway station in the city of Nagqu is the world's highest railway station combining passenger and cargo transportation.

The annual number of passenger trips handled by

the railway station surged from 16,000 in 2006 to 310,000 in 2020.

"The waiting hall, which opened to the public in 2006, is so small that many passengers have to stand during peak season," said Dong Shenggang, head of the station.

The station handled 518,000 tonnes of cargo in 2020, skyrocketing by 619 percent from 2006.

"Construction materials such as steel, cement, timber, as well as daily necessities like grains and salt have been among the major goods delivered up here," Dong said.

The Chinese central government made a cumulative investment of 1.63 trillion yuan (about 253 billion US dollars) in the 70 years after the peaceful liberation of Tibet, showed figures released in May.

Over 590 billion yuan of the total investment went into the construction of major projects that have significantly driven the region's economic development, including the Sichuan-Tibet Highway and Qinghai-Tibet Railway.

The region's gross domestic product soared to more than 190 billion yuan in 2020 from 34.2 billion yuan in 2006.

Xu Guoming, who had just left Lhasa by train for Xining, is amazed by the mushrooming buildings and infrastructure projects in Lhasa. The entrepreneur in truck transportation from east China's Shandong Province first came to Lhasa in 2013.

"Compared with my first trip there, I could hardly recognize the street I had lived in," said Xu, 42, adding that he is optimistic about his business prospects in Tibet.

To meet the rising demand for passenger transport, the old Golmud station measuring 500 square meters has been replaced by a new one covering nearly 15,000 square meters. It can accommodate 2,000 passengers in the waiting hall at the same time.

The Golmud station worker Sangye Puncog is also delighted as a new railway section connecting Lhasa and his hometown Nyingchi went into operation last month.

The 435-km line, the first electrified railway in Tibet, has shortened the travel time between Nyingchi and Lhasa to three and a half hours from some seven hours by bus.

Arranged by Sangye Puncog, his father, a rice farmer, took a train trip for the first time in his life to Lhasa. His mother, who was then in poor health, did not go.

"I'm planning to take my mother on board a train when I'm on vacation. My parents are proud of me," he said. — Xinhua correspondents Bai Shaobo and Li Linhai contributed to the story.)

## Tibetan family's journey to relishing prosperity through adversity

By Lyu Qiuping, Ma Zhuoyan and Liu Xinyong

Changchub Wangdu, an entrepreneur hailing from Nagqu City, southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region, had expected his parents to move to the regional capital Lhasa, as he considers the place more suitable for his ailing mother due to its low altitude and a better climate compared with his hometown.

"My parents have been through a lot of hardships. They deserve a better life," said the Tibetan.

Eighth among his nine siblings, the 26-year-old knows how much his parents toiled all their lives as yak herders.

The couple saved homemade yak butter in exchange for money to support the children, and even the elder siblings used to save yak meat for the younger ones.

"During hospital visits, my sick mother had to carry one kid in her arms and another on her back," Changchub Wangdu said, adding that she had to go and herd yaks the very next day after delivering a baby.

At the age of 15, Changchub Wangdu was admitted to a vocational school in Nagqu, majoring in Tibetan medicine. To reduce the burden of tuition costs on his family, he applied for an internship at a local private clinic operated by a Han man from southwest China's Chongqing Municipality. Although they were not related, Changchub Wangdu used to call the man "uncle."

"I learned how to fill a prescription and administer an injection in the clinic. Instead of paying me wages, my uncle covered all my tuition fees," he said.

After completing his studies at the vocational school, Changchub Wangdu sold second-hand cars for several months before finding a job in a security company, escorting convoys transferring cash for banks and other companies. He is now the manager at the Nagqu branch of the company, earning more than 100,000 yuan (about 15,400 US dollars) a year. Taking some money on loan from a bank and borrowing some from his Han "uncle," Changchub Wangdu opened a restaurant serving Tibetan cuisine in May 2019. The eatery generated more than 100,000 yuan worth of profit in the following year.

Last year, Changchub Wangdu spent more than 600,000 yuan on a single-bedroom apartment in Lhasa, where his parents have moved in.

This month, Wangchen, Changchub Wangdu's grandfather, came to visit the new home in Lhasa from the city of Golmud, Qinghai Province, traveling along the very road where the 76-year-old once

used to work.

Wangchen retired in 1997 after working as a road maintenance worker at the Nagqu section of the Qinghai-Tibet highway that links Tibet with the rest of China. Nine years later, the Qinghai-Tibet railway traversing through Nagqu and Golmud went into operation.

"Who could have imagined decades ago that one day we would have highways, railways and our own apartment in Tibet? Life has changed a lot," said Wangchen.

Born in 1945 in Nagqu, Wangchen used to be a serf, sleeping in a sheepfold. His feudal lord often flogged him for trivial things and made him starve.

"In winter, my pants soaked with blood and snow water in the sheepfold would freeze as hard as a wooden board," Wangchen told his grandson, adding that he had to hunt to fill his stomach.

Following Tibet's peaceful liberation in 1951, Wangchen for the first time met the Chinese People's Liberation Army. The soldiers gave him clothes as well as biscuits, a luxury that he had never had before.

Wangchen's life as a serf finally ended in 1959, when the democratic reform was launched in Tibet and feudal serfdom was abolished. Wangchen was later allocated ranch and yaks, and started learning Chinese by himself.

In 1962, eight years after the opening of the Qinghai-Tibet highway, Wangchen was hired as a road maintenance worker and he worked in that position until retirement.

Now, he earns a monthly pension of 9,000 yuan, and volunteers to clean streets and pick up garbage every day. "I'm grateful that I'm given such a high pension for doing nothing. The cleaning work is the least that I can do to repay the society," Wangchen said.

By the end of 2019, all 628,000 registered poor residents and 74 poor counties in Tibet shook off destitution, marking the end of absolute poverty in Tibet for the first time in history, according to a white paper released in May.

The average per capita disposable income of rural residents was 14,598 yuan in 2020, up 12.7 percent over the previous year and representing double-digit annual growth for the past 18 years, the white paper noted.

Optimistic about the prospects of his restaurant business, Changchub Wangdu has decided to open another outlet, which is currently being decorated.

"I want to create a restaurant chain brand in Nagqu," he said.



Photo taken on March 12, 2021 shows the Potala Palace in Lhasa, capital of southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region. — Xinhua/Chogo

## Local

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## Ooredoo pioneers in human rights, sustainable living

**KUWAIT:** Climate change is a complex and long-term global problem that puts the lives of communities and the most vulnerable people at risk along with exposing them to the loss of their homes and livelihoods. With the continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic, the nature of human life was affected, as the number of patients and deaths has increased, the unemployment rate increased around the world, in addition to economic disasters and negative effects on the environment. Thus, the climate change crisis has become out of the hands of governments, yet, today we are facing a critical moment that calls for collective collaboration and cohesion of efforts to save those in dire need. This is a race for our planet. For our lives. For our future.

Therefore, Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, collaborated with the Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) to launch the "The Human Race" campaign, which coincided with the World Humanitarian Day. Hence, the campaign aims to raise public awareness on the need for solidarity with people most affected by the impacts of the climate emergency. Ooredoo Kuwait have launched a SMS campaign in which text messages were sent to customers and published awareness posts and messages on its social media pages being a fertile platform that efficiently and effectively contribute to achieving the greatest level of awareness and encourage followers to take a serious role in participating and joining "The Human Race" campaign.

### Photo of the Day



**KUWAIT:** An aircraft prepares to land at Kuwait International Airport in Kuwait City on Friday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## Kuwait registers record-low COVID-19 tests to infections ratio

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait registered a record-low 1.89 percent tests to infections ratio as health authorities reassured that the country's health system is stable, while at the same time urging the public to stay vigilant in order to avoid another COVID-19 wave. Kuwait had announced on Friday 226 new cases registered over the previous 24 hours compared to 11,934 swab tests taken on the same day. Total cases reached 407,878 as of Friday, while deaths climbed to 2,401 with two cases reported on the same day.

Meanwhile, the recovery rate reached 98.1 percent as 618 fresh recoveries were reported on Friday, raising total recoveries to 400,148. The number of people hospitalized with the virus stood at 340 as of Friday, with 173 of them in intensive care units, Health Ministry spokesperson Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said, noting that another 5,329 patients were



**KUWAIT:** This file photo taken on August 3, 2021 shows people lined up to receive their COVID-19 vaccines at the Kuwait Vaccination Center in Mishref. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

receiving regular treatment.

In the meantime, Dr Khaled Al-Jarallah, head of the COVID-19 supreme committee, said that following health protocols remains necessary especially with the impending return to school in campus starting October 3, in order to avoid a new wave of the virus. Despite the improvements Kuwait has seen in its fight against the virus, vaccination, health precautions and epidemiological surveillance remain necessary at this point, he noted yesterday.

Dr Abdullah Al-Mutairi, a consultant at the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) at Jaber Hospital, said recently that three COVID-19 ICU wards had closed as patient occupancy decreases, while Dr Dana Al-Haqan, a pediatric consultant at the hospital, had announced last week that the last child was discharged from the hospital. Health authorities have recently announced opening new vaccination center as the country nears vaccinating 70 percent of the population against COVID-19.

## Iraqi PM to visit Kuwait for business cooperation talks

**BAGHDAD:** Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi is due in the State of Kuwait this week, the Iraqi Foreign Ministry announced on Friday. The ministry indicated in a statement that Iraq's Ambassador to Kuwait, Al-Menhel Al-Safi, held a meeting with Chairman of the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Mohammad Jassem Al-Sagr, several days ago, discussing a host of issues namely Kadhemi's expected visit. The statement quoted the ambassador as saying that the Iraqi prime minister would meet, during the visit, with Kuwaiti entrepreneurs to discuss means of facilitating their entry into the Iraqi



**Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi**

market and playing an effective role in Baghdad's sustainable development schemes, commercial and industrial investments. It also indicated that the envoy also discussed with Jassem means of boosting trade between the two brotherly countries in the shadow of "a real desire for boosting the bilateral cooperation at diverse levels and in various sectors." — KUNA



**KUWAIT:** Indian Ambassador Sibi George and family design a floral carpet at the India House, Indian embassy, yesterday.

## Keralites celebrate low-key Onam

By Sajeev K Peter

**KUWAIT:** The Malayali community in Kuwait celebrated a low-key Onam yesterday amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Although big celebrations were missing this year as well, many families prepared beautiful floral carpets and multi-course vegetarian feasts called Onasadya at their apartments on 'Thiruvonam' day which is the most important day during the 10-day-long harvest festival.

As the authorities eased COVID-19 restrictions, some residents could visit their close families and celebrate the occasion this year with traditional lunches to celebrate the important festival of Kerala. Many restaurants around Kuwait offered and home-delivered attractive Onam package meals to the convenience of the families. "Onam celebration was much better this year, compared to last year," said

Arjun Gopinath, who visited his family friends in Salmiya yesterday to celebrate the festival.

Meanwhile, Indian Ambassador Sibi George hosted a traditional Onam lunch in honor of the ambassadors of other countries in Kuwait at India House yesterday. The ambassador also held an interactive session with Indian community members at the India House yesterday.

As part of the virtual Onam celebration, Kerala Tourism has conducted a 'Global Pookkalam (floral decoration) competition' in which hundreds of residents from Kuwait also participated. According to organizers, individuals and institutions, associations and organizations participated in the competition from Kuwait which began on August 13 and will conclude tomorrow.

"As most people across the world are confined to indoors due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the online Onam festivities aim to bring together all Malayalees on a virtual platform," N Ajith Kumar, director, Kerala Non-Resident Keralites Welfare Board, said. This program will be the first Onam celebration with participation from non-resident Malayalees across the globe on a large scale, he added.

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Desperate Haitians rush aid convoys after quake

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BASUNDA, Sudan: Ethiopian refugees of the Qemant ethnic group queue for food at a camp in the village of Basinga in Basunda district of Sudan's eastern Gedaref region. —AFP

# Ethiopian ethnic minority flees to Sudan

## Qemant group dragged into a conflict not of their making

**BASUNDA, Sudan:** Dragged into a conflict not of their making, members of Ethiopia's Qemant ethnic group say their only choice was fleeing to Sudan—marking another bleak turn in a widening war. "Houses were burned, and people killed by machetes," said refugee Emebet Demoz, who, like thousands of others, ran from her village last month. "We couldn't even take the bodies and bury them."

Thousands have been killed since fighting erupted in November in Ethiopia's northernmost Tigray region, when Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed sent in troops to topple the Tigray People's Liberation Front, the regional ruling party, saying the move came in response to TPLF attacks on army camps. The violence has since sucked in other groups in bitter battles over land, and has spread from Tigray into Ethiopia's neighboring Amhara region, homeland of both the Amhara people and the ethnic minority Qemant.

Amhara fighters supported Abiy's forces, in an attempt to settle a decades-long dispute over territory they claim was seized by the TPLF during its nearly three-decade rule before Abiy took power in 2018.

The Qemant have long chafed under the cultural and economic influence of the dominant Amhara people, and in recent years have called for self-rule. A 2017 referendum on the question of creating a Qemant autonomous zone ended in rancor, with the resulting territorial dispute sparking increasingly frequent clashes between the two groups.

"The Amhara fighters backed by the government wanted us off our land," 20-year-old Emebet said. "They are killing us because we're an ethnic minority."

### 'Refused to take sides'

But Amhara regional spokesperson Gizachew Muluneh squarely denied that members of the Qemant ethnic group were being targeted. Amhara leaders say the Qemant's quest for self-rule has largely been stoked by Tigrayan rebels, who they allege are fighting a proxy war by backing the group.

Gizachew told AFP that those described as refugees were "pro-terrorist TPLF, and they are created by TPLF for the purpose of distracting Ethiopia and Amhara". The United Nations estimates that some 200,000 people have been displaced from their homes in Amhara, where the violence is driving a wedge deeper between the ethnic groups. "The Amharas wanted us to pick their side in the conflict against the Tigrayans," said refugee Balata Goshi. "We refused to take sides, so they fought us."

Clashes between the Amhara and Qemant forced thousands to flee in April this year, according to the UN's humanitarian agency. Qemant campaigners

claim that their historic homeland includes villages bordering Sudan.

But that has also led to accusations that the Qemant have received support from Sudan, which has territorial issues with Ethiopia, mostly in areas located near the Amhara region. Relations between Khartoum and Addis Ababa have also soured over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the Blue Nile, which downstream Egypt and Sudan fear threatens the water they depend on.

For civilians like Emebet stuck in the middle, the violence left her no option but to leave.

She is part of a stream of some 3,000 Qemant refugees who have crossed into Sudan in recent weeks, Sudanese officials said. "We are expecting more Qemantis to arrive, as well other ethnicities," said Mohamed Abdelkareem, from Sudan's refugee commission.

Sudan already hosts more than 60,000 refugees from Ethiopia, according to the UN, putting heavy pressure on a country already struggling with its own acute economic crisis. Emebet has found shelter in the Sudanese border town of Basinga, cramped inside a school converted into

a makeshift camp, now a temporary home for a thousand refugees.

There are basic food supplies, but she is sleeping under plastic sheeting that offers little shelter from either sweltering heat or heavy rains. "We are safe here at least," she said.

### 'Can't go back'

Refugees said they are victims of long-running ethnic strife. "Tensions had already been rising for years," said Aman Farada, a 26-year-old refugee from Ethiopia's northern city of Gondar.

"Initially, it was inter-ethnic disputes, but now it's the government fighting us," Kasaw Abayl believes the Amharas used the Tigray conflict as "an excuse" to expand their control over other land.

"They see the entire area as theirs, so they want neither us (Qemant) nor the Tigrayans there," said the 50-year-old builder. Early in the fighting, Abiy, winner of the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize, declared victory after his forces seized Tigray's regional capital Mekele.

But in June, the TPLF recaptured much of Tigray, including Mekele, and pushed east and south into the Amhara and Afar regions. The UN says the conflict has driven 400,000 people into famine-like conditions. Fighting continues. Qemant refugees say they see little chance of returning to Ethiopia any time soon. "We can't go back," said Emebet. "How can we return when this government is still in place?" —AFP

## Grace makes landfall in Mexico as major hurricane

**BOCA DEL RIO, Mexico:** Hurricane Grace slammed into Mexico for a second time early yesterday as a major Category Three storm, threatening to bring significant flooding and mudslides, US forecasters said. The storm made landfall near Tecolutla in Veracruz state, clocking maximum sustained winds of 125 miles (200 kilometers) per hour, according to the US National Hurricane Center (NHC).

Category Three is the third highest of five levels on the Saffir-Simpson scale. A hurricane warning was in effect for coastline stretching from Puerto Veracruz to Cabo Rojo. "Rapid weakening is expected as Grace moves inland over the mountains of central Mexico later today," the NHC said.

Nearly 8,000 civil defense members, soldiers and electricity board workers were ready to tackle the aftermath of the storm, Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador wrote on Twitter.

He urged residents living in places considered to be at risk to "seek refuge in high places with relatives and in shelters."

### Highways closed

Authorities in the state of Veracruz said they had prepared 200 storm shelters and planned to open another 2,000 if necessary. Veracruz Governor Cuitlahuac Garcia warned of the risk of flooding and mudslides as the storm dumped heavy rain on the mountainous region.

Members of the Mexican armed forces were ready to deploy if needed to protect residents, said civil protection national coordinator Laura Velazquez. Authorities closed most highways in Veracruz, which is crossed by numerous rivers. In



BOCA DEL RIO, Mexico: A woman removes umbrellas from the beach as strong waves reach the coast due to Hurricane Grace, which has reached category 2, in Boca del Rio, Veracruz, Mexico, Friday. —AFP

preparation for the storm, workers along the coast boarded up windows to protect stores, fishermen brought their boats ashore and residents secured their homes after stocking up on canned food and water.

"We will spend many days without fishing—almost a week," said Isabel Pastrana Vazquez, head of Veracruz's federation of fisheries cooperatives. "About 35,000 fishermen will be affected because we can't go out. We're going to have a swell and rain," he said.

### 'Dangerous storm surge'

The NHC warned that heavy rainfall in Mexico through the weekend "will result in significant flash and urban flooding as well as mudslides." A "dangerous storm surge" would be accompanied by "large and destructive waves" near the coast, it said.

The hurricane had already lashed Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula, where more than 6,000 tourists and residents were evacuated to storm shelters earlier in the week across the southeastern state of Quintana Roo. The storm first struck near the town of Tulum, famed for its Mayan temples, drenching a string of Caribbean beach resorts. —AFP

## Turkey warns EU over fears of Afghan refugee wave

**ANKARA:** Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Friday told the European Union to stick to past deals on migrants and refugees and

aid neighboring countries as fears of a new exodus from Afghanistan mount. Rising numbers of Afghan migrants could present "a serious challenge for everyone", Erdogan said in a phone conversation with Kyriakos Mitsotakis, prime minister of neighboring Greece.

Athens has already said it may send Afghans arriving on its shores back to Turkey, which it regards as a "safe" country for migrants. Referring to a 2016 deal under which "irregular" migrants landing in the EU can be sent back to Turkey in

## Anti-vaccine demos in France for sixth weekend

**PARIS:** Thousands of people demonstrated in the streets of France again yesterday against the government's COVID-19 vaccination policies amid concern from rights groups about anti-Semitic sentiment in the protest movement. Saturday's protests were called for the sixth weekend in a row to denounce a new "health pass" system announced by President Emmanuel Macron that they see as unfairly restricting the rights of the unvaccinated.

Under the system, introduced progressively since mid-July, anyone wishing to enter a restaurant, theatre, cinema, long-distance train, or large shopping center must show proof of vaccination or a negative test.

Around 200,000 people have marched in previous weekends, according to interior ministry figures, while organizers claim the real number is nearly double that. At the head of the Paris march in the early afternoon, a few hundred people held up flags and banners with the word "Liberty" on them while shouting "Macron! We don't want your pass!"

The protest movement has brought together conspiracy theorists, anti-vaxxers, former members of the "Yellow Vest" anti-government movement, as well as people concerned that the system unfairly creates a two-tier society. Far-right leader Florian Philippot, who has accused Macron of turning France into a dictatorship and likened the health pass to apartheid, was at the Paris rally yesterday.

The government insists the pass is necessary to encourage vaccination uptake and avoid a fourth national lockdown, with the unjabbed making up eight or nine out of every 10 COVID-19 patients admitted to hospital.

The anti-health pass movement has been marked exchange for aid, Erdogan urged his neighbors to "sincerely live up to their commitments".

Ankara has repeatedly accused EU capitals of failing to hold up their end of the bargain.

Now that it fears increased Afghan arrivals, Brussels should aid neighboring countries such as Iran to deal with any new mass movements of people, Erdogan said. "A new wave of migration is inevitable if the necessary measures are not taken in Afghanistan and in Iran," he told Mitsotakis.

Turkey had already spoken to Iran and was



PERPIGNAN, France: Protesters march during a national day of protest against the compulsory COVID-19 vaccination for certain workers and the mandatory use of the health pass called for by the French government in Perpignan, southern France, yesterday. —AFP

from the beginning by slogans and symbols that have been denounced by Jewish groups and anti-racism campaigners. Some protesters have worn yellow stars similar to the ones that the Nazi regime forced Jews to display during World War II, leading to condemnation from Holocaust survivors for the offensive comparison. Others have been photographed holding up signs with the word "Qui?" (meaning "Who?"), a coded reference to Jews who are accused of spreading COVID propaganda through the media and profiting from vaccination campaigns. "What I find striking is how it (anti-Semitism) is recurrent and openly displayed," the head of SOS Racisme, Dominique Sopo, told AFP. "During the Yellow Vest movement it was something expressed on the margins... now the people carrying these signs are not hiding and other protesters are not reacting."

Left-wing newspaper Le Monde condemned the rise in anti-Semitic behavior in an editorial this week, calling it a "poison for society, a danger for all of us." "Although anti-Semitism on the far-right is old, it seems to be encouraged at the moment by the rise in conspiracy thinking," it added. —AFP

toughening up border security, Erdogan added. The Greek government said in a statement that "the two leaders discussed the necessity of supporting (Afghanistan's) immediate neighbors so Afghans stay as close to home as possible".

Faced with the dramatic Taliban takeover in Kabul, a number of European leaders have called for moves to prevent a repeat of the large numbers of people seeking refuge from Middle East conflicts who reached the EU via Turkey in 2015. —AFP

## International

## Desperate Haitians rush aid convoys after quake

‘No one has come to help’: Over 2,000 dead in quake

**LES CAYES, Haiti:** Survivors of Haiti's devastating earthquake looted an aid convoy Friday as the impoverished Caribbean nation scrambled to roll out a relief effort haunted by the chaotic response to past natural disasters.

The mobbing of relief supplies and tumultuous handouts underscored the desperation in the wake of last week's powerful tremor, which killed more than 2,000 people and destroyed or damaged over 130,000 homes.

The 7.2-magnitude earthquake robbed tens of thousands of Haitians of everything they owned in a matter of seconds, with the hunt for necessities like clean water and food now a daily struggle for many.

And while humanitarian convoys have begun distributing aid, the quantities have been insufficient and those tasked with delivering supplies often lack logistical expertise.

Chaotic scenes were captured by an AFP photographer Friday in Les Cayes, one of the hardest-hit cities, as bags of rice were handed out to clamoring crowds.

Looters were able to storm one of two supply trucks before law enforcement intervened, according to the photographer, with the remaining goods haphazardly handed out at the local police station.

Desperate Haitians have had to rely on the generosity of their neighbors and relatives, many of whom have little to spare.

"I have a friend who came from (the capital) Port-au-Prince to bring me water and food and I shared that with my neighbors. He also gave me

some clothes," said Marcel Francois, a father of two who was dragged from the rubble in the wake of the quake after three hours buried under concrete.

From the ruins of his house on the road connecting Les Cayes to the airport, he now has a front-row seat to the recovery effort.

"I see a lot of authorities marching, processions of officials with their sirens and big cars from NGOs. Aid trucks also pass, but there has been nothing arriving for me," the 30-year-old said.

## ‘No one has come to help us’

Even before last week's powerful earthquake, Haiti, one of the world's poorest countries, was wracked by mounting Covid-19 cases and a political crisis that culminated last month with the assassination of president Jovenel Moise.

The nation is also still reeling from the 2010 earthquake that rattled the capital and killed over 200,000. More than 1.5 million Haitians were left homeless by that disaster, and scores of survivors spent years living in tents contending with a deadly cholera epidemic, despite billions of dollars in foreign donations and pledged aid.

In an echo of that earlier tragedy, officials have tried to once again buoy optimism with promises to "build back better".

"We have seen an incredible moment of unity in the response to the earthquake, so we believe that this can be turned into an opportunity to rebuild towards the better," UN deputy chief Amina

## Survivors loot an aid convoy



LES CAYES, Haiti: A man throws a bag of rice into a crowd of earthquake victims gathered for the distribution of food and water at the "4 Chemins" crossroads in Les Cayes, Haiti Friday. —AFP

Mohammed said Friday after a 24-hour visit.

But the lofty promises ring hollow to victims of the latest crisis to plague Haiti. Though humanitarian workers have warned against repeating the mistakes that hampered the 2010 response, tent cities are already appearing across vacant lots in urban centers.

And while Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry

has promised to organise elections as soon as possible, ordinary Haitians are anxious to start receiving aid. "We live a miserable life," Wilford Roosevelt, a survivor of the earthquake, told AFP from a football stadium full of tents.

"The ground is flooded because of the rain. This is where people sleep. No one from the authorities has come to help us." —AFP

## News in brief

## Villagers killed in Niger attack

**NIAMEY, Niger:** An attack by suspected jihadists on a village in western Niger's troubled "three-border" region has killed 17 people, a local elected official reported yesterday. The attack happened in the village of Them in the Tillaberi region, at around 8 pm (1700 GMT) on Friday, the official told AFP. "The toll is 17 dead and five wounded," he said. A resident in regional capital Tillaberi said around 10 people had been killed. Them is around 20 kilometers (12 miles) from three other villages where a series of attacks in May by jihadists linked to the Islamic State forced more than 11,000 inhabitants to flee. MPs from the region called Friday for increased security measures for the area, saying that jihadists behind the wave of attacks in the vast Tillaberi region are able to operate freely in spite of strict government controls. —AFP

## Mexico president thanks drug lord

**MEXICO CITY:** Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador on Friday thanked a veteran drug lord jailed for the murder of a US undercover agent, after the incarcerated man praised the leftist leader's security strategy. "I thank him very much for his good wishes," Lopez Obrador said at his daily news conference when asked about the comments of Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo. The 76-year-old founder of the Guadalajara cartel has been in prison since 1989 for the murder of Enrique "Kiki" Camarena, a US Drug Enforcement Administration agent. —AFP

## Slovenia TV chief fired

**LJUBLJANA, Slovenia:** Slovenia's national broadcaster on Friday sacked its head of television in a move seen by media watchdogs as a fresh attack on media freedom. The sacking is the latest strike against the media in the Balkan nation, which currently holds the EU's rotating presidency. The conservative government that came to power last year has come under fire from activists and rights groups for attacking journalists. —AFP

## Power-sharing deal in Scotland

**LONDON:** Scotland's ruling party on Friday announced a landmark power-sharing deal for a pro-independence majority in the devolved parliament in Edinburgh, catapulting the Greens into their first ministerial positions in UK politics. The agreement between the Scottish National Party (SNP) and the Scottish Green Party needs to be approved by members but tightens ties between the two parties, which both back a new vote on independence. —AFP

## Madagascar renews MSF access

**ANTANANARIVO, Madagascar:** Madagascar on Friday restored global medical charity MSF's access to the country, where borders have been shut since the start of the pandemic, allowing relief work in the famine-hit south. Teams from Medecins Sans Frontieres had lost their special authorization to continue travelling to the Indian Ocean island nation, shuttered since March 2020, when the government reinforced coronavirus restrictions in July. The inability to renew their visas would have ended food distribution and assistance to more than a million people hit by a devastating famine in an area the size of Bulgaria of Cuba. —AFP

## S Africa murders, rapes soar

**JOHANNESBURG:** Murder and rape cases in South Africa shot up between April and June from a year earlier, when the country was under a strict coronavirus lockdown, police figures showed on Friday. At least 10,000 rapes and 5,700 murders were recorded over the three months, an increase of just over 60 percent from the same period last year. —AFP

## Bolivia files 'genocide' charges against ex-president Anez

**LA PAZ:** The Bolivian prosecutor's office said on Friday it had filed charges of "genocide" and other crimes against former acting president Jeanine Anez, over the death of 20 opposition protesters in 2019. Attorney General Juan Lanchipa said he had presented documents "against citizen Jeanine Anez" before the country's Supreme Court of Justice, including charges for "genocide," which carries a sentence of 10 to 20 years in prison, according to the Bolivian penal code.

The conservative Anez came to power in November 2019 after her predecessor and rival, former president Evo Morales, resigned following weeks of protests over his controversial re-election to an unconstitutional fourth term. He fled the country after an election audit by the Organization of American States (OAS) found evidence of fraud.

After the election, at least 37 people died in violence that flared between supporters and oppo-

## A Colombian man's life shattered by 2 mine explosions

**CATATUMBO, Colombia:** Twice in 10 years, Efrain Soto's life was shattered in landmine explosions in violence-wracked Colombia. The first one robbed him of his eye, the second one killed his brother.

The number of landmine victims is rising in Colombia, as guerrilla violence continues despite a 2016 peace accord meant to end decades of armed conflict. In the Catatumbo region in northern Colombia, on the border with Venezuela, the sight of people dying or suffering terrible wounds from mines is all too familiar.

Since the explosions, Soto has had a nervous breakdown and seizures. For the past eight years, he has been taking medication to help with the psychological trauma, but he is still so distressed that even walking to a nearby village terrifies him.

## As conservatives' fortunes plunge, Merkel rides to rescue

**BERLIN:** German Chancellor Angela Merkel yesterday gave her would-be successor Armin Laschet a ringing endorsement, in a bid to shore up his ailing election campaign which has triggered fears their party could crash out of government. Merkel's conservative CDU-CSU alliance has led Germany in various coalitions since 2005 when she took office, but the country's future new government has been thrown open as her departure from the political stage nears.

The 67-year-old veteran will step down after September 26 elections and has so far refrained from commenting about who she preferred to take over from her. But yesterday, at a key election campaign rally, she came out to voice strong backing for Laschet. "It has always been important to him to place the individual and their inviolable dignity at the center of everything... I am deeply convinced that it is precisely

nents of Morales, as well as between protesters and the security forces.

Most of the deaths came in clashes between Morales supporters and security forces after the socialist leader's flight. The specific accusation against Anez relates to two incidents in November 2019 in which a total 22 people died. A report released by the OAS on Tuesday described those incidents as "massacres."

Lanchipa said they had been "provisionally classified as genocide, serious and minor injury and injury followed by death." Bolivia's opposition has decried the lack of separation of powers in the country, saying the courts, electoral body and public prosecutor's office are all loyal to leftist President Luis Arce, who is also a member of Morales's Movement for Socialism (MAS).

"First of all, we need to reform the judiciary because it is not independent or autonomous," said centrist lawmaker Alejandro Reyes. "As long as there is no judicial reform, we cannot do anything."

However, the case is unlikely to go to court, as for that to happen, the supreme court must ask congress for authorization to hold Anez responsible for what happened.

Authorization could only be given by a two-thirds majority, and although MAS controls con-

"I want to cry, I want to run, I'm afraid," said Soto. While the government has signed an historic peace accord with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) to end a long-running civil war, it did not rid the country of guerrillas and violence.

Territories rife with illegal coca plantations, where the FARC once held sway, are now infested with leftist guerrillas, right-wing paramilitaries and armed drug traffickers laying landmines indiscriminately.

The number of people killed or wounded by mines is increasing, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross. In 2020, there were 389 blast victims, compared to 57 in 2017.

During the first six months of this year alone, 263 people, including 21 children, were killed or maimed.

## Lost hope

In 2011, Soto was talking to his wife on his mobile phone just yards (meters) from his house when he was shaken by an explosion. Blood started pouring from his eye. Relatives made a makeshift stretcher and hammock to take Soto, who is over 6 feet 3 inches (1.94 meters) tall, on a five-hour trek along countryside trails to bring him to a hospital in the regional center of Cucuta, where he spent four

with this attitude that (he) will serve the people of Germany as chancellor," she said at the rally.

While Merkel's popularity ratings have held steady in the twilight of her reign, Laschet has struggled to find favor with voters. The latest polls show their conservative bloc now hanging on to a narrow lead of two percentage points against junior coalition partners the Social Democrats, who have in recent weeks made big strides to overtake erstwhile runners-up the Greens. A survey published Friday showed just as many Germans want the Social Democrats to lead the next government as the conservatives—an alarmingly big drop of five percentage points in backing for the CDU-CSU from early August.

## ‘Quick and painful’

While frustration against the government over the coronavirus pandemic had initially weighed on the conservatives' popularity earlier in the year, the mood had brightened as more Germans were vaccinated and curbs were eased. An initial boost in support for the Greens had also melted away as its leader was embroiled in a plagiarism scandal and other gaffes, giving the conservatives a strong lead in polls entering the summer. But the mood dramati-



LA PAZ: In this file photo taken on March 13, 2021 former interim Bolivia's President Jeanine Anez speaks with her lawyers in a prison cell of the Special Force for the Fight Against Crime (FELCC) after being arrested in La Paz. —AFP

gless, it does not enjoy a sufficiently large majority. While MAS lost the presidency for a year to Anez, it never gave up control of congress. After Morales resigned, Anez was the most senior parliamentarian left and was sworn in by congress as interim president, despite the lack of a quorum, with MAS legislators boycotting the session. —AFP



CATATUMBO, Colombia: Ivan Rodriguez, 25, victim of a landmine, does physical therapy with his stepson Moises at their house in Catatumbo, Norte de Santander department, Colombia. —AFP

months in treatment.

In April of last year, Soto's 41-year-old brother Carlos accidentally set off another landmine, and the ordeal was repeated. "Running away, looking for the hammock, rushing to the village again, and he was bleeding," Soto recalled. —AFP



BERLIN: Leader of Germany's conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party and candidate for Chancellor in the upcoming general elections Armin Laschet (right) bumps elbow with German chancellor Angela Merkel at the end of a CDU/CSU campaign rally for the general elections scheduled for September 26, 2021, at the Berliner Tempodrom in Berlin yesterday. —AFP

cally turned in July when Laschet was seen chuckling in the background with local officials while Germany's president gave a speech mourning victims of deadly floods. Since the disaster, the conservatives have been unable to halt a falling trend in popularity. —AFP

## International

## Under-pressure Biden tries to reassure US on Afghanistan

## No Americans would be abandoned in Afghanistan

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden sought to reassure the United States on the dramatic evacuation from Afghanistan, promising no Americans would be abandoned in one of the "most difficult" airlifts in history. Widely criticized over the chaotic exit after a sudden Taliban victory, Biden warned that the frantic effort to fly Americans, other foreigners and Afghan allies out of Taliban-occupied Kabul was dangerous.



One of the 'most difficult' airlifts in history

"This is one of the largest, most difficult airlifts in history," he said in a televised address from the White House. "I cannot promise what the final outcome will be." The White House says that about 13,000 people have got out on US military aircraft in less than a week, with the flow increasing. An hours-long pause was ordered Friday due to overcrowding at a base in Qatar, where planes were headed.

Biden cautioned that the US government does not know how many of its citizens are even in Afghanistan after 20 years of war. But he said firmly: "Let me be clear: any American who wants to come home, we will get you home." He also said the United States was "committed" to rescuing Afghans who had worked alongside US forces against the Taliban and who now fear retribution. Biden poured cold water on the idea of expanding the US military perimeter beyond Kabul's airport into Taliban-controlled streets, warning of "unintended consequences."



WASHINGTON, DC: US President Joe Biden delivers remarks on the US military's ongoing evacuation efforts in Afghanistan, while flanked by US Vice President Kamala Harris (left) and Secretary of State Antony Blinken (right), in the East Room of the White House on Friday. — AFP

However, in one incident US troops did exit the airport to get 169 people inside to safety, the Pentagon said. On the world stage, Biden rejected the notion that the military debacle, in which the US-trained Afghan army imploded and allowed the Taliban to take over almost without a fight, was hurting Washington's credibility.

"I have seen no question of credibility from our allies," Biden said.

## Biden takes questions

The White House speech was only Biden's second on the crisis since the Taliban capture of Kabul last weekend. He also took questions from reporters after the address, the only time he has done so apart from an inter-

view on ABC News. Critics were attacking Biden not just for being caught unaware by the rapidity of the Taliban takeover but his relatively low profile.

The White House, however, was clearly banking on a strategy of trying to separate the military-humanitarian crisis from the political arena. The Pentagon and State Department were in charge of giving detailed, daily press conferences, where the focus on logistical details helped polish the administration's tarnished claims to competency.

By contrast, Biden's usually omnipresent press secretary, Jen Psaki, has held only one briefing this week. Biden announced at the last minute Friday that he would not fly straight after his speech to his personal home in

Delaware, as planned—although he was still heading there yesterday.

## Domestic agenda in peril

It remained unclear what went wrong in the Biden administration's calculations in Afghanistan. However, the 78-year-old president appeared adamant that US voters will eventually forgive him for a terrifying and at times tragic few days in Kabul, instead remembering him as the president who ended 20 years of futile war.

White House Communications Director Kate Bedingfield on Friday echoed Biden's comments about the impossibility of avoiding a messy exit and said that, rather than being caught flat-footed, the administration had in fact "prepared for every contingency." There was "going to be a chaotic situation whether it happened five months ago, whether it happened five weeks ago or whether it happened this week," she told MSNBC.

The evacuation flights, secured by several thousand hastily deployed US troops, are not evidence of failure but of "foresight and planning," she said. But the drama has left Biden's political fortunes in a perilous position. Already his previously successful management of the COVID-19 pandemic was threatened by the Delta variant and ever fiercer politicization of mask and vaccine policies. And Biden's signature legislative success—getting trillions of dollars in infrastructure spending plans through a divided Senate—risks losing crucial momentum in the House at a time when his allies and advisors were consumed by the Afghan mess.

Polls showed that a large majority of Americans do not support war in Afghanistan, giving the White House confidence that eventually Biden will be able to say he was proven right. But this was the first week where the average approval ratings for Biden dipped below 50 percent.

A Reuters/Ipsos poll found approval for Biden dropped from 53 to 46 percent over last weekend during the Taliban takeover of Kabul. — AFP



KABUL: US soldiers stand guard behind barbed wire as Afghans sit on a roadside near the military part of the airport in Kabul Friday, hoping to flee from the country after the Taliban's military takeover of Afghanistan. — AFP

## Why didn't Biden leave 2,500 troops in Afghanistan?

KABUL: The Taliban's lightning-fast takeover of Afghanistan after President Joe Biden's decision to withdraw US troops by August 31 has critics asking: why didn't he just leave 2,500 troops there to fortify the now-fallen government? That was how many US forces remained in the country when Biden took office in January, after his predecessor Donald Trump slashed their numbers from 15,000.

In appearances, the 2,500 troops and 16,000 US civilian contractors behind them, seemed to have been enough to keep the Afghan government in power in the year after Trump signed a withdrawal agreement with the Taliban insurgents on February 29, 2020.

Trump set a final pullout date of May 1, 2021, and even tried to speed that up. While the Taliban stepped up attacks on Afghan government targets, their gains remained limited to non-strategic rural areas. But, abiding to the agreement, their attacks on US and NATO forces meanwhile almost dried up. No US soldier was killed after Trump's deal.

Critics argue this showed that, when backed by a skeleton US force, Kabul could hold the line against the insurgents. A battlefield stalemate was more desirable than a full Taliban victory, they said.

"We only had 2,500 troops there, light touch, no chaos, not a single American soldier killed in a year in combat," top Republican Senator Mitch McConnell said this week. He urged Biden to increase support for Afghan troops rather than leave. "If we let the Taliban dominate Afghanistan and Al-Qaeda return, it will res-

onate throughout the global jihadist movement," McConnell said.

## 'Third decade of conflict'

Biden, who had long advocated exiting Afghanistan, launched a review after taking office. In April, he announced his decision: the US would leave, but the departure deadline was pushed back three months, to the end of August. The choice, Biden explained on August 16, "was either to follow through on that agreement or be prepared to go back to fighting the Taliban."

Without an exit date, he said, the Taliban would have resumed attacks on US targets. "There was no status quo of stability without American casualties after May 1," he said. The choice was "either following through on the agreement to withdraw our forces, or escalating the conflict and sending thousands more American troops back into combat in Afghanistan, lurching into the third decade of conflict."

## Aiming for equilibrium

The impact of Biden's decision was stunning. The Taliban accelerated their campaign, Afghan troops stopped fighting, and government officials handed over their cities without resisting, until Kabul fell on August 15. Military historian Max Boot, writing in the Washington Post, tied Biden's pullout decision directly to the disintegration of the Afghan forces.

"Many argued that a mere 2,500 US troops could make no difference," he wrote. "The history of the past few months repudiates this view: The final Taliban offensive began only when the US troop pullout was nearly complete." If the United States left 2,500 troops in the country and continued to provide air support to Afghan troops, it "was enough to maintain a tenuous equilibrium in which the Taliban made advances in the countryside, but every city remained in government hands," Boot said.—AFP

ation operation, top Republicans like Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell and others cited the moral obligation of rescuing Afghans who worked with the American military and diplomatic corps.

The Statue of Liberty, the iconic symbol of freedom in New York harbor that welcomes the world's "huddled masses yearning to breathe free," may serve as inspiration for Biden to speed up the evacuation of Afghans along with Americans. Thousands of Afghan translators, interpreters and others have applied for special immigrant visas to the United States.

"We owe it to these people, who are our friends and who worked with us, to get them out safely if we can," McConnell said Tuesday on Kentucky television. A handful of Republican governors have expressed an eagerness to receive some of the Afghan refugees.

Trump, who as president reached a deal with the Taliban in February 2020 on the US withdrawal, himself sounded a note of compassion Monday, saying Afghans who worked with US forces "should be allowed to seek refuge." But after a conservative media pundit posted a photo of some 600 Afghans crowded onto a US military

## Revenge fears grow in Afghanistan with airlift result uncertain

KABUL: Fears deepened on Friday that the Taliban are reneging on promises to pardon opponents and their families in Afghanistan, with thousands facing a challenge to flee the country as under-pressure US President Joe Biden said he cannot guarantee the final outcome of the chaotic airlift.

Images of small children being carried by foreign soldiers have brought home the plight of tens of thousands of Afghans who fear life under the Islamist extremists and have been trying to get out since Sunday, when the Taliban took control of the capital Kabul. Their rapid offensive shocked the United States and its foreign allies, who were just two weeks away from completing their withdrawal from the country.

Human rights organizations called on US President Joe Biden to extend an August 31 deadline for American troops to leave Kabul, where they are securing the city's airport for the evacuation. In a televised address Biden, facing criticism over his country's response to the Taliban takeover, said he thinks he can get all Americans out by that deadline but "we're going to make that judgment as we go." "This is one of the largest, most difficult airlifts in history," Biden said. "I cannot promise what the final outcome will be."

The most at-risk Afghans, however, would not be able to get out before month's end unless flights from Kabul are increased. Sarah Holewinski, head of the Washington bureau at Human Rights Watch, told a news conference. Outside the airport's concrete walls men, women and children crowd together in hope.



KABUL: In this image courtesy of the US Marine Corps, evacuee children wait for the next flight after being manifested at Hamid Karzai International Airport, Kabul. — AFP

plane leaving Kabul, Trump voiced criticism of the images.

"This plane should have been full of Americans," he said Wednesday. "America First!" Several conservative media pundits repeated various versions of the same message. Tucker Carlson, the popular nightly Fox News host and a fierce opponent of immigration, warned that the number of Afghans resettling in the United States could swell into the "millions" over the coming decade. "So first we invade, and then we are invaded," Carlson told his viewers Monday.

## Commitment, or 'catastrophe'?

Pro-Trump conservative radio talkshow host Charlie Kirk offered his own provocative assessment, invoking the name of a liberal US congresswoman—and Muslim immigrant—that Republicans often weaponize for political gain. "Joe Biden wants a couple hundred thousand more Ilhan Omars to come into America to change the body politic permanently," he said on his show this week shortly after Kabul fell to the Taliban.

And Republican congressman Tom Tiffany, a Trump

A US soldier fired warning shots, and footage from the NGO Rise to Peace showed tear gas hanging in the air. About 13,000 people have left on American military aircraft in less than a week, the White House said, but Biden cautioned that the US government does not know how many of its citizens are even in Afghanistan after 20 years of war.

The airlift involving Afghan allies and foreigners has also seen British, Turkish, French and other European military personnel sent in to Kabul.

## 'We are ashamed'

But the operation remains dangerous and logistical difficult. Evacuation flights stopped for several hours because of overcrowding at a staging base in the Gulf emirate of Qatar, but resumed after several hours, the Pentagon said on Friday. A video viewed more than two million times on social media showed Afghans at Kabul airport lifting a crying baby above a crowd and passing it to a US soldier who pulls the child to safety over barbed wire.

The father had asked US Marines to look after the baby because it was ill, and after treatment the child was returned to its parent, the Pentagon said.

NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg said Friday that the main challenge "is ensuring that people can reach and enter Kabul airport." He spoke at an emergency video conference of the alliance's foreign ministers. A German civilian was shot on his way to the airport, a spokeswoman for the German government said.

In a professed rebrand, the Taliban have repeatedly vowed a complete amnesty but an intelligence document for the United Nations said militants were going door-to-door hunting down former government officials and those who worked with US and NATO forces. According to the confidential document by the UN's threat assessment consultants seen by AFP, militants were also screening people on the way to Kabul airport. —AFP

## Fate of Afghan allies divides US Republicans

WASHINGTON: Following compassionate calls by US Republicans to rescue Afghan allies desperate to flee the Taliban, unbending anti-immigration conservatives—including the party's loudest voice, Donald Trump—have turned to warning against an influx of refugees.

The sudden collapse of Afghanistan's government amid the turbulent exit of US forces, and the apparent lack of preparedness by Joe Biden's administration, has cast a harsh light on the president.

But it also is highlighting a fissure among Republicans over who gets into the United States, and whether a wave of refugees would be welcome. As US forces secured the airport in Kabul to oversee a massive evacu-

ally, warned of a "catastrophe" should thousands of refugees from the "known terrorist hotbed" of Afghanistan be allowed into the United States without strict vetting. Such voices are in the minority for now. But officials in the White House appear concerned that those sentiments could percolate into the mainstream and turn the moral obligation to aid US allies into a debate about immigration.

Traditional Republicans are fighting that inclination. In a letter to Biden Thursday, 16 Republican senators demanded the president do everything in his power to safely extract all Americans and Afghan allies.

"It would be unconscionable to leave any behind," they wrote. As the Republican rift grows between those seeking to resettle Afghans and far-right lawmakers or commentators feeding nativist fears about an influx of evacuees, some Democrats were calling out the dichotomy. "All the Republicans saying we have a moral duty to evacuate Afghans and all the Republicans saying we have a moral duty to keep refugees out of the country are going to have to get together and have a chat real soon," Senator Chris Murphy said Friday. — AFP

# Business

SUNDAY, AUGUST 22, 2021

## US jobless benefit cuts see decline in spending

### Half million new jobs would be created in September, October

WASHINGTON: American states that ended pandemic jobless benefits early saw slight dips in unemployment rates but big declines in spending and income, according to a study released Friday, in what could be a preview of the effects nationwide when the programs end completely.

First created by the CARES Act in March 2020 and extended several times since, the emergency benefits increased weekly unemployment payments and expanded them to freelance workers and the long-term unemployed.

But the federal aid has become controversial in recent months, as critics say it encourages people not to return to work even as COVID-19 vaccines became widely available and businesses struggle to fill open positions. Officials in 26 states — mostly led by Republicans — have announced early cuts to some or all of the programs, which are due to expire nationwide on September 6.

Analyzing data from 18,648 people who had received unemployment payments, the study found nearly 25 percent had jobs at the end of July in 19 of the 22 states that ended extra benefits in June.

That compares to about 22 percent in the 23 states that continued the programs.

However, the employment gains did not make up for the decline in incomes and spending that followed, according to the researchers from Columbia University, Harvard University, University of Massachusetts Amherst and University of Toronto.

"We see a small... rise in earnings of \$14 per-week, making up around five percent of the shortfall

from benefit decline," they wrote in the study using data from financial services firm Earnin.

However, unemployment benefits fell by \$278 a week and "the reduced income was accompanied by a \$145 per-week (20 percent) fall in spending."

#### Nationwide spending drop?

As the aid ends nationwide, "We could see around \$8 billion in reduced spending during September and October. The spending losses are



### Unemployment payments

likely to continue further as additional workers take time to enter the workforce," they wrote. While the authors were not certain, they predicted about half a million new jobs would be created in September and October, but the majority of the four million people who would lose benefits after the September expiration would "take much longer to find jobs."

President Joe Biden's American Rescue Plan stimulus package passed in March allocated \$350



NEW YORK: A group of young people walk past a 'We're hiring!' sign posted at a store in New York City yesterday. —AFP

billion to state and local governments, and on Thursday his administration said states could use that money to keep the expanded benefits going beyond September, especially if rising infections from the Delta variant of COVID-19 delay hiring.

Labor Department data released Friday gave a mixed verdict on the impact of the benefit cuts on state-level unemployment rates, with joblessness declining in only 17 states in July, nearly half of which had cut the benefits early. — AFP

## New strike to hit German passenger rail from tomorrow

FRANKFURT: Germany's passenger train network faces a second round of strikes tomorrow and disruption to freight services this weekend, adding more pain to the tourist season and already strained supply chains. The latest move in an escalating wage dispute will impact passenger services from 2:00 am (0000 GMT) on August 23 and last 48 hours, the head of the GDL train drivers union Claus Weselsky told reporters Friday.

The industrial action affecting cargo trains will begin August 21 and end at the same time four days later, the union head said. "Deutsche Bahn has up to this point not given notice that it will make any concessions in the pay dispute it started," Weselsky said, referring to the German rail operator.

"The GDL sees itself forced to call for new strikes at Deutsche Bahn," he said. Deutsche Bahn criticised the announcement of the new strike, saying in a statement that it was "a wholly unnecessary burden for our passengers and freight clients". Earlier this month, the union led a walkout after its members voted 95 percent in favour, following the collapse of pay talks with Deutsche Bahn.

On Germany's long-distance rail network, carriages were packed as only 25 percent of the scheduled service ran, during the two-day strike which began in the morning of August 11. Deutsche Bahn's freight service DB Cargo was also severely impacted, adding to delivery delays for German businesses already hit by shortages in raw materials and components



FRANKFURT, Hessen: File photo shows an empty platform at the main railway station in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany, during a strike of train drivers. — AFP

from timber and steel to computer chips.

#### 'Wrong signal'

The announcement of more strikes sends the "wrong signal at the wrong time", according to Siegfried Russwurm, head of the influential Federation of German Industry (BDI). "This strike will put an almost incalculably heavy burden not just on industry, but on the whole of society," he said in a statement.

Deutsche Bahn was already contending with huge losses as demand for travel drastically shrank during the pandemic which erupted in March 2020. It has also been struggling to rebuild long stretches of track destroyed by deadly floods that struck western Germany in mid-July. At the core of the dispute, the union is

demanding a 1.4-percent pay hike and a bonus of 600 euros (\$700) for 2021, and a further wage rise of 1.8 percent in 2022.

Deutsche Bahn had offered to phase in a 3.2-percent wage increase in two steps in 2022 and 2023. The slower increases proposed by Deutsche Bahn are necessary to "tackle the negative impact of the coronavirus pandemic" on the company's finances, it said in a statement. The last major conflict between unions and Deutsche Bahn took place between 2014-2015, when over nine months GDL organised nine rounds of strikes to demand regulatory reforms. The stoppage in May 2015 of six consecutive days has held the record as the longest in the company's history. A shorter strike hit rail traffic in December 2018, when a stoppage was called for four hours. — AFP

## UK retail sales fall for first time since May

LONDON: UK retail sales slid last month after the end of the Euro 2020 football tournament, falling for the first time since May, official data showed Friday. Retail sales fell by 2.5 percent in July from June, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement, adding food stores suffered after hospitality venues reopened.

Sales climbed by 0.2 percent in June, as football fans bought food and drink to celebrate the Euros, after a 1.6-percent drop in May. Overall retail sales are still 5.8 percent higher than before the start of the deadly coronavirus outbreak, the ONS noted.

"Following the Euro 2020-related boost in June, retail sales fell in July to their lowest level since shops reopened in April, but still remain well above pre-pandemic levels," said ONS statistician Jonathan Athow. "Food sales fell back as further lifting of hospitality restrictions meant consumers had more opportunities to spend outside retail."

"Heavy rainfall at the start of July hit fuel sales, which dipped for the first time since February," England, Scotland and Wales all participated at the Euros that took part across Europe. The final in London, on July 11, saw England lose to Italy. By the start of the Euros, most lockdown restrictions had been lifted across much of the UK. — AFP

## Morrisons backs US firm's takeover counter-bid

LONDON: British supermarket group Morrisons has accepted an improved £7.0-billion counter-bid from US private equity firm Clayton, Dubilier & Rice, and withdrawn support for a lower offer from Softbank-owned Fortress. The CD&R deal, worth the equivalent of \$9.6 billion or 8.2 billion euros, is the latest twist in a months-long takeover tussle for ownership of Britain's fourth biggest supermarket group.

New York-based CD&R announced late Thursday that it had reached a deal with Morrisons management for an offer pitched at 285 pence per share, worth £9.7 billion including debt. "The Morrisons board believes that the offer from CD&R represents good value for shareholders," said Morrisons chairman Andrew Higginson in the statement.

"CD&R have a strong record of developing, strengthening and growing the businesses that they invest in and they share our vision for Morrisons' future." The new deal trumps a rival £6.7-billion bid, agreed earlier this month from an international consortium comprising Fortress, Canada Pension Plan Investment Board, Koch Real Estate and Singapore's sovereign wealth fund.



LONDON: File photo shows a view of a Morrisons supermarket in Stratford, east London on June 21, 2021. British supermarket chain Morrisons has accepted a £7bn counter-offer from investment firm CD&R. —AFP

CD&R increased its bid after Morrisons had rejected its previous £5.5-billion offer in June. The retail giant has been caught in a bidding war as the country's supermarket sector benefits hugely from a shift to online

shopping during the pandemic.

Morrisons—which trails the UK's top three supermarkets Tesco, Sainsbury's and Asda—has almost 500 stores and more than 110,000 employees. — AFP

## VW reins in production due to chip shortage

FRANKFURT: German car giant Volkswagen will slash production at its main plant due to ongoing problems with the global supply of computer chips, a spokesman told AFP on Friday. Following the summer holidays for workers in Germany, work on the assembly line at the company's facility in Wolfsburg will be "limited" and will have to "adapt to the supply situation", the spokesman said.

Next week, cars will only be produced during the early shift at the factory, while the rest of production will be halted. Shortages of semiconductors are set to continue, according to the carmaker. The renewed scarcity is in part the result of "outbreaks of COVID-19, particularly in Malaysia, which have led to factory closures for semiconductor producers", Volkswagen said. However, the company said it hoped "as far as possible" to make up the setbacks in production over the course of the second half of the year. Earlier this week, the Volkswagen-owned car brand Audi also said that it would be delaying the resumption of production on some of its lines in Germany due to the "volatile" supply situation.

Carmakers have been among those most acutely affected by the shortage of chips, key components in both electric and conventional vehicles. On Thursday, Japanese company Toyota, the world's largest carmaker, announced that it would be reducing production in September by 40 percent. The decision was made in part due to a "parts shortage resulting from the spread of COVID-19 in Southeast Asia", Toyota said. Simultaneously, German chipmaker Infineon said it would be increasing the cost of chips in light of difficulties along the supply chain. — AFP



## Business

# Elon Musk says Tesla's robot will make physical work a 'choice'

## Robots will phase out physical labor for people

**SAN FRANCISCO:** After dominating the electric vehicle market and throwing his hat into the billionaire space race, Tesla boss Elon Musk announced the latest frontier he's aiming to conquer: Humanoid robots.

The irascible entrepreneur said he would have an initial prototype of an androgynous "Tesla Bot" by next year. Based on the same technology as the company's semi-autonomous vehicles, the robot will be able to perform basic repetitive tasks with the aim of eliminating the need for people to handle dangerous or boring work, Musk said at an online event on Tesla's advances in artificial intelligence (AI).

"Tesla is arguably the world's biggest robotics company because cars are semi-sentient robots on wheels," he said. "It kind of makes sense to put that into a humanoid form." Tesla's touting of its automation technology comes as the carmaker faces increased scrutiny over its driver-assistance system, with safety regulators in the United States launching a probe after a series of crashes.

Tesla is accused of misleading motorists into believing the so-called Autopilot vehicles can drive themselves, though Musk has defended the system. The Autopilot controversy was not discussed at Thursday's two and a half hour online conference, or brought up during questions from the audience.

Instead, Musk pledged that his future robot would be a benign presence. He said the Tesla Bot, which will have five-fingered hands and come in black and white, is intended to be "friendly" and built such that "you can run away from it and most likely overpower it."

"Hopefully that won't happen, but you never know," he joked. Musk, the second richest person in the world according to Forbes, told the confer-

ence he believes robots will phase out physical labor for people.

"I think essentially in the future physical work will be a choice," he said. As CEO, Musk has transformed Tesla from a fledgling startup into a pace-setter in the electric car industry, with the company last month reporting its first-ever quarterly profit above \$1 billion on record deliveries.

His company SpaceX is also competing in the booming commercial aerospace market, while Neuralink aims to develop brain implants to connect humans and computers. But the self-described "Technoking" has also repeatedly clashed with regulators over everything from his use of social media to discuss Tesla's operations to local



Elon Musk

coronavirus health protocols affecting his factories.

The company has had a rocky record with its human workforce, including allegations of unfair labor practices and firing a union organizer. —AFP

## China passes tough new online privacy law

**BEIJING:** China passed a sweeping privacy law aimed at preventing businesses from collecting sensitive personal data Friday, as the country faces an uptick in internet scams and Beijing targets tech giants hoovering up personal data.

Under the new rules passed by China's top legislative body, state and private entities handling personal information will be required to reduce data collection and obtain user consent.

The Chinese state security apparatus will maintain access to swathes of personal data, however. Beijing has long been accused of harnessing big tech to accelerate repression in the northwestern Xinjiang province and elsewhere.

The new rules are also expected to further rattle China's tech sector, with companies like ride hailing giant Didi and gaming behemoth Tencent in regulators' crosshairs in recent months over misuse of personal data.

Chinese tech stocks including Alibaba and Tencent dipped after Friday morning's announcement. The law aims to protect those who "feel strongly about personal data being used for user profiling and by recommendation algorithms or the use of big data in setting [unfair] prices," a spokesman for the National People's Congress told state news agency Xinhua earlier this week.

It will prevent companies from setting different prices for the same service based on clients' shopping history.

Tens of thousands of consumers have complained about having to pay more for hailing a taxi using an iPhone than a cheaper mobile phone model or for tickets if they are profiled as a business traveller, China's consumer protection watchdog said.



BEIJING: Workers clean the glass facade of a mall in Beijing. —AFP

The law is modelled after the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation, one of the world's strictest online privacy protection laws.

"China's new privacy regime is one of the toughest in the world," said Kendra Schaefer, a partner at Beijing-based consulting firm Trivium China. "China is not really looking at the short term with this law."

Instead, she said, it aims "to establish the foundations for the digital economy over the next 40 or 50 years."

The law, which comes into effect on November 1, also stipulates that the personal data of Chinese nationals cannot be transferred to countries with lower standards of data security than China-rules which may present problems for foreign businesses.

Companies that fail to comply can face fines of up to 50 million yuan (\$7.6 million) or five percent of their annual turnover.

The law says sensitive personal data includes information which if leaked can lead to "discrimination... or seriously threaten the safety of individuals" including race, ethnicity, religion, biometric data or a person's whereabouts. But Chinese cities across the country are peppered with surveillance cameras, some outfitted for facial recognition, collecting biometric information daily.

In the restive region of Xinjiang-home to most of China's Uighur ethnic minority-rights groups say residents are forced to install software on their mobile phones that allow police to access their location, photos or text messages. —AFP

## Spanish government feels heat over high power prices

**MADRID:** Scorching heat has caused power prices to soar in Spain, leading to renewed tensions in the country's leftist coalition government over how to lower ballooning electricity bills. A recent heatwave which sent temperatures soaring as high as 47 degrees Celsius (117F) in the southern region of Andalusia caused demand for electricity to jump as people turned on their air conditioners, putting further pressure on power prices which were already high due to a global natural gas supply crunch.

"Everything indicates the month of August will end with the highest electricity bill in history," consumer rights group Facua said Tuesday. It predicts the average monthly household electricity bill this month will hit 92 euros (\$107), a 44 percent increase over August 2020.

The jump in prices has largely offset the temporary reduction in the value-added tax (VAT) on electricity bills — to 10 percent from 21 percent — which Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's government introduced in July to provide relief to consumers. Far-left party Podemos, the junior partner in Sanchez's coalition government, has accused the administration of not doing enough to cut power bills.

The government "must intervene in the power market and move towards a system of regulated prices," Labour Minister Yolanda Diaz, one of the co-leaders of the party and also the third highest-ranking member of the government, told the Ctxt magazine. "All of this is due to a process of privatisations in the electricity sector... which has resulted in an oligopoly that has led to repeated price increases every year," she added.

### 'False hopes'

Spain at the end of 2020 had the fifth-highest household electricity prices in the European Union after Germany, Denmark, Belgium and Ireland,



ALMARGEN, Spain: File photo shows wind turbines close to the village of Almargin, near Malaga, on July 20, 2021. Scorching heat has caused power prices to soar in Spain, leading to renewed tensions in the country's leftist coalition government over how to lower ballooning electricity bills. —AFP

according to Eurostat, the bloc's statistics office. The country relies more heavily on natural gas to produce electricity than other European nations such as neighbouring France, which has a significant nuclear power sector, said Jordi Castilla, the spokesman for consumer group Facua.

Podemos has called for the government to issue a decree that imposes an "immediate" ceiling on power prices and has threatened to stage street protests over the issue, in a country where this question of energy poverty gets regular media attention. The proposal has been rejected by the Socialist party, which argues Spain must respect European market rules for electricity.

"To say that we can solve this with a decree generates false hopes," Minister for the Ecological Transition Teresa Ribera, a socialist, said last week in a TV interview. "Look what is happening in the rest of Europe, it is not a

problem that is specific to Spain."

### Public power firm?

Ribera has instead called on Brussels to change the rules that set power prices in the European Union, which are, according to her, dictated by the price of fossil-fuels, a system which hurts gas-dependent Spain. The minister wrote to the European Commission a few weeks ago to request alterations to the system, but Brussels "answered that it had no intention of introducing changes", she told news radio Cadena Ser earlier this week, adding that such a position was "not reasonable".

Ribera, however, has raised the idea of creating a public firm to manage the country's hydro-electric plants, a measure long demanded by Podemos to replace major power firms which it accuses of making huge profits on the backs of consumers. —AFP

## China Telecom up nearly 20% in Shanghai debut

**SHANGHAI:** Shares in China Telecom surged nearly 20 percent in their Shanghai debut Friday after the world's biggest public offering of the year, coming after the company was delisted in the United States amid China-US tensions.

China's biggest fixed-line operator raised \$7.3 billion in its share sale, making it the biggest of 2021, topping the \$5.4 billion raised in Hong Kong by TikTok rival Kuaishou Technology in February. And the firm said it could raise a further \$1.1 billion if an over-allotment option was exercised.

China Telecom's offer price was set at 4.53 yuan per share and initially sagged below that at the opening on Friday, but quickly rallied to close the morning at 5.39 yuan — a gain of 19 percent. Many of China's biggest tech and telecom firms traded their shares on the more developed US stock markets in the 2000s as they sought access to global funding.

But Beijing has pushed in recent years for its companies to list in mainland Chinese bourses — as well as in Hong Kong — partly to raise the profile of its own exchanges. That is expected to accelerate with Beijing fearing major tech and telecom champions will be squeezed by US regulators as their trade rivalry deepens, and as China executes a sweeping crackdown on its technology and other sectors.

China Telecom was delisted by the New York Stock Exchange in January along with fellow state-owned telecoms firms China Mobile and China Unicom following an executive order by former president Donald Trump.

The order banned investments by Americans into a range of companies deemed to be supplying or supporting China's military and security apparatus. China Mobile, the world's largest mobile operator by subscribers, is also eyeing a second listing in Shanghai to complement its existing Hong Kong shares, while China Unicom Hong Kong has said it is considering a mainland IPO for its technology arm. —AFP

## Businesses say HK quarantine threatens financial hub status

**HONG KONG:** European business leaders have warned that Hong Kong's stringent quarantine measures have left its residents "indefinitely trapped" in the city, threatening its status as an international business centre.

In a rare open letter to chief executive Carrie Lam, the European Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong said the city's most recent hardening of measures for inbound travellers were "out of proportion" and a "significant setback". The Chinese financial hub maintains some of the strictest quarantine rules in the world, an approach that has kept virus cases low but left most residents cut off from the rest of the world for the past 18 months. Arrivals from high-risk countries have to stay in hotel quarantine for 21 days, while for lower-risk countries that drops to seven days followed by another seven days of self-monitoring. Last week, the authorities announced that a brief flirtation with relaxing some of these rules had to be scrapped. —AFP

The decision threw travel plans of many into disarray towards the end of the summer holidays, sparked a shortage of hotel rooms and caused growing frustration within the business community. "We are of the view that Hong Kong must open itself sooner rather than later or this new quarantine regime could lead many in the international community to question if they want to remain indefinitely trapped in Hong Kong when the rest of the world is moving on," Frederik Gollob, chairman of the chamber's board of directors wrote in the letter. —AFP

## Business

# Nissan Al Babtain reinforces local expansion with launch of new showroom in Waha, Al Jahra

## Continual growth reflects high levels of customer satisfaction

**KUWAIT:** As part of its ongoing expansion strategy, Abdulmohsen Abdulaziz Al Babtain Company (AABC), the authorized dealer of Nissan vehicles in Kuwait, recently opened its third showroom dedicated to the growing demand of customers residing in and around the Al Jahra Governorate. With showrooms situated in Al Rai and Ahmadi, the new showroom now offers residents greater comfort, convenience, and access to the wide range of Nissan models, latest offers and services.

Revealing the brand-new Nissan Retail Concept (NRC), the Al Jahra showroom is the first local center to launch the new-generation space and represent the evolution of the brand customer experience that will be consistent across the global network alongside its integrated retail offerings.

The Al Jahra showroom will serve as the launch pad for the latest models as well as exclusive offers from Nissan Al Babtain, accommodating customers with immediate access and knowledge to Nissan's best. The new showroom was inaugurated during a ribbon-cutting ceremony attended by Saleh Al Babtain, Al-Babtain Co. CEO and senior management.

During the ceremony, Abdulmohsen Abdulaziz Al-Babtain Co.'s CEO - Saleh Al Babtain said: "As we forge ahead with our strategy of expansion and embrace new growth opportunities, we are delighted to open the first showroom in Kuwait that features Nissan's new corporate identity, since



its worldwide launch last year. Aimed at strengthening our presence across the country and meeting rising expectations, we established the third showroom in the Al Jahra governorate to serve our customers with an optimal experience that includes closer proximity, convenience, and access to the latest models, suitable for the whole family."

He added, "For over seven decades, we have shared a strong relationship with the global brand, continually accommodating the communities with Nissan's innovative and high-tech models, ranging from sedans to crossovers and SUVs and strategic, best-in-class service solutions to progress in a fast-growing market. We invite all of our valued customers and residents in the Al Jahra Governorate to visit our latest

showroom to take the opportunity to discover our bespoke services and an enhanced showroom experience."

Nissan Al Babtain invites its customers in Al Jahra and surrounding areas to discover the dynamic new space and experience the next generation in the vehicle purchasing journey, as well as test drive the new models, at the showroom located in Waha, Al Jahra, block 4, street 4, (opposite the Jahra Security Directorate and Jahra Municipality) in Sadaf Complex which is operational from 8:30 am until 8:30 pm everyday from Saturday till Thursday, except on Friday.

Additionally, ensuring the continuous wellbeing of both the Nissan employees and customers, Nissan Al Babtain also offers its customers with doorstep services which includes both pick-up and



delivery service.

Customers with queries and interest in gathering more information can con-

tact the dedicated call center on 1804 888 or visit the official website [www.nissankuwait.com](http://www.nissankuwait.com).

## Download ABK's 'Push Notifications' to win KD 100

**KUWAIT:** Delivering on its promise of 'Simpler Banking', Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) yesterday announced the launch of its 'Push Notifications' campaign 'Want to win KD100?'. The 'Push Notifications' service is an in-app service that notifies customers on all transactions. The monthly draw campaign will run from 22nd August until 24th November 2021. Every month, two customers who have downloaded the ABK app and enabled the 'Push Notifications' service will win KD 100 cash.

With 'Push Notifications' customers will benefit from the convenience of transaction updates and smooth browsing of saved transaction history. The service is particularly valuable to travellers, who in the absence of a roaming network, can access the service as long as they are connected to a WIFI network. To enable the Push Notifications service on the ABK app, customers should go to 'My Profile', click on 'Notification Settings', and enable Push Notifications.

For more information about ABK please visit [eahli.com](http://eahli.com) or contact an ABK customer service agent via 'Ahlan Ahli' at 1899899.

## Ooredoo wins gold and bronze Stevie awards

**KUWAIT:** Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, received another impressive honor and won the gold Stevie Awards in recognition of the company's "My Ooredoo" application, while winning the bronze Stevie Awards for the company's "Ooredoo Volunteers" program at the 2021 International Business Stevie Awards. The Stevie Awards are widely considered to be the world's premier business awards, conferring recognition for achievement in programs such as The International Business Awards for 19 years.

The Gold Stevie Award was granted in recognition of the company's "My Ooredoo" application. My Ooredoo allows customers to fully control their account through their smart devices at any time. Customers can pay their bills or recharge multiple lines at once, check their pack usage and balance, activate their Nojoom account and keep track of their points, activate several digital services and buy e-vouchers and more.

Further, the bronze Stevie Awards was a recognition of "Ooredoo Volunteer" program for being the best corporate social responsibility program of the year 2021 in the Middle East and Africa. "Ooredoo volunteering" program aims to prepare volunteers through intensive world-class activities, including workshops and a training camp, in a bid to create a generation of Kuwaiti youth that is aware of the importance of volunteering. The program, which attracts hundreds of people, provides necessary training before matching volunteers with volunteering opportunities.

Ooredoo Kuwait trains a number of volunteers on



how to deal with customers, and attract them to hear more about the company's products and services.

Commenting on winning these awards, Senior Director, Corporate Communications, Ooredoo Kuwait, Mijbil Al-Ayoub, said: "Excellence and success will always ignite our commitment and determination to create more innovative products and services, along with launching responsible initiatives towards our community. We take pride to have won these awards, which Ooredoo has been well-deserved. At Ooredoo, we are seriously committed and responsible to offer our community the best digital experiences".

Stevie Awards are conferred in eight programs: the Asia-Pacific Stevie Awards, the German Stevie Awards, the Middle East & North Africa Stevie Awards, The American Business Awards, The International Business Awards(r), the Stevie Awards for Women in Business, the Stevie Awards for Great Employers, and the Stevie Awards for Sales & Customer Service.

## Gulf Bank announces Salary Package winner

**KUWAIT:** Gulf Bank conducted its seventh monthly Salary Package draw of the year to announce the winner for July 2021. The lucky winner, Aqeel Naser Abul Sadeq, will claim a cash prize worth 12 times his salary. The draw was held yesterday at Gulf Bank's main branch, in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce & Industry.

Mohammad Al-Qattan, General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank, congratulated the winner, saying: "Aqeel Naser Abul Sadeq is our seventh salary account winner of the year, and there are ample opportunities for our customers to win monthly prizes worth 12 times their salaries, in addition to being entered into Gulf Bank's annual Salary Account draw for the grand prize of 100 times the winner's salary. Gulf Bank's Salary Account is the only account in Kuwait that encompasses offers that are specifically tailored to our customers' needs. We would like to congratulate Aqeel Naser Abul Sadeq once again, and wish everyone the best of luck!"

Throughout 2021, Gulf Bank's Salary Package offers clients a wide range of exclusive offers, including the ability to choose between an interest-free loan or a cash prize of up to 300 Kuwaiti Dinars, and a free credit card, with these offers being valid for workers in both the public and private sectors. Gulf Bank is also providing special offers for frontline workers in appreciation of their continuous efforts in combating the pandemic.

### Frontline Workers Salary Package

Gulf Bank recently tailored a special offer for

employed Kuwaiti frontline workers who wish to transfer their salaries to Gulf Bank. Upon transferring their salaries, these clients will immediately receive a set of benefits, including a cash gift of up to KD 300, or an interest-free loan of up to KD 25,000 or a special car loan offer from approved showrooms. They will also be eligible to receive a Visa or MasterCard credit card with all annual fees waived for the first year, a free MasterCard World card (upon KD 5,000 expenditure). The frontline offer also consists of other benefits, including a free safety deposit box for a period of one year upon opening the account, free concierge services, and a customer segment upgrade. The new frontline offer is open to Kuwaiti employees working in the Fire Brigade, National Guard, Civil Aviation (including Kuwait Airways) and in the following Ministries: Health, Defense, Information and Interior.

### Salary Package - Exclusive Offer

As part of the vast range of services and benefits available to Salary Account customers, Gulf Bank offers its clients the opportunity to choose the most appropriate benefits from a wide selection of attractive options.

With the 2021 Kuwaiti Salary Offer, new customers who transfer their salaries to Gulf Bank are automatically enrolled in the monthly draws, giving them the chance to win cash prizes of up to 12 times their salary. Customers are also enrolled in a yearly draw of Kuwait's largest salary prize, a cash prize of up to 100 times the winner's salary.

Gulf Bank's Salary Account also gives new customers the opportunity to receive either a KD 300 cash gift upon transferring their salaries to Gulf Bank, or an interest-free loan of up to KD 25,000. Customers must have a minimum salary of KD 500 and are eligible for the offer following their first salary transfer to Gulf Bank.

Customers can also enjoy additional benefits like a



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

### Salary Account Draws

Gulf Bank conducts monthly and annual Salary Account draws, in which all salaried customers who transferred their salaries to Gulf Bank in 2019, 2020 and 2021 are automatically enrolled. During the monthly draws, Salary Account customers have the chance to win a prize of up to 12 times their salaries and can even win up to 100 times their salaries in the annual draw. It is worth noting that Gulf Bank is the only bank in Kuwait that offers its salaried customers the opportunity to win sums of these amounts on a monthly and annual basis, as a reward for transferring their salaries to Gulf Bank. To learn more about Gulf Bank, customers can visit one of the Bank's branches, or visit the Gulf Bank website at [www.e-gulfbank.com](http://www.e-gulfbank.com). Customers can also use the WhatsApp service on 1805805 for round-the-clock assistance from Gulf Bank representatives, or call the Customer Contact Center on the same number.

## AUB congratulates Al-Hassad Weekly Draw winners

**KUWAIT:** Ahli United Bank (AUB) held the weekly draw of 18th August 2021 of Al-Hassad Islamic account Al Hassad Islamic account, the first Islamic prizes account in Kuwait which offers over 750 prizes over a 12 month period and provides numerous features. Such features include the simplest and easiest savings program, highest number of winners, largest prize value, loyalty multipliers, and unique account opening feature online with all ease with instant deposit option.

The Bank announced 20 winners of KD 1,000 as follows: Mudhi Mfrah Al-Shammari, Mousa Farraj Ol-Ayan, Mohammad Abdullah Issa, Zubayda Abdullah Ali, Hammod Jarboa



Al-Aswad, MUSAED Salem Al-Barjas, Yousef Ahmad Al-Mailam, Nawaf Knaiher Al-Matrefi, Ahmad Abdullah Al-Failakawi, Saad Ahmed Saifelnasr, Adel Mohammed Al-Azmi, Khaled El-Sayed Osman, Hind Ahmad Al-Saif, Zakaria Ahmad Solaiman, Khaled Dahlous Al-Azmi, Ahmad Abdalraheem Kameli, Fajer Othman Al-Saeed, Hadeil Nayef Al-Azmi, Omar Salah Al-Ansari and Sarah Ghuloum Ali.

The draws of Al-Hassad include several cash prizes, such as KD 100,000 each Eid and the grand quarterly draw of KD 250,000 prize which continues to be a key aspiration for customers who are wishing to fulfill their dreams. Al Hassad offers 20 weekly prizes of KD 1,000 for each winner. Furthermore, for the first time in Kuwait, the AUB Al-Hassad presents the "Privilege Draw", which is a quarterly draw of KD 25,000 exclusively for Al-Hassad customers who maintained their balances for more than one year and have not won a prize in the past five years. For all draws, the clients are eligible for one draw chance for each KD 50 deposited in their Al-Hassad account.

In addition to this attractive package of rewards, Al-Hassad Islamic account incorporates a Wakala contract for projected annual profits, making this account unique and attractive to all society segments that are aspiring to build their short and long-term savings through a unique savings account with many advantages.

For more information about Al-Hassad Account added to the investment savings account, the prizes it offers and relevant criteria, please visit any of AUB branches, contact "Haakon" Service on 1812000 or visit our website: [www.ahliunited.com.kw](http://www.ahliunited.com.kw).

Lifestyle | Features



In this file photo Sonny Chiba attends the world premiere of the new Japanese/American co-production of the feature film 'Take a Chance' at ArcLight Hollywood in Hollywood. — AFP

# Japanese martial arts actor, 'Kill Bill' star **Sonny Chiba** dies

**S**onny Chiba, a Japanese martial arts expert and actor who appeared in Quentin Tarantino's "Kill Bill," has died from COVID-19 complications, his agent said Thursday. He was 82. "Sonny passed away from COVID-19 yesterday," Timothy Beal told AFP. "Such tragic news. He was a great friend and an awesome client. Such a

humble, caring and friendly man." Born Sadaho Maeda in 1939 in Fukuoka, in the southwest of Japan, Chiba studied martial arts throughout the 1960s, becoming a particular expert in karate. His skills landed him numerous roles in Japanese films and television series, including with the influential Toei studio,

who recruited him in a competition for new talent. In the wake of Bruce Lee's worldwide success, Chiba made a name for himself outside Japan as an ultra-violent henchman in "The Street Fighter" trilogy. That performance left an impression on a youthful Tarantino, who would later cast him to play samurai-turned-sushi-chef

Hattori Hanzo, who forges a sword to help Uma Thurman in her quest for revenge in "Kill Bill." In 2006, Chiba also had a role in "The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift." Beal said Chiba had been due to work on "Outbreak Z," a zombie movie starring Wesley Snipes. — AFP

## NETFLIX ANNOUNCES DOCUMENTARY SERIES ON INSPIRATION4 SPACE MISSION

**N**etflix will soon premiere a documentary series chronicling Inspiration4, the world's first all-civilian space mission, the streaming service said Thursday. The five-episode show will air in September and will depict how the four-member crew is preparing and then launching into space aboard a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket, in near real time. The mission, scheduled for September 15, is financed and run by Jared Isaacman, the 38-year-old founder of payment processing company Shift4 Payments and the latest wealthy businessman to take advantage of the growing space tourism industry. Isaacman has invited three "everyday" people along with him for the ride: A medical worker, a college professor and an engineer.



In this photo courtesy of Netflix, the Inspiration4 crew (from left) Jared Isaacman, Hayley Arceneaux, Sian Proctor and Chris Sembroski pose for a photo. — AFP photos

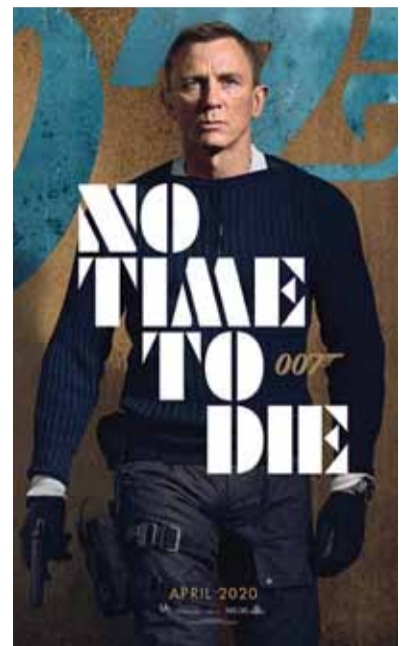
The show, titled "Countdown: Inspiration4 Mission To Space" will "take viewers behind the scenes with the four crew members—from their unconventional selection and intensive months-long commercial astronaut training, through the

intimate and emotional moments leading up to liftoff," Netflix said in a statement. The final episode will air after the mission is completed and will "feature unprecedented access inside the spacecraft, capturing the launch and the crew's journey

to space, as well as their return home to Earth." The show is produced by Connor Schell and directed by Jason Hehir.

The crew is meant to reflect the main pillars of the mission: Leadership, hope, generosity and prosperity. The "hope"

seat went to Hayley Arceneaux, 29, a physician assistant, who survived cancer as a child and will become the first person to go into space with a prosthesis. Arceneaux works at the St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, where she was treated as a child. Isaacman is using Inspiration4 to raise \$200 million for the hospital. Representing "generosity" is Chris Sembroski, 41, a US air force veteran who now works in the aerospace industry. Sian Proctor, a 51-year-old entrepreneur, professor of geosciences and two-time NASA astronaut candidate, symbolizes "prosperity." "If they can go, we can all go," said a promotional video for the show, released Thursday. Tourists have already gone into space in the years 2001-2009 aboard Russian spacecraft, but unlike the Inspiration4 mission, they were accompanied by professional astronauts. — AFP



## BOND MOVIE 'NO TIME TO DIE' FINALLY GETS LONDON PREMIERE

**M**uch-delayed James Bond movie "No Time To Die" will finally get its world premiere in London next month, the makers of the franchise announced on Friday. "The World Premiere for #NoTimeToDie will take place on Tuesday 28 September 2021 at London's @RoyalAlbertHall," said a tweet from the official 007 Twitter account. "Producers Michael G. Wilson, Barbara Broccoli and director Cary Joji Fukunaga will join Daniel Craig on the red carpet."

The 25th installment of the fictional British spy saga has seen its release postponed several times due to the pandemic. It was originally set for a London premiere last March, ahead of a global rollout the following month, before that was pushed back by subsequent waves of coronavirus around the world. In January US studio MGM said the film would be released globally on October 8.

"No Time to Die", directed by Cary Joji Fukunaga ("Beasts of No Nation", "True Detective") is expected to be Craig's last outing as the suave British spy, after starring in four previous films. It sees Bond drawn out of retirement in Jamaica by his old friend and CIA agent Felix Leiter. Rami Malek ("Bohemian Rhapsody") plays Bond's adversary Safin, while Lashana Lynch, Lea Seydoux, Ana de Armas and Ben Whishaw also star. Produced at a rumored cost of around \$250 million, the film's success is crucial for MGM, while Universal Pictures will distribute the film overseas. — AFP

## R Kelly ex-associate says bribed official for fake ID in Aaliyah marriage

**R**Kelly's former tour manager on Friday said he bribed a worker at a public aid office to get false identification saying the late singer Aaliyah was of age, so she could marry the R&B star now on trial for sex crimes. Testifying under a grant of immunity from later prosecution, Demetrius Smith—who worked for Kelly for more than a decade in the 1980s and 1990s—said he paid a worker \$500 to secure the then-15-year-old Aaliyah Haughton a fake ID, used shortly

thereafter to wed Kelly, who was then 27. "I went to the welfare office, and I walked in, and I said, 'Hey wanna make some money?'" Smith, now 65, said during the dramatic afternoon at the Brooklyn courthouse where Kelly is on trial for crimes including racketeering, bribery and sexual exploitation of a child.



In this file photo R Kelly leaves the Leighton Criminal Court Building after a hearing on sexual abuse charges in Chicago, Illinois.— AFP

Smith told the jury Kelly and his associates hatched the wedding plan because Aaliyah had said she was pregnant—and Kelly feared "jail." He believed marriage could stop her from testifying against him if criminal charges were ever filed over his relationship with the teenager. It was "to protect himself; to protect Aaliyah," Smith said.

He testified that he and Kelly left his tour and flew back to Chicago for the whirlwind 1994 marriage, which was later annulled. Smith said he had urged the star not to marry Aaliyah, then Kelly's protegee with whom he forged a "playful" and "flirtatious" relationship, according to the witness. I said "he couldn't marry her and she was too young," Smith said, adding that the singer's associates were encouraging the union as a solution. "He asked me whose side I was on."

Smith said he feared "I was getting ready to be pushed out the loop" of

Kelly's career, so "I wanted to make it happen." The witness grew exasperated several times during the questioning, which will continue Monday, telling the court he wished to leave and saying "I feel like I'm on trial." "I'm truly uncomfortable," he said. "We're continuously talking about Aaliyah. Her parents aren't here."

Aaliyah—whose debut album "Age Ain't Nothin' But A Number" Kelly produced—died in a plane crash in 2001, when she was 22. The first week of the long-anticipated trial that included searing testimony from one of his accusers has offered a glimpse into the sprawling web of physical, sexual and emotional abuse Kelly, now 54, is accused of steering for more than two decades. — AFP

## Scan here: Italian tattoos COVID vaccine pass on arm

**A** 22-year-old student in Italy has become an unexpected Internet sensation after tattooing the barcode of his COVID certificate on his arm. Andrea Colonna said he hadn't given much thought in advance before getting his latest tattoo, but decided on the topical-and practical-choice after talking with tattoo artist Gabriele Pellerone. "It's certainly something original, I like to be different," Colonna, from the southern city of Reggio Calabria, told Corriere della Calabria newspaper.

The underside of Colonna's left arm now bears a matrix of black squares from the QR code of his official Italian green pass. The pass gives proof of coronavirus status—that you are vaccinated, have recovered from the virus or tested negative in the last 48 hours. An extension of the EU's digital COVID certificate,

it has been required in Italy since August 6 to get into cinemas, museums and indoor sports venues or to eat indoors at restaurants. Colonna, who said he had received both doses of a coronavirus vaccine, said although he has received lots of attention on Instagram and TikTok, his parents were left a bit perplexed. "Certainly they encouraged me to be less impulsive and to better reflect on things..." he told the paper. But his new

barcode works, he said: A video posted on TikTok by Pellerone shows a masked Colonna entering McDonald's and lifting his arm to take a photo of his tattoo. A security guard at the entrance is seen scanning Colonna's photo before the video ends abruptly—leaving it unclear whether Colonna ultimately got his Big Mac or not. — AFP



## Facebook unveils virtual reality 'workrooms'

**F**acebook on Thursday unveiled technology for "workrooms," allowing remote collaboration for people using its Oculus virtual reality gear. The "Horizon Workrooms" project allows users to switch back and forth from virtual reality to web conferencing to adapt to different situations. "Workrooms is our flagship collaboration experience that lets people come together to work in the same virtual room, regardless of physical distance," the company said in an Oculus blog post.

"It works across both virtual reality and the web and is designed to improve your team's ability to collaborate." This enables participants to join a meeting as an avatar in virtual reality or by video calling. The announcement comes as the social media giant moves to blend its hardware, gaming and virtual reality units to build an immersive digital world known as the "metaverse," borrowing a term coined by sci-fi writer Neal Stephenson.

The project is seen as central to Facebook's future by chief executive Mark Zuckerberg, who is seeking to diversify the company beyond social networking and digital advertising.

It also comes with more people working remotely during the pandemic and companies seeking new ways to enable collaboration among scattered employees. The Oculus division has largely been used for gaming but is gaining traction in other areas as virtual reality is adapted for tourism, remote work and other applications. — AFP



This file photo illustration shows the Facebook logo on a smartphone in front of a computer screen in Los Angeles.—AFP

## Lifestyle | Features



In this picture a humanoid robot delivers drinks to customers at the Dawn Cafe in Tokyo.

— AFP photos



In this picture an employee (left) takes pictures of a humanoid robot with a customer (right) at the Dawn Cafe in Tokyo.



A customer takes pictures of a humanoid robot delivering drinks at the Dawn Cafe in Tokyo.



In this picture a humanoid robot delivers drinks to customers at the Dawn Cafe in Tokyo.



Miniature humanoid robots named OriHime at the Dawn Cafe in Tokyo.



A humanoid robot delivers drinks to customers at the Dawn Cafe in Tokyo.

## Tokyo robot cafe offers new spin on disability inclusion

At a Tokyo cafe, Michio Imai greets a customer, but not in person. He's hundreds of kilometers away, operating a robot waiter as part of an experiment in inclusive employment. Dawn cafe's robots are intended to be more than a gimmick, offering job opportunities to people who find it hard to work outside the home. "Hello. How are you?" a sleek white robot shaped like a baby penguin calls from a counter near the entrance, turning its face to customers and waving its flippers. Imai is behind the controls at his home in Hiroshima, 800 kilometers (500 miles) away, one of around 50 employees with physical and mental disabilities who work as Dawn's "pilots", operating robot staff.

The cafe opened in central Tokyo's Nihonbashi district in June and employs staff across Japan and overseas, as well as some who work on site. It was originally supposed to open last year to coincide with the Paralympics, but the opening was postponed by the pandemic—just like the Games, which begin on Tuesday. Around 20 miniature robots with almond-shaped eyes sit on tables and in other parts of the cafe, which has no stairs and smooth wooden floors large enough for wheelchairs. The machines named OriHime feature cameras, a microphone and a speaker to allow operators to communicate with customers remotely. "May I take your order?" one asks, next to a tablet showing a menu of burgers, curry and salad. As customers chat with the pilots operating the mini robots, three larger, humanoid versions move around to serve drinks or welcome customers at the entrance. And there's even a barista robot in a brown apron at the bar that can make coffee with a French press.

'A part of society'

But the robots are largely a medium

through which workers can communicate with customers. "I talk to our customers about many subjects, including the weather, my hometown and my health condition," said Imai, who has a somatic symptom disorder that makes leaving home difficult. "As long as I'm alive, I want to give something back to the community by working. I feel happy if I can be a part of society." Other operators have a range of different abilities, including some Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) patients who use eye movements on a special digital panel to send signals to the robots.

The project is the brainchild of Kentaro Yoshifuji, an entrepreneur who co-founded the company Ory Laboratory that makes the robots. After suffering a bout of bad health as a child that left him unable to go to school, he began thinking about ways to bring people into the workforce even if they can't leave home. "I'm thinking about how people can have job options when they want to work," said the 33-year-old. "This is a place where people can participate in society."

He established the cafe with support from major companies and crowd-funding, and says the experiment is about more than robots. "Customers here are not exactly coming to this location just to meet OriHime," he told AFP at the cafe. "There are people operating OriHime behind the scenes, and customers will come back to see them again."

### Work to do on inclusion

The cafe's launch comes with the Paralympics due to open on August 24 and disability advocates debating Japan's progress on inclusion and accessibility. Since Tokyo won the bid to host the Games in 2013 it has touted efforts to make public facilities more accessible. But support for inclusion remains limited, said Seiji Watanabe, head of a non-profit organization in central Japan's Aichi that supports employment for people with disabilities.

In March, the government revised regulations to edge up the minimum ratio of disabled workers at a company from 2.2 percent to 2.3 percent. "The level is too low," Watanabe told AFP. "And Japanese companies don't have a culture of hiring diverse human resources on their own initiative." At Dawn, Mamoru Fukaya said he and his 17-year-old son were enjoying the cafe on a lunchtime visit. "(The pilot) was very friendly," the 59-year-old said. "Since he said he can't work outside his home, it's great that there's this kind of chance."

Yoshifuji is focused on the cafe project now, but thinks robots could one day even make the Paralympics more inclusive. "There's a possibility that a kind of new Paralympics for those who are bedridden can be created," he said. "We could even create new sports. That might be interesting." — AFP



A humanoid robot delivers drinks to customers at the Dawn Cafe in Tokyo.

## ICSK Senior celebrates India's 75th Independence Day with a virtual art exhibition 'Srijan 2021' a creation by young minds



ICSK celebrated India's 75th Independence Day by conducting a virtual art festival 'Srijan 2021' on August 15, 2021. The budding young artists of ICSK got a chance to showcase their inlaid skills in art. The Chief Guest for the inaugural function was Jitheshji, renowned Super Speedy Cartoonist and Former Vice Chairman of Kerala Cartoon Academy. The program was graced by Chairman Shaik Abdul Rahiman, Vice Chairman, Vinukumar Nair, Secretary Azharuddin Amer Mohammed, Board of Trustees, Dr V Binumon, Principal and Senior Administrator ICSK Senior, principals, vice principals and deputy vice principals of all the branches of ICSK, academic supervisors, subject HODs, teachers, parents and students. The program began with the Islamic prayer by Lamiah Tariq Abdul Majid, followed by the Kuwait and Indian national anthems. Dr. Binumon warmly welcomed the

chief guest, board members and all present. He congratulated the students on their participation and enthusiasm for the exhibition and spoke about the idea behind conducting 'Srijan'. The Chief Guest Jitheshji conveyed his wishes on India's 75th Independence Day and appreciated the endearing and undaunted spirits of the participating students. Chairman Rahiman initiated the lighting of the lamp, symbolizing the official inauguration of 'Srijan'.

A compiled video presentation of the five best arts from category A, B and C were displayed.

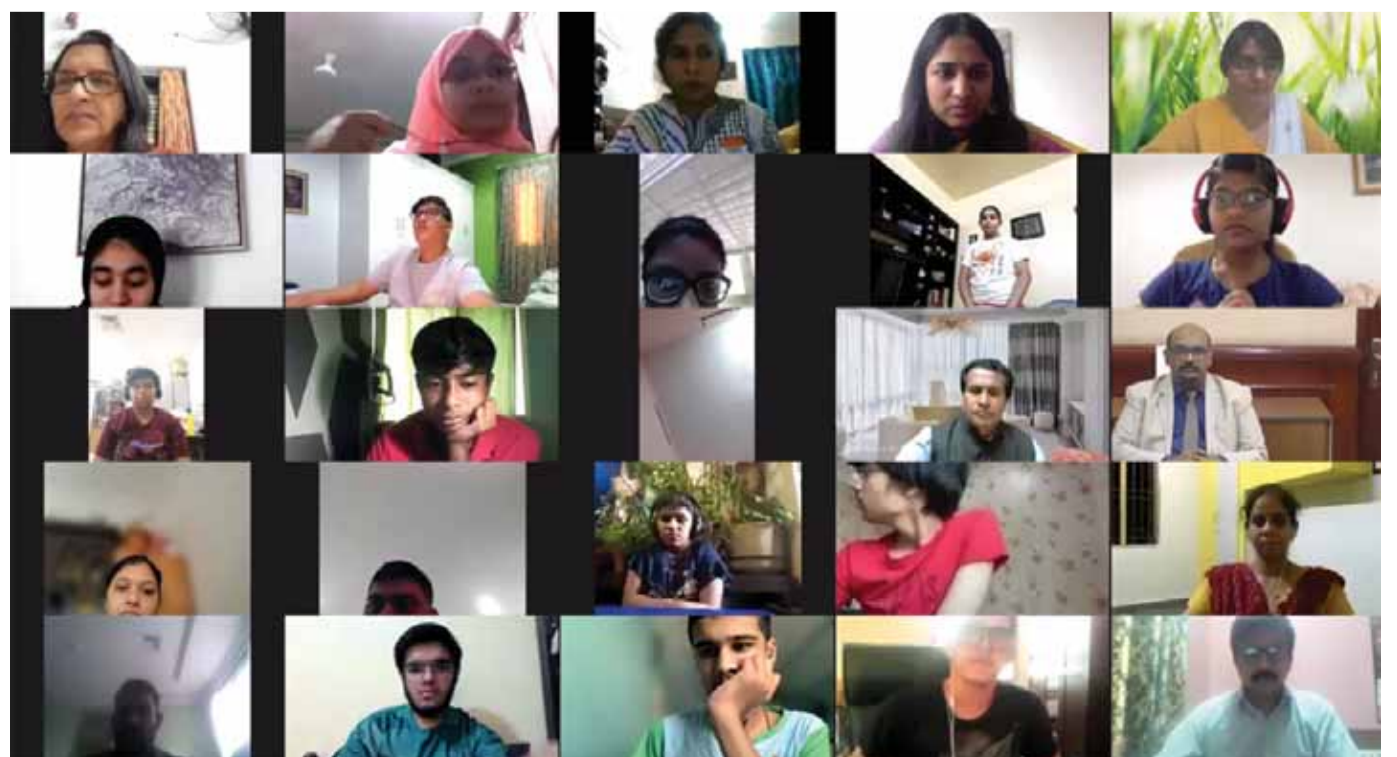
Abdul Rahiman, awarded virtual certificates of excellence to the winners of category 'A' and presented mementos of appreciation to the judges of all the three categories. Secretary Azharuddin Amer Mohammed, awarded virtual certificates of excellence to the winners of category 'B'. Dr Binumon awarded virtual certifi-



cates of excellence to the winners of category 'C'. Art teachers Suraj and Neetu created beautiful pieces of art depicting Mahatma Gandhi's Dandi March and Neeraj Chopra's gold medal win in the Tokyo 2021 Olympics and wood-based ceramic artwork of a woman sitting with a floral backdrop respectively. A soulful rendition of a patriotic song by Harini Mahadevan, a melodious musical treat 'Aye Watan' by Micah Prince, a graceful

dance performance by Miriam Alphonso George dedicated to the freedom fighters of our nation, a heart-touching instrumental performance by Hristun Fernandes on the keyboard, violin and xylophone enthralled the audience. Sakina Yusuf shared, small techniques and gave tips for budding digital artists.

Susan Rajesh, Vice Principal, ICSK Senior, delivered the vote of thanks. She welcomed all to the first virtual art exhibition conducted by a school in Kuwait. She spoke about its concept, its importance with relation to students and the judgment criteria, appreciating the students for the large number of entries received. The program closed with a display of entries by all the students ranging from pencil drawings, to shell art, caricatures, digital art and wall paintings.





In this photograph a dive guide shows tourists a mosaic from Terme del Lacus, the submerged ancient Roman city of Baiae at the Baiae Underwater Park, part of the Campi Flegrei Archaeological Park complex site in Pozzuoli near Naples.



A dive guide shows tourists a Roman brick wall of the thermal building of the Nymphaeum of punta Epitaffio.

— AFP photos



A dive guide shows tourists a mosaic from Terme del Lacus.



Dive guide shows tourists a copy of the original statues preserved at the Museum of Baiae, representing Dionysus with ivy crown in the Nymphaeum of punta Epitaffio.



Fish swim past a copy of the original statue preserved at the Museum of Baiae, representing Antonia Minor, mother of Emperor Claudius, in the Nymphaeum of punta Epitaffio.

# Diving among ancient ruins where Romans used to party

**F**ish dart across mosaic floors and into the ruined villas, where holidaying Romans once drank, plotted and flirted in the party town of Baiae, now an underwater archaeological park near Naples. Statues which

Augustus and Nero, had villas here, as did Julius Caesar and Mark Anthony. The poet Sextus Propertius described the town as a place of vice, which was "foe to virtuous creatures". It was where "old men behave like young boys, and lots of young boys act like young girls," according to the Roman scholar Varro. But by the 4th century, the porticos, marble columns, shrines and ornamental fish ponds had begun to sink due to bradyseism, the gradual rise and fall of land due to hydrothermal and seismic activity. The whole area, including the neighboring commercial capital of Pozzuoli and military seat at Miseno, were submerged. Their ruins now lie between four and six meters (15 to 20 feet) underwater.

### 'Something unique'

"It's difficult, especially for those coming for the first time, to imagine that you can find things you would never be able to see anywhere else in the world in just a few meters of water," said Marcello Bertolaso, head of the Campi Flegrei diving center, which takes tourists around the site. "Divers love to see very special things, but what you can see in the park of Baiae is something unique." The 177-hectare (437-acre) underwater site has been a protected marine area since 2002, following decades in which antiques were found in fishermen's nets and looters had free rein. Divers must be accompanied by a registered guide.



A careful sweep of sand near a low wall uncovers a stunning mosaic floor from a villa which belonged to Gaius Calpurnius Pisoni, known to have spent his days here conspiring against Emperor Nero. Explorers follow the ancient stones of the coastal road past ruins of spas and shops, the sunlight on a clear day piercing the waves to light up statues. These are replicas; the originals are now in a museum. "When we research new areas, we gently remove the sand where we know there could be a floor, we document it, and then we re-cover

it," archaeologist Enrico Gallochio told AFP. "If we don't, the marine fauna or flora will attack the ruins. The sand protects them," said Gallochio, who is in charge of the Baiae park. "The big ruins were easily discovered by moving a bit of sand, but there are areas where the banks of sand could be meters deep. There are undoubtedly still ancient relics to be found," he said. — AFP

A dive guide shows tourists a mosaic from Villa a Protiro.



A mosaic from Terme del Lacus, the submerged ancient Roman city of Baiae at the Baiae Underwater Park, part of the Campi Flegrei Archaeological Park complex site in Pozzuoli near Naples.

once decorated luxury abodes in this beachside resort are now playgrounds for crabs off the coast of Italy, where divers can explore ruins of palaces and domed bathhouses built for emperors. Rome's nobility were first attracted in the 2nd century BC to the hot springs at Baiae, which sits on the coast within the Campi Flegrei—a supervolcano known in English as the Phlegraean Fields.

Seven emperors, including



A dive guide shows tourists a map of the Nymphaeum of punta Epitaffio, the submerged ancient Roman city of Baiae.



The detail of the mosaic from Villa a Protiro is seen in the submerged ancient Roman city of Baiae at the Baiae Underwater Park.



A dive guide shows tourists a copy of the original statue preserved at the Museum of Baiae, representing Dionysus with ivy crown in the Nymphaeum of punta Epitaffio.



A dive guide shows tourists a Roman marble whit a metal of the thermal building of the Nymphaeum of punta Epitaffio.

## Sports

# Top seeds Medvedev, Barty secure triumphs at Cincinnati

## Medvedev looks to extend winning streak vs Rublev in semis

**CINCINNATI:** Daniil Medvedev took quick revenge on Friday for his Olympic loss to Pablo Carreno Busta, with the top seed at the ATP and WTA Cincinnati Masters delivering a crushing 6-1, 6-1 verdict. The Russian world number two had it all his way into the semi-finals with a 56-minute rout, which ended on the Spaniard's double-fault.

"I was feeling great during the match. In these conditions you try to win the match as fast as possible, especially against Carreno Busta, who can catch fire at any moment and start getting you into long rallies," Medvedev said. "I tried to keep pushing him and I am really happy I managed to do it."

Women's top seed Ashleigh Barty recovered from being down a break in the second set to sweep past fellow French Open champion Barbora Krejčíková 6-2, 6-4. The Australian handed her Czech opponent only a third loss since mid-May.

Krejčíková won Roland Garros in June while Barty claimed the Paris title in 2019 and Wimbledon this season. "I feel like I did a good job looking after my own serves," Barty said. "For all but one service game, I felt like a lot of the time I was in control. It was just staying patient, knowing that I was doing the right things."

Medvedev, last week's Toronto champion, won his

eighth match in a row as he prepares for a final four contest against compatriot Andrey Rublev. Fourth seed Rublev defeated France's Benoit Paire 6-3, 4-6, 6-3 with the Russian advancing to his fourth Masters 1000 quarter-final in six tournaments this season.

Sefanos Tsitsipas, the second seed, had to lift after Felix Auger-Aliassime saved two match points late in the second set. But the Greek did just that to post a 6-2, 5-7, 6-1 win for his ninth semi-final of the season. "Things got tough in the second set and I had to find different solutions. I stepped in with aggression in the third," he said. "It took a lot of patience to find my opportunities in the third set. But I was determined and I didn't let go."

Norway's Casper Ruud, a wizard on clay this summer with three titles in three weeks, was taken

apart by Olympic gold medalist Alexander Zverev 6-1, 6-3 as the top four men's seeds took their places in the semis. Medvedev has won all four tour matches against Rublev, including the quarters here in 2019 when Medvedev went on to win the title. "I'm happy to play against him, because it's a nice challenge for me to see what I need to improve," Rublev said.

The fairytale story for wild card Jil Teichmann continued with a 6-3, 6-2 defeat of Tokyo Olympic champion Belinda Bencic, a fellow Swiss. "Everything



**MASON:** Pablo Carreno Busta of Spain congratulates Daniil Medvedev of Russia during the Western & Southern Open at Lindner Family Tennis Center on Friday in Mason, Ohio. —AFP

went right, I felt good from the beginning," Teichmann said. "I served well, defended well, it all worked out." The Swiss will play for the final against

Karolina Pliskova, who put out Paula Badosa when the Spaniard retired trailing 7-5, 2-0 with a right shoulder injury. —AFP



### Olympic gold medalist Zverev advances

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## Nadal to miss US Open with season ending foot injury

**PARIS:** Rafael Nadal will miss the US Open after announcing on Friday that he is ending his season because of an injury to his left foot that has troubled him since his defeat in the semi-finals at the French Open in June.

"Hello everyone, I wanted to inform you that unfortunately I have to end the 2021 season," the Spaniard wrote on Twitter. "Honestly, I've been suffering a lot more than I should with my foot for a year and I need to take some time to resolve this problem or at least improve the situation (if I want to be able to play) the next few years."

Following his defeat to Novak Djokovic at Roland Garros, Nadal skipped Wimbledon and the Olympics before making a return to the courts in Washington earlier this month. He beat Jack Sock but then slipped to a three-set defeat at the hands of South Africa's Lloyd Harris, after which the 35-year-old declared that "the foot was better".

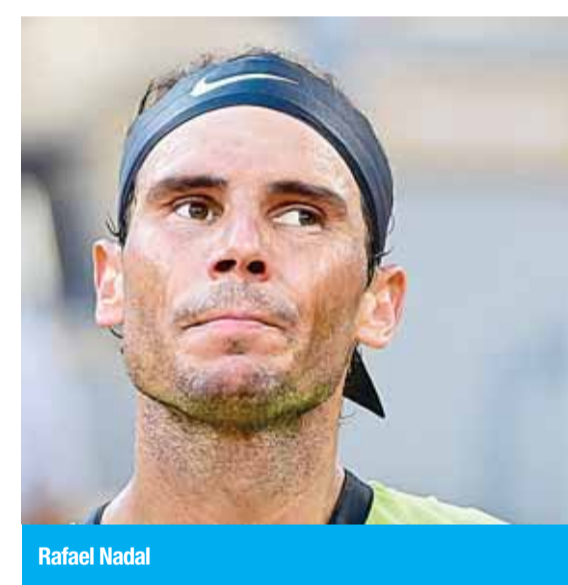
However, that proved to be premature as he then pulled out of the Toronto Masters saying it

was "not a happy situation" and is missing from the current tournament in Cincinnati, the traditional curtain-raiser for the US Open which starts on August 30. Nadal said that he wanted to give his foot time to heal so that he could come back fully competitive in 2022.

"It is with the greatest enthusiasm that I will do everything I can to find the best possible form and return to competition with the objectives that are most important to me," said Nadal. "I am convinced that I can achieve this if my foot heals and, of course, with great daily effort. I will work as much as I can to make it so. I promise to work hard to try and continue to benefit from this sport for a while longer."

The world number four, who has 20 major titles to his name including four in New York, is just the latest big name to miss out on the US Open. Last week, another former champion Roger Federer also pulled out of Flushing Meadows. The 40-year-old, who has five US Open titles to his name, said he needed further knee surgery and admitted he "will be out for many months".

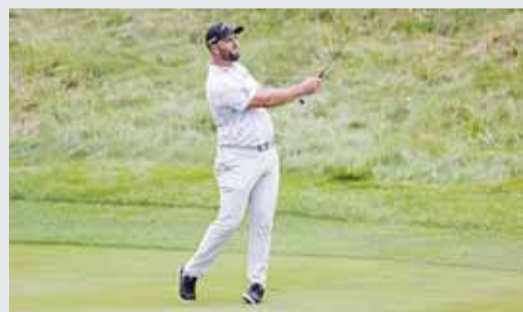
Defending champion Dominic Thiem also announced his withdrawal this week after failing to recover from a wrist injury. World number one Djokovic is expected to be present in spite of not having played since losing the bronze medal match at the Olympics in Tokyo. The Serb has won all three majors this



Rafael Nadal

season and is eager to make a clean sweep in New York.

A three-time champion at the US Open, Djokovic is bidding to become only the third man — and first since 1969 — to complete a calendar Grand Slam. Victory would also give him a record 20th major, breaking the tie of 20 he currently has with Nadal and Federer. This year's US Open will be the second in a row that both Nadal and Federer have missed. —AFP



**JERSEY CITY:** Jon Rahm of Spain plays his third shot on the 15th hole during the second round of The Northern Trust, the first event of the FedExCup Playoffs, at Liberty National Golf Club on Friday in Jersey City, New Jersey. —AFP

## Rahm grabs one-stroke lead at PGA Northern Trust

**NEW YORK:** Top-ranked Jon Rahm, the reigning US Open champion, fired a bogey-free four-under par 67 to grab a one-stroke lead after Friday's second round of the US PGA Northern Trust tournament. The 26-year-old Spaniard stood on 12-under par 130 without a bogey through 36 holes at Liberty National in suburban New York at the first FedEx Cup playoff event.

It's the first time in 110 starts in Rahm's US PGA career that he has started 36 holes without a bogey. "It's nice to be bogey-free, but it's not like it's goal number one. Might be actually first time I go 36 holes bogey-free," Rahm said. "The goal is to win a tournament and put yourself in the best position. If I had to choose, I would rather be leading than bogey-free."

American Tony Finau was second on 131 after a 64 Friday with fifth-ranked Justin Thomas, Olympic champion Xander Schauffele and fellow American Keith Mitchell sharing third on 132. Schauffele and three-time major winner Jordan Spieth each had six birdies, two eagles and a bogey to shoot 62s. Spieth, who shared 10th with Brooks Koepka on 134, holed an 81-yard shot from the fairway at the par-4 fifth. "Just chipped the ball unbelievably well," Spieth said. "It led to at least some short par putts and then took advantage when they were for birdie."

Rahm, who captured his first major title in June at Torrey Pines, said he was most pleased about keeping his composure, notably in the wake of poor wedge shots on approaches at the third and 16th holes.

"I'm leaving myself a really tough up-and-down and I was able to make good putts for par," Rahm said. "Just accepting that I can miss shots. You get a little too greedy, miss the green, and you can have a tough up-and-down, and I've been able to save those so far. Coming into the weekend, I'm definitely going to have to clean a couple of those mistakes up." Rahm began off the 10th tee and dropped his approach to seven feet at the par-5 13th before sinking a birdie putt, then added a clutch 24-foot putt to save par at the par-4 16th. After making a 10-foot par putt at the third, Rahm birdied three of the next four holes, his longest putt from just outside five feet at the par-3 fourth.

### Rahm says playoff unfair

The event is the first of three FedEx Cup playoff tournaments to crown a season points champion, with fields reduced to 70 next week and 30 for the Tour Championship at Atlanta in two weeks. "It's important," Rahm said of the Cup. "It's a trophy that a very select group of people are going to be able to put their name in. It's one of those like in majors and great events like The Players to where we're called upon and you have to show up and play good." Rahm said he doesn't like a system where you could win two playoff events but have a poor final week and finish well back. "I don't think it's fair," Rahm said. "Win the first two and if you don't play good on the last one, you can end up with a really bad finish. I don't like it." When told it was like the Super Bowl, Rahm said the team that lost the NFL title game "still finished second," and added, "They have to understand golf is a little different." —AFP

## First-ever Turkmen Olympic medalist gifted car, apartment, cash

**ASHGABAT:** Turkmenistan's first-ever Olympic medalist, weightlifter Polina Guryeva, was gifted an apartment, a car and \$50,000 in cash for her exploits at a ceremony in the Central Asian country's capital Ashgabat on Saturday.

Guryeva, 21, won silver for Turkmenistan at this summer's Games in Tokyo in the women's 59 kg weightlifting competition. It was the ex-Soviet country's only medal at the Games and the first in its history. Turkmen shooter Marat Niyazov previously won a silver medal representing the Soviet Union at the 1960 Games in Rome.

The celebrations of Guryeva's victory were led by Honored Coach of Turkmenistan, Serdar Berdymukhamedov, the 39-year-old son of the country's hardline leader Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov.

At the ceremony in Ashgabat, the younger Berdymukhamedov handed Guryeva, who is ethnic Russian, three white-lacquered wooden boxes. One contained keys to a three-room apartment in the capital city, the second held keys to a white Lexus SUV and the third \$50,000 in cash.

"I cordially congratulate you on this significant event, testifying to the growth of the authority of independent Turkmenistan in the international sporting space," Berdymukhamedov told Guryeva. He said her victory "increased the world fame, prestige and authority of the sovereign homeland and the Turkmen people."

## Tee shot to T-shirt: Matsuyama hits ball into fan's clothing

**NEW YORK:** Reigning Masters champion Hideki Matsuyama hit an errant tee shot inside a spectator's shirt in Friday's second round of the US PGA Northern Trust tournament in suburban New York. The 29-year-old Japanese star, who won the first major title by any



**ASHGABAT:** Turkmenistan's first-ever Olympic medalist, weightlifter Polina Guryeva (right) receives presents during a ceremony in the capital Ashgabat yesterday. —AFP

"I dedicate this medal to our president and the Turkmen people in honour of the 30th anniversary of the independence of Turkmenistan," Guryeva said. Turkmenistan, a gas-rich nation of around six million people famous for its outlandish displays, gained independence from former master Moscow in 1991.

The secretive country is regularly cited by

rights groups as one of the world's worst abusers of civic, religious and press freedoms. The younger Berdymukhamedov has received a number of promotions this year making him the second most powerful figure in the country after his father and fuelling speculation he will eventually replace the elder as leader of the autocratic country. —AFP

man from his homeland last April at Augusta National, struck the astonishing shot at the 506-yard 10th hole at Liberty National in Jersey City, New Jersey.

Matsuyama watched his ball hook well right off target. The ball struck a paved cart path, took a high bounce and then nestled its way inside the shirt of a male fan walking on the path. The man stopped, not wanting to jostle the ball from where it landed. It wasn't like it was in a pocket. The ball was between the fabric and his body. "Went between my legs, hit my knee and somehow rolled up into my shirt," the fan said as television cameras captured the unusual moment. Matsuyama smiled as he walked up and

studied the situation, pulling out a tee and putting it by the man's right shoe to mark the spot. Only then feeling comfortable to move, the fan shifted and the ball fell from its position trapped inside the shirt and rolled into the grass. Matsuyama signed the ball for the fan but went on to make bogey on the hole, snapping a run of five birdies in a row to finish the front nine. Matsuyama followed on the back nine with three birdies, another bogey and a closing double bogey — sending a bunker shot out of bounds to the right — to fire a three-under par 68 for the round and stand on five-under 137 after 36 holes. —AFP

## Sports

# Mbappe on target as PSG win without Messi and Neymar

## We need to build a team, that is the challenge: Pochettino

PARIS: Kylian Mbappe and Angel di Maria were both among the scorers as a Paris Saint-Germain side missing both Lionel Messi and Neymar won 4-2 away at Brest on Friday to make it three wins out of three this season in Ligue 1.

Ander Herrera and Idrissa Gana Gueye also found the net as PSG moved ominously on to nine points from a possible nine and clear at the top of the fledgling French table with a second consecutive 4-2 victory. The full house of 15,000 in Brittany were denied the chance to see Messi make his PSG debut after the Argentine was left out of the squad as he continues to build up his fitness.

Neymar, who like Messi returned to training late after going all the way to the final of the Copa America last month, was also left out but PSG once again showed that they have little trouble finding the net and winning without the two superstars.

However, once again their defending left a lot to be desired and will have given coach Mauricio Pochettino food for thought with a number of players still waiting on the sidelines. "I prefer to win, but if I could choose a result I would prefer to win without conceding a goal," Pochettino said. "We have lots of star names but we need to build a team, that is the challenge. It won't be easy because we need to find a balance among all the talented players we have. It will take time."

### Donnarumma on the bench

Italy's Euro 2020 goalkeeping hero Gianluigi Donnarumma appeared in the squad for the first time since arriving from AC Milan but was left on the bench as Keylor Navas started in goal.

Donnarumma's fellow European champion, Marco Verratti, did play for the first time this season in midfield but skipper Marquinhos was still missing.

Mbappe has dominated headlines in Paris as speculation surrounds the future of the World Cup winner, who is out of contract at the end of the campaign and is wanted by Real Madrid. However he set up a total of four goals in the opening league wins against Troyes and Strasbourg, and once again Mbappe played a central role in the rudimentary surroundings of the Stade Francis-Le Ble.



### Fans denied chance to see Messi's debut

PSG went ahead midway through the first half when Mbappe's clipped cross was cleared out to the edge of the area where Herrera met the ball on the volley and the Spaniard's shot found the bottom corner. Mbappe made it 2-0 in the 36th minute, arriving to head in his first goal of the season after Georginio Wijnaldum's shot had been blocked.

Brest got one back just before the break when Franck Honorat finished first-time after a fine backheel lay-off by Romain Faivre. Nevertheless Gueye



BREST: Paris Saint-Germain's French forward Kylian Mbappe celebrates after scoring a goal during the French L1 football match between Stade Brestois and Paris Saint-Germain at Francis-Le Ble Stadium in Brest on Friday. — AFP

appeared to put the game to bed when he made it 3-1 in the 73rd minute with a piledriver from 35 meters which Brest's Dutch international goalkeeper Marco Bizot could only help on its way.

Yet Brest pulled another one back five minutes from time through Steve Mouinie and PSG were actually in danger of conceding an equalizer until

the 90th minute when Di Maria broke downfield and played a one-two with Achraf Hakimi before scoring with a delightful lob. Di Maria had come on for Mbappe late on for his first appearance of the campaign and his goal was reminiscent of his winner for Argentina in the Copa America final against Brazil last month. — AFP

## Marsch wins battle of US bosses as Leipzig thrash Stuttgart

BERLIN: Jesse Marsch celebrated his first Bundesliga win in charge of RB Leipzig in a battle of the US coaches on Friday, as his side cruised to a 4-0 victory over Pellegrino Matarazzo's VfB Stuttgart. Victory was a welcome boost for new Leipzig boss Marsch, in the first ever clash between two American coaches in the Bundesliga.

Hungarian midfielder Dominik Szoboszlai scored brilliant long-range goals either side of half-time as Leipzig bounced back from a disappointing opening day loss to Mainz last week. "It was a great reaction after last weekend. We said we needed to show our passion today, and we were sharp from the very beginning," said Marsch.

"It was a great performance from us, but we have to keep playing bravely," he added. Marsch's side put on a furious attacking display in the

first half, chalking up 12 shots on goal before they finally broke Stuttgart's defenses on 38 minutes.

The goal was worth waiting for, as Szoboszlai smashed the ball into the bottom corner from outside the area to open his Bundesliga account. Emil Forsberg doubled the lead straight from the kick-off in the second half, flicking the ball past the goalkeeper after a brilliant backheel assist from Andre Silva.

Szoboszlai made it 3-0 almost by accident a few minutes later. His fizzing free-kick was intended as a cross, but sailed into the bottom corner without anyone else getting a touch. "You don't get much better than that in front of the fans on your home debut," said the Hungarian.

Silva then also scored his first goal for Leipzig on his home bow, coolly converted from the penalty spot after



LEIPZIG: Leipzig's US head coach Jesse Marsch reacts next to Leipzig's mascot Bulli after the German first division Bundesliga football match between RB Leipzig and VfB Stuttgart in Leipzig on Friday. — AFP

a hotly disputed handball decision. "The penalty decision did not change the game. Leipzig were just a class above today," said Matarazzo. "We

didn't really play a team of this quality in pre-season, and talking about something is different to actually experiencing it." — AFP

## Knicks-Raptors game among NBA 75th anniversary tributes

NEW YORK: Games paying tribute to key moments in NBA history were among those announced Friday as the league revealed its 2021-2022 season schedule, which will begin on October 19. The Toronto Raptors will visit the New York Knicks on November 1 to mark the 75th anniversary of the league's first regular-season contest, which was played between the Knicks and Toronto Huskies on November 1, 1946.

The teams who have been part of every NBA campaign — the Knicks, Boston Celtics and Golden State Warriors who began in Philadelphia — will play one another across three games in a five-day December stretch. The Warriors will visit New York on December 14 and Boston three nights later while the Knicks will visit the Celtics on December 18.

On January 7, 2022, the Atlanta Hawks will visit the Los Angeles Lakers in a game played 50 years to the day after the Lakers beat Atlanta for their

33rd consecutive victory, which remains the longest winning streak in NBA history. Each NBA club will play 82 games in a season starting October 19 and ending April 10, 2022.

The league earlier announced its opening night schedule, with Brooklyn at reigning champion Milwaukee and Golden State at the Lakers. Also revealed earlier was a Christmas Day lineup featuring Atlanta at New York, Boston at Milwaukee, Golden State at Phoenix, Brooklyn at the Lakers and Dallas at Utah.

This year's two top selections in the NBA Draft, number one Cade Cunningham of Detroit and number two Jalen Green of Houston, are set to face each other in the regular season for the first time when the Pistons visit Houston on November 10.

On January 17, the NBA's Martin Luther King Jr Day celebration will include Chicago at Memphis in the Grizzlies' 20th annual game on the US holiday and Milwaukee at Atlanta in a rematch of this year's Eastern Conference finals plus Utah at the Los Angeles Lakers.

Six-time NBA All-Star Kyle Lowry of Miami, who spent the past nine seasons with Toronto and helped the Raptors to the 2019 NBA crown, will lead the Heat into Toronto for the first time since leaving for Miami on February 3.



LAS VEGAS: Cade Cunningham #2 of the Detroit Pistons poses for a portrait during 2021 NBA Rookie Photo Shoot on August 15, 2021 at UNLV Campus in Las Vegas, Nevada. — AFP

The first matchup between this year's NBA Finals rivals will be played on February 10 when the Bucks visit the Phoenix Suns, with Milwaukee playing host to the Suns in the rematch on March 6. The opening game of next year's NBA Finals is set for June 2. — AFP

## Antetokounmpo joins ownership of MLB Brewers

WASHINGTON: Greek NBA star Giannis Antetokounmpo sparked the Milwaukee Bucks to their first title in 50 years and on Friday became a part owner of Major League Baseball's Milwaukee Brewers. Merging the worlds of the slam dunk and home run, Antetokounmpo donned a Brewers jersey in a ceremony at the baseball club's home ballpark.

"The city of Milwaukee means so much to me," Antetokounmpo said. "I'm honored to be joining the Brewers ownership group to further my commitment and dedication to this great community. I take great pride in my city and I'm excited about what we can build together."

The Brewers, 74-48, lead the National League Central division by 8 1/2 games over Cincinnati as they chase a fourth consecutive playoff

berth. Brewers chairman and principal owner Mark Attanasio introduced Antetokounmpo, the first new individual investor in the Brewers ownership group since Attanasio took control of the team in 2005. "We're honored to have Giannis join our team of Milwaukee Brewers investors," Attanasio said. "Giannis is a great athlete, a world champion, and a true local hero with international renown."

Antetokounmpo signed a five-year contract extension with the Bucks worth \$228 million last December. Just last month, the Greek standout and two-time NBA Most Valuable Player took the Bucks back to the top of the NBA with a victory over the Phoenix Suns in the NBA Finals.

The Brewers, formed in 1969, have had even less success than the Bucks'



LAS VEGAS: Giannis Antetokounmpo of the Milwaukee Bucks gives a thumbs-up as he leaves a game between the Bucks and the Minnesota Timberwolves during the 2021 NBA Summer League at the Thomas & Mack Center on August 13, 2021 in Las Vegas, Nevada. — AFP

half-century of futility since their only other crown. The Brewers lost their only appearance in MLB's

World Series championship final in 1982, falling to the St Louis Cardinals in the maximum seven games. — AFP

## Film stars bring glamour to Welsh football outpost

PARIS: Wrexham brought a rare sprinkling of stardust to the fifth tier of English football when they belatedly kicked off their National League campaign at Solihull Moors yesterday. The club from the market town and former mining hub in northeast Wales only missed the promotion play-offs for a place in the Football League by one point last season, but that is not the reason for the upsurge in optimism.

Wrexham has surprising new owners and while most fans in Britain dread Americans taking over their clubs, so far at Wrexham the signs are good. One of them is also very big. Last weekend, huge white letters imitating the famous Hollywood sign but spelling out 'W.R.E.X.H.A.M.' appeared above the town, although, instead of the sun-kissed hills above Tinseltown, the sign rests on the slagheap of a disused coalmine. It emerged on Friday that the sign had been paid for by the sponsors of the National League.

In February, Ryan Reynolds and Rob McElhenney, two Hollywood movers and shakers, bought the club, saying they wanted to turn it into a "global force". Canadian Reynolds is a Hollywood A lister, the star of "Deadpool" and the former husband of Scarlett Johansson. McElhenney has a less glitzy filmography but has produced long-running US TV hit "It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia". Now the pair face the more difficult task of making Wrexham sunny.

The club has a proud history but has never come close to being a 'global force'. Until this year its most famous name was Joey Jones, who became the first Welshman to win the European Cup when he was with Liverpool but had three spells and 270 games at Wrexham.

Wrexham played in the Football League from 1921 to 2009, reaching the second division for four seasons in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Before they were exiled from the Welsh Cup because they opted to remain in the English leagues, Wrexham appeared eight times in the old Cup Winners Cup, losing 2-1 on aggregate to Anderlecht in the quarter-finals in 1976.

They have been stuck among English football's barely-noticed since 2009. Yet star power is drawing in fans. The club halted season-ticket sales at 5,500 at the 10,500-capacity Racecourse Ground. In 2019-20, Wrexham drew an average of 4,057. Promoting his latest blockbuster, "Free Guy", Reynolds found himself in the unusual position, for a Hollywood actor, of discussing Wrexham.

"Well, first off, super excited," he told a press conference this month. "I mean, we've made no secret of that, it's the role of a lifetime for both me and for Rob McElhenney." He also made clear he was aware of British fans' suspicion of Americans. "I wouldn't dare call it soccer," he said. "I care about my well-being enough to not call it soccer."

Reynolds is not the only Hollywood star getting into soccer. Eva Longoria owns stakes in Nexaca in Mexico and, like Natalie Portman, in Angel City FC, a Los Angeles women's team. Will Ferrell, Matthew McConaughey and Drew Carey own stakes in Major League soccer franchises.

In the 1950s and 1960s baseball was fashionable. Bing Crosby invested in the Pittsburgh Pirates, Bob Hope in the, now renamed, Cleveland Indians, Danny Kaye in the Seattle Mariners. Bill Murray has a stake in the minor-league St Paul Saints. — AFP

## Grealish bags first City goal as champs cruise

Liverpool beat Burnley; Leeds hold Everton to 2-2 draw



MANCHESTER: Manchester City's English midfielder Jack Grealish celebrates after scoring their second goal during the English Premier League football match between Manchester City and Norwich City at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester, north west England, yesterday. — AFP

**LONDON:** Jack Grealish scored his first goal for Manchester City as the Premier League champions thrashed Norwich 5-0, while title rivals Liverpool extended their perfect start with a 2-0 victory against Burnley yesterday.

Grealish marked his home debut following his British record £100 million (\$136 million) move from Aston Villa with a close-range effort to double City's lead in the first half. Tim Krul's own goal had given City the lead at the Etihad Stadium.

Aymeric Laporte, Raheem Sterling and Riyad Mahrez netted in the second half to ensure City bounced back from last weekend's defeat at Tottenham. City had been beaten in both of Grealish's previous appearances, losing the Community Shield against Leicester and then slumping in their Premier League opener.

But Grealish's first goal since January helped show Pep Guardiola's side they can cope without Harry Kane if their prolonged pursuit of the Tottenham striker ends in failure. With the injured Kevin De Bruyne absent for City, Gabriel Jesus, Bernardo Silva and Laporte all started amid reports they are looking to leave after growing unhappy with their reduced roles last season.

Jesus took the chance to remind Guardiola of his qualities with a virtuoso display. It was the Brazilian forward's volleyed cross in the seventh minute that brought City's opener. Grant Hanley attempted to clear but instead hit Norwich goalkeeper Krul as the ball looped into the net.

Grealish got off the mark in slightly fortuitous fashion in the 22nd minute. Jesus's cross reached Grealish at the far post and bounced in off the England midfielder. Laporte scored in the 64th minute with a close-range finish after Norwich failed to clear a corner. Jesus provided his third assist of the afternoon as Sterling tapped in after 71 minutes before Mahrez grabbed City's fifth with a simple finish in the 84th minute.

At Anfield, Liverpool earned a second successive wins thanks to goals from Diogo Jota and Sadio Mane, but Reds boss Jurgen Klopp was angry with Burnley's aggressive tackling. Jota scored Liverpool's first goal in the 3-0 win at Norwich last

weekend and the Portugal forward gave Klopp's men the lead again with an 18th minute header from Kostas Tsimikas' cross.

### 'Too dangerous'

Senegal winger Mane opened his account for the season in the 69th minute. Teenage midfielder Harvey Elliott, making his first Premier League start, picked out Trent Alexander-Arnold and the defender's deft pass to Mane was slammed past Nick Pope from 12 yards. However, Klopp was frustrated that Sean Dyche's side, renowned for their physical approach, were able to get away with some thunderous challenges due to lenient refereeing.

"You saw these challenges of (Ashley) Barnes and (Chris) Wood on Virgil (Van Dijk) and Joel (Matip)," Klopp said. "I am not 100 percent sure if we are going in the right direction with these decisions, if we go 10 years back. It is too dangerous. It is just hard. The rules are how they are but you cannot defend

these situations." Raphinha's rocket rescued Leeds in their 2-2 draw against Everton at Elland Road. Dominic Calvert-Lewin put Everton ahead in the 30th minute, converting a penalty after Liam Cooper's challenge on the England striker.

Mateusz Klich hauled Leeds level four minutes before half-time with a composed finish from just inside the area. Demarai Gray restored Everton's lead in the 50th minute as the winger drilled home for his first goal since signing from Bayer Leverkusen in the close-season.

But Leeds equalized through a blistering strike from Brazilian winger Raphinha in the 72nd minute. Danny Ings scored a spectacular bicycle kick as Aston Villa beat Newcastle 2-0 to claim their first win of the season.

Former Southampton striker Ings' moment of magic came in first-half stoppage-time, making it two goals in as many appearances for his new club. Anwar El Ghazi got Villa's second from the penalty spot after Jamal Lascelles handled in the 62nd minute. Patrick Vieira is still waiting for his first win as Crystal Palace manager after a 0-0 draw against Brentford in the first meeting between the London clubs for 44 years. — AFP



### Laporte, Sterling, Mahrez score for City

## Arsenal's spending ups pressure on Arteta to deliver

**LONDON:** Facing up to a first season in 25 years without European football, Arsenal were expected to feel the economic crunch caused by the coronavirus pandemic but have spent more money on new players than any other Premier League club in the transfer window to date.

The arrival of Norwegian midfielder Martin Odegaard from Real Madrid and imminent signing of Aaron Ramsdale as competition for the role as number one goalkeeper has taken the Gunners outlay to a reported £130 million (\$178 million).

In both Arteta's first two seasons in charge, Arsenal have finished eighth in the Premier League, their worst performances since 1995. A club that between 1998 and 2016 enjoyed 19 consecutive campaigns in the Champions League under Arsene Wenger has now been deprived of the prestige and riches of Europe's top club competition for five years.

Their start to the new season has done little to offer hope that run will be ended come May as they opened the Premier League campaign with a 2-0 defeat to newly-promoted Brentford. Arteta bemoaned the fact that match was not postponed on Friday after four positive coronavirus cases robbed him of strikers Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang and Alexandre Lacazette.

But the Spaniard needs a quick response ahead of today's visit of European champions Chelsea and a trip to Manchester City next weekend if his side are to avoid going into the September international break without a point. "I love challenges and we have a challenge," said Arteta. "Let's just embrace it and do the



Mikel Arteta

best that we can every single day to try to create the best possible atmosphere around this place."

### Kroenke follows Glazer's lead

The atmosphere inside the Emirates for a first full house in 17 months today will reveal a lot about whether a summer spending spree has eased the angst among fans. Arsenal supporters protested furiously against the club's American billionaire owner Stan Kroenke towards the end of last season after his involvement in the failed European Super League project.

Like Manchester United's US-based owners, the Glazer family, Kroenke has loosened the purse strings in the transfer window after complaints over his investment in the club. As United fans returned en masse to Old Trafford for a 5-1 win over Leeds last weekend there was barely any trace of the protests that saw a behind closed doors match against Liverpool in May postponed as angry fans stormed the pitch.

However, while United's signings of French World Cup winner Raphael Varane and England international winger Jadon Sancho could make them title contenders, the response to Arsenal's arrivals has not been so positive. — AFP

## Ronaldo is staying at Juve, says Allegri

**ROME:** Cristiano Ronaldo will remain at Juventus, coach Massimiliano Allegri insisted yesterday, saying he had received assurances from the Portugal star dispelling rumors of a possible return to Real Madrid.

"Let's clarify this issue, Ronaldo told me that he's staying," Allegri said in response to numerous questions on Ronaldo's form and mindset ahead of today's Serie A opener at Udinese. "He has always trained well and has always been available. I've read rumors in the papers, but he's never wanted to leave Juventus."

Italy's top scorer last season with 29 goals was absent for Juve's final warm-up against the club's youngsters on Thursday, but Allegri said he was ready to play in what will be his fourth and final season of his contract. Allegri's comments follow the 36-year-old's own rejection of reports he was angling for a return to Madrid under Carlo Ancelotti, calling such talk "disrespectful".

In an Instagram post this week Ronaldo said his "story at Real Madrid has been written", although he did not explicitly say that he was not looking for a way out of Juve. "There have been frequent news and stories associating me with a number of clubs in many different Leagues, with nobody ever being concerned about trying to find out the actual truth," Ronaldo added.

Since moving to Juve in 2018, Ronaldo has won two Serie A titles and one Italian Cup, but has not brought the European glory the Italian club craves. Allegri has returned to manage the club after a two year absence following the failure of Pirlo's regime which saw Juve let go of the league title for the first

time since 2012.

"Like every year, we are out to win every competition," said Allegri, who won five Scudettos with Juve from 2015 to 2019. "We'll take things one step at a time and try to win our first match at Udine. It's going to be a finely fought season and you can't have peaks at 100 and then 30, better to have a cruising speed of 80 to 90."



Cristiano Ronaldo

### Florenzi to Milan

Elsewhere, Alessandro Florenzi has completed his move to AC Milan on a season-long loan from Roma, the seven-time European champions announced yesterday. In a statement, Milan said that the 30-year-old "was joining the rossonero club until June 30, 2022".

Italian media put the cost of the loan deal at one million euros, with an option to make the move permanent after one year estimated at 4.5 million euros. Florenzi was part of the Italy squad which won Euro 2020 and has played 45 times for the Azzurri. He is embarking on his third straight loan after spending last term at Paris Saint-Germain and half of the previous campaign at Valencia.

Milan are back in the Champions League this season for the first time since being knocked out in the round of 16 by Atletico Madrid in 2014. Florenzi has plenty of experience in the competition having broken through into Roma's senior side in 2012. He has played 280 times for his home-town club, and featured in four campaigns in Europe's top competition, reaching the semi-finals in 2018. — AFP