



**2** Kuwait's ranking in US TIP report unchanged at Tier 2



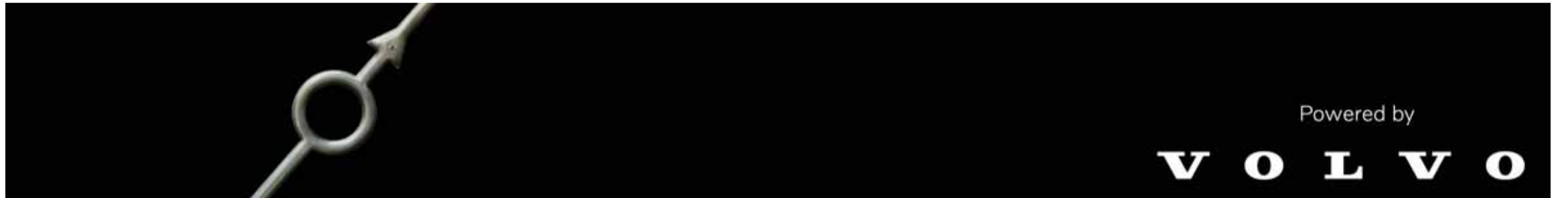
**5** Canadian military on alert as wildfires rage



**7** Afghan fighting rages as US forces see exit by Aug



**16** Denmark beat Czechia to reach Euro semifinals



# World battles Delta variant, Saudi suspends UAE flights

Record deaths in Russia • Iran fears 'fifth wave' • Tougher curbs in Indonesia



CHENNAI: A municipal worker drives an auto-rickshaw decorated with mock syringes through the streets to boost awareness on the importance of COVID-19 vaccination yesterday. — AFP

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia has suspended flights to three countries, including the neighboring United Arab Emirates, as countries around the world rushed to contain the rapid spread of the highly contagious Delta variant. Flights to and from the UAE, alongside those to Ethiopia and Vietnam, will be suspended from today, a Saudi interior ministry official said, quoted by the state news agency SPA. Saudi citizens and residents returning from these countries will be required to quarantine for 14 days, it added.

Citizens would be banned "from travelling directly or indirectly, without obtaining prior permission from... authorities". The decision was taken due to "the spread of a new mutated strain of the (COVID-19) virus", it added, without explicitly mentioning the increasingly globally emergent Delta variant. The move comes seven weeks after the oil-rich kingdom permitted fully immunized citizens to travel abroad, after a ban on foreign trips that lasted more than a year. The UAE, and especially Dubai, is a key leisure destination for Saudis.

The variant, first detected in India and now present in at least 85 countries, is the most contagious of any COVID-19 variant yet identified. The UAE announced last week it had recorded cases of the Delta variant and it has suspended flights to and

from India. In Kuwait, the head of the supreme committee for COVID-19 Dr Khaled Al-Jarallah yesterday said the Delta variant continues to affect unvaccinated people, who make up the majority of patients in hospitals and intensive care units.

Meanwhile, Russia has so far ruled out a new lockdown to fight surging Delta cases, even as it reported 697 more deaths yesterday - setting a new nationwide record for the fifth straight day. Second city Saint Petersburg hosted a Euro 2020 quarterfinal between Spain and Switzerland on Friday night, with concern raised after hundreds of cases were detected among spectators attending games across the continent.

Russia had hoped its vaccination campaign would tamp down a new wave, but it has met with widespread skepticism and a sluggish rollout, with only 16 percent of Russia's 146 million people having been jabbed. AFP journalists saw hundreds of people waiting at vaccination points across Moscow on Friday. Last week President Vladimir Putin urged Russians to "listen to experts" rather than rumors about the virus and vaccines.

Iran, battling the Middle East's deadliest outbreak of the coronavirus, has warned it could be hit by yet another wave of infections.

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## News in brief

### Egypt opens Med naval base

MARSA MATROUH, Egypt: Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi yesterday opened a strategic naval base on the Mediterranean Sea to "secure shipping lines", the presidency said. "It is the latest Egyptian military base on the Mediterranean, and will be focused on securing the country's northern and western front," the Egyptian presidency said in a statement. The ceremony was attended by Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan. The base lies some 255 km west of Alexandria, towards the border with Libya, a country where both Egypt and the UAE have played a key military role. — AFP

### OPEC+ fails to reach accord

LONDON: The members of the OPEC+ alliance of oil producing countries failed to reach agreement on production quotas from August at a meeting on Friday, with the group saying talks had been adjourned until tomorrow. The hitch in Thursday's discussions came "due to the UAE raising a last-minute objection to a Russian-Saudi Arabia deal reached earlier in the day", according to analysts from Deutsche Bank. The Bloomberg agency reported on Thursday that an agreement had been floated which would involve raising production by 400,000 barrels per day (bpd) each month from August onwards, reaching an extra two million bpd by the end of 2021. — AFP

### Cyberattack hits US businesses

SAN FRANCISCO: A US IT company urged customers to shut down their servers Friday after cyberattackers smuggled ransomware onto its network platform. Kaseya said Friday evening that it had limited the attack to "a very small percentage of our customers" who use its signature VSA software, "currently estimated at fewer than 40 worldwide". Cybersecurity firm Huntress Labs had earlier said in a Reddit forum that it was working with partners targeted in the attack, and that some 200 businesses "have been encrypted". Kaseya describes itself as a leading provider of IT and security management services to small and medium-sized businesses. — AFP

## Iraq sizzles as blackouts hit

BAGHDAD: When the mercury soared to 52 degrees Celsius last week in Iraq, Ali Karrar placed his baby for a couple of minutes in the fridge. But when the power went off on Thursday night across oil-rich Iraq, people were left at a loss as to how to escape the torrid heat. Those with the means hooked up fridges, air conditioning units and fans to private generators - but not Karrar, who lives in the town of Al-Hillah, as well as others across the impoverished and rural south.

Four southern provinces have been without electricity since Tuesday, including Basra - home to Iraq's main port. Sizzling temperatures have been compounded by high levels of humidity.

"The children sleep right on the floor to try and stay cool, but us, the adults, haven't slept a wink these past nights," Meshaal Hashem, a Basra dockworker and father of three, told AFP.

In the city of Diwaniyah, Rahi Abdelhusein buys bags of ice to cool down his children, saying it helps hydrate them. Shops have placed hoses and makeshift showers outdoors to attract customers to stop. Anger has mounted among Iraq's 40-million population, with corrupt politicians at the center of a blame game for its poor services and dilapidated infrastructure.

"The electricity ministry is blaming the oil ministry which is blaming the finance ministry, and the finance ministry says the culprit is Iran, but Iran says it's the Iraqi government's fault, and the government lays the blame on the people who accuse politicians of

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BAGHDAD: An Iraqi man connects overhead cables providing generator electricity to homes and businesses who can afford it in Sadr City on Friday amid power outages and soaring temperatures. — AFP

## Bollywood superstar Aamir Khan announces divorce

MUMBAI: Bollywood superstar Aamir Khan announced yesterday that he is splitting with his wife of 15 years, filmmaker Kiran Rao. The A-list couple released a statement saying their break-up had been agreed but they would raise their son together and still work on joint projects. "In these 15 beautiful years together we have shared a lifetime of experiences, joy and laughter, and our relationship has only grown in trust, respect and love," they said.

"Now we would like to begin a new chapter in our lives - no longer as husband and wife, but as co-parents and family for each other." Khan and

Rao met while shooting a film in 2001 in which Rao was the assistant director, and they married in Dec 2005. The 56-year-old actor, whose film about wrestling, "Dangal", made him the top Indian star in China, was divorced from actor Reena Dutta in 2002.

"We began a planned separation some time ago, and now feel comfortable to formalize this arrangement, of living separately yet sharing our lives the way an extended family does," Khan and Rao said. "We remain devoted parents to our son Azad, who we will nurture and raise together. We will also continue to work as collaborators on films, Paani Foundation, and other projects that we feel passionate about." Khan and Rao, 47, thanked their family and friends "without whom we would not have been so secure in taking this leap". "We request our well-wishers for good wishes and blessings, and hope that - like us - you will see this divorce not as an end, but as the start of a new journey." — AFP



MUMBAI: In this file photo taken on Jan 21, 2019, Indian Bollywood actor Aamir Khan poses for a picture with his wife director Kiran Rao. — AFP

## Tunisia hails Jabeur after landmark win

TUNIS: Ons Jabeur's landmark appearance in the last 16 of Wimbledon was hailed in her native Tunisia yesterday for helping lift the gloom of the country's political and health crisis. "Ons Jabeur has joined the greats," read the headline in Arabic-language newspaper Al Chourouk, propelling tennis to the front pages,

a rare occurrence in a country where football is king.

"It makes us dream! Fortunately we have it to brighten up our days," said Sarra, a Tunisian Internet user. Another Twitter user Kamel said Jabeur's achievement in becoming the first Tunisian woman to reach the last 16 at Wimbledon brought "the light that was so lacking in the dark sky of our country". "We have our official supplier of happiness, the only one who helps us to forget our gloomy news in Tunisia: bravo @Ons\_Jabeur", tweeted journalist Marwen Ben Mustapha.

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Ons Jabeur

## Local

# Kuwait's ranking in Trafficking in Persons Report remains unchanged at Tier 2

**KUWAIT:** The 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report found that Kuwait held its Tier 2 rankings and continues to make progress. The government demonstrated overall increasing efforts compared to the previous reporting period, according to the report released by the US Department of State.

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken had unveiled the 2021 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report on Thursday at the United States Department of State in Washington, DC. The report is an annual publication documenting the efforts of the governments of 187 countries and territories, including the United States, to combat human trafficking.

"For over 20 years, the Trafficking in Persons Report has demonstrated the United States' conviction that human trafficking is a global threat necessitating a global response," said US Ambassador to Kuwait Alina L. Romanowski. "Human trafficking undermines the rule of law, robs millions of their dignity and freedom, and threatens public safety and national security everywhere," she added.

"The report is the world's most comprehensive resource of governmental anti-trafficking efforts," Ambassador Romanowski said. "It reflects the US Government's commitment to global leadership on this key human rights and law enforcement issue. The US was ranked for the first time in the TIP Report in 2010, a decision taken to ensure our policies live up to our ideals."

The report's standards are set by the US Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) and the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children (also known as the 'Palermo Protocol'). "It is our sincere desire to partner with the government and the people of Kuwait to ensure that trafficking victims are cared for and perpetrators are brought to justice," Ambassador Romanowski said.

Some of the Government of Kuwait's efforts to meet the minimum standards as outlined in the report include the continued use of a specialized trafficking unit to investigate potential trafficking crimes and increase prosecutions and convictions under the anti-trafficking law. The government also provided shelter and protection services to victims of trafficking and executed new policies to protect workers vulnerable to trafficking.

While the report documents progress, it also highlights several key areas for improvement. It found that the government did not regularly use standard procedures for proactively identifying victims and referring them for protection services, and continued to detain, prosecute, and deport trafficking victims, including those fleeing forced labor. Also, some officials continued to routinely use arbitration and administrative penalties to resolve grievances filed by domestic and other migrant workers instead of investigating such cases as human trafficking crimes.



**WASHINGTON:** Kari Johnstone, acting director of the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, listens as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken delivers remarks on the release of the 2021 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report at the State Department in Washington, DC on Thursday. — AFP

## Delta variant spreading among unvaccinated in Kuwait

**KUWAIT:** The Delta variant of the novel coronavirus continues to affect unvaccinated people who make up the majority of patients in hospitals and intensive care units in Kuwait, head of the Supreme Committee for COVID-19 Dr Khaled Al-Jarallah said yesterday. Kuwait had listed 26 deaths on Friday and Thursday as the country continues to battle a spike in new cases which have climbed by over 3,700 within the same two-day period.

On Friday, Kuwait's daily coronavirus cases jumped by 1,895 to 360,406 as deaths rose by 16 to 1,995, according to the health ministry. Kuwait had reported 1,824 new cases and 10 deaths the day before. The number of active cases jumped from 18,703 on Thursday to 18,807 on Friday, while patients in intensive care units reached 296 on Friday, up from 294 the day before. On the other hand, total recoveries reached 339,604 after 1,775 fresh recoveries were announced Friday and 1,707 the day before. — KUNA



**KUWAIT:** Fire engines outside a Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh building where a fire was reported.



Damage left by fire in a shop at the Mubarakia Market.

## Scores rescued from Jleeb building fire

**KUWAIT:** Firemen saved scores of people trapped inside a burning building in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh, Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) said, noting that no injuries

were reported. Fire engines of Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh, Ardhya, and technical rescue center rushed to the scene as fire erupted on third floor of a residential building, KFF said in a statement.

Tens of people were trapped before rescue arrived due to smoke plumes, noted the statement. KFF teams used escalators and smoke-protective devices during the operation and were able to contain the fire without any significant injuries,

while an investigation went underway to determine the causes of the blaze. Meanwhile, firemen put out a blaze that hit six stores in Mubarakia Market Friday evening. Operations received a call about fires in small shops, so Hilali and Madena fire stations responded. Firemen managed to extinguish the blaze as no injuries were reported, KFF said, adding that an investigation was opened.

## Iraq sizzles as blackouts...

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shortcomings," Iraqi political analyst Sajad Jiyad tweeted. "The politicians just shrug and say, 'We've got to live with it.'"

Boiling temperatures and power outages often go hand in hand during the summer months in Iraq, but there are other factors behind the latest crisis. Iraq - the second largest producer in the OPEC oil cartel - buys gas and power from neighboring Iran to supply

about a third of its power sector, dilapidated by decades of conflict and poor maintenance.

But Iran decided Tuesday to cut supplies to its neighbor, saying the Iraqi electricity ministry owes it more than \$6 billion in arrears. Iraq says it is unable to pay because of US sanctions on money transfers to Iran, a deep financial crisis compounded by lower oil prices, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The government in Baghdad also says few consumers are paying their utility bills, with many stealing electricity by hooking up lines illegally to power mains.

Endemic corruption was a key driver of protests that shook Iraq from October 2019 to June 2020. Iraq is ranked 21st from last bottom on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, with tens of billions of dollars missing from state coffers. — AFP

and shopping malls were shuttered in the capital Jakarta, across the main island of Java and on Bali after the daily caseload quadrupled in less than a month, with the Delta variant blamed.

The overwhelmed healthcare system is teetering on the brink of collapse as jammed hospitals turn away patients, forcing desperate families to hunt for oxygen tanks to treat the sick and dying at home. Elsewhere in Southeast Asia, Myanmar ordered two million people in the second city of Mandalay to stay at home Friday as the coup-hit country struggles to contain coronavirus cases. New measures were also put into place in Portugal, with an 11 pm to 5 am curfew entering force overnight for nearly half the population in a bid to rein in rising Delta infections.

The Delta variant has driven outbreaks in places that had previously been able to mostly avoid the pandemic's ravages. Fiji, which went an entire year without recording any community coronavirus cases until Delta arrived in April, recorded its biggest-ever infection increase yesterday. Authorities reported two deaths and warned of more to come as the virus threatens to overwhelm the South Pacific nation's health system. Only about one percent of Fiji's 930,000 people have been fully vaccinated, with the Red Cross blaming misinformation spread online for hampering the rollout.

Africa has also been largely spared the worst of the pandemic, but infection numbers have increased in the continent for six weeks running, driven by the Delta variant. Deaths rose by 15 percent across 38 African countries to nearly 3,000 in the same period. "The speed and scale of Africa's third wave is like nothing we've seen before," Matshidiso Moeti, the World Health Organization's regional director for Africa, said last week. South Africa, the continent's worst-hit country, posted a new record of 24,000 cases on Friday. "We are indeed... in the eye of the storm of the third wave," Deputy Health Minister Joe Phaahla said.

Meanwhile in Italy, 300 healthcare workers have lodged a legal challenge against the requirement that they get vaccinated against coronavirus, according to media reports. "This isn't a battle by anti-vaxers but a democratic battle," constitutional lawyer Daniele Granara, who helped build up the case, told the Giornale di Brescia newspaper. — AFP

## Facebook tests alerting users to extremist posts

**SAN FRANCISCO:** A Facebook test of pop-up boxes asking people whether they think friends are becoming extremists raised concerns Friday among US conservatives who felt their voices might be stifled. Facebook spokesman Andy Stone said in a Twitter exchange that the alerts sprang from an initiative at the social network to combat violent extremism and dangerous organizations.

"Redirect Initiative" features are intended to route people using hate- or violence-related search terms toward resources, education or outreach groups aimed at more harmonious outcomes, according to Facebook. For example, Facebook said that searches related to white supremacy in the United States get directed to a Life After Hate group that provides crisis intervention.

Images of the alerts shared on Twitter showed messages asking whether users were worried some-

one they knew was becoming an extremist or if they had been exposed to extremist content. People could opt to click on a link to "get support" or simply close the pop-up box. Virginia state politician Nicholas Freitas, a Republican, was among those who shared an image of the Facebook alert on Twitter.

"I have a real concern that some leftist technocrats are creating an Orwellian environment where people are being arbitrarily silenced or banned for saying something the 'thought police' doesn't like," Freitas said in the post. Facebook and other online platforms have been under pressure to stop the spread of misinformation and posts leading to real-world violence.

The social media giant recently beefed up automated tools to assist group moderators striving to keep exchanges civil in a time of clashing viewpoints. Automated systems at Facebook check for posts in groups and news feeds that violate the platform's rules about what content is acceptable. Facebook in June banned former US president Donald Trump for two years, saying he deserved the maximum punishment for violating platform rules over a deadly attack by his supporters on the US Capitol. — AFP

## World battles Delta variant, Saudi...

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"It is feared that we are on the way to a fifth wave throughout the country," President Hassan Rouhani told a meeting of Iran's anti-virus taskforce, warning the public to be careful as "the Delta variant has spread" in southern provinces.

Iran's health ministry has classified as "red" - the highest category on Iran's coronavirus risk scale - the capital Tehran and nine other cities in Tehran province. The southern and southeastern provinces of Fars, Hormozgan, Kerman and Sistan-Baluchistan are also now classified as "red". In red zones, all shops must stay shuttered except for those considered essential, including grocery stores and pharmacies.

Yesterday, Alireza Raisi, the spokesman for the anti-virus taskforce, called for "strict controls of the country's borders", especially those on the eastern side of Iran. Strangled by US sanctions that have made it difficult to transfer money to foreign firms, Iran says it is struggling to import vaccines for its population of 83 million. Just over 4.4 million people have received a first dose of anti-COVID vaccine in Iran, while only 1.7 million have received the necessary two jabs, the health ministry says.

The authorities in Iran have approved emergency use of two locally produced vaccines. Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei received the first dose of one on June 25, his office announced on Twitter. The health ministry yesterday reported 111 new COVID deaths and another 8,341 infections in Iran, taking the overall number to 84,627 fatalities and 3,241,037 cases.

The Delta variant has propelled a resurgence of the virus which has already killed nearly four million people, forcing numerous nations to reimpose restrictions well over a year after the pandemic first swept the world. Thousands of troops and police hit the streets in Indonesia to enforce a partial lockdown imposed yesterday, as the country recorded a record 27,913 new daily cases as well as 493 deaths. Mosques, restaurants

## Tunisia hails Jabeur after...

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On Twitter, "Onstoppable" trended. Tunisia is currently suffering a third wave of coronavirus likened to a "tsunami" by health officials. In some areas of the country, hospitals are full to capacity. Several regions are under lockdown while gatherings and parties have been banned in the capital Tunis and many large cities.

Jabeur, the world number 24, has reached the second week of Wimbledon with impressive wins including against five-time champion Venus Williams and 2017 winner Garbine Muguruza. Tomorrow, the 26-year-old takes on Poland's Iga Swiatek, the 2020 French Open champion, for a place in the quarterfinals.

Tunisia's former Minister of Tourism, Armal Karboul thanked Jabeur for being "an inspiration to all of us". Fadhel Moussa, the mayor of Ariana, near Tunis, described her achievement as "breath-taking". However, few other politicians reacted to the performance of Jabeur. Most are caught up in a political crisis which has paralysed the government for months, while the country suffers the social backlash of the pandemic.

Jabeur is getting used to setting records. In

January, she became the first Arab player to reach the quarter-finals of a Grand Slam in Australia. On the eve of Wimbledon, she won the Birmingham grass court tournament to become the first Arab woman to win a WTA title. Tennis may not rank highly amongst interests in the country, but she is a popular figure attributing her success as "100 percent Tunisian".

Originally from a modest neighborhood of Sousse, a seaside town in the Gulf of Hammamet which stretches into the Mediterranean, Jabeur started playing tennis at the age of three. She played in tournaments against boys and at 12 joined the sports school of El Menzah in Tunis. "She was very lively, dynamic, sympathetic and sociable, she liked to joke a lot," recalled the former Tunisian federation's technical director Hichem Riani.

In 2011, in the midst of the Tunisian revolution, 16-year-old Jabeur hit the headlines by winning the junior tournament at the French Open. Although she left Tunisia at 16, she returns regularly to train with Issam Jalleli, and her husband and physical trainer Karim Kamoun. "She makes us forget what is happening here and to believe in ourselves," Borhan Ben Slimane, a tennis coach in Tunis told AFP.

"The message is there - Tunisia can have champions in individual sports which are too often neglected. After the swimmer Oussama Mellouli (a two-time Olympic swimming gold medalist from Tunisia), this is another encouraging achievement. In Iraq, where I worked this year, she is very well known, tennis fans are following her closely", added Ben Slimane. — AFP

Local

News in brief

Amir congratulates US

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of congratulations to US President Joe Biden yesterday on the occasion of the 245th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. In the cable, His Highness the Amir commended strong ties between both sides, wishing Biden good health, and for the US further progress and prosperity. His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables to President Biden. —KUNA

Kuwait praises Saudi efforts

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Foreign Ministry praised on Friday Saudi Arabia's ongoing efforts to resolve the Yemeni crisis. It also welcomed a Riyadh-hosted meeting that brought together representatives of the Yemeni government and the Southern Transitional Council, which resulted in a consensus to stop all forms of escalation. Kuwait went on to urge sides involved in the Riyadh Agreement to complete their obligations under the deal, and restore security and stability to Yemen. —KUNA

Oil price up

**KUWAIT:** The price of Kuwaiti oil went up by 31 cents to \$75.47 per barrel Friday after being at \$75.16 pb the day before, said the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. The price of the Brent crude saw an increase by 33 cents to \$76.17 per barrel, while the West Texas Intermediate went down by seven cents to \$75.30 pb. —KUNA

Photo of the Day



**KUWAIT:** Pigeons take cover under the shade of trees on the seafront of Kuwait City on Friday, as the country recorded extremely high summer temperatures. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Kuwait safe passage for 400+ migratory bird species



**KUWAIT:** Different kinds of migratory birds fly hundreds and thousands of kilometers to find the best ecological conditions and habitats for feeding, breeding and raising their young. About 400 bird species consider Kuwait as a safe passage because of the innate life and suitable environment that is why the Kuwaiti government has given great attention to know the life cycle of these birds and established several reserves in the country to secure a safe shelter for them. The United Nations initiated the World Migratory Bird Day (WMBD) in 2006 as an annual awareness-raising campaign to highlight the ecological importance of migratory birds and calls for their global conservation through international cooperation. —KUNA

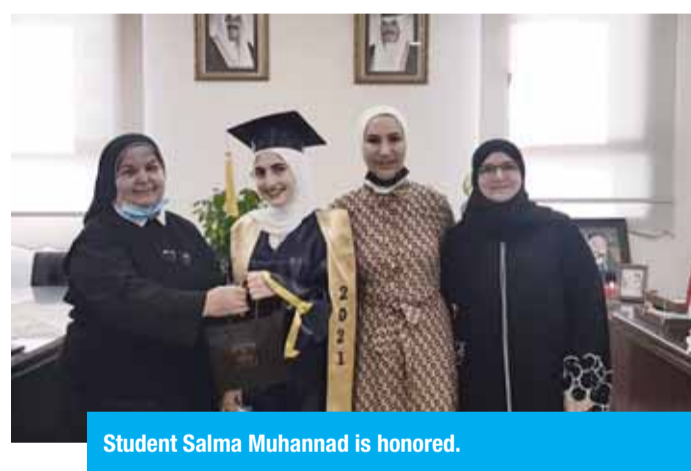


Fajr Al-Sabah celebrates outstanding students

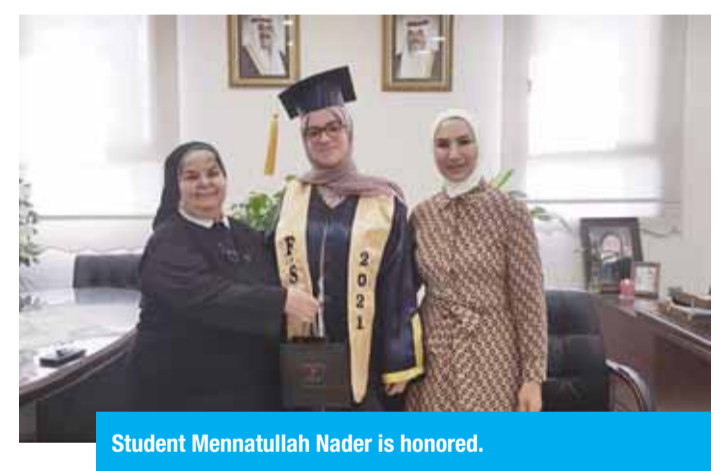
ACK's health, safety protocols success story shared with KAS

**KUWAIT:** The Occupational Health and Safety department at the Australian College of Kuwait (ACK) visited the Kuwait American School (KAS) in order to assist them in preparing their campus and facilities according to the health safety and security protocols for the return of their students. ACK's initiative with KAS was initiated by conducting a safety audit of the school campus and developing a comprehensive guide booklet for them with all needed health, safety, and security protocols for the school to adopt for anticipated students' return to school campus in September 2021. On another note, ACK's journey with COVID had many milestones and landmarks including being the first college to have students on campus to continue their practical sessions in 2020. The setup for these practical classes took a lot of preplanning, safety auditing and

effort to embed all needed protocols ensuring the risk of cross-infection is minimal. The implemented strategy resulted in the success of their efforts, hence, the college wanted to take that experience and learning curve of having students on campus at a time of COVID-19 and help assist schools in preparing their campuses with all needed health, safety, and security protocols. On this occasion, Mariam Al-Maraghi, ACK's Health and Safety Manager, highlighted that educational sectors have an important role in the development of society and community involvement. Maraghi further added: "It is both our moral duty and work ethic as an educational sector to continue embedding a positive safety culture, not only for our college, but also to branch this positive safety culture in our beloved country."



Student Salma Muhannad is honored.



Student Mennatullah Nader is honored.



Student Aya Waleed is honored.



Student Sandi Emad is honored.



Student Mariam Mohammad is honored.



Student Rawan Ahmad is honored.

**KUWAIT:** Fajr Al-Sabah private school held a ceremony for its outstanding high school graduates who finished in the top 10. School principal Muna Al-Qallaf and General Manager Mary Sweidan

attended the ceremony where each student was received with her family and presented with a gift. Sweidan thanked the students and their parents, and wished the students success in the future.

# 100 years of the founding of CPC



Tibetan herdsman Sonam Tsering with his grandson at a mountainous rural village in northwest China's Qinghai Province, June 8, 2021. (Xinhua/Wu Gang)



The memorial of the first National Congress of the Communist Party of China, in Shanghai, June 19, 2021. (Xinhua/Liu Ying)

## Why Western political theories can't explain success of century-old CPC

By Xinhua writers Gui Tao, Jiang Jiang, Wang Zichen and Li Zhihui

**BEIJING:** At an altitude of 3,300 meters, Sonam Tsering offered a hada, a traditional Tibetan silk scarf that symbolizes purity and auspiciousness, to a guest who had come from afar -- Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee.

The Tibetan herdsman, whose family previously struggled to make ends meet in a mountainous rural village in northwest China's Qinghai Province, now owns 80 sheep and 20 cattle thanks to poverty-alleviation subsidies and loans from the government.

Sonam Tsering, who had bid farewell to his former home, a dilapidated adobe structure surrounded by uneven stone walls, welcomed Xi outside his new house that is equipped with a flush toilet and a driveway that leads up to the front door.

"Thanks to the Party's favorable policies, the lives of us herders are getting better every day," Sonam Tsering said.

The visit of Xi came less than a month before the world's largest Marxist party, which has seen its membership explode from 50-plus individuals to more than 95 million, celebrates its centennial.

Over the past century, the Party has transformed the once shattered and impoverished country into the world's second-largest economy. The CPC has led China to achieve miracles of rapid economic growth and long-term social stability, which has had profound global implications.

Under the CPC's leadership, the modernization goal that the Chinese people, such as Sonam Tsering, have been striving toward is no longer out of reach.

Western political theories fall short in explaining the CPC's success. For a party that has remained committed to serving the people, the country's 1.4 billion citizens are an inexhaustible source of strength.

### A PARTY OF "OUR OWN"

The CPC is substantially different from Western-style political parties. In a nutshell, it is viewed by the Chinese people as "a party of our own."

Born in the early 20th century, a period when the downtrodden Chinese people were struggling against foreign invasions and internal divisions, the CPC established its original aspiration and mission -- to seek happiness for the Chinese people and rejuvenation for the Chinese nation. The Party has been translating the needs of the people into concrete actions ever since.

CPC members have vowed to fight for the freedom, democracy and happiness of the people. Through their sacrifices, they have played a pioneering and exemplary role, with their influence transcending the boundaries of space and time. Committed to the cause, they have never gone back on their word.

Li Dazhao, one of the main founders of the CPC and also a man of great learning, was arrested, imprisoned and tortured in 1927. At the age of 38, Li, whose articles had inspired millions of Chinese youths, remained steadfast in his beliefs even in the face of death at the hands of a warlord. The gallows where he was hanged have been enshrined as the No. 0001 cultural relic of the National Museum of China.

Data shows that as many as 3.7 million CPC members sacrificed their lives from 1921 to 1949 in striving for the establishment of the people's republic. This figure does not include countless such individuals who died anonymous deaths.

This spirit of sacrifice has been carried forward by Chinese Communists in the country's latest efforts to battle both extreme poverty and the COVID-19 epidemic. More than 39 million CPC members and cadres fought against COVID-19 on the front lines, of whom nearly 400 lost their lives, according to official figures.

Fully aware that poverty is incompatible with socialism, the CPC led the Chinese people to initiate reform and opening up, which changed the fate of countless individuals. Among them are Mo Yan, the peasant-turned-Nobel laureate, and Nan Cunhui, the billionaire who was once a roadside cobbler.

From 1949 to 2019, China's per capita disposable income grew at an average annual rate of 6.1 percent in real terms.

The CPC leaders have been consistent with their people-centered philosophy. As early as 1934 when the CPC-led Red Army fought against the ruling Kuomintang party to liberate the Chinese people, Mao Zedong pointed out that "We must ... solve the problems facing the masses -- food, shelter and clothing, fuel, rice, cooking oil and salt, sickness and hygiene, and marriage."

"In short, all the practical problems in the masses' everyday life should claim our attention," Mao said. Following through on his commitment, he declared the founding of the People's Republic of



Poverty relief assistants and village officials help carry melons planted by villagers in southwest China's Guizhou Province, Nov. 11, 2020. (Xinhua/Yang Wenbin)



Medical workers move COVID-19 patients into isolation wards at Huoshenshan (Fire God Mountain) Hospital in Wuhan, Feb. 4, 2020. (Xinhua/Xiao Yijiu)

China in 1949.

Decades later, echoing Mao's words, Xi repeatedly stressed that "the people's aspiration for a better life is our goal."

"No matter where our Party cadres are, they will always ask the villagers 'What kind of good life do you expect to have?'" Xi said during his tour of Qinghai. "Let's work together for a better life."

Issues related to people's livelihoods, including employment, income distribution, education, social security, medical care, housing, elderly care, child-care and food safety, all weigh heavily on Xi's mind.

China has declared a war against pollution, as "lucid waters and lush mountains" are demanded by the people. The country has announced its ambition to peak its carbon emissions by 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality by 2060. Data shows that China has contributed a quarter of humanity-caused greening between 2000 and 2017.

The CPC has made it clear to all that the greatest political achievement for itself is improving the well-being of the people.

### INSEPARABLE, INVINCIBLE

In the 1930s, Edgar Snow visited Yan'an, the then center of the Chinese Communist revolution, where the American journalist found "a rocklike solidarity" among the people of the region led by the CPC. The Red Army, though ragged and poorly armed, had a charm that made them invincible.

The unity between the people and the Party observed by Snow has remained unbreakable. In old times, people volunteered to provide food to the rev-



Three Chinese astronauts onboard the Shenzhou-12 spaceship enter the space station core module Tianhe, June 17, 2021. (Xinhua/Jin Liwang)

olutionary soldiers and even dismantled their own wooden doors to make stretchers for the fallen.

In the fight against COVID-19, hundreds of millions of Chinese citizens have responded to the call of the Party and the government to quarantine themselves to prevent the spread of the virus. The engines of the "world's factory" have been roaring and the country's daily mask production capacity rapidly exceeded 100 million.

Today, CPC members can be easily found in all walks of life, including workers, farmers, students, private entrepreneurs, Chinese employees of foreign companies and internet influencers. Despite their different ages and jobs, they all "serve the people" -- the most concise and accurate summary of the fundamental purpose of the CPC.

The Chinese people recognize the good governance of the CPC in their own ways: People raised red banners to express their gratitude to earthquake rescuers; Children stood on tiptoe to offer water to flood fighters; Octogenarians bowed to anti-epidemic medical convoys; Villagers in Xinjiang presented flowers to cadres who had helped them eradicate extreme poverty.

A report from Harvard University in 2020 showed that the Chinese people's overall satisfaction with the government exceeded 93 percent.

The "mass line," a methodology of the CPC that requires its members to stay close to the people, has been written into the Party's Constitution. The CPC believes in pooling people's wisdom and power.

The east China village of Xiaogang is widely hailed as "China's number one reform village." Back in 1978, 18 farmers in the poverty-stricken village took great risks in secretly signing an agreement to contract collective land to individual households. The household contract responsibility system that derived from Xiaogang was spread nationwide in a few years. The history of Xiaogang is widely cited as an example of the CPC pooling grassroots wisdom to solve national problems.

China's "whole-process democracy," a hallmark of

socialist democracy that distinguishes it from Western political systems, runs through all processes including elections, decision-making, administration and supervision. All major decision-making is procedure-based and follows democratic deliberations.

In the formulation of the Party leadership's proposals for formulating the 14th Five-Year Plan, extensive solicitations of comments and suggestions from various sectors were held. Online solicitations also received over 1 million comments within a matter of weeks.

A total of 546 comments and suggestions were finally reflected in the proposals, a drafting process which Xi called "a vivid example of the CPC's intraparty democracy and China's socialist democracy."

The Party, which believes that China has no need for the model of democracy found in the West, has established a democracy that suits the country itself.

### NEVER-ENDING SELF-IMPROVEMENT

Over the past century, the Party has constantly adapted to the changing circumstances with policy changes -- one latest such shift being China's adoption of the three-child policy to improve the demographic structure of the world's most populous country.

But one thing that remains unchanged is the CPC's bond with the Chinese people, a relationship often described as being as "inseparable as fish and water."

The Party sees corruption as the "greatest threat" to its survival and its relationship with the Chinese people.

In 1952, Liu Qingshan and Zhang Zishan, two corrupt senior Party officials, were executed in China, demonstrating the early anti-corruption determination of the CPC. This determination remains to the present day.

In recent years, the CPC's anti-graft watchdog has ousted corrupt officials all the way from low-level "flies" to high-ranking "tigers."

The investigation of Zhou Yongkang, a former member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, came as a shock to some outsiders who had doubted the CPC's anti-corruption campaign would ever extend its reach to such heights.

When a grassroots-level government employee failed to pay for two apples from a local salesman in Shandong Province in 2015, he was disciplined. Yet this was not a case of making a mountain out of a molehill, as shown by a well-known anecdote of Mao. In 1948, when China was beset by civil war, the Communist army chose not to take a single apple from civilians, as "they were apples of the people," according to Mao.

Underlying this commitment, Xi urged all CPC members to have the resolve and tenacity to persevere in the "never-ending" fight against corruption. In 2020, around 604,000 people were disciplined by China's top anti-graft body.

The Party not only ensures it remains principled and professional but also guarantees it stands on the cutting edge of the times.

At the launch meeting of a recent campaign on Party history learning and education, Xi stressed the importance of maintaining the Party's tight bond with the people. The campaign was the latest of the CPC's efforts to unify its members' thought, enhance discipline and boost their morale as they march ever forward.

Having embarked on a new journey, the CPC is leading the Chinese people to build China into a great modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious and beautiful by the centenary of the People's Republic of China. This will be the largest modernization drive achieved through peaceful development in the history of humanity.

Recently, three Chinese astronauts, all CPC members, flew into space and entered the in-orbit space station core module Tianhe, which will be their home for the next three months.

Foreign astronauts are welcomed to cooperate with their Chinese counterparts after the construction of China's space station is completed, an embodiment of the CPC's concept of "a community with a shared future for humanity."

While a century of glory has been recorded in the annals of history, the CPC stands ready to write a new chapter for the people and by the people.

(Wang Pan, Xu Yang, Zhang Zhanpeng, Li Huaiyan, Cheng Di, Yangxiu Dazhen, Miao Xiaojuan and Xu Xiaoping also contributed to the story.)



Indonesia rolls out tougher curbs as virus cases skyrocket

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## Over 2,000 flee as Philippine volcano spews toxic gas



KAMLOOPS, BRITISH COLUMBIA: This handout photo courtesy of BC Wildfire Service shows the Sparks Lake wildfire, British Columbia, seen from the air. —AFP

# Canada on alert as wildfires rage

## 152 fires active in British Columbia, 89 of them sparked in the last two days

OTTAWA: Canada's government warned Friday of a "long and challenging summer" ahead as it prepared military aircraft to help evacuate towns and fight more than 100 wildfires fueled by a record-smashing heat wave. At least 152 fires were active in the western province of British Columbia, 89 of them sparked in the last two days, according to officials. Most were caused by lightning strikes.

The fires were north of the city of Kamloops, 350 kilometers (220 miles) northeast of Vancouver. While the immediate blame for the scorching heat in Canada has been placed on a high-pressure "heat dome" trapping warm air in the region, climate change is causing record-setting temperatures to become more frequent.

Globally, the decade to 2019 was the hottest recorded, and the five hottest years on record have all occurred within the last five years. "The dry conditions and the extreme heat in British Columbia are unprecedented," Public Safety Minister Bill Blair said Friday. "These wildfires show that we are in the earliest stages of what promises to be a long and challenging summer."

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau met Friday afternoon with an incident response group that included several ministers. He said he had already spoken with British Columbia's premier, as well as local mayors and indigenous chiefs in communities under threat.

"We will be there to help," he told a news conference. The response group announced it would set up an operations center in Edmonton, where armed forces will be able to provide logistical support. Military aircraft were also deployed to help. Roughly 1,000 people have already fled the wildfires in British Columbia, and authorities are searching for many who have gone missing.

Late Friday, the British Columbia medical examiner's office said there had been 719 deaths in the past

week, "three times more" than the average number of deaths recorded over this period under normal circumstances. "It is believed likely the extreme weather BC has experienced in the past week is a significant contributing factor to the increased number of deaths," Lisa Lapointe, the province's chief coroner, said in a statement. The village of Lytton, 250 kilometers (155 miles) northeast of Vancouver, was evacuated Wednesday night because of a fire that flared up suddenly and spread quickly. Nearly 90 percent of the village was torched, according to Brad Vis, an MP for the area.

The fire came a day after the village set a Canadian record-high temperature on Tuesday of 49.6 degrees Celsius (121 degrees Fahrenheit). "I cannot stress enough how extreme the fire risk is at this time in almost every part of British Columbia and I urge British Columbians to listen carefully to officials in your communities and follow those directions," provincial premier John Horgan said.

### 'Concerning' heat

The heat wave continued to spread across central Canada on Friday. In addition to British Columbia, heat wave warnings were issued for the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, as well as parts of the Northwest Territories and northern Ontario. "A dangerous long duration heat wave will continue" and will bring "very warm temperatures over the next couple of days," Environment Canada warned in bulletins for British Columbia. "The duration of this heat wave is concerning as there is little relief at night with elevated overnight temperatures."

Lytton resident Jeff Chapman told the CBC he saw his parents die in the fire that engulfed the town. With only minutes to react, the elderly couple sought shelter from the smoke and flames in a trench in their backyard, as Chapman ran for safety at nearby rail

tracks. From that vantage, he said, he saw the fires sweep across and destroy most of the town.

"Today our thoughts are mostly with families that are grieving, that are facing terrible loss," said Trudeau during his press conference. British Columbia also warned Friday of flooding from melting mountain snow caps and glaciers under the heat dome.

Further south, the US states of Washington and Oregon have also been sweltering under record-high temperatures this week. Hundreds of firefighters scrambled Friday to contain three wildfires in drought-hit northern California that have scorched

nearly 40,000 acres, including a popular tourist lake preparing to welcome hordes of visitors for the July 4 holiday weekend.

Evacuation orders were in place along stretches of Shasta Lake—a camping and boating hotspot 160 kilometers south of the Oregon border—as soaring temperatures and high winds spur blazes at a relatively early stage in the region's fire season. Around 40 structures were destroyed, including at least half a dozen homes near the town of Lakehead.

More than 500 lightning strikes were recorded in California in the last 24 hours, threatening to cause more fires. —AFP

## Famine in Tigray

UNITED NATIONS: Over 400,000 people have "crossed the threshold into famine" in Ethiopia's war-torn Tigray region, a senior UN official said Friday, appealing for urgent humanitarian action to help the millions affected by the brutal eight-month long conflict.

Fighting between the Ethiopian government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) was reignited last month when the rebels launched a major counter-offensive that saw them retake their regional capital of Mekele. This week Ethiopian forces destroyed two key bridges allowing desperately-needed aid into the region, prompting charges Addis Ababa was seeking to choke off humanitarian assistance.

Friday saw the UN Security Council hold its first public meeting on a conflict that has left thousands of dead and plunged hundreds of thousands into hunger. Ramesh Rajasingham, Acting Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, told that meeting that the situation had "worsened dramatically" as the conflict had reignited in recent weeks. —AFP



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## International

# Indonesia rolls out tougher curbs as virus cases skyrocket

## Over 50,000 police, troops deployed to enforce restrictions

**JAKARTA:** Thousands of troops and police hit the streets of Indonesia's Java island and Bali yesterday to enforce new virus curbs as the Southeast Asian nation battles an unprecedented wave of COVID-19 infections. The country's overwhelmed healthcare system teetered on the brink of collapse as jammed hospitals turned away patients, forcing desperate families to hunt for oxygen tanks to treat the sick and dying at home.

Hundreds of checkpoints were set up at mosques, parks, shopping malls and restaurants were shuttered across the capital Jakarta and hard-hit Java. Over 50,000 police and troops were deployed to enforce restrictions in areas home to more than 100 million people. The rules also applied to Bali where police patrolled shuttered beachside eateries after the holiday island shelved plans to reopen to foreign tourists.

The world's fourth most populous nation has seen its daily caseload more than quadruple in less than a month with a new record yesterday of 27,913 cases logged in the past 24 hours and 493 official deaths—less than Friday's record 539 fatalities.

Indonesia's tally to date stands at 2.25 million cases and 60,027 deaths—making it one of Asia's worst-hit nations. But that figure is widely believed to be a severe undercount due to low testing and poor tracing measures.

"The stricter restrictions came too late," said Jakarta resident Maya Puspita Sari. "Before, people who got COVID-19 were strangers, but now it's also the people closest to me who are infected. The virus is getting so much closer and it's terrifying."

### 'Little people'

The highly infectious Delta variant of the virus, first identified in India and now present in at least 85 countries, was driving the recent surge, the health ministry said. Experts had earlier warned that millions travelling at the end of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan could spark an explosion in cases. The streets of Jakarta were largely deserted yesterday but staying at home wasn't an option for many who live hand to mouth in a country of nearly 270 million.

"The measures need to be tougher, but please think about the little people like me," said 35-year-old Paijo as he struggled to find buyers for the instant coffee packages hanging from his bicycle. "Of course I'm afraid... but this is my only livelihood and I'm supporting my wife and two kids."

Indonesian President Joko Widodo, better known as Jokowi, had long resisted the strict lockdowns seen in other virus-wracked nations, saying they could tank Southeast Asia's biggest economy. But this week the government ordered all non-essential employees to work from home, while classes would only be held online.

The new measures are set to last until July 20 in the hopes of bringing daily infections below 10,000. Health experts warned that the tougher measures may not be enough. The restrictions still allow for often-jammed public transport to continue operating at a reduced capacity.

Domestic sea, air and bus travel was also still open to people who have at least one vaccine dose. "How do you do physical distancing on public transportation?" said Indonesian epidemiologist



**JAKARTA:** This aerial picture shows streets partly deserted in Jakarta yesterday, as Indonesia imposed a partial lockdown in the capital due to the COVID-19 coronavirus Delta variant. —AFP

Windhu Purnomo. "The government is still prioritising the economy by letting people move around."

A mass vaccination for 12-17 year olds was held at a Jakarta football stadium yesterday as

Indonesia races to ramp up its bid to jab some 180 million people by early next year. Only about five percent of the country's people have been fully vaccinated with two jabs so far. —AFP

## Cardinal, 9 others, to be tried in Vatican over fraud

**VATICAN CITY:** An influential Cardinal and nine others will be tried within the Vatican's legal system over alleged financial wrongdoing, the Holy See announced yesterday. Italian Cardinal Angelo Becciu, who was one of the most influential figures in the Vatican and a close ally of Pope Francis, will appear before the tribunal of the Holy See from July 27, according to a Vatican statement.

The 73-year-old was dismissed from a powerful Vatican job last September, after Francis told him he was accused of syphoning off Vatican charity funds to help his siblings.

Becciu will be prosecuted over embezzlement, abuse of power and witness tampering in the case, linked to a scandal concerning a loss-making Vatican investment in central London which happened under his watch. He has always professed his innocence.

Before his dismissal, he led the Vatican's department on sainthoods. From 2011 to 2018 he was the Substitute for General Affairs, a role akin to chief of staff in the Vatican's central bureaucracy.

Among the others set to face Vatican justice are Rene Bruehlhart, former head of the Financial Information Authority (FIA), the Vatican's financial watchdog.

He will face abuses of power charges as will Enrico Crasso, an investment fund manager who controlled millions of euros of Vatican money.

Among the others facing Vatican justice are former FIA director Tommaso Di Ruzza and Italian consultant Cecilia Marogna, known as "the Cardinal's Lady" for her links with Becciu.

The investment at the heart of the scandal is a building in London's upmarket Chelsea district, transformed into 50 luxury apartments. —AFP

## 43 missing after migrant boat sinks

**TUNIS:** At least 43 people were missing off the southeastern coast of Tunisia after a boat carrying more than 120 migrants sank, the Tunisian Red Crescent said yesterday. "Eighty-four migrants were rescued and 43 others disappeared after a boat carrying 127 migrants sank off the coast of Zarzis" on Friday night, Mongi Slim of the Red Crescent told AFP.

The vessel had set off from Libya's coast, he added, citing the accounts of survivors. The Tunisian navy rescued "84 illegal migrants of various nationalities" including from Bangladesh, Chad, Egypt, Eritrea and Sudan, the defence ministry said.

The survivors picked up off Zarzis were aged between three and 40, the ministry said, without giving any number for those missing. It said that the boat had departed the port of Zuwara, in north-western Libya during the night between Monday and Tuesday. —AFP

## Tusk: Sharp-tongued fighter who led EU through crises

**WARSAW:** Donald Tusk, who took over as acting head of Polish opposition party Civic Platform yesterday, is an unflappable fighter with political roots in Poland's anti-communist movement and experience putting out fires both at home and in Brussels.

A football-mad historian with piercing blue eyes, the 64-year-old served two terms as prime minister before leaving his homeland for Brussels, where he snagged the top job in 2014. As president of the European Council, which brings together the EU's national leaders, he handled crises ranging from migration to Greece's economic plight to tough Brexit negotiations.

After learning English from scratch for the post, Tusk went on to win a reputation for plain speaking with a penchant for colourful phrasing. Of Brexit, he warned for example "there will be no cakes on the table for anyone, there will be only salt and vinegar."

Since 2019, he has served as head of Europe's top political grouping, the centre-right European People's Party (EPP). Active on Twitter, he frequently takes shots at his arch-rivals in Poland, the right-wing Law and Justice (PiS) party in power, notably offering criticism of their handling of the pandemic and efforts to tighten the abortion law.

After someone tweeted last year that it would be a game-changer for Tusk and PiS leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski to get vaccinated together, Tusk replied: "I'd be prepared to jab him myself for the cause."

## 8 civilians killed in NW Syria

**IBLIN:** Six children were among eight civilians killed by regime artillery fire yesterday in Syria's last major rebel stronghold of Idlib in the country's northwest, a war monitor said. The shelling yesterday morning also wounded 16 others in several locations of the Jabal al-Zawiya area in the south of the stronghold, the Syria Observatory for Human Rights said. It killed five members of the same family — a man, his wife and their three children — in the village of Iblin, two children in Balyun village, and another child in Balshun village, it said. In Iblin, an AFP photographer saw the bodies of the family arrive at a health dispensary, wrapped in woollen and cotton blankets.

## Hurricane Elsa threatens Caribbean

**PORT-AU-PRINCE:** Hurricane Elsa churned through the Caribbean early yesterday, bringing powerful winds and threatening to pile further misery on violence-wracked Haiti. The Category 1 storm weakened slightly overnight and was packing maximum sustained winds of 75 miles (120 kilometers) per hour.

At 5:00am (0900 GMT), it was just south of Hispaniola — which is made up of Haiti and the

### 'Cruising for a bruising'

The two are bitter enemies, with Kaczynski accusing Tusk of having "moral responsibility" for the death of his brother Lech, the then-president, in an air crash in Russia in 2010. Tusk was the prime minister when the crash wiped out a large chunk of the Polish establishment on the way to Smolensk to mark the murder of thousands of Poles by the Soviet secret police during World War II.

Polish and Russian investigators found that pilot error, bad weather and poor air-traffic control were to blame. Conservatives have accused Tusk's government of negligence in preparations for the presidential visit and shortcomings in the investigation.

Tusk's bitter enmity with the PiS spilled onto the international stage when Poland's right-wing government tried — but failed — to block his re-election as head of the European Council in 2017. "Be careful of the bridges you burn because once they are gone you can never cross them again," Tusk told reporters at the time. Tusk's roots as a fighter go back to his upbringing in Gdansk on the Baltic Sea. "As a child, as a young man, I was a typical hooligan... We would roam the streets, you know, cruising for a bruising" after fights or football matches, he told the Financial Times in 2014. Football has continued to be an obsession, with Tusk able to recite match results from major tournaments held decades ago off the top of his head.

### Chimney painting

Gdansk later became the cradle of the Solidarity movement and it was here that Tusk forged his credentials as something of a Cold War warrior. A trade unionist, journalist and historian, he also ran a modest industrial painting business under Communism. Private enterprise was rare then, but small ventures were tolerated.

"It's by painting all sorts of industrial sites, chim-

Nurses and others prepared the bodies for burial, cleaning the bloodied corpse of a young boy before swaddling it in white fabric, he said. The Idlib health directorate reported that the dead man in Iblin worked for its local branch, and likewise reported the death of his wife and three of their children.

Yesterday's death toll is one of the highest since an international ceasefire came into force in March 2020 to protect the jihadist-dominated bastion from a regime offensive. But violations of the truce, brokered by regime ally Russia and rebel backer Turkey, are relatively frequent, as government forces maintain pressure on the rebel enclave.

In past weeks, Russian warplanes have pounded the southern Idlib region in tandem with artillery shelling by regime forces, according to the monitor. The war in Syria has killed nearly 500,000 people since it started in 2011 with the brutal repression of peaceful demonstrations. —AFP



**BALYUN:** Syrians lift a fallen concrete slab as they salvage items from the rubble of a damaged house following reported regime shelling in Jabal al-Zawiya's Balyun village, in the south of Syria's last major rebel stronghold of Idlib. —AFP

Dominican Republic — and moving northwest at 31 mph, the US National Hurricane Center (NHC) said. "On the forecast track, Elsa will move near the southern coast of Hispaniola later today and tonight, and move near Jamaica and portions of eastern Cuba today," the NHC said.

"By Monday, Elsa is expected to move across central and western Cuba and head toward the Florida Straits." It said Elsa could bring a tidal surge of as much as five feet (1.5 meters) above normal on Cuba's southern coast; up to four feet on the southern coast of Hispaniola; and up to three feet on the coast of Jamaica.

Rainfall, storm surges and strong winds from Elsa could affect the Florida Keys and parts of the Florida peninsula early next week, but this depends on how the storm behaves this weekend when it hits large Caribbean islands, the NHC said. Hurricane-related

weather would be bad news for the Florida town of Surfside, near Miami, where rescuers are trying to dig out a collapsed condo building in search of survivors and bodies.

In Haiti on Friday, authorities expressed worry that they lack emergency supplies such as food and water. A good part of the emergency resources the government did have were used in another crisis: the evacuation of thousands of people from their homes in Port-au-Prince because of raging gang violence.

Many of these people are staying in gyms, schools or other public buildings, and some of the supplies that had been earmarked for the hurricane season have been used on these evacuees, said Jerry Chandler, director of the Haitian civil protection agency. As the hurricane approached, authorities declared a weather alert Friday. —AFP

## International

# Afghan fighting rages as US forces see exit by end August

## More than 300 Taliban fighters killed in fighting with government forces

**KABUL:** Hundreds of Taliban fighters were killed in fierce battles with government forces across several provinces of Afghanistan, officials said yesterday, as Washington announced it would finish withdrawing its troops from the country by the end of August. Washington's announcement came after all US and NATO troops vacated their main Bagram Air Base, from where the coalition forces led operations for two decades against the Taliban and their Al-Qaeda allies.

Over the past 24 hours, more than 300 Taliban fighters were killed in fighting with government forces, the Ministry of Defence said yesterday. Scores were killed in air strikes, including a pre-dawn assault yesterday, in the southern province of Helmand, where the insurgents and government troops have regularly clashed.

There have been fears that Afghan forces would struggle without the air support that the United States has provided. "In recent days, the Afghan air force has intensified its air strikes against the Taliban hideouts and the insurgents have suffered casualties," Attaullah Afghan, a member of Helmand provincial council, told AFP.

The Taliban rejected the government's claims. Both sides often exaggerate each other's casualties and their claims are difficult to independently verify. But since May 1 when the US military began its final withdrawal of about 2,500 troops, the two warring sides have clashed fiercely across the rugged countryside as peace talks between them have faltered.

As a result, the Taliban have seized dozens of districts in blistering assaults targeting government

forces. The insurgents have encircled almost all major cities across the country, and yesterday claimed seizing seven more districts in the north-eastern province of Badakhshan.

Top US envoy to Kabul, Ross Wilson, lashed out at the insurgents. "The Taliban is using violent propaganda and hate speech to intimidate, threaten & attack Afghans on social media," Wilson said on Twitter yesterday.

"Violence and terror cannot create peace." The Pentagon pressed on with its withdrawal to end America's longest war. On Friday, all US and NATO troops left Bagram Air Base, signalling that the military involvement for coalition forces was finally nearing its end.

### 'Hub for foreign intervention'

Over the years, the mini-city north of Kabul has been visited by hundreds of thousands of US and NATO service members and contractors. It has great military and symbolic significance. "For many Afghans, Bagram is remembered as the hub for more than one foreign intervention, as it was the main air base for the Soviets throughout their occupation of the country as well," said Andrew Watkins, an Afghanistan expert at the International Crisis Group. "Not only has it been the entry point of most foreign troops that have passed through the country since 2001, it has been home to many of the in-country air assets that have lent the Afghan security forces such a vital advantage on the battlefield."

The exit of foreign troops from Bagram has further fuelled concerns the country might slide into



**BAGRAM:** An Afghan National Army (ANA) soldier looks out while standing on a Humvee vehicle at Bagram Air Base, after all US and NATO troops left, some 70 Km north of Kabul yesterday. — AFP

new civil war, as in the 1990s after the Soviets left. "I see history repeating. The Americans are doing the same what the Russians did. They are going without ending the war," said Kabul resident Dawood Hotak.

"I feel our country will slide back into another civil war as the Taliban have intensified their attacks and the Americans are exiting." US

President Joe Biden attempted to ease these concerns at the White House on Friday.

He said the US military is keeping an "over the horizon capacity" which could bring firepower to help the government and its forces if needed. Media reports say the Pentagon will probably retain about 600 troops in Afghanistan to guard the vast US diplomatic compound in Kabul. — AFP

## Two dead as Japan landslide sweeps away homes

**TOKYO:** Two bodies were found after a huge landslide at a resort town in central Japan swept away homes yesterday following days of heavy rain, with around 20 people still missing, officials said. Television footage showed a torrent of mud obliterating buildings as it crashed down a hillside in Atami, southwest of Tokyo, sending people fleeing as it buried part of a road.

"I heard a horrible sound and saw a mudslide flowing downwards as rescue workers were urging people to evacuate. So I ran to higher ground," the head of a temple near the disaster told public broadcaster NHK. "When I returned, houses and cars that were in front of the temple were gone."

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga said emergency services and the military had launched rescue and evacuation missions, warning that more downpours were forecast. "There is a possibility of heavy rain due to the rain front, so we still need to be alert at the maximum level," he said at an emergency disaster meeting.

Atami saw rainfall of 313 millimetres in just 48 hours yesterday—higher than the average monthly total for July of 242.5 millimetres, according to NHK. Two people were "found in a state of cardio and respiratory arrest", the regional governor said, an expression often used in Japan before confirming a death.

"Because of the heavy rain, the ground loosened and the mudslide occurred... it picked up speed and swept away houses together with people," Shizuoka Governor Heita Kawakatsu told reporters. He said "around 20" people were still missing after being



**ATAMI:** Workers remove mud and debris at the scene of a landslide following days of heavy rain in Shizuoka Prefecture yesterday. — AFP

swept away by the landslide.

### Rainy season

The disaster began at around 10:30 am at a river near the city, which is around 90 kilometres (55 miles) from Tokyo and is famous as a hot spring resort. A video posted on TikTok from the scene showed a huge slurry of mud and debris sliding slowly down a steep road and nearly engulfing a white car, which drove away before a faster and more violent torrent arrived.

In other clips on social media, the landslide was seen toppling electricity poles, with large areas left inundated by several waves of earth. Much of Japan is currently in its annual rainy season, which lasts several weeks and often causes floods and landslides, prompting local authorities to issue

evacuation orders.

Scientists say climate change is intensifying the phenomenon because a warmer atmosphere holds more water, resulting in more intense rainfall. More than 200 people died as devastating floods inundated western Japan in 2018. The highest evacuation alert, which urges people "to secure safety urgently", has been issued to Atami city which has more than 20,000 households, according to NHK.

Residents in many other cities in Shizuoka have also been ordered to evacuate. Around 2,800 homes in Atami have been left without power, according to the Tokyo Electric Power Company. Shinkansen bullet trains between Tokyo and Osaka were temporarily stopped due to the heavy rain, while other local trains in rain-affected areas were also halted, rail company websites said. — AFP

## Freed US journalist remembers horrors of Myanmar jail

**FAIRFAX:** Journalist Nathan Maung turned to meditation when he was jailed for reporting on Myanmar's bloody coup, but even back home in sleepy Virginia, he can't forget those left behind, including a colleague still at the mercy of their jailers. In March, as the junta moved to crush mass pro-democracy protests on Myanmar's streets, about 45 soldiers arrived at Maung's office in the commercial capital Yangon, he told AFP in an interview.

As the squad battered their way through the gate and a locked door, Maung was frantically sending messages to friends telling them he was about to be arrested, he said. When the soldiers finally broke through and stormed in with their guns up, "I said, 'Please, don't shoot us.'" Myanmar has been rocked by a huge uprising since the February putsch that ousted Aung San Suu Kyi and her government.

The junta has responded with force-shooting protesters, arresting suspected dissidents, rounding up journalists and shutting down news outlets. Maung and his colleague Hanthar Nyein watched the squad take "everything from our office"—cash, jewelry, and even shoes—before they were brought to an interrogation center in northern Yangon.

There, he said, he was held "for four days"—during three of which he was denied food, and for two, water. "I kept practicing Vipassana medita-

tion to be mindful," said Maung, who is a Myanmar-born US citizen. And with the first sip of water came hope. "After I drank my first water, I thought I could live," he said. "I wouldn't be killed."

### Crackdown on dissent

More than 880 people have been killed and almost 6,500 arrested in the crackdown according to a local monitoring group, although the State Administration Council—as the junta calls itself—disputes these figures. Another group, Reporting ASEAN, says 89 journalists have been detained since the coup.

In March, one journalist livestreamed his own arrest on his employer's official Facebook page, with the chaotic footage showing loud bangs outside his apartment building. Kamayut Media, which Maung founded, faced similar charges under a colonial-era law that criminalizes encouraging dissent against the military. As well as brute force, the military has re-tooled a colonial-era law to make spreading "fake news" a crime as it tightens its grip on dissent.

### 'Cigarette burns'

Maung soon found out how brutal the consequences of being brought in could be. "They hit my eardrums with their bare hands several times, they beat my face and shoulders," he said.



**FAIRFAX:** Journalist and US citizen Nathan Maung poses for a picture during an interview with AFP in Fairfax, Virginia. — AFP

"(They) kicked... my sides." His phone had been broken by the time he got to the center, and was of no use to his interrogators looking for contacts of dissidents and other journalists.

But Hanthar Nyein's was still working, and they needed his password. "They put his legs on the ice block for hours, burnt his skin with a cigarette," Maung said. He refused to tell them until they threatened to rape him, Maung said, and when they found pictures of him with Suu Kyi and other political figures, he was beaten again. The junta's information team says all investigations and interrogations are being carried out according to the law.

### 'I left him behind'

Maung believes US diplomacy

was one of the factors in all charges against him being dropped, and his release in June. It is a freedom not yet afforded to fellow US citizen and journalist Danny Fenster, who has been held since May 24, the only foreign reporter remaining in junta custody. In Fredericksburg, Virginia, Maung said he is committed to continuing his work and a "free Burma"—using a previous name for Myanmar—and to work to free other imprisoned journalists, such as his colleague Hanthar.

Until then, he has demons to live with. "I contacted our lawyers when I arrived in the States, and I was told that he was crying in the court when I left him behind," he said. "It broke my heart... I do not enjoy my freedom at all." — AFP

## Protesters mark Myanmar coup leader's birthday

**BANGKOK:** Protesters in coup-hit Myanmar marked the birthday of junta leader Min Aung Hlaing yesterday by burning his portrait and staging fake funerals.

The nation has experienced mass protests and a brutal military response since the February 1 coup which ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Almost 890 civilians have died in a crackdown by the State Administration Council—as the junta calls itself—and almost 6,500 have been arrested, according to a local monitoring group.

Yesterday, anti-coup demonstrators posted pictures on social media of a traditional noodle soup dish called Mohinga, which is often served at funerals in Myanmar. "Many innocent people lost their lives because of him. So, if he died, the whole country would be happy."

In Mandalay, the country's second-largest city, some activists burnt pictures of the junta leader and set fire to fake coffins at mock funerals. Min Aung Hlaing turned 65 yesterday — the age he would have been subject to mandatory retirement while he headed up the armed forces, as stipulated by the country's 2008 constitution. Some analysts believe that was a factor in his power-grab because he had not been able to see a path to higher office with the help of the military-backed political party, which was routed in the election last year. Before the coup, Min Aung Hlaing was considered an international pariah, condemned for presiding over the brutal 2017 crackdown on the country's stateless Rohingya population. — AFP

## Over 2,000 flee as Philippine volcano spews toxic gas

**MANILA:** More than 2,000 people have fled from a volcano eruption that has filled the air near the Philippine capital with toxic gas, officials said yesterday. Taal volcano, which sits in a picturesque lake, has been belching sulphur dioxide for several days, creating a thick haze over Manila and several surrounding provinces, and prompting health warnings.

At least 2,400 people have left their homes since the government called for evacuations of hamlets on the lake's shores, provincial disaster official Joselito Castro told AFP. "We expect more residents to evacuate over the coming days," he said, adding that they were seeking refuge either in schools closed by the coronavirus pandemic or in the homes of relatives.

Taal lies just 50 kilometres (30 miles) south of Manila and for much of the past week has discharged volcanic smog that has blotted out the sun in the capital. Civil defence officials have warned that upwards of 317,000 people could be vulnerable to toxic gas emissions from the volcano under the current eruption's worst-case scenario.

Taal is one of the most active volcanoes in a nation hit periodically by eruptions and earthquakes due to its location on the Pacific "Ring of Fire"—a zone of intense seismic activity. The last eruption there in January 2020 shot ash 15 kilometres (nine miles) high and spewed red-hot lava, crushing scores of homes, killing livestock and sending over 135,000 people into shelters. — AFP

# Business

SUNDAY, JULY 4, 2021

## Biden hails 'historic' rebound as US adds 850,000 jobs in June

### Data cements evidence of a broad recovery

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden on Friday cheered the "historic" US rebound from the COVID-19 crisis as the economy gained 850,000 new jobs in June, cementing the evidence of a broad recovery. The uptick was better than expected and came after two months of disappointing results, buoyed by big increases in the hard-hit leisure and hospitality sector, the Labor Department said in its closely watched monthly report.

With the latest gains, the world's largest economy has added 3.3 million jobs in the first six months of the year. "This is historic progress, pulling our economy out of the worst crisis in 100 years," Biden said at the White House. The Democratic president credited the massive American Rescue Plan approved in March and the rapid acceleration of vaccinations as factors fueling the economic revival.

"Our economy is on the move and we have COVID-19 on the run," Biden said, though he acknowledged there is more work to do. The unemployment rate last month ticked up to 5.9 percent from 5.8 percent in May, the data showed, and the jobless rate for Black workers rose a tenth of a point to 9.2 percent. The data also showed the economy is still short 6.8 million jobs compared to February 2020.

Biden called for more "critical investments" in infrastructure outlined in his American Jobs Plan, including roads and bridges but also childcare and higher education. "It's going to help us create more good jobs, ease the burden on working families, and strengthen our economy—strengthen it in the long run," the president said.

#### Worker shortage boosting wages

As the United States has brought the pandemic under control, Americans have been able to attend professional sports games, travel, and dine out and

celebrate weddings in person. The sector has hired at a rapid pace, adding 343,000 positions last month, the report said. However, it is still short 2.2 million jobs from the pre-pandemic level. Education gained 230,000 positions at the state and local government level, while manufacturing gained 15,000. But construction lost jobs, and more workers saw their hours increased.

"While today's report was shy of the coveted 1-million mark, it paints a picture of a steadily recovering jobs market," said Lydia Boussour of Oxford Economics. While she noted that many companies continue to report difficulties finding people to fill open positions, she said the strong performance "is likely the start of a series of stellar reports that will underpin the strongest US economic performance since 1951 this year."

The labor shortage also is driving wages higher, with average hourly earnings rising by 10 cents to \$30.40 in June, following larger increases in May and April, the report said.

Biden said that dynamic tips the balance of power in favor of workers and "gives them the power to demand to be treated with dignity and respect." "More jobs, better wages. That's a good combination," he said.

Wall Street was ebullient about the "Goldilocks" report and seemed to have tamed investors' fear that rising wages will spark uncontrolled inflation, with all three major indices posting new records ahead of the July 4 holiday weekend.

#### Mixed data?

Still, the struggle to find workers as businesses reopen has become a political issue, with Republicans blaming the generous federal jobless benefits as keeping potential hires on the sidelines. As a result, 22 state governments have terminated



LOS ANGELES: In this file photo taken on May 28, 2021 a 'Now Hiring' sign is posted in front of an ice-cream shop in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

supplemental unemployment benefits early, and another four states have announced plans to follow suit, although some face legal challenges. The extra benefits are set to expire in September.

Robert Frick of Navy Federal Credit Union downplayed the rising jobless rate and said there are signs of good news ahead. "The unemployment rate nudged up because more Americans are seeking jobs, and good employment gains for teachers will have a multiplier effect in the next few months, as that allows kids to go back to school and frees over a million parents to return to work," he said of the data.

Meanwhile, the broadest measure of joblessness

fell below 10 percent for the first time since the start of the pandemic. That "U6" rate—which includes those who work part-time because they cannot find full-time work, as well as discouraged workers who are not looking for a job—peaked at just under 23 percent in April 2020.

Still, the figures showed some mixed results as the ranks of the long-term unemployed—those jobless for 27 weeks or more—rebounded after declining in May. And employment in the auto sector fell by more than 12,000, which economists say is linked to the global semiconductor shortage that has hindered production, as well as annual summer factory shutdowns. —AFP

## IMF sees much stronger US growth, 2021 GDP +7.0%

WASHINGTON: The IMF is bullish on the US economic recovery, predicting growth will hit 7 percent this year—much stronger than previously forecast and "the fastest pace in a generation," the Fund said in a report.

The cheery analysis is a boon to President Joe Biden's administration and comes amid data showing an improving job market and on the eve of the all-important official employment report. The International Monetary Fund's annual review of the US economy put growth at its fastest rate since 1984, and also boosted the 2022 GDP forecast to 4.9 percent, 1.4 percentage points higher than the April estimate.

But while the IMF mostly cheered Biden's policies to support the economy, the report flagged "significant concern" over the fact he has not pulled back on tariffs on goods like steel and aluminum imposed by his predecessor. The United States has seen a "remarkable recovery," the Fund said, helped by "unprecedented" support from government spending and the Federal Reserve's "highly effective" stimulus measures.

The report notes the potential for growth to be even higher than forecast, but the outlook assumes \$4.3 trillion in spending over the next decade from Biden's proposed American Jobs Plan (AJP) and



Kristalina Georgieva

American Families Plan (AFP). Together those programs would fuel a more than 5 percent GDP increase for 2022-2024, the IMF estimated. "Rather than just offering a short-term boost to demand that then fades away, the Jobs and Families Plans are expected to produce a lasting improvement in income and living standards for many years to come," IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva told reporters.

However, if Congress fails to approve the legislation or sharply curtails the size, that would reduce the growth boost. Asked about that, Georgieva noted the bipartisan agreement on the physical infrastructure parts of the proposal.

"Size is not everything. What matters more than sizes, what is the composition of the packages," she said. The IMF report said there is "solid empirical evidence ... of the societal payoffs" of programs like those Biden has proposed, which include access to childcare to allow women to enter and remain in the workforce, and access to higher education and

training to ensure younger workers have necessary skills for the jobs available.

A "permanent increase in taxes on corporate profits and on high income households is warranted" to pay for the proposals.

#### 'Significant concern'

The Washington-based crisis lender reserved its harshest comments for Biden's trade policies, and said removing trade barriers would help support his worker-centric agenda. "It is of significant concern ... that many of the trade distortions introduced over the past four years remain in place," the report said.

Biden has continued tariffs imposed by former president Donald Trump on imported steel and aluminum, washing machines, solar panels, "as well as a range of goods imported from China."

The IMF also questioned the tougher requirements set by the Trump administration for US products in government procurement which remain in place. "These policies should be reconsidered. Trade restrictions and tariff increases should be tightly circumscribed," the report said.

The IMF forecast, which downplayed inflation risks, was in line with the Congressional Budget Office and Federal Reserve officials, which see strong government spending and a surge of consumer demand supporting the recovery and hiring as businesses work to return to normal. New applications for US unemployment benefits fell last week to the lowest since the pandemic lockdowns began, dropping to 364,000, the Labor Department reported Thursday. —AFP



PARIS: A total of 130 countries have agreed a global tax reform ensuring that multinationals pay their fair share wherever they operate, the OECD said, but some EU states refused to sign up.

full global agreement to halt the race to the bottom for corporate taxes."

Germany, another backer of the tax reform, hailed it as a "colossal step towards tax justice", and France said it was "the most important tax agreement in a century". British finance minister Rishi Sunak, whose country holds the G7 presidency, said "the fact that 130 countries across the world, including all of the G20, are now on board, marks a further step in our mission to reform global tax".

But EU low-tax countries Ireland and Hungary declined to sign up to the agreement reached in the OECD framework, the organization said, highlighting lingering divisions on global taxation.

Both countries are part of a group of EU nations also including Luxembourg and Poland that have relied on low tax rates to attract multinationals and build their economies. Ireland, the EU home to tech giants Facebook, Google and Apple, has a corporate tax rate of just 12.5 percent. —AFP

## Global tax deal backed by 130 nations

PARIS: A total of 130 countries have agreed a global tax reform ensuring that multinationals pay their fair share wherever they operate, the OECD said, but some EU states refused to sign up.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development said in a statement that global companies, including US behemoths Google, Amazon, Facebook, and Apple would be taxed at a rate of at least 15 percent once the deal is implemented. The new tax regime will add some \$150 billion to government coffers globally once it comes into force, which the OECD said it hoped would be in 2023.

"The framework updates key elements of the century-old international tax system, which is no longer fit for purpose in a globalized and digitalized 21st century economy," the OECD said.

The formal agreement follows an endorsement by the G7 group of wealthy nations last month, and negotiations now move to a meeting of the G20 group of developed and emerging economies on July 9-10 in Venice, Italy. US President Joe Biden said the latest deal "puts us in striking distance of

## US regulators probe 'spontaneous' fire of top-end Tesla

KUWAIT: US transportation safety regulators said Friday they are probing an incident in which a brand-new Tesla apparently burst into flames, temporarily trapping the driver, with firefighters needing more than two hours to extinguish the blaze. The cause of the fire that scorched the Model S Plaid on Tuesday remained undetermined, and a lawyer representing the car's owner called for the vehicle to be taken off roads.

"This is a harrowing and frightening situation and an obvious major problem," attorney Mark Geragos told AFP. "Our preliminary investigation is ongoing, but we call on Tesla to sideline these cars until a full investigation can occur."

Geragos retweeted a post that said the car "spontaneously combusted" and the driver "was trapped & could have died." His firm released a photo showing the sedan, which has a price tag of \$129,990, engulfed in flames. Tesla did not immediately respond to an AFP request for comment.

Firefighters said the car was ablaze when first responders arrived at the scene in a township near Philadelphia. They had to take special precautions due to the car's large battery, which was on fire, with "copious" amounts of water poured on the Tesla for more than two hours, according to firefighters. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration told AFP it is probing the fire.

"If data or investigations show a defect or an inherent risk to safety exists, NHTSA will take action as appropriate to protect the public," a spokesperson said. The investigation comes as US safety regulators are focusing on accidents involving cars made by Tesla and other auto manufacturers with driver assistance systems. The move comes after a fatal Tesla crash in Texas earlier this year in which police said there was no one behind the wheel.

Tesla has said the car's Autopilot system was not engaged in the incident and that it believes the driver was indeed behind the steering wheel. Tesla's technology also garnered unwanted publicity from Consumer Reports testers who demonstrated how to "fool" Autopilot into driving a Tesla without anyone behind the wheel. The company describes Autopilot as a driver enhancement system that, despite its name, requires a human operator. —AFP



## Business

# Alghanim Industries concludes facility management apprenticeship program

## Program solidifies Alghanim's commitment to national development plan and Vision 2035

KUWAIT: Alghanim Industries, one of the largest privately-owned companies in the Gulf, concluded a facilities-management apprentice training program in cooperation with the Youth Public Authority. The program equips young engineering graduates with the necessary tools needed to work and excel in the field of facility management.

The program solidifies Alghanim Industries' commitment to Kuwait's national development plan and Vision 2035, which aspires to transform the country into a leading financial and trade hub, amplifying the role of the private sector in leading the economy, creating competition, and promoting production efficiency. The Youth Public Authority coordinated the program in collaboration with seven private sector organizations, including Alghanim Industries.

Extending over four months and certified by the Middle East Facilities Management Association - MEFMA - 22 engineers, from various fields including academic work and on-the-job apprenticeship, attended the program. Training focused on enhancing the participants' skills in several managerial fields, from fixed asset and venue management to environmental and general safety procedures, all of which was supplemented with additional special topics.

Encouraged by Alghanim Industries' training prowess, more than 70 percent of participants nominated Alghanim Industries as their employer of choice. Behind the company's wealth of professional knowledge showcased in the training program, Alghanim Industries is further empowered by its adoption of state-of-the-art sustainable tech and



Kutayba Y Alghanim



Dr Mishaal Alrubaie

innovative automation solutions across all its facilities. Whether in industrial plants and service centers or in automotive showrooms and retail stores, Alghanim Industries cemented its empowerment of young professionals by extending job offers to several program graduates.

Mirroring the directives of Executive Chairman Kutayba Y Alghanim, the company's investment in youth development is crucial to its future. Commenting on the company's participation, the chairman said: "We're thrilled and proud to support this initiative, which is as distinguished as it is needed. Bridging academic education with vocational training is an excellent professional combination that benefits both these young professionals and our communities. As a Kuwaiti company, investing in your youth is beyond a national duty. It is planting the seeds for our country's future."

The chairman also applauded the Youth Public Authority, saying "We hope to continue collaborating on more initiatives with the Youth Public

Authority in the future. I would like to personally congratulate all the young engineers who completed this program. I am certain that this valuable apprenticeship will help them enhance their skills and launch their careers."

Director General of the Youth Public Authority Dr Mishaal Alrubaie also lauded the efforts of Alghanim Industries while expressing a shared commitment to further develop future Kuwaiti generations. The director added: "The Youth Public Authority is proud to play a pioneering role in supporting private sector companies with their efforts to localize human resources. The success of this program is a result of a successful partnership between the public and private sectors to achieve a joint goal - creating a promising generation of career-driven young Kuwaitis."

Supporting youth initiatives is central to Alghanim Industries' commitment to Kuwait's economic well-being. During June, the company honored five young Kuwaiti female architects for winning the inaugural Kutayba Yusuf Alghanim Architecture Prize. Conceived by the chairman to spotlight young Kuwaiti professionals working at the intersection of the arts and engineering, competitors were asked to repurpose a defunct 44-meter-tall water tower built in the 1960s and located in one of Alghanim's facilities in Shuwaikh. "We have so many promising, creative and intelligent young professionals," Executive Chairman Alghanim said. "It is delightful to see such vigor and skill from the youth; our future is in good hands."

Alghanim Industries is one of the largest, privately-owned companies in the MENA region.



Founded at the turn of the century in Kuwait, the company today employs more than 15,000 people in 30 businesses across 40 countries in the Middle East, North Africa, Eastern Europe and Asia.

Alghanim is a market leader in almost every major sector of its operations, which include: engineering, retail, automotive sales and service, insulation and pre-engineered steel building structures, logistics and warehousing, fast moving consumer goods, food & beverage, office automation, advertising, insurance, consumer credit and travel. The company is actively growing its brand portfolio, with a focus on top-tier global partners. Among them: Avis, British Airways, British Petroleum, Cathay Pacific, Daewoo, Honda, Saint-Gobain and Toshiba. Additionally, Alghanim Industries has created a number of successful regional businesses, including X-cite (consumer electronics), and Safat Home (lifestyle and home furniture).

## US carmakers report higher 2nd quarter sales

NEW YORK: Automakers reported huge jumps in second-quarter US sales, but face a challenging summer as the global semiconductor shortage continues to plague the industry.

General Motors and Toyota saw impressive increases compared with the same quarter of 2020 when large parts of the US economy remained under tight COVID-19 restrictions. GM said US sales soared 40 percent this spring to 688,236 units. "The US economy is accelerating, consumer spending is robust and jobs are plentiful," GM Chief Economist Elaine Buckberg said. "Consumer demand for vehicles is also strong, but constrained by very tight inventories. We expect continued high demand in the second half of this year and into 2022."

GM continued to see robust appetite for larger vehicles, especially pickup trucks. Just two pickup brands-the Chevrolet Silverado and GMC Sierra-accounted for about 35 percent of all sales.

The company also pointed to increases in sales of its Bolt electric vehicles, although the volumes remain tiny compared with total sales. GM this year has unveiled a series of major projects to boost electric vehicle capacity. But the US auto giant's inventories stood at just 211,974 vehicles, depleted by 37 percent from the end of the first quarter. Inventories in June 2019 stood at 809,387.



FLINT, US: In this file photo, General Motors Co Chevrolet and GMC pickup trucks are parked outside the Flint Assembly plant in Flint, Michigan. — AFP

Automakers have been forced to dial back or alter production due to the semiconductor crunch, which analysts say is hitting sales as well. Toyota scored a 73 percent increase in US auto sales to 688,813 compared with the second quarter of 2021. Toyota's press release did not disclose inventory data, but sales in June were off 14 percent compared with May.

"We are in an unusual time. The low inventories are starting to have an effect on sales," said Michelle Krebs of Cox Automotive. Krebs said both GM and Toyota have low inventories of popular models, prompting some consumers to defer purchases because they could not find what they wanted, or were put off by elevated prices. "The whole

market is in a place we have never been before," Krebs said. "The overwhelming story is the lack of inventory due to the chip shortage."

Krebs said it was difficult to know when dealerships might be replenished meaningfully, and lean inventories are expected to persist through the summer and possibly into fall. Semiconductor supplies remain tight, but IHS Markit expects the situation to improve somewhat in coming weeks. "In third quarter we expect continued disruption but not to the scale seen in the first or second quarter," IHS Markit said in a note Wednesday. "The situation is becoming better understood and great efforts are being made to enhance visibility within a very complex supply chain." — AFP



DUBLIN: Shoppers walk through a busy Grafton Street in Dublin. Ireland's finance ministry expects to lose two billion euros (\$2.4 billion) each year from 2025 if the global minimum rate comes about. — AFP

## Ireland's low-tax economy can face OECD reform

DUBLIN: Far-reaching global tax reforms are reaching fruition and on the face of it, Ireland has most to lose after the small European economy threw open its doors to US multinationals.

On Thursday, 130 countries endorsed an outline agreement by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which groups 38 wealthy nations, to level up global corporation tax. "Pillar one" would re-allocate tax jurisdiction from where multinationals are headquartered to where they make profits, while the second pillar would establish a global minimum rate of 15 percent.

The OECD says the deal will generate an estimated \$150 billion in extra revenues globally, adapt the tax system to the modern digitalized economy and support state finances battered by the coronavirus crisis. The pact came after the G7 group of leading economies-the United States, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan-last month agreed on the minimum rate of 15 percent for corporation tax.

Ireland has maintained a 12.5 percent rate since

2003, and has become the European base for a raft of US companies, especially technology and pharmaceutical giants whose profits have rocketed during the pandemic. It was one of only nine nations that refused to sign up despite expressing "broad support", owing to the 15-percent proposal.

"I have expressed Ireland's reservation, but remain committed to the process and aim to find an outcome that Ireland can yet support," Finance Minister Paschal Donohoe said.

### 'Writing on the wall'

Some analysts believe Ireland's economy is over-dependent on multinationals like Facebook, Apple and Google. Just 10 firms paid 51 percent of Ireland's corporate tax receipts last year. In 2019, Ireland drew 15.7 percent of its total fiscal intake from corporation tax.

Ireland's finance ministry expects to lose two billion euros (\$2.4 billion) each year from 2025 if the global minimum rate comes about. Research company Oxford Economics predicted the OECD reforms would make Ireland one of Europe's most indebted states, and it also faces disruption from neighboring Britain's Brexit withdrawal from the EU. But with tax havens such as the Cayman Islands also signing up to the proposals, Ireland knows "the writing is on the wall", said economics professor Lucie Gadenne of Britain's University of Warwick. — AFP

## Rising food prices deepen woes of world's poorest

PARIS: Global food prices are rising at their fastest rate in a decade, exacerbating the troubles of the world's most vulnerable nations as they struggle with the fallout from the coronavirus pandemic. The United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is worried that soaring prices could foment further social unrest in countries already mired in political turmoil. Here is a look at the situation worldwide:

### Where are food prices headed?

According to the FAO, food prices were nearly 40 percent higher in May than a year ago, the sharpest increase since September 2011. On a 12-month basis, the price of corn has skyrocketed by 88 percent, soybean by 73 percent, grain and dairy products by 38 percent, sugar by 34 percent and meat by 10 percent. "Obviously, it's very concerning," said Arif Husain, chief economist of the World Food Program.

In 2007-2008, brutal increases in the price of basic foodstuffs sparked riots in a number of cities around the world. Peaking in 2010-2011, the price rises acted as a harbinger for the Arab Spring uprisings.

### What is driving the phenomenon?

The global economy is rebounding but inflation is also rising as governments have spent huge sums on stimulus programs after the pandemic brought economic activity to a standstill last year.

China, which the World Bank projects will notch up growth of 8.5 percent in 2021, is gobbling up basic foodstuffs such as oilseed, cereals and meat. "It really is China which is currently fuelling the surge in food prices," said economist Philippe Chalmin. The US economy is also expected to bounce back strongly, with the World Bank projecting growth there of 6.8 percent this year.

But the economic recovery is "very uneven" across the world, with developing nations facing higher import bills while their income is not growing, said Josef Schmidhuber, deputy director of the FAO's trade and markets division. Other factors behind the surge in prices include a drought in Brazil, which is driving up corn prices, rebounding oil prices and an explosion in sea freight costs.

### How long will it last?

That is difficult to say. For the moment, harvests are projected to be very good.

The US Department of Agriculture is forecasting record crop production for 2021-2022 and also record harvests of Brazilian soybean and American corn. If these materialize, that will help ease the price situation. But climate conditions could be a wild card in such projections.

The FAO's Schmidhuber believes that prices will remain relatively high this year, notably if oil prices go up as the agriculture sector consumes a lot of energy. "If they rise, food prices will remain high for a long period of time". For FAO economist Abdolreza Abbassian, "the only thing we know is that the food market is going to be even more volatile in the future than it was in the past". —AFP

## Jobs data push Wall St stocks to new highs

NEW YORK: Wall Street stocks surged to fresh records Friday while the dollar retreated after a solid US jobs report that was not seen as accelerating a monetary policy shift. After a muted session in Europe, the three major US indices notched all-time highs after the Labor Department reported the US economy added 850,000 jobs in June, better than expected and far stronger than in the prior two months. Analysts however said the much-anticipated monthly data was not uniformly outstanding, noting that unemployment ticked up to 5.9 percent.

The market viewed the data as a "Goldilocks"-type outcome in reference to the fairy tale character, who famously preferred her porridge at the right temperature, not too hot or too cold.

Briefing.com analyst Patrick O'Hare characterized the data as "okay." The report "tabled any kind of concern that the report would stir the Fed to action faster than expected," he told AFP in an interview. Most large tech firms enjoyed another banner session, with Apple and Microsoft piling on two percent or more, along with Amazon, where founder Jeff Bezos is set to step down as CEO next week, but maintain a leadership position as chairman.

But IBM shares fell 4.6, weighing on the Dow, as it announced that Jim Whitehurst would step down as president of the tech giant following the integration of Red Hat, which Whitehurst had led prior to its acquisition by IBM. Meanwhile, oil prices were mixed as markets monitored grinding talks among petroleum producers in the OPEC+ alliance, which again failed to reach agreement on production quotas, saying late Friday that negotiations would resume next week.

European markets ended the day little changed. Asia was mixed as investors weighed the fact the Delta variant of coronavirus has forced several governments, including Australia and South Africa, to reimpose lockdown measures. —AFP

## Business

# KFH launches project to develop strategy for business sustainability

## Bank's sustainability report to be in accordance with latest global standards

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Finance House (KFH) launched a project to develop a sustainability strategy to integrate with the bank's business strategy. In this project, KFH will work on continuing the development of human resources, as well as enhancing transparency and credit rating by preparing the seventh sustainability report in accordance with the latest international principles, standards, and frameworks by partnering with a global consulting firm, PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC).

This project derives from KFH's vision towards leading the global development of financial services in compliance with the provisions of Islamic Sharia and elevating it to the level of the most profitable, sustainable, and most trusted Islamic bank in the world. It also comes as an activation of KFH's mission to achieve the highest levels of innovation and excellence in customer service while protecting and developing the common interest of all parties involved with the institution.

The Executive Manager of Corporate Governance at KFH, Mohammed Al-Arbeed, said that the development of KFH's integrated sustainability strategy aims at analyzing and measuring the economic, social, and environmental impacts, whether at the operational level or the level of business continuity, as well as identifying and managing environmental and social risks and opportunities, in a manner that creates value for all stakeholders and development partners.

Al-Arbeed pointed out that the project kicked off with an interactive workshop in which representatives from various concerned departments within the Bank participated, adopting in this way a participatory approach based on the capacity building and skills development of KFH's human resources, with the participation of highly qualified international and local

experts to transfer and localize the knowhow at KFH group, based on the bank's values of partnership and responsibility.

Al-Arbeed added: "The importance of the project comes from multiple global, national and sectoral institutions and levels: i) after the United Nations launched the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals promoting prosperity while taking into account the protection of the people and the planet, and ii) the adoption of the Framework Convention on Climate Change, the "Paris Agreement" in 2015, which aims to reduce global warming and GHG emissions, adopted by the State of Kuwait, as well as all the countries in which KFH operates, whilst iii) the state of Kuwait developed the Kuwait Vision 2035 aiming to transform Kuwait into a global financial and commercial center that attracts investment.

Accordingly, KFH's integrated sustainability strategy will complement the efforts of the state of Kuwait in financing government and development projects, as well as identifying ways to strengthen its role in order to contribute effectively to achieving comprehensive development and the goals of Kuwait Vision 2035".

Al-Arbeed also explained that the topic is gaining importance in particular in the financial sector which is witnessing rapid developments, especially after the coronavirus crisis, in terms of greater attention to the governance of economic, social, and environmental risks and impacts of the operational processes of financial institutions on the one hand, and the development of banking services with developmental Economic, social and environmental impacts on the other hand, as well as attention to the efficiency of social and environmental risk management systems

and the extent of their comprehensiveness and proactiveness in facing crises and emergencies timely.

He stated that the global financial sector is witnessing a remarkable development in the volume of responsible investments and sustainable financing and the development of financing products with positive social and environmental impacts. These developments represent an opportunity for financial institutions committed to the principles of sustainability, as the volume of investments in sustainable assets, according to the latest reports of the Global Alliance for Sustainable Investment, amounted to more than 30 trillion US dollars, with an increase of 34 percent in two years, noting the development of many financial products and the increase in demand for them, such as green, social and sustainable instruments, green finance and mortgages, carbon reduction funds and others.

Al-Arbeed pointed out that the Global Risks report showed that environmental and social risks, in conjunction with risks related to information security and information infrastructure will be at the top of the global risks, adding that the report indicated that the economic impacts resulting from natural disasters around the world in 2018 amounted to 165 billion US dollars, where 50 percent of this total is not insured.

He also stated that: "In order to keep pace with these rapid developments, a set of global public initiatives were developed, such as the United Nations Global Compact to encourage companies around the world to adopt sustainability and social responsibility principles and business practices, the United Nations Initiative for Sustainable Stock Exchanges (SSE) with the membership of the Kuwait Stock Exchange, in addition to the Principles of Responsible Investment

(PRI), the United Nations Environment Program Financing Initiative (UNEP-FI), and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). A set of frameworks for the governance of social and environmental risks for financing operations (equator-principles) have also been developed. Furthermore, a set of disclosure recommendations for measuring and reporting the risks of climate change on financing portfolios is developed by the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD). The Global Reporting Initiative has also developed global reporting standards for disclosures on social and environmental impacts, risks, and opportunities, as well as ways of their governance. It is worth noting that the International Accounting Standards Authority Foundation is currently working on including sustainability disclosures, and the Basel Committee is currently working on studying disclosures on the risks of climate change.

In conclusion, Al-Arbeed affirmed KFH's keenness to enhance the sustainability strategy based on the pioneering cycle aligning with the latest global developments, as well as a cycle in maximizing the gains of all stakeholders, enabling the bank's business strategy to achieve its objectives, and continuing to achieve its leading development role.



Mohammed Al-Arbeed

## Almulla holds workshop on anti-money-laundering

**KUWAIT:** Almulla inaugurated the first virtual workshop on Best International Practices and Strengthening Anti-Money-Laundering and Combating Terrorism Financing in the Exchange Companies Sector, in cooperation with the US Embassy in Kuwait in the presence of representatives from the US Department of Justice and the US Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN).

Abdulla Najeeb Almulla, Chairman of the Kuwaiti Union of Exchange Companies - Kuwait, and his deputy, Talal Behman, inaugurated the first virtual workshop on June 28, 2021, on Best International Practices and Strengthening Anti-Money Laundering and Combating Terrorism Financing in the Exchange Companies Sector. This cooperation is the first of its kind with The US Embassy in Kuwait, and in the presence of representatives from the US Department of Justice Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance and Training (OPDAT) and the US Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN).

The virtual workshop is part of the Kuwaiti Union of Exchange Companies efforts to create a safe work environment to perform remittances business and

examine the best practices of the US to assist with combatting money laundering and terrorism financing operations around the world.

In his opening statement, Almulla praised the Central Bank of Kuwait's leading role in regulating the exchange profession and creating a safe work environment for the remittances business through updated legislation and instructions issued in this regard.

On the other hand, Puneet V Kakar, the Resident Legal Advisor - US Department of Justice, outlined the policies and procedures adopted by the US on how to combat money laundering and terrorism financing by extremist groups. He also praised the role and efforts of the Kuwaiti government and the CBK in this regard, emphasizing the common goals and cooperation between the United States and the State of Kuwait. Kakar also praised the importance of strict procedures followed by exchange companies and avoiding all risks by being cautious dealing in digital currencies and with fake companies, as both became common channels in money laundering and terrorism financing opera-



Abdulla Najeeb Almulla



Puneet V Kakar

tions internationally.

The workshop also included a presentation by Talal Behman, in which he addressed the policies and procedures followed by exchange companies in Kuwait and the relevant instructions issued by the CBK and other regulatory authorities.

Rollin Badal, Chief of the Money Services Business and Non-Bank Financial Institutions Section, Financial Crimes Enforcement Network, FINCEN, gave a presentation where he described the regulations of FINCEN with respect to money transmitters and the importance of implementing the recommendations of the Financial Action task Force (FATF) related to combating money laundering and terrorism financing.

## Gulf Bank wraps up vaccination drive; 84% of staff inoculated

**KUWAIT:** Gulf Bank has announced it has vaccinated 84 percent of its 1,834 employees against the novel coronavirus, with staff members across all departments at the Bank having now received the COVID-19 vaccine. Gulf Bank achieved this milestone after successfully wrapping up an internal staff vaccination campaign launched in partnership with the Ministry of Health, in the interest of the collective safety of the Bank's employees and customers.

During the course of the campaign, which took place last Sunday, June 27 from 8 AM to 11 AM, a total of 220 employees who registered for the vaccine were vaccinated at the Bank's state-of-the-art training center, located on the 34th floor of Crystal Tower in Kuwait City. As of date, a total of 922 employees have now received the first dose of the vaccine, while 615 employees have completed their vaccinations with both doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech and Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines.

Commenting on the staff vaccination campaign, Gulf Bank's General Manager of Human Resources, Salma Al-Hajjaj, said: "Our employees are the cornerstone of Gulf Bank. In light of the health challenges that the whole world is experiencing, and with the availability of COVID-19 vaccines in the country, we knew it was imperative that we protect our employees to ensure their safety, their families' safety, and the safety of our customers. That is why we have spared no effort in cooperating with the Ministry of Health, who we would like to thank for their swift response in providing the necessary vaccines. We would also like to thank the medical team at the Gulf Bank Training Center for their efforts in vaccinating our employees. We would also like to take this occasion to stress the importance of getting vaccinated for the few remaining employees who have not yet received the vaccination (either due to health reasons or other obstacles) to prioritize getting vaccinated as soon as possible, in order to ensure their safety and the safety of all our employees."

Gulf Bank is committed to applying the best preventive health measures to ensure the collective safety of both its clients and staff. During the first stages of returning to normal life, Gulf Bank was keen to ensure business continuity while implementing a set of initiatives that prioritized both employees' physical and mental wellbeing, and included several staff wellness programs, the periodic sterilization of the Bank's branches, implementation of social distancing measures, and regular reminders for customers and employees to wear masks at all times. To encourage a culture of social distancing and to raise more awareness about social distancing, Gulf Bank also placed multiple signs and banners across its branches indicating the number of people allowed in any given space.



Salma Al-Hajjaj

## Executive outlines Huawei's vision for AppGallery

**KUWAIT:** Huawei spokesperson Lu Geng, Vice President Middle East and Africa, Huawei Global Partnerships & Eco-Development, in an interview, outlines Huawei's vision for AppGallery and its key achievement over the past year globally and in the MEA region.

**Question:** What is AppGallery, and where is it available?  
**Geng:** AppGallery is the official app distribution platform for Huawei and one of the top 3 app marketplaces globally. It was launched first in China in 2011. Subsequently, a global version was officially launched in April 2018.

AppGallery has nine years of experience in aggregating and distributing applications. It offers various global and local apps across 18 categories, including navigation & transport, news, social media, and others. The distribution platform is available in more than 170 countries/regions with 540 million monthly active users globally, covering mainstream apps and services in Europe, Latin America, Asia Pacific, Middle East, Africa, and more regions.

**Question:** What is Huawei's vision for AppGallery?  
**Geng:** Our vision is to make AppGallery an open, innovative app distribution platform accessible to consumers around the world. At the same time, Huawei aims to strictly protect users' privacy and security while providing them with a unique and smart experience.

With AppGallery, we want to provide consumers with more choices and provide developers with more innovative technology to imagine new possibilities for their user experience. Our unique Huawei Mobile Services Core allows apps to be integrated across different devices, delivering more convenience and a smoother experience - and this is part of our wider "1+8+N" strategy at Huawei.

**Question:** What's AppGallery's key achievement over the past year globally and in the MEA region?  
**Geng:** AppGallery reached several milestones in its ongoing development. We have successfully developed AppGallery into a platform where consumers can enjoy innovative experiences with optimized and integrated apps into Huawei's unique hardware and software capabilities.

The platform now has 2.7 million registered developers. In addition, the global audience has increased to 540 million Monthly Active Users, demonstrating AppGallery growing impact on developers and mobile users around the world. Globally, 134,000 apps integrated with Huawei Mobile Services Core. The number of apps launched on AppGallery in 2020 outside China was more than 10 times that of 2019.

The platform also saw an app distribution reach of 38.4 billion in 2020, 174 billion more than 2019. Again, gaming is at the forefront of this expansion, with over 500 percent more games now available on the platform.

In the Middle East and Africa region, the Partnerships & Eco-Development team has concentrated its efforts on working with local developers to bring the most relevant apps to users. We can see also that developers in this region are increasingly looking to AppGallery to reach local audiences and tap into its growing global audience. Gaming vertical follows the same trend as globally. We've seen a positive growth of 240 percent in the local gaming app portfolio since last year by integrating popular games such as Tamamat, Rababa, Jawaker, UMX, Babil Games, Yalla, Ahena Studio, Inspired Square, and much more.

Other verticals like E-commerce, banking, transportation, food delivery, and airlines have seen a significant increase within the past year. Major local entities from these various industries have integrated their mobile apps within our Ecosystem. The platform now includes popular ride-hailing apps available in the Middle East and Africa, such as Abu Dhabi Taxi and Dubai Taxi Corporation (DTC), Bolt, Karwa, SWVL, and Jeeny. Major regional airlines have also joined AppGallery and Huawei users can now use Emirates airline, Etihad Airways and Qatar Airways mobile apps to plan and manage their travel from the convenience of their smart devices while limiting physical contact and interactions at all stages of their journey. We've also integrated leading delivery services and e-commerce apps in the region like talabat, hungerstation, noon shopping and Jumia. In terms of banking, following the new digitalization trend, various banks and financial institutions have integrated their smart applications within our HMS Core, to benefit from Huawei's large audience base and leading technology. In Kuwait Huawei users can now download quickly and safely many banking apps such as NBK, CBK, KFH, Gulf Bank, Borgan Bank, Boubyan Bank, Warba Bank and Ahli Bank (ABK).

**Questions:** Can you tell us about new partnerships in the Middle East and Africa?  
**Geng:** In the Middle East and Africa, Huawei has recently launched its a new innovative range of Super Devices. Huawei's Super Device experience provides the solution by enabling different devices to seamlessly connect and collaborate in a convenient and secure manner. Distributed technology is used to allow all types of different devices to connect under one system. This means previously independent products now form part of a cohesive and holistic "Super Device". This integrates all hardware and resources and thereby effortlessly leverages the capabilities of its component devices based on a user's needs.

In terms of partnerships Huawei has worked closely with various entities in the region to leverage the Super Device



Lu Geng



capabilities, providing users with a truly intelligent experience across all types of scenarios

Dubai Taxi Corporation (DTC), one of the largest taxi operator in Dubai and subsidiary of the Dubai Government Roads and Transport Authority (RTA), Emirates one of the world's leading international airlines, talabat, one of the leading food delivery apps in the region and Jeeny, one of the first ride hailing apps in Saudi, are the first entities in the region to see their apps running seamlessly and smoothly onto the flagship HUAWEI Watch 3 smartwatch, providing an unprecedented experience.

Huawei users, by downloading these apps from the AppGallery, can now track their food delivery directly from their wrist, get automatic notifications on their emirates flight status and book their taxi ride straight from the new Huawei Watch 3 smartwatch without using their smartphones anymore.

Moreover, the Huawei Watch 3 Pro brings an effortless payment experience to nol customers in UAE. Users can now travel with their Huawei smartwatch via Dubai metro, bus, and tram. They can also use their smartwatch to pay for groceries (in selected locations) and other RTA public transport services.

Huawei is in the process of working closely with many more key partners in the Middle East and Africa across all the Super Device range to bring to the consumer the most enhanced and high-quality experience. You will see in the near future more products roll out with more partnerships in this region.

**Question:** What promises does 2022 bring along?  
**Geng:** AppGallery will continue to provide users with access to global and local apps, protect data security and privacy, and deliver innovative experiences. At the same time, Huawei is teaming up with the world's top and mainstream app companies and app development companies, encouraging them to launch their apps to AppGallery.

We understand that consumers have specific and varying needs across markets, and we are not just focused on the top apps by sheer download volume. Still, we are also investing a significant amount of time working with the key sectors that are universally accepted as the most.

We see that AppGallery is making progress currently, and Huawei feels confident about its future in providing a different perspective to consumers.



Business

NBK Economic Report

# Egypt's GDP growth picks up despite pandemic challenges

## Inflation remains below central bank's target range

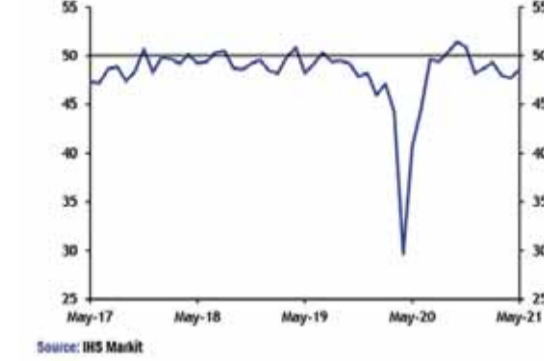
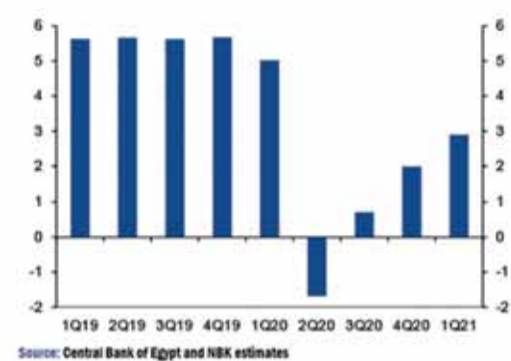
KUWAIT: Egypt has succeeded in laying the foundations of a more resilient and balanced economy that has been able to manage the spread of COVID-19 without derailing growth or halting structural reforms. Still, the economy remains under pressure due to COVID. A third wave of infections in 2Q21 saw daily cases above 1,000 starting late April, before easing from mid-May after restrictions to curb the virus's spread were reintroduced on May 6. Total confirmed cases reached about 280,000 and deaths over 16,000 by the end of June.

To accelerate the vaccination campaign, the government signed an agreement with China to manufacture the Sinovac vaccine locally, and aims to vaccinate 40 percent of its population by the end of 2021 (3.4 million people had been vaccinated by June). To boost the tourism sector over the crucial summer period, restrictions were lifted on June 1, including on the early closure of shops and restaurants, while the vaccination of workers in hotels in Southern Sinai and the Red Sea provinces was completed to encourage both domestic and foreign tourists.

### GDP growth

Helped by an easing in lockdown restrictions from January, the gradual reopening of business activities pushed economic growth to 2.9 percent y/y in Q3 of FY20/21 (Jan-March) from 2 percent a quarter earlier. This was supported by government efforts to alleviate the pandemic's impact on key sectors and to boost domestic demand by raising wages and supporting vulnerable households. Over the first 9 months of FY20/21 (July-March), GDP growth averaged 1.9 percent y/y compared to about 5.4 percent in the same period a year earlier. Several sectors managed to maintain their growth trajectory, including wholesale & retail trade, industry, agriculture and real estate, representing more than half of the economy. However, the tourism sector that represents 11.3 percent of GDP remained badly affected by the pandemic.

In this context, the unemployment rate edged up to 7.4 percent in 1Q21 from 7.2 percent in 4Q20, on the back of the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic. However, this rate is below the peak of 9.6 percent recorded in 2Q20 and even the 2019 average of 7.9 percent, suggesting a return to close to normal in some



business areas.

The PMI also continues to show signs of normalization, although is off its highs. The headline index recorded a huge improvement from the levels seen at the peak of the pandemic crisis, averaging 48.7 in 1Q21 versus 38.3 in 2Q20. While the index remains in sub-50 contraction territory, this level of the index has historically been consistent with solid GDP growth. Figures for Q2 so far look a touch softer, perhaps affected by the virus restrictions imposed in May. However, firms are optimistic about the outlook as the future output index reached 79.1 in May, its highest level since February 2018.

With virus cases starting to dip, restrictions recently eased and vaccine rollout picking up, we expect the economy to continue its improvement in the coming quarters. Growth is forecast at 2.5 percent in FY20/21, rebounding strongly to about 5 percent over the medium term, benefitting from the authorities' continued commitment to reforms. However, the still unknown path of the pandemic and in particular the threat of new virus variants remains a serious risk to the outlook for the coming year both in Egypt and globally.

### Fiscal reforms

The government has continued to address its public finance challenges through a combination of measures such as reducing energy subsidies and directing the savings to priority areas. In fact, the government achieved a primary surplus (i.e. before interest is paid) of 0.4 percent of GDP during the first nine months of FY20/21 (July-March), despite an increase in spending

needed to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. Amid government efforts to reduce debt-servicing costs by changing debt maturities to benefit from lower interest rates, the total deficit reached about 4.4 percent of GDP during the first seven months of the current FY20/21 (July-January), against 4.6 percent during the same period a year ago.

The government is targeting a decrease in the deficit to 6.5 percent of GDP in FY21/22, 5.3 percent in FY22/23, and 4.6 percent in FY23/24, thanks to a medium-term strategy to reduce the burden of debt servicing and create additional financial space for the budget to support economic activity. The public debt-to-GDP ratio is expected to rise slightly to 83 percent in FY20/21 up from 82.5 percent in FY19/20, but should decline to about 80 percent by the end of June 2022. These targets seem reasonable and close to our forecasts as long as the government maintains its commitment to reforms in the areas of economic growth and fiscal sustainability.

### External sector

The current account balance has widened a little since the start of the pandemic, with some key sectors still in bad shape. The deficit reached \$5.7 billion (6.4 percent of NBK estimated GDP) in 1Q21 from \$2.8 billion (3.1 percent of GDP) in the previous year. The tourism sector, which is one of the main sources of foreign exchange, saw its revenues drop by 67.5 percent over the first nine months of FY20/21 to \$3.1 billion, as the pandemic sharply reduced international travel. The trade deficit also widened by 12.7 percent to \$30.7 billion in July-March, amid a rise in imports of equipment

related to COVID and an increase in commodity prices.

On the positive side, net foreign direct investment began to recover during 2H FY20/21, with net inflows of \$1.4 billion in 1Q21 compared to \$970 million in 1Q20. Remittances from Egyptians working abroad also continued an upward trend, increasing by 8.5 percent to \$23.4 billion in July-March compared to \$21.5 billion a year ago. Looking ahead, the current account deficit could reach 4.0 percent of GDP in FY20/21, before improving to around 2.5 percent of GDP in coming years, as pandemic fallout fades.

As the pandemic affected foreign reserves, the authorities were able to secure additional financial buffers in the form of IMF support, foreign borrowing and the recent acceleration of capital inflows. Indeed, net foreign reserves increased by around \$125 million in May to \$40.5 billion, and were up more than \$4 billion versus the pandemic trough of \$36 billion in May 2020. Foreign reserves are expected to rise as Egypt received in June the third tranche worth \$1.6 billion of the IMF's \$5.2 billion stand-by agreement program.

After appreciating against the US dollar in 2020, the pound has been broadly stable in 1H21 and has traded at an average of EGP15.7/\$1 so far this year. This stability against the backdrop of the pandemic reflects overall improved macroeconomic performance, relatively high interest rates which have maintained the currency's attractiveness, and confidence surrounding reforms. The steady pound has also reinforced the improved economic climate by supporting the investment environment and contributing to reduced inflationary pressures versus earlier years.

### Stable monetary policy

From an average of 4.4 percent y/y in 1Q21, inflation picked up to 4.8 percent in May, the highest since December. This was attributed to an increase in food and beverage prices amid Ramadan and the Eid al-Fitr celebration. In the coming months, inflation could increase given rising commodity prices, scheduled electricity tariff hikes and the potential pick-up in demand as economic activity recovers. Still, it is expected to remain much lower than the double-digit rates recorded in 2019 and before, reflecting both improved policy setting and greater exchange rate stability following earlier currency liberalization measures.

## NBK releases sustainability report for 2020

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has issued its annual Sustainability Report for the year 2020 under the theme "Maintaining Course", underscoring its leading role and institutional approach to integrate sustainability into systems for managing environment, social and governance (ESG) impacts.

In this fifth Sustainability Report, which is aligned with the guidelines of the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), NBK shares its key sustainability-related accomplishments for 2020 through a proactive and comprehensive response to support customers, employees and its community in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as initiatives in environment, healthcare, social contribution, education and sports.

In developing this report, NBK continued to follow a stakeholder-focused and standards-aligned approach to sustainability. Accordingly, the report was developed with consideration given to a range of global and local sustainability frameworks and drivers, including the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Kuwait National Development Plan (KNDP).

NBK boasts its accomplishments over the past years towards achieving its sustainability pillars, and looks forward to continued progress in making ESG standards a basis for dialogue with customers, embedding sustainable finance in all its operations, and building sustainability as an integral part of its corporate culture."



### NBK's resilience throughout COVID-19

The annual Sustainability Report highlights the bank's response to the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic across its functions and operations. NBK's readiness and incisive early action helped manage the emerging COVID-19-related risks. Every department played a role in NBK rapidly implementing and scaling up digital solutions and electronic services for remote work and for security and continuity in financial services provision. NBK's IT team supported the transition from on-site operations to a remote access infrastructure, enabling employees to work from home and to serve customers through virtual financial transactions. NBK also amplified customer support services to aid customers in this forced transition to mobile banking. Further, NBK leveraged all their social media channels and brand to inform, educate, and motivate both customers and community members regarding pandemic safety measures.

### Internal governance

The report summarizes NBK's governance structure, Board of Directors (BoD), Board Committees, governance disclosures and compliance processes. It describes the bank's ethical and transparent business practices, highlighting its code of conduct, commitment to human rights, prioritization of investor relations, and a range of ethical business areas that include anti-corruption, anti-fraud, and anti-money laundering. NBK strengthened its commitment to the highest standards of governance by initiating the process to add two new independent members to the board of directors (completed this year), enhancing the role of the Risk and Compliance Committee in surfacing and managing a wide range of risks, and emphasizing its long-standing commitment to human rights by creating and approving a new Human Rights policy.

### Enhancing business practices

In 2020, because in-person visits to branches

decreased 44 percent and use of mobile banking increased 41 percent, NBK implemented numerous initiatives and programs to build a satisfying customer experience within that new environment, including digital transformation infrastructural changes, local delivery banking, youth programs and discounts, partnerships with popular retail outlets, and social-media-mediated education and support for customers as they navigated the COVID-19 pandemic. Customer satisfaction remained essentially steady at 93 percent satisfaction despite the unprecedented changes forced by COVID-19.

### Caring for people

Another key sustainability dimension reported for the previous year is the workplace, where the bank exhibits sustainable management of and engagement with its people. Some highlights this year include implementation and achievement of: dozens of leading-edge practices to support the health of employees in the midst of the pandemic; 72.7 percent Kuwaitization rate; 45.8 percent female employees' proportion of the workforce, the highest among all regional banks; 51,924 employee training hours delivered; and the provision of NBK Clinic services to employees.

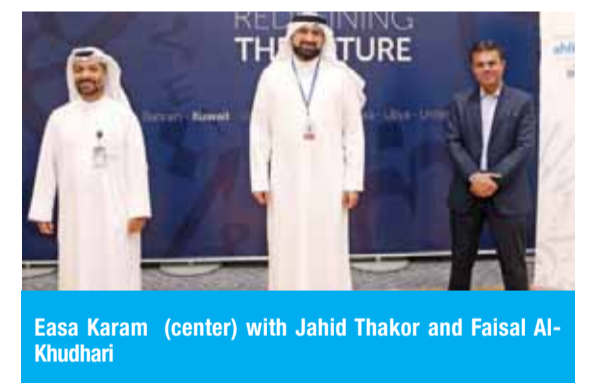
### Impacting community

NBK has a very long-standing commitment to being a responsible corporate citizen in the community, especially by giving back through contributions, awareness raising, and community engagements. Social media was a vital tool for NBK in 2020, enabling virtual engagement with NBK's community by achieving nearly 2 million engagements across their six major social media platforms. The report outlines NBK's social initiatives ranging from healthcare to COVID-19 awareness to education and youth, including the provision of around 375 volunteering hours by staff concerning COVID-19 awareness, and training 32 youth students through "Tamakan" career readiness program for fresh Kuwaiti graduates.

### Managing environment impacts

The report highlighted the substantial progress made in reducing environmental impacts, including energy, water, waste and resource management, headquarter relocation, and the calculation of NBK's footprint in terms of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Because of both COVID-19 demand reductions and moving to the new green headquarters building, the bank achieved 70 percent and 80 percent reductions in their electricity and water consumption, respectively. NBK also both reduced paper use and recycled nearly 100 metric tons of paper, lowering their GHG emissions by 615 metric tons just from those two efforts alone. The bank also was able to recycle over 3,600 electronic devices.

It is worth mentioning that NBK is the first banking institution in Kuwait to issue a sustainability report highlighting the bank's social, economic and environmental initiatives and the implementation of corporate governance principles in accordance with the standards of Integrated Reporting (IR) Framework and the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI). The bank's efforts in this regard over the past years were recognized by inclusion in the FTSE4Good Index and the Refinitiv AFE Low Carbon Select Index in MENA, in which NBK ranked first among regional banks and Kuwaiti companies in terms of the index's weight. In 2020, NBK also maintained its MSCI ESG Index rating at BBB.



Easa Karam (center) with Jahid Thakor and Faisal Al-Khudhari

## AUB holds workshop on occupational safety and health

KUWAIT: As part of its incessant endeavor to enhance the culture of occupational safety and health among the Bank's employees, Ahli United Bank (AUB) held a workshop for its employees through Microsoft Team App in cooperation with Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) at, with the aim to raise staff awareness of any potential risks in the work environment and to familiarize them with the appropriate preventive measures to deal with such risks.

Commenting on this event, Sahar Dashti, General Manager of the Customer Protection, and the Head of CSR Team at AUB said in a press release: Ahli United Bank is always keen to ensure the safety of its employees, enhance their awareness of the importance of occupational safety and health as the best ways to protect against risks and address challenges in work environment. Dashti added: From this prospective, AUB hosted KOC Safety Professionals Jahid Thakor, in a workshop, through which he spoke to the Bank's employees about the rules of occupational safety and health. The workshop was successful and beneficial, especially that the lecturer is a certified trainer from the United Kingdom and a specialist in this field.

Dashti pointed out that workshop addressed a number of important pillars, where the concept of occupational safety and health, HSSE management system, potential risks of working in an office environment and ways to take appropriate preventive measures, especially, electricity and fire related risks and how to control them, were introduced in details. Moreover, the workshop addressed emergency evacuation plans. The lecturer also provided a practical drill on discovering potential risks in the office environment, and concluded the workshop with a set of health, safety, security and general environment instructions, and how to enhance and support the functions of safety committees.

Dashti said that this workshop was held as part of the Bank's keenness to qualify its employees, and to encourage them to follow ways to protect against potential risks, and how to handle them according to scientific, systematic and deliberate bases. Dashti expressed sincere thanks and appreciation to Faisal Al-Khudhari Head of HSSE Unit Commercial and Corporate Directorate from KOC for his good cooperation.

It worth noting that this event is one of the basic pillars of the CSR program at AUB towards its employees, and its constant endeavor to create a safe and motivating work environment in the interest of employees and to maintain their safety as they are its human wealth and the basis for achieving its success.



NBK strives to strengthen its position as a leading provider of sustainable banking services, and is committed to maintaining this approach. NBK has always defended the essential role of banking services in achieving the aspirations of individuals and companies, along with its rigorous approach in integrating ESG issues at the heart of its business.

The year 2020 has been one-of-a-kind for NBK, as COVID-19 presented a range of challenges, well-met by the coordinated efforts of NBK staff in every business unit.

## Lifestyle | Cannes Film Festival

## Spike Lee: Channeling America's Black rage

Spike Lee has been captivating and provoking audiences since the 1980s with his frank depictions of America's racial tensions, infused with his signature mix of entertainment, activism and rage. He is the first Black man to head the jury at the Cannes Film Festival, which helped launch his career back in 1986 when his shoestring debut "She's Gotta Have It" won the Youth Award. Since then, he has gone on to make several landmark films about Black America, while also branching out into very different styles.

In the process, he has blazed a trail for new generations of Black filmmakers. Michael Genet, an actor and screenwriter who penned the script for Lee's 2004 comedy "She Hate Me", says Lee "opened the doors for everybody who's come after him."

**'Cerebral kind of cat'**

Born Shelton Jackson Lee in Georgia on March 20, 1957, "Spike" was the son



US director Spike Lee

of a jazz musician father and an English teacher mom. He was primarily raised in Brooklyn, which is home to his production company 40 Acres and a Mule Filmworks. A small man with a piercing gaze from behind his round glasses, Lee graduated from Atlanta's Morehouse College, a historically Black, all-male school, with a communications degree, before moving on to a master's in film and television at New York University.

In the summer of 1985, Lee filmed

"She's Gotta Have It" in two weeks in Brooklyn's Fort Greene neighborhood, and took one of the key roles himself as motor-mouthed Mars Blackmon. John Canada Terrell, one of his co-stars, described Lee as a "very strange cerebral kind of cat."

The black-and-white feature was his breakout moment, but it was the follow-up, 1989's "Do the Right Thing" that established him as one of the stand-out directors of his generation. Exploring Brooklyn's racial tensions across one sweltering day, it is now seen as one of the defining movies of the decade.

**'Storyteller'**

"Spike was always quiet. He kept to himself but I called him the idea man," recalls Herbert Eichelberger, an associate professor of film at Clark Atlanta University whom Lee calls his mentor. "He would come with all kinds of ideas about doing films and making certain kinds of approaches to a situation." Eichelberger

remembers that "from the start, he was a good storyteller." He thought Lee's career would be focused on documentaries, given his keen powers of observation of society around him.

But Lee would only embrace that format in 1997 with "4 Little Girls"—the Oscar-nominated story of the racially motivated bombing of an African-American church during the US civil rights movement. Lee instead established himself as a force to be reckoned with in cinema, producing films that often had a political bent like "Malcolm X" and "Jungle Fever". He managed to keep the Hollywood machine at arm's length, maintaining control of his own marketing, distribution and editing, with mostly Black casts.

**Full circle**

But Lee has refused to be typecast and has tried his hand in many different genres. These have included a heist drama, "Inside Man", and a remake of Korean martial arts revenge flick "Old

Boy". Though always shot through with political commentary, his recent films have returned to some of his earlier themes, to great critical success. "BlackKkKlansman", about a Black FBI agent infiltrating the Ku Klux Klan, won him the second-place Grand Prix at Cannes, and best adapted screenplay at the Academy Awards, his first Oscar not counting an honorary award in 2015.

His most recent film, "Da 5 Bloods", about Black veterans from the Vietnam war, was another critical success—and part of a recent tie-up with Netflix that also saw him direct a TV adaptation of "She's Gotta Have It". Lee is also a lifelong basketball fan, and a fixture at New York Knicks games. He made a series of black-and-white Nike ads in the 1980s and 1990s, in character as Mars Blackmon alongside NBA legend Michael Jordan, that changed sports marketing forever. — AFP



## Cannes film-makers celebrate musical heroes

It will be a feast for the ears as well as the eyes on the Croisette this year with a string of films celebrating musical heroes across different eras and cultures.

**Opening Sparks**

Wild film-maker meets legendary band in the opening film of the festival on July 6. "Annette" by French director Leos Carax features Marion Cotillard and Adam Driver, but the real stars may prove to be the US band Sparks. Cult favorites since the 1970s, the duo provided not just the soundtrack but the script to this otherworldly musical about a celebrity couple whose lives are turned upside down by the arrival of their first child. "Annette" is a much-anticipated gift for lovers of cinema, music and culture," promised festival president Pierre Lescure.

**Velvet Underground and Jane Birkin**

There is more from the annals of rock lore in the form of Todd Haynes's new documentary, "The Velvet Underground", about the hugely influential New York band led by Lou Reed. It's familiar territory for the US director, who made a fictional film inspired by David Bowie, "Velvet Goldmine", and a fictionalized account of Bob Dylan's life, "I'm Not There". The new doc promises a mix of interviews and exclusive footage from the time.

Meanwhile, actor Charlotte Gainsbourg is premiering an intimate documentary about her mother Jane Birkin. "Jane" is her first outing as a director and has been in the works for several years, with scenes shot in the famous Parisian home she shared with husband Serge Gainsbourg.

**Multi-generational rap**

The sounds of Moroccan hip-hop form the basis for the country's first Palme d'Or nomination in 60 years. Nabil Ayouch's "Casablanca Beats" follows a rapper working in a cultural center in a working class area, where hip-hop culture runs up against the social constraints of the neighborhood. Meanwhile, one of the godfathers of French rap, JoeyStarr, features in two films at the festival.

**Times Up UK Critics.**

Touting this year's selection of four women as the joint best-ever with 2019 was "embarrassing," she added, "especially as statistically female representation is worse this year than in 2019 as the competition line-up has swollen from 21 to 24". They will, however, face a jury that is mostly female, including French-Senegalese director Mati Diop and actor Maggie Gyllenhaal, for the fourth time in the festival's history (2009, 2014 and 2018).

**Parallel sections**

There is more to Cannes than the main competition, however. Exactly half of the 24 films featured in the Directors' Fortnight are by women, including a directing debut from Luana Bajrami, who appeared in "Portrait of a Lady on Fire". The International Critics' Week, which focuses on young directors, has seven women among its 13 entries.

There is hope this will continue, with the recent appointment of film expert Ava Cahen as the new head of the independent strand. Born in 1986, she is the youngest person ever to hold the position and will take over after this year's event from director Charles Tesson.

**Out of competition**

There is much to look forward to outside the competitions, too. "Peaceful" by French director Emmanuelle Bercot stars that great icon of Gallic cinema Catherine Deneuve, who suffered a minor stroke during filming but is making a triumphant return to the Croisette. There is also excitement over the premiere of Charlotte Gainsbourg's directing debut, a documentary about her mother Jane Birkin ("Jane").

And US actor-director Jodie Foster, of "Taxi Driver" and "Silence of the Lambs" fame, will receive an honorary Palme. Foster did not mince her words during her last visit to Cannes in 2016, saying Hollywood studio bosses still saw women directors as "too great a risk to take". But she also said she opposed the idea of setting a quota for female representation. "We're not talking about junior executives," she said. "We're talking about an art form." — AFP

## A familiar question at Cannes: Where are the women?

With just four women among the directors behind the 24 films in competition for the Palme d'Or, a familiar script is playing out at Cannes. Only one woman has ever won the film industry's most prestigious prize: Jane Campion for "The Piano" in 1993. Debates over whether to blame the festival's selection committee, or the wider film industry, have become as routine as sunshine and champagne on the Croisette.

The debate reached new heights in 2018. With the #MeToo movement in full swing, 82 women held a protest on the steps of the Palais in Cannes, including Jane Fonda, Marion Cotillard and "Wonder Woman" director Patty Jenkins. This year's edition can at least boast a more balanced list when the other sections of the festival are included, with some 40 women presenting films this year.

**Palme nominees**

Three of the four women in the main competition are French: Mia Hansen-Love ("Bergman Island"), Catherine Corsini ("The Divide") and Julia Ducournau ("Titane"), along with Hungary's Ildiko Enyedi ("The Story of My Wife"). Cannes organizers insist they choose films on merit, taking no account of race, gender or nationality. But certain (male) arthouse luminaries and Cannes regulars are practically guaranteed a slot, even when their films turn out to be awful.

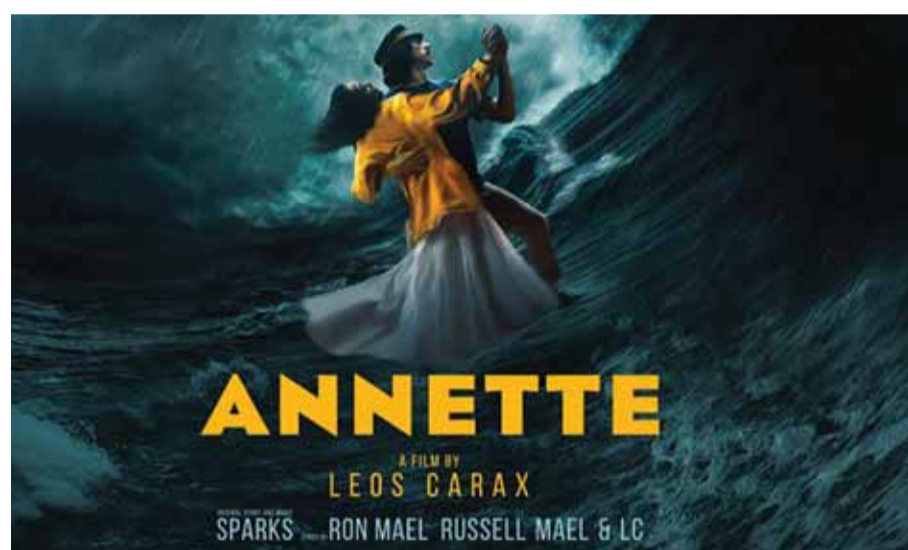
Campion may have been among this year's selection if it were not for the festival's ongoing beef with Netflix, which has produced her latest, "The Power of the Dog". "It's no surprise that the history of the Cannes Film Festival is dominated by the celebration of male achievement when it has overwhelmingly been programmed by men," said Sophie Monks Kaufman, co-chair of pressure group



Milla Jovovich

## COVID makes the Cannes parties even more exclusive

The battle for after-party invites was always fierce at the world's most glamorous festival, but thanks to social distancing rules it will be even harder than usual to get past the doorman in Cannes this year. "We won't be able to do just whatever we want," warned Cannes Film Festival president Pierre Lescure. "We are not going to have a lot of parties and big gatherings that could create difficult consequences." The parties had already been scaled down in recent years from the festival's golden age last century, due to the economic downturn and pressure from locals for a bit of peace. But now the pandemic has really put a down-

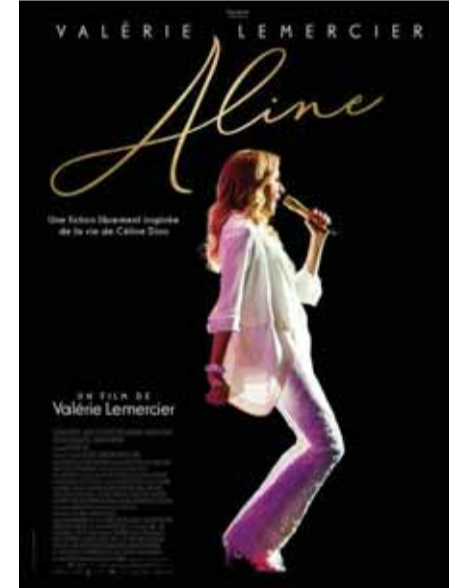


The Velvet Underground

Already a familiar face on French TV screens, he stars alongside Vanessa Paradis in competition entry "Love Songs for Tough Guys", while a film about his early rap collective NTM, "Supremes", is premiering on the same night out of competition.

**Bill Murray to Celine Dion**

Among the other musical options featuring on the Croisette is an unofficial biopic about Celine Dion, "Aline" by director Valerie Lemerrier, whose release has been pushed back several times due to the pandemic. It gets odder with a concert film featuring legendary US comedian Bill Murray reciting contemporary numbers in collaboration with a German cellist and piano trio. The film,



"New Worlds, the Cradle of a Civilization", has Murray reciting songs from West Side Story to Van Morrison in what promises to be one of the more random out-of-competition screenings.

Another intriguing entry in the program is "Tralala" from French film-makers the Larrieu brothers, in which a middle-aged songwriter goes searching for the Virgin Mary. If nothing else, it features the spectacle of former Bond villain Mathieu Amalric looking like a hobo and playing a ukulele. — AFP



Nicole Kidman



Heidi Klum

er on things.

"It's our responsibility to everyone—the festival, the town, the participants—that this post-pandemic event goes smoothly," said Lescure. What that means in real terms is that hangers-on are getting axed from the guest lists. One of the high points—the gala for US AIDS charity amfAR—is still going ahead, but the number of attendees at this year's event on July 16 are falling from 900 to 400. The star power will still be in evidence, however, with Alicia Keys performing and Milla Jovovich, Nicole Kidman and Heidi Klum confirmed to attend.

Chopard, the jewelers who make the actual Palme d'Or trophy, have cancelled their grand party—another of the usual high points—in favor of a few select get-togethers on the terrace of the Martinez hotel. "In any case, for the last decade, the budget for parties has fallen considerably. Parties that had once gathered 1,000 people were already down to 300," Dominique Segall, one of France's top press agents, told AFP.

# Lifestyle | Cannes Film Festival



This combination of file pictures (from left, up to down) shows the Jury of the 74th Cannes Film Festival, including US director Spike Lee, French actress and director Melanie Laurent, US actress Maggie Gyllenhaal, French singer Mylene Farmer, Austrian film director Jessica Hausner, French actor Tahar Rahim, Brazilian Director Kleber Mendonça Filho, South-Koreen actor Song Kang-ho and French movie director Mati Diop. — AFP

## Cinema glitz returns with a reborn Cannes

The Cannes Film Festival returns next week, promising to bury the long months of darkness and solitude under an avalanche of celebrity, champagne and chin-stroking arthouse cinema. It is billed as nothing less than a resurrection. "Cinema is not dead!" festival supremo Thierry Fremaux declared last month. It is the first major fully-fledged film festival since the pandemic, and a truckload of Hollywood stars from Timothee Chalamet to Nicole Kidman to Matt Damon are expected on the Croisette between July 6 and 17.

It's not quite a return to normal, of course, even if France's COVID numbers have been steadily improving and most restrictions lifted. There will be no "bises"-the French-style peck on the cheeks-at the top of the fabled steps to the Palais des Festivals. And some of the glitz will be toned down, with many after-parties cancelled and the big galas cutting their invite lists in half to meet social distancing guidelines.

Organizers are also slowly waking up to the fact that the sight of celebrities and moguls arriving on private jets and megayachts doesn't seem so chic in an age of impending climate disaster. So this year: no plastic, lots of electric cars, and most symbolic of all: a red carpet that is half the size and made from recycled material.

### Stargazing

But our collective need to gawk at megastars on the Cote d'Azur will not be denied. One film in this year's competition accounts for an outside share of the celeb-count: Wes Anderson's "The French Dispatch" includes Chalamet,

Benicio del Toro, Bill Murray and many more. Two other stars of that film-Tilda Swinton and Lea Seydoux-will be near-ubiquitous on the Croisette, with appearances in a remarkable eight movies between them. Damon is in town for the premiere of his latest thriller, the Marseilles-set "Stillwater".

But Cannes is all about the filmmakers, and after last year's edition was cancelled due to the pandemic, a particularly rich crop of festival alumni is competing for the Palme d'Or. Among those submitting themselves to the famously blunt audiences of Cannes are several past winners: Italy's Nanni Moretti with his new film "Tre Piani", France's Jacques Audiard ("Les Olympiades") and Thailand's master of the slow-burn Apichatpong Weerasethakul with his English-language debut ("Memoria").

The opening night film is also a first in English for France's Leo Carax, directing Adam Driver and Marion Cotillard in what is certain to be a bizarre and visually arresting musical about a celebrity couple and their mysterious child, "Annette". Dutch shockmeister Paul Verhoeven, who made his name with Hollywood megahits like "Robocop" and "Basic Instinct", continues his late run of (slightly) more subtle European fare with "Benedetta" about lesbian nuns in 17th century Italy.

Sean Penn will also be hoping for a personal resurrection after his catastrophic appearance in 2016, when his Africa-based humanitarian love story "The Last Face" was mercilessly booed. He is aiming for a warmer reception to "Flag Day", starring himself and his

daughter Dylan. Also in the competition are Iran's two-time Oscar winner Asghar Farhadi, who returns with "A Hero", and Russia's Kirill Serebrennikov, who is unable to attend due to an embezzlement conviction that is widely seen as punishment for criticizing Vladimir Putin.

### Gender imbalance

The panel judging the 24 entries is headed by US director Spike Lee-the first time a black man has led the jury-and includes "The Serpent" star Tahar Rahim and US actress Maggie Gyllenhaal. With just four female directors in the competition, the festival's tendency to pick the usual (male) suspects of the arthouse elite is once again under scrutiny. Only one woman has won the top Palme d'Or prize in 73 editions of the festival: Jane Campion for "The Piano" in 1993. The selection is more balanced in the other sections, however, with over half the entries in the independent Directors' Fortnight and International Critics Week coming from women directors.

US actor-director Jodie Foster will likely field questions on the subject as she picks up an honorary Palme. There is plenty happening outside the competitions, including a first showing of Oliver Stone's new documentary about the JFK assassination, updating his feature-length conspiracy theory from 1991. That will play in the new Cannes Premiere section, along with other intriguing documentaries: one about troubled star Val Kilmer ("Val") and Charlotte Gainsbourg's ode to her mother Jane Birkin ("Jane"). — AFP

## Films competing for Cannes Palme d'Or

Here are the 24 films competing for the Palme d'Or as the Cannes Film Festival returns from July 6 to 17, with a jury led by US director Spike Lee.

### 'Annette'

by **Leos Carax, France**

Adam Driver and Marion Cotillard star as a glamorous celebrity couple whose lives are upended by the arrival of their first child. The first film in a decade from auteur Carax is also the first in English from the eccentric French mind behind arthouse favourites "Holy Motors" and "The Lovers on the Bridge."

### 'The French Dispatch'

by **Wes Anderson, US**

Film fans can never get enough of Wes Anderson, and his latest quirky bauble can be counted on for more obsessively curated sets and shots, 20th-century nostalgia, family disharmony and Bill Murray. Plus yet more megastars in Anderson's menagerie in the form of Timothee Chalamet and Benicio Del Toro, and a set-up-foreign correspondent in France-that is likely to play well with critics at Cannes.

### 'Benedetta'

by **Paul Verhoeven, Netherlands**

From "Robocop" to "Basic Instinct" to "Starship Troopers," Dutch director Paul Verhoeven has always walked a fine line between gaudy schlock and cinematic genius. His latest tale recounts a lesbian affair in a 17th-century convent, starring Virginie Efira and Charlotte Rampling.

### 'A Hero'

by **Asghar Farhadi, Iran**

Iran's lauded director Asghar Farhadi has worked in multiple languages but returns to his homeland for his latest, details of which are scant. He has won awards all over, including Oscars for "A Separation" and "The Salesman", which also won best screenplay at Cannes.

### 'Tout s'est Bien Passe' (Everything Went Fine)

by **Francois Ozon, France**

Featuring French stars Sophie Marceau and Charlotte Rampling, France's prolific and eclectic director Francois Ozon tells the story of a woman asked by her father to help him die.

### 'Tre Piani' (Three Floors)

by **Nanni Moretti, Italy**

Exactly 20 years after winning the Palme d'Or with "The Son's Room" and nine years after heading the main jury at Cannes, Moretti is back with his first-ever adaptation of a novel, which looks at three families who live on three different floors, in three chapters.

### 'Titane'

by **Julia Ducournau, France**

Starring French veteran actor Vincent Lindon, "Titane" is the second feature after "Grave" by horror film specialist Ducournau, which she reportedly wrote in six weeks between two Covid-19 lockdowns.

### 'Red Rocket'

by **Sean Baker, US**

The comedy-drama by indie filmmaker Baker features Simon Rex as an over-the-hill porn star who returns to his hometown in Texas, where he is not very welcome, and hopes to build on the success of "The Florida Project".

### 'Petrov's Flu'

by **Kirill Serebrennikov, Russia**

An alcohol-fuelled stroll by a cartoonist and his friend in post-Soviet Russia brings back childhood memories that get mixed up with the present. Serebrennikov is unable to attend Cannes due to a criminal conviction, widely seen as punishment for his political views.

### 'France'

by **Bruno Dumont, France**

The gritty director adapts a novel by Charles Peguy, killed in World War I, updating it to chart the fall from grace of a star TV reporter in contemporary France.

### 'Nitram'

by **Justin Kurzel, Australia**

Following a smash hit adaptation of "Macbeth" starring Michael Fassbender and Marion Cotillard and a less successful adaptation of video game "Assassin's Creed", the Australian director looks at events leading up to the Port Arthur mass shooting in Tasmania that led to gun control reforms.

### 'Memoria'

by **Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Thailand**

Tilda Swinton stars in the slow-burn director's first film in English. It comes 11 years after he won the Palme d'Or for the dreamlike "Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives". Shot in Colombia, "Memoria" follows a Scottish horticulturist as she tries to understand strange sounds in the night.

### 'Lingui'

by **Mahamat-Saleh Haroun, Chad**

Set in the outskirts of N'Djamena, "Lingui" tells the story of an adolescent whose unwanted pregnancy puts her in conflict with her country's traditions and the law. Haroun lives in France, but most of his films have been produced in his birth country of Chad, which he left during unrest in the 1980s.

### 'Paris 13th District'

by **Jacques Audiard, France**

Audiard won the Palme in 2015 for "Dheepan", but is best-known abroad for "The Prophet" and "Rust and Bone". His latest is based on three graphic novels by US author Adrian Tomine and set in a mixed neighbourhood of Paris. It features four young people who are sometimes friends, sometimes lovers, and sometimes both.

### 'The Restless'

by **Joachim Lafosse, Belgium**

Starring Leila Bekhti and Damien Bonnard, the film tells the story of a couple under stress due to Bonnard's character suffering from bipolar disorder, and who do their best to protect their child.

### 'The Divide'

by **Catherine Corsini, France**

Two decades after her film "Replay" entered the Cannes competition, Corsini returns with a drama about a couple stuck in a hospital that comes under siege during a violent Paris demonstration inspired by the Yellow Vests movement.



### 'The Worst Person in the World'

by **Joachim Trier, Norway**

A film about love and its complications, Trier's latest concludes an accidental trilogy of Oslo-based films exploring exclusion and isolation. It tells the story of Julie, turning 30 and looking for answers in a new relationship, only to be let down by reality.

### 'Hytti No 6' (Compartment No 6)

by **Juho Kuosmanen, Finland**

Two strangers-a Finnish woman and a gloomy Russian-share a train compartment winding its way up to the Arctic circle in a road movie set against the backdrop of the 1980s Soviet Union. Kuosmanen hopes to follow the success of his charming, low-key boxing flick, "The Happiest Day in the Life of Olli Maki".

### 'Casablanca Beats'

by **Nabil Ayouch, France-Morocco**

Ayouch rocks the suburbs of Casablanca with a film about young people seeking an outlet through hip-hop in an underprivileged neighborhood made infamous in 2003 after a group of radicalized local youth carried out suicide bombings in the city.

### 'Ha'Berech' (Ahed's Knee)

by **Nadav Lapid, Zionist entity**

After winning prizes in Locarno, Cannes and Berlin for his first three films, Lapid explores two battles waged by a Zionist director, one against the death of freedom and one against the death of a mother, both of which are doomed to failure.

### 'Drive My Car'

by **Ryusuke Hamaguchi, Japan**

An aging, widowed actor looking for a chauffeur ends up hiring a 20-year-old woman. Things go wrong between them at first, but then a special relationship emerges.

### 'Bergman Island'

by **Mia Hansen-Love, France**

An American film-making couple spends a summer on Faro, the windswept Baltic island that inspired Ingmar Bergman. Reality and fiction start to blur as the weeks pass.

### 'A Felesegem Tortenete' (The Story of My Wife)

by **Ildiko Enyedi, Hungary**

Featuring France's Lea Seydoux, who features in three of the films in competition this year, Enyedi's film kicks off with a bet by a sea captain that he'll marry the first woman who walks in. It follows Enyedi's Golden Bear win at Berlin in 2017 for "On Body and Soul".

### 'Flag Day'

by **Sean Penn, US**

Star actor Penn again steps behind the camera for a film about a conman whose daughter struggles to come to terms with his choice of profession. Penn stars alongside his own daughter Dylan, as well as Josh Brolin. — AFP

## Cannes director: The return of cinema is 'very moving'

Ahead of its return on Tuesday, AFP spoke to Cannes Film Festival director Thierry Fremaux about the nail-biting build-up and efforts to address criticism on questions of the environment and gender.

**Q: It's the first edition since the pandemic. Will this big get-together turn the page on the crisis?**

**A:** Not quite. The pandemic hasn't been defeated. We have invited the films selected in 2020 that weren't able to climb the stairs (of the Palais des Festivals) as a way to remember that at the start of the year, nothing gave us confidence that Cannes would take place. But the organization and the spirit are the same as a normal edition. Everything is in place on the technical and health front to ensure there are no problems. The selection is beautiful and rich. The festival-goers, the press and all the film teams will be there, as will the beautiful jury led by Spike Lee, who is the first black man to hold the position.

The restaurateurs and hoteliers can't wait to welcome everyone. Artists are coming especially to be there, like Jerry Schatzberg (winner of the Palme d'Or in 1973), who at 94 is the oldest living filmmaker. We are touched that he said: "Cannes is restarting, it's our family-I want to be there." Festival-goers have been in France for 10 days to do the quarantine, journalists have taken their



Cannes Film Festival general delegate Thierry Fremaux speaks as he presents Cannes 2020 Special, a mini-version of the Cannes Film Festival at the Palais des Festivals et des Congres in Cannes, southeastern France, on Oct 27, 2020. — AFP

precautions. It's all very moving. The cinema world is coming back together.

**Q: Only four women directors are in the competition, though many young female talents are in the parallel sections. Where are we on the question of gender equality?**

**A:** Four women in the competition-I'm the first to think that it's not enough. But in the Un Certain Regard section, dedicated to new talents, there are many more, which shows notable progress. There were countries where there were no female directors, and even there things are starting to change. Of the three Russian films selected for Cannes, there is a woman director this year.

At Cannes, we can't use quotas, but we can be pragmatic. The teams and bodies of the festival have been feminized. The jury is mostly women this year even if the president is a man. The selection committee is mostly women. Any time we can send a signal, we do it. No film will ever be selected on the basis of the director's gender, race or religion, but if we are hesitating between two films and one is by a woman, we will

pick that one. We do the same regarding geography. Cannes is a universalist festival.

**Q: The festival has taken measures to reduce its impact on the environment, and put together a special program on the subject. What role can it play on the climate question?**

**A:** Cannes is the biggest international cultural event in the world, so we aim to set an example. A team of advisors was recruited to work with the festival to put in place a series of strong measures to reinforce our efforts to be responsible on green issues. And since Cannes is first and foremost a festival of cinema, we are using films which reflect our concerns: works that show how serious our situation is, in Asia, India, Africa, and others; from the generation of Greta Thunberg that recognize that it is today's children who will save us and who won't give up. There's a documentary about the beauty of the world, "The Velvet Queen", and even a "generational climate comedy" by (French actor-director) Louis Garrel, "The Crusade". — AFP

## Sports

# Athletes back Richardson after marijuana costs her Tokyo 100m

NEW YORK: US sports stars from Olympic track champion Michael Johnson to NFL and NBA stars backed Sha'Carri Richardson after she was suspended for using marijuana and lost her 100m Olympic berth. The US Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) announced a one-month ban after she tested positive for marijuana, a banned World Anti-Doping Agency substance. Richardson said she took the drug to cope with the pressure of trying to reach the Olympics and the pain of learning about the death of her biological mother.

"I don't know why marijuana is banned. Maybe a good reason. Maybe not," tweeted Johnson, a four-time world champion and two-time Olympic champion at 400m and former world and Olympic 200m champion. "I know how it feels to lose a parent. Indescribable pain! I'm from the same neighborhood as (Richardson) Tough place! I wish people would stop calling her and this ban stupid unless you know the reason for both."

Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes, the 2020 Super Bowl Most Valuable Player, tweeted of Richardson's ban: "This is so trash man... just let her run!" Richardson, who this season became the

sixth-fastest woman ever at 100m, will not be able to compete in the event.

Richard Sherman, a Super Bowl champion cornerback with Seattle, said he backed Richardson but questioned a society that would punish her for coping with personal loss. "I'm very proud of this young woman but so frustrated at the place we are as a society," Sherman said. "She is dealing with one of the greatest personal losses anyone could ever have to deal with in the midst of trying to accomplish one of the most difficult feats. Now we make her explain."

Retired NBA star Dwyane Wade addressed those who decided marijuana, legal in much of the United States, should be a banned substance. "But majority of y'all rule makers smoke and probably are investors in THC companies," Wade said. "Let's stop playing these games." The issue of Richardson's ban came up at the White House briefing and White House press secretary Jen Psaki noted it was a decision by USA-DA but stressed: "Sha'Carri Richardson is an inspiring young woman who has gone through a lot personally. And she also happens to be one of the fastest women in the world and that's an important part of the story as well." — AFP



Sha'Carri Richardson

## News in brief

### Obi Mikel joins Al-Kuwait

KUWAIT: Former Chelsea and Nigeria midfielder John Obi Mikel has signed a one-year contract with Al-Kuwait SC, the Kuwait Premier League club announced on Thursday. Mikel Obi, 34, joins the club for the 2021-22 season having ended a one-season spell at English Championship side Stoke City. The former Super Eagles captain won the Africa Cup of Nations with his home nation alongside two Premier League titles, the UEFA Champions League and Europa League, respectively, and three FA Cups with Chelsea. His illustrious career also saw him winning the domestic cup with Turkish Super Lig side Trabzonspor. — KUNA

### Salah left out

CAIRO: Liverpool attacker Mohamed Salah was omitted from the Egypt's Olympic Games squad, the Egyptian Football Federation (EFA) announced. It has been widely reported the Reds had refused to release Salah and Galatasaray had also done so for Mostafa Mohamed for the tournament between July 21-August 7. The 22-man squad, named by under 23 coach Shawky Gharib on Friday, included Al-Ahly goalkeeper Mohamed El-Shennawy, Itihad's Ahmed Hegazy and Zamalek's Mahmoud al-Wensh. The Turkish club are taking part in July's Champions league play-offs against PSV Eindhoven. The Pharaohs qualified for Tokyo's Games after their U-23 AFCON triumph in 2019. They are in Group C, playing alongside Argentina, Spain, and Australia. — AFP

### Leeds sign Harrison

LONDON: Leeds signed Manchester City winger Jack Harrison for a reported fee of around £15 million (\$20 million) on Friday after his successful loan spell at Elland Road. Harrison agreed a three-year contract with Leeds following three seasons on loan with the Yorkshire club. Leeds had an option to make Harrison's stay permanent after his latest loan campaign with Marcelo Bielsa's side. Harrison has made 128 appearances in all competitions for Leeds and played a key role in the club's return to the Premier League. He featured in 36 league games for Leeds last season, scoring eight goals, as they completed their first top-flight campaign in 16 years with a ninth place finish. — AFP

### Mata agrees new deal

LONDON: Juan Mata has signed a new one-year deal with Manchester United to keep him at Old Trafford until June 2022, the Premier League club announced on Friday. The 33-year-old Spain international joined from Chelsea in 2014 and has made 273 appearances for United, scoring 51 goals. On a busy day at Old Trafford, United brought former England goalkeeper Tom Heaton back to the club for a second spell after he left Aston Villa in June. The 35-year-old, who agreed a two-year deal, graduated from United's youth academy before moving onto Cardiff in 2010. United also announced on Friday that goalkeeper Lee Grant has signed a one-year contract extension to keep him at the club until 2022. — AFP

## Lightning one win from repeating as Stanley Cup champions

LOS ANGELES: Tyler Johnson struck twice as Tampa Bay moved to within one win of back-to-back Stanley Cup titles after the Lightning clobbered the Montreal Canadiens 6-3 in game three of the Stanley Cup finals on Friday. Johnson scored twice on the backhand and Nikita Kucherov delivered a goal and an assist for the Lightning, who scored consecutive goals early in the first and second periods to seize a commanding 3-0 series lead. "I am extremely happy for the win. I might be happier for Tyler Johnson," said Lightning coach Jon Cooper.

The Lightning can win their second NHL championship in nine months with a victory in game four tomorrow at the Bell Centre in Montreal. Teams that take a 3-0 lead in the final have won 26 of the last 27 times. The Toronto Maple Leafs defeated the Detroit Red Wings in 1942 after losing the first three games. "I know how much fun it was last year and I want to do that again," said Johnson. The Lightning defeated the Dallas Stars in six games last season to win the title for the second time in franchise history. The Lightning have outclassed the Canadiens using their superior speed, offensive skills and playoff experience in the Stanley Cup final which returned to Canada on Friday night for the first time in a decade. Montreal have been offensively challenged, relying mainly on their young

players for goals, and their goaltender Carey Price has been outplayed by his Lightning counterpart Andrei Vasilevskiy. "I can definitely play better. It is just not good enough so far," said Price.

Vasilevskiy made 32 saves Friday in front of the pandemic-limited crowd of 3,500 as the series shifted to Montreal which hosted its first Stanley Cup final since the Canadiens won their most recent Cup in 1993. Once again the Lightning got offensive production from their defense as Czech Jan Rutta and Sweden's Victor Hedman, on the powerplay, opened the scoring with long shots from the point to give Tampa a quick 2-0 lead less than four minutes into the first period. The Lightning defense have scored five goals in the series, which is as many as the entire Canadiens team has scored. Tampa have 14 total goals which is the most in the first three games of the finals since 1984. Kucherov, with his eighth of the postseason, scored 1:40 into the second, using his backhand to tip the puck past Price and make it 3-1.

Just under two minutes later, Johnson gave the Lightning a three-goal lead by cutting across the front of the net and putting a backhand up high past Price. Johnson's teammate Mathieu Joseph set up the goal by using his left skate to slyly redirect the puck over to Johnson, soccer-style. Johnson scored his second to make it 5-2 at 15:19 of the third with another backhand goal for Tampa, who are trying to become the second team in 22 years to repeat as champs. Phillip Danault, Nick Suzuki and Corey Perry scored for Montreal, who had head coach Dominique Ducharme back behind the bench for the first time since game two of the previous series. Ducharme finished his 14-day quarantine after testing positive for COVID-19 following his team's first trip to Las Vegas to play the Knights. — AFP



MONTREAL: Tyler Johnson #9 of the Tampa Bay Lightning scores a goal past Carey Price #31 of the Montreal Canadiens during the third period in Game Three of the 2021 NHL Stanley Cup Final at Bell Centre on Friday in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. — AFP

## Brazil edge Chile to set Copa America semi-final with Peru

RIO DE JANEIRO: Lucas Paqueta's second-half strike was enough for defending champions Brazil to hold off determined Chile 1-0 on Friday and book a Copa America semi-final showdown with Peru. Second-half substitute Paqueta made an instant impact, finding a gap in Chile's defense and firing into the back of the net in the 47th minute to put Brazil up 1-0. Less than two minutes later, however, Brazil were reduced to 10 men when Gabriel Jesus's reckless high kick caught Eugenio Mena in the face and drew a straight red card. Chile couldn't capitalize on the man advantage, no matter they how hard they tried.

Eduardo Vargas thought he'd grabbed the equalizer in the 62nd with a close-range shot, but VAR confirmed the offside call was correct. In the 69th, Mena's cross from the left found Ben Brereton, whose looping header had Brazilian goalkeeper Ederson wrong-footed but caromed off the crossbar.

Ederson came up with another big save in the 78th as Chile battled desperately for an equalizer. Carlos Palacios went for broke five minutes into injury time with an attempt from the top of the box that sailed over the crossbar. Brazil's best first-half chance came after 20 minutes, when Neymar found Roberto Firmino at Claudio Bravo's far post, but the Liverpool striker couldn't convert. Ederson was soon called on and dived right to save a shot from Vargas after the Chilean striker shook off Thiago Silva. Jesus, played in by Neymar, nearly fired Brazil ahead shortly before half-time but Chilean keeper Claudio Bravo tipped his shot over the bar. With the victory, Brazil set up a rematch

of the 2019 final in which they beat Peru 3-1. Peru punched their semi-final ticket earlier Friday, beating Paraguay 4-3 on penalties after playing to a 3-3 draw in regular time in Goiania.

In Goiania, Miguel Trauco scored the decisive penalty for Peru in a shoot-out that echoed the drama of the match with two shots over the crossbar and three saves. Peruvian keeper Pedro Gallese set the stage for Trauco with his diving save of Alberto Espinola's attempt.

Paraguay captain Gustavo Gomez had opened the scoring in the 11th minute, but Gianluca Lapadula scored in the 21st and 40th to give Peru the lead. Paraguay's prospects looked bleak when Gomez was sent off moments before halftime, but Junior Alonso pulled them level in the 54th minute. Yoshimar Yotun's 80th-minute strike put Peru up 3-2, but after Andre Carrillo was sent off in the 84th to reduce the Peruvians to 10 men Gabriel Avalos grabbed a last-minute equalizer to force the shoot-out. — AFP



RIO DE JANEIRO: Brazil's Lucas Paqueta (left) celebrates with Neymar (center) and Richarlison after scoring against Chile during their Conmebol 2021 Copa America football tournament quarter-final at the Nilton Santos Stadium in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on Friday. — AFP



SPIELBERG BEI KNITTELFELD: Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton arrives to the third practice session at the Red Bull Ring race track in Spielberg, Austria, yesterday, ahead of the Formula One Austrian Grand Prix. — AFP

## F1 champion Hamilton extends contract with 'incredible' Mercedes

LONDON: Formula One champion Lewis Hamilton has extended his contract with Mercedes until 2023, the team announced yesterday. Hamilton, 36, has won six of his seven F1 titles with the outfit since joining them in 2013.

Together they have dominated the sport for the past seven years. Mercedes have won the constructors' championship every season since 2014 with Hamilton winning six of the last seven drivers' titles. Hamilton will reportedly earn £40 million (\$55 million dollars) a year under the new deal.

"It is hard to believe it's been nearly nine years working with this incredible team and I'm excited we're going to continue our partnership for two more years," Hamilton said in a statement. "We've accomplished so much together but we still have a lot to achieve, both on and off the track."

As the only black driver on the F1 grid, the Briton is a prominent advocate against racism and took the knee wearing a Black Lives Matter t-shirt before each race last season. Hamilton highlighted the backing he had received from Mercedes in making that stand as another reason behind his decision to renew.

"I'm incredibly proud and grateful of how Mercedes has supported me in my drive to improve diversity and equality in our sport," he said. "They have held themselves accountable and made important strides in creating a more diverse team and inclusive environment."

Hamilton is one championship victory away from overtaking the all-time record he shares with Michael Schumacher but has already overtaken the German with a record 98 Grand Prix wins. He has won three of this season's eight races so far but is facing his toughest challenge for many seasons as he trails championship leader Max Verstappen by 18 points.

"His achievements in this sport speak for themselves, and with his experience, speed and race-craft, he is at the peak of his powers," Mercedes team principal and chief executive Toto Wolff said. "We are relishing the battle we have on our hands this year — and that's why we also wanted to agree this contract early, so we have no distractions from the competition on track. I have always said that as long as Lewis still possesses the fire for racing, he can continue as long as he wants." Next season, Formula 1 will introduce the alterations to cars which were pushed back from this year by the coronavirus pandemic. They aim to aid drivers to overtake more often. "As F1 enters a new era in 2022 with wholesale technical regulation changes, Mercedes and Lewis will forge new ground in a collaboration which has spanned his entire F1 career," Mercedes said. Hamilton will try to stop Verstappen claiming a third consecutive win at the Austrian Grand Prix today. After this weekend's racing, the season takes a break before the British Grand Prix on July 18, the 10th of a 23-race campaign. — AFP



# Insigne stunner sends Italy into semi-final clash with Spain

**MUNICH:** A stunning strike by Lorenzo Insigne fired Italy into the semi-finals of Euro 2020 on Friday as a 2-1 win over Belgium sent them through to a last-four meeting with Spain. Nicolò Barella struck the opening goal of the quarter-final in Munich before Insigne curled in Italy's second in an action-packed first half.

defeat means more European Championship quarter-final heartbreak for Belgium, who exited at the same stage in 2016 after defeat by Wales. Belgium sorely missed their captain Eden Hazard, ruled out by a hamstring injury, even as Kevin De Bruyne won his race to shake off an ankle injury.

### Spinazzola injury

Italy's win came at a cost, with left-back Leonardo Spinazzola out of the tournament with a leg injury. "Leonardo had a great European championship. Now whoever replaces him will do the same," said Italy defender Leonardo Bonucci.

Italy had the ball in the net on 13 minutes when Bonucci chested it past Thibaut Courtois from a free-kick, but the goal was disallowed by VAR for an offside against captain Giorgio Chiellini. Marco Verratti and Youri Tielemans both earned yellow cards for midfield tussles involving the pair.

Verratti was booked for holding Tielemans in a tackle, while the Belgian picked up a yellow card moments later for clattering into the Italian. Italy broke the deadlock with 31 minutes played. When Belgium failed to clear, Verratti played the ball into Barella, who stayed on his feet, squeezed past two defenders and drilled across Courtois.

A piece of brilliance on 44 minutes saw Napoli's Insigne double the Italy lead when he was allowed to dribble to the edge of the area and then curl his shot inside the post. However, Belgium got back into the game when a rush of blood saw Giovanni Di Lorenzo concede a penalty for using his elbow to brush off Jeremy Doku, filling in for Hazard.

Lukaku stepped up and rifled in the resulting spot-kick to halve the deficit. With an hour gone, Belgium had the best chance of the second half, coming agonizingly close to an equalizer, when De Bruyne's cross led to Lukaku having his shot blocked by the thigh of Spinazzola.

Martinez brought on fresh legs up front with Dries Mertens and Nacer Chadli for the final 20 minutes. There was an almost instant impact when Mertens fed Chadli, whose cross-cum-shot was deflected by Di Lorenzo just out of the reach of Lukaku and Thorgan Hazard. With time running out, Doku fired over after beating three defenders, while a last-gasp De Bruyne free-kick also failed to beat the Italy defense as the Azzurri clung on. — AFP



**MUNICH:** Italy's defender Leonardo Spinazzola is stretchered off the pitch injured during the Euro 2020 quarter-final football match between Belgium and Italy at the Allianz Arena in Munich on Friday. — AFP

## Italy aiming to honor injured Spinazzola with Euro 2020 glory

**MUNICH:** Lorenzo Insigne says Italy are gunning for Euro 2020 glory in honor of left-back Leonardo Spinazzola, who is out of a tournament he has lit up after injuring his Achilles tendon in the Azzurri's thrilling quarter-final win over Belgium.

Spinazzola, 28, was stretchered off after 79 minutes and is expected to be sidelined for several months. "It's a great loss for us. We are now trying to go very far — for him. He was so important for this team," said Insigne, who scored the stunning second goal in Friday's 2-1 win in Munich.

"We'll try to do everything we can to make it to the final for him," he added ahead of Tuesday's semi-final against Spain at Wembley. A video of the Italian team wildly cheering Spinazzola on the plane ride out of Munich went viral on social media. "We're very sorry for 'Spina', he didn't deserve that," said Italy coach Roberto Mancini. "He has played brilliantly, one of the best players at the Euro. It's such a shame, we wish him all the best."

Italy deserved the win in Bavaria as Nicolò Barella gave them the lead in the 31st minute before Insigne added the crucial second with a superb curling strike from outside the area. Belgium grabbed a lifeline when Romelu Lukaku converted a penalty just before half-time, but the Red Devils could not break the disciplined Italian defense after the break.

Azzurri fans are now dreaming of seeing four-time World Cup winners Italy claim the European Championship for the first time since 1968, with Spain standing in their way in the last four. "Now we continue to dream, but with our feet on the ground," said defender Leonardo Bonucci. "We started the European Championship with a dream in the drawer, let's leave it there. We have a match against Spain, a national team that didn't look like going all the way, but got back up. It will be a great match." — AFP

## Petkovic proud of Swiss 'heroes' despite loss

**SAINT PETERSBURG:** Switzerland coach Vladimir Petkovic hailed his players as "heroes" on Friday after they fell just short of reaching a first major tournament semi-final with defeat by Spain on penalties at Euro 2020. The Swiss, playing in their first major quarter-final since 1954, saw Remo Freuler sent off in the 77th minute but hung on to force spot-kicks after a 1-1 draw in Saint Petersburg, only to lose 3-1.

"My players are the heroes of the night," said Petkovic, whose side had beaten world champions France on penalties in a thrilling last-16 tie. "We would have deserved to go through. I have mixed feelings. A lot of pride, because we gave everything and we leave here with our heads held high. On the other hand, we were so close to the semi-final, and that doesn't happen every year."

Swiss goalkeeper Yann Sommer was unfortunate to be on the losing side after making eight saves in extra time and keeping out a penalty in the shoot-out. But his opposite number Unai Simon saved twice, with both teams also missing the target once. "Yann (Sommer) — he's a hero," added Petkovic. "He didn't have that bit of luck in the penalty shoot-out." — AFP



**SAINT PETERSBURG:** Switzerland's coach Vladimir Petkovic speaks to his players before penalty shoot-outs during the Euro 2020 quarter-final football match between Switzerland and Spain at the Saint Petersburg Stadium in Saint Petersburg on Friday. — AFP



**MUNICH:** Italy's players celebrate victory after the Euro 2020 quarter-final football match between Belgium and Italy at the Allianz Arena in Munich on Friday. — AFP

Belgium grabbed a lifeline just before the break when Romelu Lukaku converted a penalty, but Roberto Martinez's side ultimately fell short against a disciplined Italian defense. "We scored two and we could have scored more," said Italy coach Roberto Mancini. "I think the victory is fully deserved. Spain are next but the more you go forward the most difficult it becomes."

While Italy face Spain at Wembley on Tuesday,

The Manchester City playmaker showed why the medical staff worked around the clock to get him fit by regularly causing Italy problems, but Romelu Lukaku twice was denied by Gianluigi Donnarumma. "It was a miracle that I played, because there was definitely damage to my ankle," said De Bruyne. "We tried everything to win that match. Getting eliminated is always a disappointment. Too bad I couldn't do more."

## Germany's Kroos retires from int'l football

**BERLIN:** Germany midfielder Toni Kroos said Friday he was retiring from international football, days after the team was knocked out of Euro 2020 by England. "I have played 106 times for Germany. There will not be another time," the 31-year-old Real Madrid star wrote on Twitter.

"I had already made the decision to retire after this tournament," he added, referring to the European championships which ended for the Germans when they lost 2-0 to England in the last 16 on Tuesday at Wembley. "It had been clear to me for a while that I will not be available for the World Cup 2022 in Qatar."

Kroos said he planned in the next years to place his "full concentration" on Real Madrid. "I would also like to be there more as husband and father for my wife and children," he wrote. "Due to the (international) breaks that I will get in the future, I believe that I can recharge my battery better," he added.

Thanking supporters and critics alike, Kroos also had special words for Joachim Loew, who bowed out as national coach on Tuesday following 15 years in the job. "He made me a national team player and a world champion. He trusted me. We wrote a success story together."

Loew first picked Kroos for a friendly against Argentina in 2010. He went on to play a bit-part in that year's World Cup campaign in South Africa when the Germans finished third. Four years later he was a key component, playing every minute of every game and scoring twice in the 7-1 semi-final demolition of hosts Brazil, as Loew's side lifted the World Cup trophy.

Kroos said he had considered retiring after Germany's disastrous 2018 World Cup campaign in Russia, when they finished last in their group, but Loew talked him out of it. "The trainer had to call more than once," Kroos told German daily Bild, revealing that Loew's replacement Hansi Flick had wanted Kroos to stay on after Euro 2020.

Kroos says he would have "loved" to have seen Germany go on to reach the Euro 2020 final and win "this one big title". "It was a great honor for me to wear this jersey for such a long time. I did it with pride and passion," he added.

There had been calls to drop Kroos during Euro 2020 after below-par performances in the group stages. Yet the midfielder said the doubters only spurred him on, "thanks to all the critics for their extra motivation," he wrote. — AFP



**SAINT PETERSBURG:** Switzerland's coach Vladimir Petkovic speaks to his players before penalty shoot-outs during the Euro 2020 quarter-final football match between Switzerland and Spain at the Saint Petersburg Stadium in Saint Petersburg on Friday. — AFP



**SAINT PETERSBURG:** Spain's goalkeeper Unai Simon saves a kick by Switzerland's defender Manuel Akanji during a penalty shoot-out at the end of the Euro 2020 quarter-final football match between Switzerland and Spain at the Saint Petersburg Stadium in Saint Petersburg on Friday. — AFP

## Simon saves lift Spain past Swiss to reach semis

**SAINT PETERSBURG:** Goalkeeper Unai Simon was the hero as Spain edged past 10-man Switzerland 3-1 on penalties on Friday to set up a Euro 2020 semi-final against Italy. After a 1-1 draw in Saint Petersburg which saw the Swiss play for 43 minutes a man down, Simon made two saves in the shoot-out to help keep Spain's bid for a record fourth European crown alive.

"Football was just there. We are deserved winners," said Simon, who made an embarrassing error in the 5-3 last-16 win over Croatia. "Just like we had to erase the memory of that mistake in the last match, it's time to quickly forget this triumph because we face a tough rival in the next match."

It was heartbreak for Switzerland, who were bidding for reach the semi-finals of a major tournament for the first time in their history. Spain forged ahead early on when Denis Zakaria put through his own net, but Switzerland were the better side for long periods and Xherdan Shaqiri, standing in for the suspended Granit Xhaka as captain, equalized in the 68th minute.

The Swiss were reduced to 10 men with 13 minutes remaining, though, when midfielder Remo Freuler was controversially dismissed for a tackle on Gerard Moreno. Switzerland goalkeeper Yann Sommer, the hero of the penalty shoot-out win over world champions France in the last 16, made a string of fine saves in extra time.

But Simon saved from Fabian Schaer and Manuel Akanji, while Ruben Vargas blazed over in a tense finale as Spain snuck through, with Mikel Oyarzabal smashing home the winning spot-kick. "We have to go into the semi-final fresh, confident and with our heads high. We have to win the Euro now," added Athletic Bilbao's Simon.

After scoring 10 goals in their previous two matches, this was a return to the type of profligate

performances which saw Spain draw their first two group games against Sweden and Poland. But the 2008 and 2012 winners had made a dream start to this quarter-final, taking the lead in fortunate circumstances in only the eighth minute.

A corner was cleared only as far as Jordi Alba, whose left-footed volley was diverted past Sommer by Switzerland midfielder Zakaria, only playing in place of Xhaka. It was the 10th own goal of Euro 2020, more than the other 15 editions combined.

Alvaro Morata wasted an excellent opportunity by heading too close to Sommer when unmarked, but then Switzerland started to grow into the game. Switzerland had a brilliant chance for a leveler in the 64th minute, as Shaqiri sparked a quick counter-attack which ended with Simon reacting well to keep out Steven Zuber's stabbed effort at his near post.

### Shaqiri strikes

But the underdogs found the equalizer they deserved four minutes later, as Freuler latched onto a loose ball after a mix-up in the Spanish defense and squared for Shaqiri to slot into the far corner and score his third goal of the tournament. The pattern of the game changed in the 77th minute though, when referee Michael Oliver gave Freuler his marching orders for a sliding challenge on Spanish substitute Moreno.

Switzerland managed to keep Spain at bay until the end of normal time with relative ease, but in the third minute of the additional half an hour Moreno should have put Spain back in front, only to miskick Alba's cross wide from close range. Switzerland were perhaps lucky not to have another man sent off shortly afterwards, when Silvan Widmer escaped a second yellow card for a cynical foul on Dani Olmo.

Moreno somehow passed up another golden opportunity, denied at point-blank range by Sommer, before the Borussia Moenchengladbach stopper made an excellent diving save from Oyarzabal. Sommer made eight saves in extra time alone, but his one in the shoot-out from Rodri was not enough, despite Sergio Busquets also hitting the post, as Switzerland missed three of their four penalties. — AFP

## Denmark hold off Czech rally

BAKU: Denmark's fairytale run at Euro 2020 will continue into the semifinals after they beat the Czech Republic 2-1 in Baku yesterday to move into a last-four meeting with England or Ukraine at Wembley. First-half goals from Thomas Delaney and Kasper Dolberg were enough to see Kasper Hjulmand's men through despite a second-half rally from the Czechs inspired by Patrik Schick's fifth goal of the tournament.

The Danes have now scored 10 goals in winning their last three matches after starting the tournament with two defeats, the first amid shocking circumstances when Christian Eriksen suffered a cardiac arrest on the pitch.

Three weeks on, they are dreaming of a repeat of 1992 when Denmark won the European Championship despite not even qualifying. Then Yugoslavia's expulsion due to an outbreak of war gave them a second chance and they are playing like a side inspired by the emotion of Eriksen's collapse and recovery.

The Inter Milan midfielder was able to leave hospital after less than a week with a defibrillator fitted in his chest, but on the field Denmark have survived the loss of their star man for the past decade. After playing all three group games in Copenhagen and in front of thousands of travelling Danish fans in Amsterdam in a 4-0 thrashing of Wales last weekend, only a small pocket of supporters could make the 4,000-kilometer trip to Azerbaijan.

Those that did make it were celebrating within five minutes as Delaney was left completely unmarked to head home Jens Stryger Larsen's corner. Tomas Vaclik then had to deny Mikkel Damsgaard to prevent the Danes doubling their lead in a blistering start. But the Czechs then came into the game and twice Kasper Schmeichel was forced into saves by Tomas Holes.

Denmark were always a threat on the break, though, and Vaclik had to stand up to parry another powerful drive by Damsgaard. Vaclik was powerless three minutes before half-time when Joakim Maehle added another assist to his fine tournament with a teasing cross with the outside of his right foot that



BAKU: Czech Republic's midfielder Tomas Soucek heads the ball as Denmark's defender Andreas Christensen defends during the UEFA Euro 2020 quarterfinal match at the Olympic Stadium yesterday. —AFP

Dolberg smashed home from close range. Czech boss Jaroslav Silhavy made two substitutions at the break and the introduction of Jakub Jankto and Michael Krmencik made an instant impact. Krmencik stung the palms of Schmeichel before the Leicester goalkeeper was forced to turn

Antonin Barak's shot behind. But Denmark did not heed their warning as Schick latched onto Vladimir Coufal's cross to join Cristiano Ronaldo as the tournament's top goalscorer. The Czechs' momentum soon fizzled out with both sides visibly jaded by their long journey east and the searing heat. Vaclik

kept his side in the game with a string of saves to twice deny substitute Yussuf Poulsen and then Maehle when one-on-one. However, with Schick forced off by a muscle strain, Silhavy's men lacked the goal threat to trouble Denmark through six minutes of stoppage time. — AFP






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