



**7** Philippine cops win battle of the bulge after rule dropped



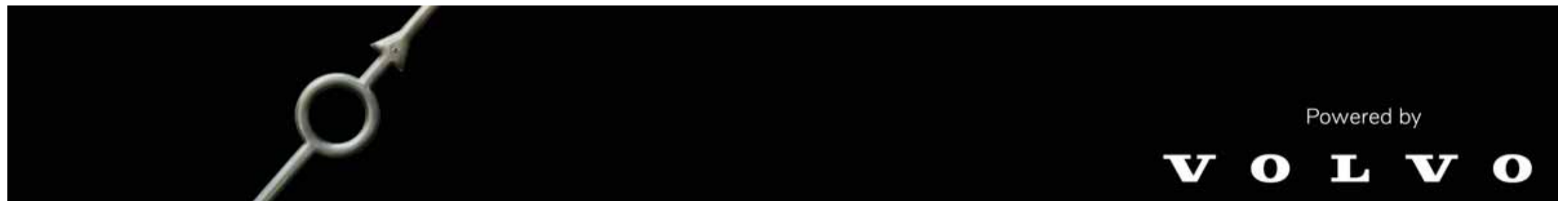
**8** Building boom in Lhasa heightens Tibet divisions



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**13** Never apologize for who I am: Rashford



# Kuwait to close all children's activities, camps from July 25

## Defense ministry, KPC hospitals urged to support health system

### Court frees poet Sayer, sets trial in October

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** The criminal court yesterday decided to free poet Jamal Al-Sayer without bail and set his trial for Oct 5 on charges of writing tweets deemed offensive to HH the Amir and spreading false news. Sayer was arrested last week and the public prosecution ordered his detention pending his trial. He has denied the accusations.

MPs have strongly criticized the way Sayer, who is elderly, was arrested by police without calling him for investigation. They also criticized a decision by the public prosecution to detain him, saying the action violates a new amendment to the law banning the detention of defendants fac-

ing opinion charges.

Opposition MP Muhammad Al-Sayer, who is a relative of the poet, said despite the release of the poet, opposition MPs are still demanding holding an emergency term of the National Assembly to discuss a number of draft laws. The lawmakers said the proposed term will debate the non-implementation by the public prosecution of a new amendment that bans the detention of defendants being interrogated in opinion cases.

The term also seeks to debate and approve a law challenging judges and prosecutors and a law that will set the duration of service for judges and prosecutors. So far, 29 MPs have signed the

Continued on Page 2

**KUWAIT:** The Cabinet decided late Monday to shut down all activities for children indefinitely from July 25 on recommendations by the ministerial committee overseeing the coronavirus pandemic. The Cabinet decided to "close all activities for children including summer clubs from Sunday, July 25 until further notice" read a statement issued following the Cabinet's weekly meeting.

The Cabinet also asked the ministry of defense and Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) to offer their hospitals to the country's health system after a sharp increase in the number of new coronavirus cases. Kuwait has seen a spike in the number of new coronavirus cases and deaths despite vaccinating hundreds of thousands of people.

The ministry of health has reported well over 1,400 new cases daily for the past several weeks and also reported a significant increase in the number of deaths, patients receiving treatment at hospitals and patients in intensive care units. The

ministry on Monday reported 1,694 new cases and as many as 19 deaths, all of whom had not received any vaccination. The rate of infection remains high at 11.74 percent when it should be below 5 percent.

The ministry said 1,175 people infected with the coronavirus are receiving treatment at hospitals, while as many as 331 patients are in intensive care units. The largest number of cases were reported in Ahmadi governorate with 30 percent, followed by Farwaniya and Hawally governorates with 24 percent each. Jahra came in fourth place with 12 percent and the Capital governorate came in last place with 10 percent.

The Cabinet called on the public to continue their cooperation by complying with health precautions and to register with the national vaccination program in a bid to reach immunity levels in the society which will result in reducing pressure on the health system in the country.

### News in brief

#### Gene editing 'blocks virus'

**PARIS:** Scientists have used CRISPR gene-editing technology to successfully block the transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus in infected human cells, according to research released yesterday that could pave the way for COVID-19 treatments. Researchers in Australia used an enzyme, CRISPR-Cas13b, that binds to relevant RNA sequences on the novel coronavirus and degrades the genome it needs to replicate inside human cells. — AFP

#### Iran, US in prisoner swap talks

**TEHRAN:** Iran confirmed yesterday ongoing "negotiations" with the United States over a potential prisoner swap, after a US official said Washington is working to release its detained citizens. The US envoy for Iran, Robert Malley, said on Saturday that US President Joe Biden insists on the release of all Americans and will not accept a "partial deal". — AFP

#### GBS risk after J&J jab

**WASHINGTON:** The US Food and Drug Administration updated its warning labels Monday for the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine to include information about an observed "increased risk" of a rare neurological disorder called Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS). — AFP

#### Face recognition to fight COVID

**BEIJING:** Facial recognition tech linked to personal health codes has been rolled out in a Chinese city bordering Myanmar as authorities seek to squash a coronavirus outbreak. This is the first publicly reported instance of facial recognition being used to track a person's movements and health status as they enter and exit residential areas, supermarkets, transport hubs and other public places. — AFP

#### Iran unveils Islamic dating app

**TEHRAN:** Iran on Monday unveiled an Islamic dating application aimed at facilitating "lasting and informed marriage" for its youth, state television reported. Called Hamdam - Farsi for "companion" - the service allows users to "search for and choose their spouse", the broadcaster said. — AFP

## Grief, anger as 64 killed in Iraq COVID unit fire

**NASIRIYAH, Iraq:** Grief and anger gripped the Iraqi city of Nasiriyah yesterday after fire swept through a temporary COVID isolation unit, killing at least 64 people and injuring dozens. The devastating blaze on Monday evening at the southern city's Al-Hussein Hospital, which medics said was fuelled by oxygen canisters exploding, was the second such tragedy in Iraq in three months.

"Sixty-four (bodies) were retrieved and 39 identified and handed over to their families," a source at the provincial forensic science department told AFP. "Medical teams and relatives of victims are finding it difficult to identify the rest of the corpses," the source said, adding that the toll could rise as more bodies were feared buried under the rubble. An official tally listed in local media said 39 of the victims so

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NASIRIYAH: People gather as a massive fire engulfs the coronavirus isolation ward of Al-Hussein hospital in this southern Iraqi city late Monday. — AFP

## Qatar takes key step to control its own airspace

**DOHA:** Qatar said yesterday that it has been given a preliminary green light by a UN body on a proposal to control its own airspace, months after resolving a rift with its neighbors. The UN's

International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) has given Qatar permission "in principle" to establish its own Flight Information Region (FIR) in its airspace, the wealthy Gulf emirate announced.

This decision was in response to a request from Doha to withdraw from an agreement signed with Bahrain, another Gulf monarchy, under which it had delegated its air navigation services. A three-year row with its Gulf neighbors led by Saudi Arabia had highlighted the shortcomings of the deal, which left Qatar completely reliant on access to airspace controlled by other countries.

Qatar and Bahrain were left with maritime boundaries drawn by Britain, the former colonial power, that have been the source of recurring disputes and clashes. Airspace is largely determined based on existing land and maritime borders. The ICAO "agreed, in principle... with the establishment of a Doha Flight Information Region (FIR) and Doha Search and Rescue Region (SRR)," at talks last month, Qatar's transport and communications ministry said in a statement. It would "include Qatar's sovereign airspace and, to optimize safety

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## Foreign envoys in Lebanon despair

**BEIRUT:** As Lebanon's economy tanks, foreign envoys are resorting to increasingly undiplomatic language to make clear their exasperation with politicians who demand bailout cash without delivering basic reforms in return. Donors have conditioned any financial aid to the Mediterranean country on the establishment of a new government to enact urgently needed reforms that would tackle endemic graft.

But while Lebanese citizens slide

further into poverty, politicians remain unable to agree on a new government line-up, nearly a year on from a deadly port explosion that forced the last one to resign. "There's great frustration with the Lebanese political class, because it's incapable of placing the common good above its personal interests," a French diplomatic source said. As political parties squabble over ministerial portfolios, the Lebanese pound has plunged, lately trading on the black market at less than a tenth of its official value.

Bread has become more expensive and petrol scarce, while at home and work Lebanese swelter during increasingly long power cuts. Supplies of some drugs have run low and the

Continued on Page 2



BEIRUT: French Minister Delegate for Foreign Trade and Economic Attractiveness Franck Riester and French Ambassador to Lebanon Anne Grillo visit Beirut port yesterday. — AFP

## Local

# Deputy Amir receives Kuwait social security authority officials



KUWAIT: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Public Institution for Social Security officials. — KUNA

KUWAIT: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday the Public Institution for Social Security's (PIFSS) investment committee

chief Abdullah Al-Humaidhi, alongside his deputy Mishal Al-Othman. The PIFSS contingent, which also included committee members Abdulaziz Al-Turaiji and Ziyad Al-Mukhaizeem, in addition to the

pension fund's Deputy Director General for Investment Affairs Raed Al-Nusf, spoke of the institution's record asset gains this year, which amounted to a 20.9 percent increase from last year's figure.

His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince thanked the officials for their contributions towards this remarkable achievement, encouraging them to strive for similar accomplishments. — KUNA

## Turkish speaker lauds exceptional ties with Kuwait



KUWAIT: Turkish Parliament Speaker Mustafa Sentop speaks during a press conference in Kuwait yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KUWAIT: Turkish Parliament Speaker Mustafa Sentop lauded yesterday the exceptional ties with the State of Kuwait, saying that both Turkey and Kuwait were open for more cooperation in different fields. Speaking to the press on the sidelines of his visit to Kuwait, Sentop affirmed that he was eager to visit Kuwait despite the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, adding that he was thankful for the invitation by Kuwait National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem. Sentop said that he was honored to have met with 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-Ahmad Al-Sabah, stressing that such meetings would contribute to the development of relations on all aspects. Both countries are willing to seek further cooperation in various fields reiterated the Turkish parliamentary Speaker, adding that the two countries shared common vision in regards to political issues in the region namely the Palestinian cause. He added that Kuwait and Turkey would work on the parliamentary level to promote the Palestinian dream of an independent state within the 1967 borders in line with international laws regarding the matter. — KUNA

## Kuwait's Foreign Minister meets Turkey's top lawmaker

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah met yesterday with the Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey Mustafa Sentop, who is currently on a visit to the country. During the meeting, they discussed views on strong bilateral ties and their advancement in various fields, in addition to reviewing regional and international developments, as well as issues of common concern. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets the Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey Mustafa Sentop. — KUNA

## Deputy FM receives UK, Sudan envoys

KUWAIT: Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Ambassador Majdi Al-Dhefeeri received yesterday UK's Ambassador to the country Belinda Lewis, as well as Sudan's Ambassador to Kuwait Abdulmonem Al-Ameen. Bilateral ties between Kuwait and both nations, in addition to latest regional and international developments were discussed during the separate meetings; both attended by Deputy Foreign Minister Office Director Ambassador Ayham Al-Omar. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Ambassador Majdi Al-Dhefeeri meets UK's Ambassador to Kuwait Belinda Lewis. — KUNA Photos



Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Ambassador Majdi Al-Dhefeeri meets Sudan's Ambassador to Kuwait Abdulmonem Al-Ameen.

## Court frees poet Sayer, sets...

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request, which needs the signature of at least 33 members to enforce the term, which is unlikely to be secured because there are only 31 opposition MPs.

In another development, MP Sayer sent a question to HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah about what the authorities have done to implement a statement he made last year

vowing to make Kuwaitis 70 percent of the population. Kuwaitis currently make up 30 percent of the population.

Sayer said the prime minister in June 2020 made a statement in which he vowed to make Kuwaitis 70 percent of the population with expatriates making up 30 percent, exactly the reverse of the current percentage. He asked the premier if any measure had been taken to implement the plan, adding what were the technical, legal and administrative factors for the statement. The lawmaker asked if the statement was based on studies and requested copies of those studies. He also demanded to know the time-frame of implementing the statement.

died in the inferno. In Al-Nasr, north of the city, mourners laid to rest two brothers and two sisters who perished in the flames.

Other funerals were held in the Shiite holy city of Najaf, where mourner Yunus Saleh blamed politicians for the tragedy. "My family lost five members and a sixth wasn't found. We couldn't identify his body," he said. "Where else would something like this happen? Where? The (political) parties burned them."

Hundreds of young protesters shut down private hospitals in Nasiriyah to pressure the authorities to open the doors of a new public hospital. Last month, Prime Minister Mustafa Kadhemi inaugurated the Turkish-built facility. But the more than 400-bed facility has yet to open to patients. Yesterday, Kadhemi declared three days of national mourning for the "martyrs" of Nasiriyah.

The city is seen as the heart of a nationwide anti-government protest movement that broke out in late 2019. "The state must take the necessary measures... to confront the corrupt," one young protester told AFP. He said those responsible must be held "accountable... in transparent investigations that show people that it (the state) is serious about putting an end to these tragedies". — AFP

## Foreign envoys in Lebanon...

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cash-strapped state can barely buy enough fuel to keep the nation's power on, respectively leaving charities and private backup generators struggling to fill the gap.

The French diplomatic source said the international community was ready to help Lebanon. But "sadly we can't because, opposite us, we have no one to talk to, or we do but they don't have the means - or the willingness - to act". The last government, painstakingly cobbled together, had barely got off the ground before the explosion at Beirut port on Aug 4, when hundreds of tons of ill-stored ammonium nitrate fertilizer ignited, killing more than 200 people.

Foreign donors have over the past year pledged millions of dollars in humanitarian aid to the Lebanese people, including at two conferences

organized by former colonial power France. But, said the French source, "we're not going to provide the Lebanese state with a blank cheque". A high-ranking UN official said a third donor conference this month would be the chance to sound the alarm over the "humanitarian consequences" of the political paralysis.

"Lebanon - which has a GDP higher than most poor countries - is facing food insecurity, malnutrition and issues of access to basic services," the official said. But "humanitarian aid cannot be a sustainable solution," the official noted, adding that the international community will not "take over the state's... role".

An Arab diplomat in Beirut said Lebanese decision-makers did not appear to have a plan of their own, hoping instead that the international community would help, without them "making any concession, any change" in return. "The international community has long been repeating the same thing: Help yourself so that we can help you."

In Lebanon, more than half the population now lives below the official global poverty line. Beirut's diplomats have seen living conditions deteriorate first hand. — AFP

## Grief, anger as 64 killed in Iraq...

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far identified were women. The blaze also injured 100 people. "We heard their screams but we couldn't help them much," said activist Hisham Al-Sumeri, who had helped in the relief effort. He accused the authorities of negligence.

Smoke was still rising from the charred debris of the temporary building yesterday, as grieving relatives looked on. "A patient comes in looking for treatment and he ends up being carried out in a coffin," said Abou Nour Al-Shawi, an elderly onlooker. He pointed out the frailty of the structure, which had collapsed quickly in the flames. "This place is not even fit for animals," he said.

As the first funerals were held, indignant protesters vented their outrage at provincial authorities they blame for the deaths, an AFP correspondent said. In Al-Dawaya, east of Nasiriyah, a joint funeral was held for six members of a single family who had

## Qatar takes key step to control...

Continued from Page 1

and efficiency of the regional airspace, other contiguous airspace over the high seas," it added. Qatar's proposal also covered "its intention to withdraw from the current arrangement whereby it has delegated to Bahrain the provision of air navigation services over its sovereign territory". "The proposal represents one of the sovereign rights of the State of Qatar and

demonstrates the huge investments made by Qatar to develop its air navigation system," Transport Minister Jassim Al-Sulaiti said in the statement.

The move comes a few months after a landmark reconciliation between Qatar and other Gulf countries including Bahrain. The regional bloc led by Saudi Arabia broke ties with Doha in 2017, accusing it of supporting Islamist movements - charges that it denied. During the boycott Qatar sought to strengthen its self-sufficiency in various sectors of its gas-rich economy. The emirate, which is hosting the 2022 World Cup, has become a major player in the airline industry through Qatar Airways, which along with Dubai-based Emirates is one of the largest airlines in the Middle East. — AFP

Local

# Cabinet calls on Defense, KPC to support Kuwait's health system

**KUWAIT:** The Cabinet assigned the Ministry of Defense and Kuwait Petroleum Corporation to harness their hospitals to support health system in the country. The Cabinet also decided to shut down all summer clubs with children's activities, effective from Sunday July 25 until further notice. The decisions were made during the weekly Cabinet meeting, held on Monday under the direction of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah at Seif Palace.

On the advent of Eid Al-Adha, the Cabinet congratulated His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah as well as Kuwaitis and residents on this occasion, wishing happy returns of this joyful occasion. Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Sabah said after the meeting. The Cabinet decided that Eid holiday will start on July 18 until 22.

The Premier briefed the Cabinet on the gist of his talks with Speaker of Grand National Assembly of Turkey Mustafa Setop who is on an official visit to Kuwait. The talks covered the deep-rooted relationships and means of enhancing them to serve the two peoples, and a number of issues of common concern.

In light of the announcement by the

Foreign Ministry's committee of prisoners and missing persons on the identification of ten prisoners and missing martyrs through the analysis of genetic fingerprint of the remains that were brought from Iraq, the Cabinet offered condolences to the families of those martyrs who sacrificed for their home and its territorial integrity.

### Health developments

Within the government's attention to follow up the latest developments of health situation, the Cabinet listened to a presentation made by Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Hmoud Al-Sabah on the numbers of infections, deaths and recoveries in all governorates. He added that the rate of recovery exceeded 94 percent, pointing to a rise in the deaths amongst unvaccinated people, and patients in the hospitals and ICUs. The minister also appraised the Cabinet of all efforts made by the ministry's staff in order to combat the pandemic and variant strains as well as complete vaccination of all segments, noting that the vaccine has proven high effectiveness against the virus variants. The Cabinet expressed appreciation to the efforts made by the entire ministry's staff to perform this humanitarian mission at these exceptional conditions. It urged the public for cooperation and continuing abidance by health requirements to ensure providing health services to all to



**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah chairs the Cabinet's meeting. — KUNA

overcome this crisis with minimal losses.

The ministers discussed the education, health and youth committee's recommendations on the integrated plan submitted by Kuwait University, General Secretariat of the Council of Private Universities, Higher Institute of Musical Arts, and Higher Institute of Theatrical Arts regarding resuming study at educational institutions as of September 2021. The Cabinet considered the committee's recommendation regarding the 2021-2026 Ministry of Information's strategy.

It commended efforts of those responsible for preparing that strategy aiming to develop media in order to achieve a vision of building sustainable and pioneering media of a meaningful content that combines citizenship, originality and modernity.

The strategy abides by Kuwait's values stemmed from moderate Islam and traditions, and aims to boost the country's history and media as well as its Gulf and Arab culture. The Cabinet assigned the Ministry of Information to

submit a report every three months on the strategy's implementation. In addition, the Cabinet discussed political affairs in light of the latest developments on the political arena on international and Arab levels. It followed with great concern the repercussions of Ethiopia's dam, expressing Kuwait's support to legitimate water rights of both Egypt and Sudan. The Cabinet lauded efforts by Egypt and Sudan to contain the crisis and solve it in line with the rules of international law. — KUNA

## Kuwait, France discuss security

**KUWAIT:** Undersecretary of Kuwait's Ministry of Interior Lt Gen Essam Al-Nahham met yesterday with the French Internal Security Attache in Kuwait Gendarmerie Colonel Stephane

Lacroix. A ministry statement said that both sides tackled topics of common interests, means to boost relations and exchange of information and expertise. During the meeting, Lt Gen Nahham stressed deep bilateral relations with France, while Lacroix affirmed the importance of the meeting as it improves level of cooperation between the two sides, it added. — KUNA



**KUWAIT:** Undersecretary of Kuwait's Ministry of Interior Lt Gen Essam Al-Nahham meets the French Internal Security Attache in Kuwait Gendarmerie Colonel Stephane Lacroix. — KUNA

## World should not wobble amid adversity: Kuwait

**KUWAIT:** The world should not wobble in the face of increasing adversity, Kuwait's foreign minister told his counterparts from countries that form the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) yesterday, citing the COVID-19 pandemic as an unprecedented challenge. As the world continues to grapple with hardships ranging from conflicts and crises to disasters and pandemics, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Al-Nasser Al-Sabah urged NAM member states, amid Serbia-hosted talks via video link, to navigate the COVID pandemic with "optimism." The Kuwaiti minister said the Cold War era bloc's "core mission" remains unchanged since its inception back in 1961, which is to ensure a world where "peace and parity" abound, as embedded in UN resolutions and conventions. "We remain shoulder-to-shoulder with the international community in the pursuit of global justice," the minister emphasized, saying the world is dealing with hardships at every corner, the latest of which was the coronavirus pandemic. On the COVID pandemic, he said it "caught the world off guard," but hoped that the next time the bloc meets, "the worst of the pandemic would have elapsed." — KUNA



**Dr Ahmad Al-Nasser Al-Sabah**

## Kuwait National Guard celebrates graduates



**KUWAIT:** Kuwait National Guard Undersecretary Lt Gen Hashim Abdelrazaq Al-Rifae said the guard is concerned with developing the human element and enhancing their skills so that they fulfill their duties towards the security

and stability of the country. Rifae spoke during the swearing-in ceremony of the 25th batch of non-commissioned officers who graduated from the non-commissioned officers institute at the interior ministry. He conveyed greetings of the

higher command, headed by Chief of National Guard HH Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah and Deputy Chief Gen Sheikh Ahmad Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Rifae wished the graduates all success.

## Gulf Bank shines in latest lyrical masterpiece

**KUWAIT:** Gulf Bank is celebrating the successful launch of its latest song, which was released in anticipation of the semi-annual Al-Danah account draw for the KD 1 million prize taking place tomorrow. The new song is performed by Abdulsalam Mohammed and Hadi, with a maritime melody that reflects the culture of the people of Kuwait and the spirit of Gulf Bank.

As is tradition, Gulf Bank's clients have become accustomed to expecting entertaining performances from the Bank in celebration of various national and social occasions. This time around, after Gulf Bank increased the Al-Danah account prizes with the promise to announce two new millionaires this year, the Bank launched a song that celebrates its relationship with its loyal customers, rewarding them in a similar fashion as to how the sea rewards its seafarers depicted in the music video. This is evident in the music video released with the song, which depicts the difficulty of pearl diving and the hardship that our forefathers endured while, at the same time, highlighting the ease of winning with Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account, and how life changing winning an Al-Danah prize can be.

During the course of the song, artists Abdulsalam Mohammed and Hadi refer to



**KUWAIT:** Group photo of the team.



**Najla Aleisa**

Gulf Bank's slogan, the Al-Danah account draws and prizes, and to the increase in the Al-Danah prize amounts.

Commenting on Gulf Bank's latest work, Gulf Bank's Deputy General Manager of Marketing, Najla Aleisa, commented: "At Gulf Bank, we have

grown accustomed to celebrating our national and social occasions with our dear clients. With this year's updated Al-Danah account prizes, we have even more reason to celebrate: the announcement of our upcoming millionaire in our semi-annual Al-Danah account draw! We are excited to have launched our latest song to highlight just how rewarding saving with an Al-Danah account can be, and to remind our clients that there are always plenty of chances for them to win with Al-Danah."

Gulf Bank's semi-annual Al-Danah account draw will take place tomorrow at 7 pm. Viewers can watch the live broadcast event on Al-Rai TV, Gulf Bank's social media channels, and via the event link at <https://www.e-gulfbank.com/kdm>.

## Arabian red fox thrives in Kuwait's desert



**KUWAIT:** The Arabian red fox, locally known as 'Al-Hesni', is common in the open desert of Kuwait, living in small groups and seeking refuge from the merciless sun by digging deep

holes in the ground. The animal — feeding on mice, gerbils, small rabbits and birds' eggs — is facing a bit of a struggle due to illegal hunting, which threatens its existence. — KUNA

## Local

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## Young Writers

## The sincere dean of diplomatic corps

By Nermin Al-Houti

I, since my return to my dear homeland Kuwait, kept seeing him in almost every cultural and art event. This man always participated with educated and creative individuals. He is the Senegalese Ambassador to Kuwait, Abdou Lahad Mbacke, who was the dean of the diplomatic corps for over 23 years in Kuwait.

Culture and politics are two sides of a coin, and this is what Mbacke was doing. Our words today are to tell him goodbye with the hope to meet this political and cultural personality in the future at cultural or art events in Kuwait or anywhere else.

I did not expect to write to see off a friend who always backed Kuwait and educated Kuwaitis with his views and advised us. We will miss you for sure. Ambassador Mbacke is an excellent reader of all Kuwait writers, particularly the columnists in Kuwait. We will miss your follow-up and opinion of our columns.

We tell you goodbye, hoping to see again. You are the son of Kuwait and will remain so. You joined us for more than a quarter century in our sad and happy times. You were and still are a member of all Kuwaiti families through your visits and contacts with diwanis. You will soon depart your second country, and all we have are prayers for you and your family to have a happy life. We ask Almighty Allah to always hear good news about you. We will miss you.

## Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: The sun sets behind buildings in Kuwait City on Monday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

## 'Friendship Society' covers patients' medication bills

KUWAIT: Director General of Kuwait Humanitarian Friendship Society Khalid bin Sabt paid a visit to Farwaniya Hospital Director General Dr Mohammad Al-Barrak in the presence of head of accounting Ali Al-Mutairi. Bin Sabt handed Dr Barrak a cheque to cover the cost of medication of insolvent patients of various nationalities, to relieve them from this burden in coordination with the hospital administration. Meanwhile, Dr Barrak thanked the chairman and board members of KHFS for their efforts to achieve their humanitarian goals towards all those who live in Kuwait regardless of nationality, race or religion.



KUWAIT: Director General of Kuwait Humanitarian Friendship Society Khalid bin Sabt hands over the cheque to Farwaniya Hospital Director General Dr Mohammad Al-Barrak, in the presence of the hospital's head of accounting Ali Al-Mutairi.

## Ooredoo Kuwait honors Dr Feeli

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, honored Dr Bassam Al-Feeli, the founder of Orbital Space, the first private company in the Middle East to provide access to space through CubeSat technology, Nada Al-Shemmari and Abdulraof Al-Feeli, on the occasion of the success of releasing Kuwait's first Nano satellite into orbit called "Qmr Kuwait".

Dr Feeli and Nada Al-Shemmari were greeted by Abdulaziz Yaqoub Al-Babtain - Chief Executive Officer; Fadi Kawar - Chief Operating Officer; Mijbil Alayoub - Senior Director, Corporate Communications; Fatima Dashti - Senior Manager, Public Relations, Internal Communications and Social Responsibility; Essa Al-Moosa - Senior Director, Customer Care; Thamer Al-Tahous - Director, VIP and the Public Relations Team in Ooredoo Kuwait. The team expressed their pride in Dr Feeli's strenuous efforts and great achievements on behalf of the State of Kuwait, which resulted in a historic achievement called the "Qmr Kuwait", which was released from Cape Canaveral Space Force Station located in Florida, United States.

Meanwhile, Dr Feeli gave a detailed explanation of the project and its development stages, stressing on the fact that the main objective of this project is to raise awareness about satellite technology, in addition to raising the name of the State of Kuwait and encouraging Kuwaiti youth.

Ooredoo affirmed its continuous support for youth and local skills and talents in various sectors including: science, technology and space innovations, since space inspires the youth. Further, the company stressed on the fact that the ultimate goal of such honors is to develop the capabilities of youth in scientific research and raise awareness about space experiments and their role in sustainable development along with improving the quality of life.

Dr Feeli is a Kuwaiti scientist with expertise in



KUWAIT: Ooredoo CEO Abdulaziz Yaqoub Al-Babtain (center) honors Dr Bassam Al-Feeli (right) and Nada Al-Shemmari.

advanced technologies including nanotechnology, lasers and photonics, advanced nuclear reactors design, and space technologies. He is currently a Scientific Consultant and Program Manager within Innovation and Enterprise Directorate at the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS). Among his responsibilities at KFAS is organizing science, technology, and innovation related learning programs that would provide local companies with tools and skills to improve business productivity and competitiveness.

Dr Bassam holds PhD in Microelectromechanical Systems (MEMS) from Virginia Tech where he contributed to the development of micro gas analysis devices. He has served as scientist in the Nanotechnology program with the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research, and program coordinator in the Kuwait National Nuclear Energy Committee. In 2012-2013, Bassam was a Fellow of the Kuwait-MIT Center for Natural Resources and the Environment. He has served as a visiting scientist at MIT Chemical Engineering Department, and was a visiting scientist at the Institute for Materials Research, Tohoku University, Japan.



A group photo at Ooredoo headquarters.

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Philippine police win battle for the bulge after rule dropped

US says helping investigate Haitian president's killing

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## Taleban will not fight inside Afghan cities

### Militants warn Turkey against extending its troop presence

KABUL: The Taleban do not want to battle government forces inside Afghanistan's cities and would rather see them surrender, a senior insurgent leader said yesterday, as the militants also warned Turkey against extending its troop presence.

The hardline Islamist group has swept through much of the north as foreign troops complete their withdrawal, and the government now holds little more than a constellation of provincial capitals that must largely be resupplied by air.

Yesterday, the head of a Taleban commission that oversees government forces who surrender urged residents of Afghanistan's cities to reach out to them. "Now that the fighting from mountains and deserts has reached the doors of the cities, Mujahiddin (Taleban) don't want fighting inside the city," Amir Khan Muttaqi said in a message tweeted by a Taleban spokesman.

"It is better... to use any possible channel to get in touch with our invitation and guidance commission," he said, adding this would "prevent their cities from getting damaged".

The strategy is one well-worn by the Taleban — particularly during their first rise to power in the 1990s — cutting off towns and district centres and getting elders to negotiate a surrender. Muttaqi's comments came as the defence ministry said Afghan forces had cleared Qala-i-Naw city after days of fighting.

The Badghis province capital saw sustained street fighting last week in the first assault by the Taleban on a major urban centre since foreign troops commenced their final withdrawal in May.

The call also came the same day as a video emerged that CNN said it had verified showing a group of Afghan commandos being gunned down

by the Taleban in June after surrendering.

#### Turkey warning

In a separate statement yesterday, the Taleban said Turkey's decision to provide security to Kabul airport when US-led forces leave was "reprehensible".

"We consider stay of foreign forces in our homeland by any country under whatever pretext as occupation," the group said, days after Ankara agreed with Washington to provide security for Kabul airport.

As foreign forces wind up their withdrawal — due to be completed by August 31 — the situation on the ground is changing rapidly.

The top US general in Afghanistan relinquished his command Monday at a ceremony in the capital, the latest symbolic gesture bringing America's longest war nearer to an end.

The pace of the pullout — and multiple offensives launched by the Taleban — have raised fears that Afghanistan's security forces could be swiftly overwhelmed, particularly without vital US air support. Around 650 American service members are expected to remain in Kabul, guarding Washington's sprawling diplomatic compound.

But Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Friday he had agreed with the United States on the "scope" of how to secure Kabul airport.

Peace talks between the insurgents and the government supposedly taking place in Doha have largely fizzled out, and the Taliban now appear set on a complete military victory.

But claims by the hardline group to control 85 percent of the country are impossible to verify



KANDAHAR: Men donate blood for people who got injured during clashes between Taleban and government forces, in Kandahar district on July 12, 2021. — AFP

independently — and strongly disputed by the government.

The insurgents have tried to capture cities in the past, but so far have failed to keep them. They briefly held the northern city of Kunduz in 2015 and 2016 but were pushed out by government forces. In 2018, insurgents seized Ghazni for a few days,

torching its main bazaar and killing scores of civilians. In the latest fighting, local officials said the Taleban had captured two districts in the largely Shiite Hazara province of Bamiyan. During their repressive rule two decades ago, the insurgents drew international outrage by blowing up giant centuries-old statues of Buddha in Bamiyan. — AFP

## Cuba blames US for unprecedented anti-govt protests

HAVANA: Havana on Monday blamed a US "policy of economic suffocation" for unprecedented protests against Cuba's communist government, as Washington pointed the finger at "decades of repression" in the one-party state.

The longtime foes traded barbs a day after thousands of Cubans took to the streets chanting: "Down with the dictatorship" in protests dispersed by police who arrested dozens. The anti-government rallies erupted spontaneously in several cities as the country endures its worst economic crisis in 30 years, with chronic shortages of electricity, food and medicine and a recent worsening of the coronavirus epidemic.

The only authorized gatherings in Cuba are usually events of the ruling Communist Party, but according to the data journalism site Inventario, a total of 40 demonstrations took place on Sunday. President Miguel Diaz-Canel blamed the discontent on the United States pursuing a "policy of economic suffocation to provoke social unrest in the country." Cuba has been under US sanctions since 1962. "What do they want? To provoke social unrest" with a view to "regime change," he said in an address broadcast on public television and radio.

#### 'Decades of repression'

In a statement from Washington, US President Joe Biden expressed support for the protesters' demand for relief "from the decades of repression and economic suffering to which they have been subjected by Cuba's authoritarian regime."

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said it would be a "grievous mistake" for Cuba to blame Washington for protests he said could be traced to the communist leadership's "mismanagement" of the economy and COVID-19.

US-Cuba relations have been particularly fraught since then-president Donald Trump reinforced sanctions following an historic but temporary easing of tensions under Barack Obama between 2014 and 2016. The tougher measures, left unchanged by Biden, and the collapse of tourism due to the global pandemic, contributed to Cuba's economy declining 11 percent in 2020.

On Sunday, several hundred protesters marched through the capital Havana chanting: "We want liberty" as police and soldiers kept watch. AFP witnessed officers spraying tear-gas and beating protesters with plastic pipes.

Social media showed scenes of rallies around the country despite the mobile internet-only introduced to the island in 2018 — being mostly offline on Sunday afternoon. It remained so by lunchtime Monday.

The EU and UN on Monday called for Cuba to respect freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. "I would like to call on the government there to allow peaceful demonstrations and to listen to the discontent being expressed by the demonstrators," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said. — AFP

## Malaysia shuts COVID centre after 200 workers infected

KUALA LUMPUR: A Malaysian coronavirus vaccination centre was temporarily closed yesterday after more than 200 workers tested positive for COVID-19, authorities said, as the country's cases set a new daily record. The Southeast Asian nation is battling a serious outbreak driven by highly infectious variants, and has been under a strict lockdown since the start of June.

It has ramped up its jab drive by opening mass vaccination sites, and about 11 percent of the population are so far fully vaccinated while almost 25 percent have received a first dose. But one centre in hard-hit Selangor state was forced to close after 204 staff and volunteers out of 453 there tested positive, said Khairy Jamaluddin, minister in charge of the inoculation drive.

Those infected had low "viral loads" and none had serious symptoms, possibly because most workers at the site in Shah Alam city had been vaccinated, he said. He added that 400 of the workers there had been inoculated, but he did not say which vaccine they had been given. Malaysia is using the Pfizer-BioNTech, AstraZeneca and Sinovac shots.



KUALA LUMPUR: File photo shows single mother Tilda Kalaivani waving a shirt to use as a white flag to call for help, after being affected by COVID-19 in her rental apartment in Kuala Lumpur. — AFP

"This is the first time we've had to shut down a (vaccination centre) because of positive cases, but we acted fast," Khairy said, adding it would not hamper the overall programme.

The centre's closure led to thousands of appointments being rescheduled, but it will re-open Wednesday after sanitisation, with new staff. Despite being under strict curbs for weeks, with only essential businesses allowed to operate, Malaysia's infection rates have remained high. Daily cases hit a new record of 11,079 Tuesday, along

with 125 deaths. Health Minister Adham Baba later told reporters nearly 700 new beds for virus patients had been added at hospitals in the capital, as well as in Selangor and Negeri Sembilan state, taking the total to over 5,000. He also announced an extra 1,200 medical staff would be hired and about 5,000 new volunteers brought in to help in the three hard-hit areas. The country of almost 33 million people has so far reported more than 855,000 virus cases, and nearly 6,400 deaths. — AFP

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## International

# UN human rights council urges 'verifiable withdrawal' of Eritrean troops from Tigray

## Voiced grave concern at reported widespread abuses in the region in recent months

GENEVA: The UN Human Rights Council called yesterday for an immediate end to all violations in Ethiopia's conflict-torn Tigray region and for Eritrean troops to quickly withdraw in a verifiable manner. The top UN rights body approved a resolution presented by the European Union, which hailed a unilateral ceasefire declared by Ethiopia last month and also its participation in a joint investigation into the Tigray situation.

But it voiced grave concern at reported widespread abuses in the region in recent months, including mass killings of civilians and rampant sexual violence. In particular, it highlighted the reported participation of Eritrean troops in serious abuses there, including violations of international law, "exacerbating the conflict".

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed—who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2019 for rapprochement with neighbouring Eritrea—sent the army into Tigray last November to oust the region's once-dominant ruling party, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).

Abiy had accused them of orchestrating attacks on Ethiopian military bases in Tigray, an important economic and industrial region in the Horn of Africa nation. After eight months of brutal conflict with federal troops, the Tigray Defence Forces last month swept across large parts of Tigray and seized the regional capital Mekele.

The months of fighting—marked by grisly massacres and widespread sexual violence—has killed thousands of people, while the United Nations says hundreds of thousands are on the brink of famine.

### Joint investigation

Yesterday's resolution, adopted with 20 of the rights council's 47 members in favour, 14 opposing and 13 abstaining, called "for an immediate halt to all human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law." The text also called for "the swift and verifiable withdrawal of Eritrean troops from the Tigray region." Eritrean troops are accused of massacring civilians and forcing Eritrean refugees back across the border, according to rights groups during the eight-month conflict.

For months, both Ethiopia and Eritrea flatly denied the involvement of Eritrean forces in the conflict, but Abiy finally admitted their presence in March, and said they would withdraw. Before the vote, Eritrea's representative, Adem Osman Idris, slammed the resolution, insisting that his country's troops had left the region. Yesterday's resolution was met with strong resistance from Eritrea, as well as China and Venezuela, which together presented 15 proposed amendments, which were all rejected. Ethiopia also categorically rejected the text, saying it interfered with an ongoing investigation into the situation in Tigray. The resolution did welcome Ethiopia's decision to agree to the joint probe with the UN rights office, and urged the government to ensure the conditions needed for a "full, unhindered and independent investigation" and for attaining accountability for all violations.

Anita Pipan of Slovenia, who presented the resolution on behalf of the EU, insisted the intention was not to interfere with the probe, but said "for the process to



HUMERA: People gather at a gas station during a food distribution organized by the Amhara government near the village of Baker, 50 km southeast of Humera, in the Tigray Region of Ethiopia. — AFP

be credible, transparency is needed." "Given the seriousness of the situation, the international community has the right to be kept informed."

UN rights chief Michelle Bachelet told the council last month that the joint investigation had begun in mid-May was expected to conclude its work in August.

Yesterday's resolution called on Bachelet's office to provide the Ethiopian government with advice and technical assistance towards ensuring accountability. It also called for her to present an oral update to the council during its next two sessions in September and March on progress made in the joint investigation. — AFP



CARACAS: Venezuela's opposition leader Juan Guaido and his wife Fabiana Rosales are seen outside their house in Caracas. — AFP

## Venezuela's Maduro says Mexico to host talks with oppn

CARACAS: Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro said Monday that Mexico will host talks between his government and the opposition, but insisted he will only take part if international sanctions are lifted and he is protected from any plots to oust him.

Maduro's re-election in 2018 has not been recognized by either the opposition at home or by around 60 other countries — including the European Union and the United States. Washington in particular has ramped up sanctions against Venezuela and its regime, putting huge pressure on a country that has plunged deeper into political, economic and humanitarian crisis.

"Norway has been promoting an international dialogue based in Mexico, and very well, we agree," Maduro said at a meeting with lawmakers at the presidential palace in Caracas. "What we do not agree with is that some people who say they want to participate in the dialogue are preparing coups, financing criminals, terrorist attacks, and are planning assassinations," added the president.

Maduro's comments come after the arrest of oppo-

sition leader Freddy Guevara, who was detained Monday by the secret police and will be charged with terrorism and treason, according to the prosecutor's office. Guevara has been accused in the past of encouraging violence in protests that called for Maduro's departure, although the lawmaker was pardoned by the president last year.

Without referring to Guevara directly, Maduro said on Monday that some of those who have been pardoned "go free and immediately join in looking for criminals, paying for violent groups and preparing assassinations." The US and EU have said they are willing to review sanctions if negotiations in favor of "credible" elections advance.

Maduro insisted his participation in Mexico depended on whether the measures, which include an oil embargo by the US, were lifted. "We have proposed three conditions to go to Mexico," Maduro told lawmakers. "One, that the United States and the European Union lift all sanctions.

"Two, that all political sectors, by sitting down, recognize the validity and functioning of public powers and constitutionality of the country and its legitimate authorities." "Three, that all sectors renounce violent plans with criminals, coups, assassination and other avenues of violence."

Regional elections are taking place in Venezuela in November, and Maduro has promised to respect the results should his opponents triumph in the mayoral and gubernatorial contests. — AFP

Moroccan system's fundamental promise of fair trials for individuals accused of crimes and is inconsistent with the promise of the 2011 constitution and His Majesty King Mohammed VI's reform agenda," State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters.

"Press freedom is foundational to prosperous and secure societies, and governments must ensure that journalists can safely perform their essential roles without fear of unjust attention, violence or threats," he said. But the Moroccan prosecutor's office said Raissouni received a "fair" trial and had been "prosecuted for crimes that have nothing to do with his journalistic work."

Price said the United States was also raising with Morocco other cases of journalists including that of Omar Radiwho has, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, been held in solitary confinement on charges of sexual assault and undermining state security. Morocco is a longstanding ally of the United States, which under former president Donald Trump recognized its claim to disputed Western Sahara as the kingdom agreed to normalize relations with Zionists entity.—AFP

US citizens — killed the president in his home last week, also injuring his wife.

"At the request of the Haitian government, the Department of Justice, along with its US government partners, is assisting the Haitian National Police in the investigation," the department said in a statement.

"An initial assessment has been conducted in Haiti by senior US officials. The department will continue to support the Haitian government in its review of the facts and circumstances surrounding this heinous attack." It added it would also investigate if any US laws had been broken.

"Political leaders need to come together," Biden told reporters earlier. "The US stands ready to contin-

## Nigerian kidnappers free abducted emir, hold 13 relatives

KANO: An emir kidnapped in northern Nigeria's Kaduna state has been freed while 13 other family members remained in captivity, his son said yesterday. The attackers, known locally as bandits, stormed the palace of 83-year-old Alhassan Adamu, the emir of Kajuru outside the state capital of Kaduna early on Sunday, and seized victims, including women and children.

Emirs are revered in predominantly Muslim northern Nigeria as custodians of Islam and tradition. They have no constitutional role, but wield influence and act as a link between the people and government. "His Highness was released yesterday and he is now in the palace," said Musa Alassan Adamu, the emir's eldest son. "He was dropped by his captors outside the town from where he walked to the palace," Adamu told AFP.

He said the monarch was taken to hospital for med-

ical checks where he was certified to be in good health. "The bandits are still holding 13 members of the family," the son said. Twelve family members were initially thought to have been abducted with the emir.

A video clip seen by AFP shows the emir addressing his followers, who came to sympathise with him after his release. He broke down in tears as soon as he began his address. A source in the palace said the kidnappers had contacted the palace for ransom for the release of the other hostages.

Police in Kaduna have not yet commented on the incident. Kaduna has recently become a target for kidnapping-for-ransom gangs, seizing students and travellers on highways, but the abduction of the emir marked the first time such a high-profile victim had been seized. Northwest and central Nigeria have in recent years been terrorised by gangs of cattle thieves and kidnappers who raid villages, killing and abducting residents as well as stealing livestock after looting and burning homes. The gangs have lately been attacking schools and abducting students to squeeze ransom from parents.

Around 1,000 students have been kidnapped since December. On July 5, more than 100 students were kidnapped from a boarding school in Kaduna state, in the latest mass abduction targeting schools. — AFP



MEXICO CITY: Passengers travel on the cable car system dubbed Cablebus after its inauguration outskirts of Mexico City, on July 12, 2021. — AFP

## Commuters escape Mexico City gridlock in new cable car

MEXICO CITY: Commuters soared over one of the world's biggest and most traffic-clogged cities as a new cable car system went into operation in the Mexican capital on Monday. The 9.2-kilometer (5.7 miles) aerial tramway, comprising 377 cars that can each carry 10 passengers, promises to cut travel times for thousands of people in northern Mexico City.

"How much time was wasted. They should have done this much earlier," said 46-year-old electrician Marco Antonio Garcia, delighted that what was a journey of more than an hour now takes 20 minutes. "Are we in France or Switzerland?" he said, laughing along with the other passengers.

Department of Justice, Department of Homeland Security, State Department and National Security Council met with top Haitian officials.

"The delegation reviewed the security of critical infrastructure with Haitian government officials and met with the Haitian National Police, who are leading the investigation into the assassination," NSC spokeswoman Emily Horne said.

They also met with Haitian political leaders, including interim Prime Minister Claude Joseph and Senate President Joseph Lambert, "to encourage open and constructive dialogue to reach a political accord that can enable the country to hold free and fair elections." — AFP

In contrast to the buses and metro where pick-pockets and thieves operate, passengers aboard the new Cablebus system enjoyed comfortable seats, legroom, air conditioning and Wi-Fi. "It reduces my travel time a lot," 21-year-old psychology student Karen Leon said, traveling with family members who gazed down on the city with a mixture of astonishment and amusement.

It was a welcome change from the hellish commute that many endure in the capital and surrounding urban sprawl, home to a total of more than 20 million people. The line between Cuauhtemoc and Indios Verdes can carry up to 5,000 people an hour between six stations, according to Mayor Claudia Sheinbaum's office, which plans to open a second line in the east of the city.

Another cable car system was inaugurated in 2016 in Ecatepec just north of the capital, an area plagued by crime and poor public transportation. Similar systems also exist in a number of other Latin American cities, notably La Paz and adjoining El Alto in Bolivia which have a 32-kilometer aerial tramway. — AFP

## US criticizes Morocco jailing of journalist

WASHINGTON: The United States on Monday criticized its ally Morocco for handing a five-year prison sentence to a journalist and urged the kingdom to protect media freedom. The State Department said it was "disappointed" by Friday's sentencing of Souleimane Raissouni, the editor-in-chief of the now-defunct Akhbar Al Yaoum whose allies say he was targeted for his critical coverage.

Raissouni, who has lost a significant amount of weight after a hunger strike of more than 90 days, was convicted of indecent assault against another man, making him the latest in a string of journalists prosecuted for alleged sex crimes. "We believe the judicial process that led to this verdict contradicts the

## US says helping investigate Haitian president's killing

WASHINGTON: The United States said Monday it was helping investigate Haitian president Jovenel Moise's assassination and did not rule out sending troops at Haiti's request. According to Haitian authorities, a hit squad of 28 men — 26 Colombians and two

## International

# Thailand defends COVID-19 vaccine 'mix-and-match' after WHO warning

## Russia says India will produce 300m Sputnik V doses each year

**BANGKOK:** Thailand yesterday defended mixing two different COVID-19 vaccines to battle a surge in infections, after the WHO's top scientist warned it was a "dangerous trend" not backed by evidence. The kingdom is struggling to contain its latest outbreak fuelled by the highly contagious Delta variant, with cases and deaths skyrocketing and the healthcare system stretched thin.

Authorities said they will mix a first dose of the Chinese-made Sinovac jab with a second dose of AstraZeneca to try and achieve a "booster" effect in six weeks instead of 12. Thailand's chief virologist Yong Poovorawan said this would be possible by combining an

inactivated virus vaccine-Sinovac-with a viral vector vaccine such as AstraZeneca.

"We can't wait 12 weeks (for a booster effect) in this outbreak where the disease is spreading fast," he said. "But in the future, if there are better, improved vaccines... we will find a better way to manage the situation." His comments come a day after the World Health Organisation's chief scientist Soumya Swaminathan called the strategy a "dangerous trend".

"We are in a bit of a data-free, evidence-free zone as far as 'mix-and-match'", she said. Thailand has reported more than 353,700 coronavirus cases and 2,847 deaths-

the bulk of them detected since the latest wave kicked off in April from an upscale Bangkok nightlife district.

Healthcare workers were the first in line to receive Sinovac, but authorities said Sunday nearly 900 medical staff-most of them vaccinated with that shot-got COVID-19. They will now also get an AstraZeneca or Pfizer-BioNTech booster shot, authorities said.

Virus hotspot Bangkok and nine other hard-hit provinces are now under tougher restrictions that include a night-time curfew and a ban of gatherings over five people.

Meanwhile, the developers of Russia's Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine said yesterday a deal had been struck with Indian vaccine maker the Serum Institute to produce 300 million doses annually. "The parties intend to produce over 300 million doses of the vaccine in India per year with the first batch expected in September 2021," the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) said in a statement.

Sputnik V was registered by Russia in August last year-the first of four vaccines developed in the country-and the RDIF says it is approved for use in 67 countries. Its hasty development and distribution for use ahead of late-stage trials meant the jab was initially greeted with scepticism.

Sputnik V has since won over experts, in a scientific and geopolitical victory for President Vladimir Putin, who announced late last month he had been inoculated with the vaccine. Kirill Dmitriev, the CEO of RDIF, described the deal with Serum as "a major step" that would increase Sputnik V production capabilities and ultimately "save lives both in India and around the world".

He said that technology transfer had begun and joint production was expected to start in the coming months. Serum Institute CEO Adar Poonawalla said in the statement that since it had shown "high efficacy and a good safety profile, it is critical that the Sputnik vaccine is accessible in full measure for people across India and the world."

In January, the RDIF, which helped finance Sputnik V, announced that it had applied for registration of the vaccine in the European Union. — AFP



**NARATHIWAT:** A civilian defence volunteer alerts people to lockdown measures including the curfew introduced to halt the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus in the southern province of Narathiwat, as Thailand faces a surge in cases of the virus. — AFP

## New COVID rules spark France vaccination rush

**PARIS:** A record number of French people booked appointments for COVID-19 jabs after President Emmanuel Macron announced restrictions on the unvaccinated, including mandatory tests to enter restaurants. The head of the main website to book vaccination appointments said traffic was at an all-time high following Macron's televised speech on Monday night.

"We recorded 20,000 appointments per minute, an absolute record since the start of the campaign, and it's continued during the night and into this morning," Doctolib boss Stanislas Niox-Chateau told BFMTV. A total of 926,000 people had booked a jab on the site, with 65 percent of them under 35, he added.

Macron announced that from August anyone wanting to go out to eat or drink, take a long-distance train or visit a shopping centre would need to show a "health pass", which means either proof of vaccination or a negative test.

The pass will also be needed to attend a festival, a theatre show or a cinema screening as part of the government's strategy to tackle the surging number of new cases linked to the Delta variant. Free COVID tests will end in September "to encourage vaccination instead of taking many tests", Macron added in the speech watched by 22 million people.

The head of state also announced mandatory vaccinations for healthcare staff, retirement home workers and others working with vulnerable people from September, in line with similar moves in Greece, Italy and Britain.

### Objections

The measures sparked fierce criticism by some on social media, with the French word for dictatorship — #Dictature-trending on Twitter amid accusations the government has introduced mandatory vaccination by stealth. Some objected on the grounds that the health pass infringed on the personal liberty to choose to get vaccinated or not, while anti-vaxxers pushed conspiracy theories about the links between the government and pharmaceutical companies.

A tweet from Macron from December 2020 in which he said "the vaccine will not be obligatory" was also shared. French far-right leader Marine Le Pen criticised the government for making vaccinations mandatory for healthcare staff, who will not be paid after September 15 if they are not jabbed.

"We applauded them at 8pm, considered them our daily heroes, always there despite their low salaries and difficult working conditions," she wrote on Twitter. "Now they're being made to feel guilty and threatened with not being paid, with indecent brutality." Jocelyn Bouyssy, the head of the CGR Cinemas group, told Franceinfo radio that he was "very angry" about the health pass which would be difficult to implement and dissuade people from going out to watch a film. "We're like lambs being led to the slaughter," he said. Health Minister Olivier Veran insisted that the health pass was "not a punishment, it's not blackmail".

"You can carry on working without being vaccinated, taking your children to school without being vaccinated," he told RMC radio. He said the choice was between accepting the new measures, which primarily affect the unvaccinated, or heading for a fourth lockdown, which would hit the whole country. — AFP

## Japan says 'sense of crisis' needed over Taiwan

**TOKYO:** Japan yesterday said US-China tensions over Taiwan are an increasingly urgent issue that threatens regional stability, as the balance of power in Asia shifts between the rival countries. In its annual white paper-a rundown of the most pressing military threats to the country-Japan's defence ministry referred to the tussle over Taiwan in more direct terms than ever before.

Beijing considers Taiwan part of its territory and has ramped up diplomatic, military and economic pressure on the self-governed island in recent years. The United States has reacted to Beijing's pressure campaign with testy words and hardline policies-prompting its ally Japan, which has key trade relationships with both world powers, to eye the situation with caution.

"The overall military balance between China and Taiwan is tilting to China's favour, and the gap appears to be growing year by year," the Japanese document said. "Stabilising the situation surrounding Taiwan is important for Japan's security and the stability of the international community," it added.

"It is necessary that we pay close attention to the situation with a sense of crisis, more than ever

before." The white paper prompted an angry response from Beijing. "Japan has for some time... levelled unreasonable accusations against China's normal national defence construction and military activities, made irresponsible remarks about China's legitimate maritime activities, and exaggerated the so-called China threat," foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said.

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's government approved the paper, which also warned that North Korea poses "grave and imminent threats to Japan's security" and criticised China's "insufficient transparency" regarding its military affairs.

Japan has been increasingly vocal about China's maritime expansion and military build-up, publicly protesting the presence of Chinese vessels around disputed islets known as the Senkaku by Tokyo and the Diaoyu by Beijing. But the country also has considerable concerns about the economic impact of irritating Beijing-its number one trading partner-after recent attempts to improve diplomatic ties.

In April, Suga and US President Joe Biden emphasised "the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait". While these words were cautious, it marked the first time a Japanese leader has joined a US president in a statement on Taiwan since the allies separately switched recognition from Taipei to Beijing in the 1970s.

China reacted angrily to remarks made earlier this month by Japan's Deputy Prime Minister Taro Aso, who said his country would "have to defend Taiwan" if the island is invaded by Beijing, according to local media. — AFP



**QUEZON CITY:** In this photo taken on January 25, 2021, members of the Philippine National Police conduct morning exercises outside their office in Quezon City, as part of a fitness programme in the force to combat obesity and weight gain amongst its personnel. — AFP

## Philippine police win battle for the bulge after rule dropped

**MANILA:** Philippine police have won a battle for the bulge after the force dropped a requirement for officers seeking promotion to meet body fat targets, an official document showed yesterday. Expanding waistlines have been a hefty problem among police in the Southeast Asian country for years. A 2019 study showed almost 35 percent of personnel were overweight and nearly 10 percent obese.

Rules introduced at the start of the pandemic by former police chief Debold Sinas — who publicly acknowledged his own efforts to shed kilos through diet and exercise — made it compulsory for the 220,000 members of the force to work out daily and

submit monthly body mass index (BMI) readings.

Officers seeking to rise up the ranks were blocked if they failed to meet BMI targets, said personnel head Major General Rolando Hinanay.

In a memo to his recently appointed boss, the reed-thin police chief General Guillermo Eleazar, Hinanay called for the rule to be suspended.

He argued COVID-19 restrictions had made it difficult for officers to work out and lose weight.

"As a result, many personnel were disqualified for promotion," Hinanay said. Eleazar confirmed to reporters yesterday he had approved the request. Officers are supposed to have a BMI of between 18.5 and 27, depending on their age, to qualify for service. Generally a BMI of between 18.5 and 24.9 is considered a "healthy weight".

A petition filed by disgruntled officers had argued the policy was "detrimental" and "a form of discrimination to personnel who are above normal BMI".

In the past officers have been sent to training camps or assigned to less desirable posts to shame them into losing weight. — AFP

## Myanmar junta hits Suu Kyi with more corruption charges

**YANGON:** Myanmar's junta authorities have slapped more corruption charges on Aung San Suu Kyi, her lawyer said yesterday, adding to an eclectic charge sheet that could see the Nobel laureate jailed for more than a decade.

A mass uprising in Myanmar against the military's February coup has been met with a brutal crackdown that has killed more than 890 civilians, according to a local monitoring group. Suu Kyi, 76, who is under house arrest, is already on trial for sedition, illegally importing walkie talkies and flouting coronavirus restrictions during elections last year her party won in a landslide.

She will face four more charges of corruption, her lawyer Khin Maung Zaw told reporters on Tuesday, adding to those she already faces over claims she illegally accepted \$600,000 in cash and around 11 kilos of gold.



**Aung San Suu Kyi**

Her legal team has yet to see "the first information reports and other documents", he said, adding that the charges would be heard by a court in the second city of Mandalay from July 22. Tuesday's hearing on charges Suu Kyi violated Covid restrictions was adjourned, as no prosecution witnesses showed up, Khin Maung Zaw said.

On Monday a prosecution witness failed to testify after becoming infected with the coronavirus. Infections are spiking in Myanmar, with the State Administration Council — as the military junta calls itself — reporting more than 5,000 new cases Monday, up from fewer than 50 per day in early May. — AFP

## Greece hit with new migrant pushback claim

**ATHENS:** Tchinda said the longed-for destination of his risky Aegean crossing — the island of Kos — was already tantalisingly in view when Greek vessels halted the boat he was sailing in along with 30 other migrants. "First a navy ship blocked our way, then it was joined by two smaller Zodiac-type boats," the 39-year-old from Cameroon told AFP. "The coastguards were armed and shouted at us to go home," he said in a series of phone interviews conducted between July 1 and 8. A cellphone video shared by the Cameroonian with AFP shows a packed dinghy immobilised by a Greek coastguard patrol boat, with four crew members monitoring the migrants.

A second patrol boat and a third vessel can be seen in the distance. "Stay down and stay calm, for your safety," a Greek coastguard, in a mask and gloves, says, holding a long pole. Next to him, a female coastguard fingers a machine gun. But the migrants, most of them men wearing life jackets, are agitated.

"I am tired," one man shouts back. "Pushback," says another. Tchinda, who declined to give his last name, said he believed the guards "did not dare" to act violently towards the migrants because they saw them filming. But, he said, they made waves to push the dinghy back towards Turkish waters. "Luckily no one fell into the water but it could have been very dangerous," the Cameroonian added. The Turkish coastguard confirmed in a June 11 written statement that it had picked up a boat the previous day shortly before 1:00 p.m. local time. Details on the number of migrants on board, its location and the time chimed with those described by Tchinda. The incident comes amid a series of media and NGO reports in recent months on the forced return of migrants from Greek territory or in Greece's waters to Turkey.

Amnesty International said last month that illegal pushbacks of refugees and migrants to Turkey had become Greece's "de facto" border policy. The Greek government has repeatedly denied the accusations.

Between January 2020 and March 2021, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) documented around 300 reported incidents of illegal expulsions around the Aegean islands and Greece's northeastern Evros land border with Turkey. Several migrant support groups, including the Greek Helsinki Monitor, in May filed a complaint at the European Court of Justice against Frontex, the EU's border monitoring agency. The case was based on testimony from Ange, a young woman from Burundi, who said she and a Congolese minor were assaulted, robbed and detained on their arrival on the Greek island of Lesbos, then abandoned on rafts without a motor, water or food. — AFP

# Business

WEDNESDAY, JULY 14, 2021

## Oil demand surges, market set for deficit and volatility: IEA

### Rising vaccination rates help underpin robust economic activity

**PARIS:** Oil demand surged last month as rising vaccination rates helped underpin robust economic activity, but with OPEC+ nations pumping less than needed prices are set to be volatile until it reaches a deal to raise output, the IEA warned yesterday. A meeting of OPEC+ nations earlier this month was deadlocked over plans to gradually ease production cuts, imposed to reverse the plunge in oil prices at the start of the coronavirus pandemic as demand tumbled.

But demand is rebounding, with the International Energy Agency estimating it surged by an estimated 3.2 million barrels per day (mbd) last month, which is more than a third of the overall drop in demand last year. The IEA expects oil demand to rise by another 3.3 mbd in the three months from July. That is more than twice as large as the seasonal increase registered during the same period in 2019, which the IEA said is a result of easing COVID restrictions and increasing vaccination.

While OPEC+ had been set to gradually raise oil output, the stalemate means production is frozen at current levels until an agreement is found. "Oil prices reacted sharply to the OPEC+ impasse last week, eyeing the prospect of a deepening supply deficit if a deal cannot be reached," the IEA said in its latest monthly report.

The main international oil contracts have been trading around \$75 per barrel, and some analysts see a spike to \$100 as possible. But there is another pos-

sibility: the overall OPEC+ deal breaks down and producers open the taps and try to gain market shares, which would likely lead to prices crashing.

"At the same time, the possibility of a market share battle, even if remote, is hanging over markets, as is the potential for high fuel prices to stoke inflation and damage a fragile economic recovery," said the IEA. Investors have been worried that a surge in inflation could force central banks to raise their ultra-low interest rates, thus removing one of the main supports for the economic recovery.

The IEA said that absent increased production by OPEC+ nations the market for crude is set to tighten, with additional stocks built up during the pandemic already gone and reserves running below the long-term average in industrialized nations. Furthermore, it forecasts the biggest draw upon stocks in at least a decade will happen this quarter as OPEC+ pumps nearly 2 mbd less than market demand. The gap will rise to 3.2 mbd in the final three months of the year.

"Oil markets are likely to remain volatile until there is clarity on OPEC+ production policy," the IEA warned. It also noted that a spike in prices would not be in the long-term interest of oil producers.

"While prices at these levels could increase the pace of electrification of the transport sector and help accelerate energy transitions, they could also put a drag on the economic recovery, particularly in emerging and developing countries," the IEA



**PARIS:** Oil demand surged last month as rising vaccination rates helped underpin robust economic activity, but with OPEC+ nations pumping less than needed prices are set to be volatile until it reaches a deal to raise output, the IEA warned yesterday.

report said. While the agency, which advises oil-consuming nations, foresees oil demand recovering along with the global economy, it doesn't discount the pandemic continuing to weigh upon the market.

"COVID-19 remains a significant threat to oil

demand growth in the near- to medium-term, in particular in the non-OECD." Emerging nations not in the OECD group of advanced nations—such as China and India—were responsible for much of the growth in the global economy before the pandemic. —AFP

## Lhasa building boom heightens divisions in Tibet

**LHASA:** Under towering mountains, cranes and newly-built blocks of flats stretch up to blue skies around the Tibetan capital of Lhasa, as a construction boom creates a two-tier system of property wealth between state workers and everyone else. A huge infrastructure and building drive in Tibet has brought airports, roads, railways and new flats, which Beijing says are improving life across the remote mountainous plateau.

But the boom is also changing the historic Buddhist city and pushing property prices out of reach of many residents, Tibetans say, sharpening divisions in a region well-known for discontent under Chinese control. A short distance from the Potala Palace, the former home of the exiled Dalai Lama, construction workers crawl over high-end condo towers being built by Chinese developer Country Garden.

They are priced similarly to many major Chinese cities, despite average Tibetan incomes still being among the country's lowest. The development sits opposite billboards advertising other projects and near a modern new shopping center. AFP recently joined a rare and tightly controlled government-led tour of Tibet, which has heavily restricted entry for foreign journalists

since deadly anti-China protests exploded across the region in 2008.

### Haves and have-nots

China's government says development is the antidote to discontent in Tibet, where many people still revere the Dalai Lama—the region's spiritual leader—and resent an influx of Chinese tourists and settlers. Since 2008 it has poured investment into the region, making Tibet one of China's fastest-growing regions economically and fuelling rising average incomes.

Many residents agree such modernizations are welcome, but experts have warned Lhasa's 860,000 people are also increasingly polarized between haves and have-nots. The building binge is perhaps the most visible evidence, seen as largely benefiting educated government workers while Tibetan rural migrants struggle to keep up. Nearly one million square meters of newly-built housing was sold in 2020, up 28 percent from the previous year.

Real estate listings show around three dozen new developments currently selling homes in Lhasa. With prices rising, entering the market relies on public-sector jobs "because there are very few options outside of that to



This photo taken on June 3, 2021 shows a general view of new building sites under construction in the regional capital Lhasa in China's Tibet Autonomous Region. —AFP

make the big bucks," said Andrew Fischer, a professor at Erasmus University Rotterdam. "The property market opens up only once you've passed that gateway. That gateway is what controls people."

Rural migrants are moving from other parts of Tibet to Lhasa to seek better economic and educational opportunities but usually end up on society's lower rungs, said Emily Yeh, professor at the University of Colorado Boulder. Many have low Mandarin language abilities, a prerequisite for many urban jobs.

### Job competition

Even at the higher end, competition for top jobs is fierce as employment growth lags the numbers of new grad-

uates. Interviewing locals was difficult under the watchful eyes of government minders, but overseas Tibetans who are in close touch with those on the ground say a toxic social brew is developing.

"Most people who are educated work for the government. (But) you have increasing numbers of young Tibetans who are well-educated... and didn't get a government job," said an overseas Tibetan who spoke on condition of anonymity. He says this is creating a pool of educated youths unable to earn enough to buy homes. Tibetans also told AFP that government workers face extra controls and pressure to shun their Buddhist faith, which they fear endangers their religious and cultural heritage. —AFP

## China growth slowed sharply to 7.7% in second quarter: Poll

**BEIJING:** China's economic growth slowed sharply in the second quarter as the country's army of consumers remained hesitant to splurge and exports were dented by disruptions, according to an AFP poll of analysts. The world's second largest economy has staged a rapid recovery from last year's pandemic-induced slump, but the investment and manufacturing rebound fuelling it now seems to be fading—and other drivers are not picking up fast enough.

It is forecast to have grown 7.7 percent on-year in April-June and 8.5 percent for the full year, according to a poll of 12 analysts conducted by AFP. While the quarterly figure would be much slower than the record 18.3 percent seen at the start of the year, that jump was largely driven by the low base of comparison owing to large parts of the country being locked down to prevent the spread of the virus.

Official figures will be released tomorrow. The virus first emerged in China in late 2019, but the strict containment measures meant the disease was brought under control fairly quickly, allowing the country to be the only major economy to expand last year. But analysts note that the economy has been expanding more slowly since the start of 2021 as the pandemic drags on globally. "The production side of the economy is... under pressure amid increasing supply challenges," Moody's Analytics



**SHENZHEN, China:** This file photo taken on June 22, 2021 shows cargo containers stacked at Yantian port in Shenzhen in China's southern Guangdong province. —AFP

economist Christina Zhu told AFP.

"Input shortages, surging raw material costs, and shipping disruptions are weighing on the country's manufacturers, threatening to drag down the country's growth," she said. China's factory activity has been bogged down in recent months by supply shortages of key commodities and semiconductors, which are used to make a range of goods from electronics to vehicles.

### Export challenges

The government has also "put the brakes on lend-

ing in order to stop the rise in private corporate and household debt", said Hao Zhou, senior emerging markets economist at Commerzbank. "The industrial sector has so far remained relatively unimpressed by this," he added, pointing to expectations of slowing industrial output.

Unlike most other countries, the government has so far refused to embark on a big-spending stimulus drive as it looks to prevent overheating. However, on Friday the central bank lowered the amount of cash lenders must keep in reserve, which it said would pump an extra \$154 billion into the economy. —AFP

## France fines Google 500m euros in news copyright row

**PARIS:** France's competition watchdog yesterday slapped Google with a 500-million-euro (\$593-million) fine for failing to negotiate "in good faith" with media companies over the use of their content under EU copyright rules. It is "the biggest ever fine" imposed by the Competition Authority for a company's failure to adhere to one of its rulings, the agency's chief Isabelle De Silva told reporters, saying the decision was intended to "reflect the gravity" of Google's shortcomings.

The regulator also ordered Google to present media publishers with "an offer of remuneration for the current use of their copyrighted content", or risk paying additional damages of up to 900,000 euros a day. A Google spokesperson said in a statement to AFP that the company was "very disappointed" by the decision. "We have acted in good faith during the entire negotiation period. This fine does not reflect the efforts put in place, nor the reality of the use of news content on our platform," the company insisted.

"This decision is mainly about negotiations that took place between May and September 2020. Since then, we have continued to work with publishers and news agencies to find common ground."

The long-running legal battle has centered on claims that Google has been showing articles, pictures and videos produced by media outlets when displaying search results without adequate compensation, despite the seismic shift of global advertising revenues towards the search giant. In April 2020, the French competition authority ordered Google to negotiate "in good faith" with media groups after it refused to comply with a 2019 EU law governing digital copyright.

The so-called "neighboring rights" aim to ensure that news publishers are compensated when their work is shown on websites, search engines and social media platforms. But last September, French news publishers including Agence France-Presse (AFP) filed a complaint with regulators, saying Google was refusing to move forward on paying to display content in web searches. While Google insists it has made progress on the issue, the French regulator said the company's behavior "indicates a deliberate, elaborate and systematic lack of respect" for its order to negotiate in good faith. —AFP





## Business

# Boeing to reduce 787 production after identifying a new jet issue

## EU airlines fear fuel tax as climate push takes off

LOS ANGELES: Boeing will temporarily reduce production of the 787 Dreamliner plane after identifying a new issue with the jet during inspections, the company announced yesterday.

Boeing is "reprioritizing production resources for a few weeks" after it "identified additional rework that will be required on undelivered 787s," the company said, without providing further details. The aviation giant has been working with regulators at the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) on a system of 787 inspections after earlier production problems on the plane.

The FAA described the problem as a "manufacturing quality issue near the nose on certain 787 Dreamliners in the company's inventory of undelivered airplanes," an agency spokeswoman said. "Although the issue poses no immediate threat to flight safety, Boeing has committed to fix these airplanes before resuming deliveries. Based on data, the FAA will determine whether similar modifications should be made on 787s already in commercial service." The latest 787 problem adds to the headwinds facing Boeing even as the travel industry begins to rebound from a deep downturn caused by COVID-19, and commercial airlines announce significant new plane orders. A Boeing spokesman said new 787 deliveries remain halted as the company negotiates with the FAA on an inspection protocol for the jet's fuselages.

The announcement means Boeing's 787 output "will temporarily be lower than five per-month and will gradually return to that rate," the company said. "Boeing now expects to deliver fewer than half of the 787s currently in inventory this year."

Boeing has previously said it has about 100 787 planes in inventory. The disclosure about came as Boeing reported 79 second-quarter commercial

plane deliveries, up from 70 in the year-ago period.

The figures include a big jump in 737 MAX deliveries after the FAA cleared the jet to resume service in November 2020 following a 20-month grounding due to two deadly crashes. Boeing's shares fell 1.9 percent in pre-market trading to \$233.85.

Meanwhile, the European Commission will propose a raft of measures to slash EU aviation emissions when it unveils a bumper package of legislation aimed at reaching its climate goals.

But the push, including an unprecedented tax on highly polluting jet fuel, is facing strong headwinds from airlines in the bloc, who fear they will have their wings clipped.

Brussels argues that a new levy on kerosene for flights inside the EU is a must if the 27-nation bloc is serious about reaching its ambitious target of cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 55 percent compared with 1990 levels by 2030. The aviation sector—which makes up about three percent of current EU emissions—insists the tax would make it unable to compete with rivals from outside the bloc.

And the proposal is set to be one of the thorniest issues when European lawmakers, EU member states, lobbyists and green activists start what is expected to be months of furious haggling to shape the final laws.

The proposed legislation, seen by AFP, lays out the strategy envisioned by the EU executive. The tax-to be introduced gradually over a decade—would be based on how energy efficient and environmentally friendly different types of kerosene are.

The aim is to convince carriers to switch to more "sustainable" mixes that contain some biofuels. These would not be taxed.

Due to international legal constraints, private jets



LOS ANGELES: In this file photo a grounded United Boeing 787 Dreamliner is seen on the tarmac at Los Angeles International Airport. — AFP

and cargo planes would remain exempt from the new levy. The commission also plans to issue a separate directive aimed at boosting the-still very modest-use of "sustainable fuels".

### Cheap fuel havens?

Some member states have already come out in favor of the plan. Belgium, Luxembourg and Austria wrote an open letter calling for a kerosene tax to be applied "without delay" in the EU—and pushing for the same measure to be adopted internationally. Meanwhile, the EU's airline sector has hit back with

its own concerns.

A group of eleven major companies including Air France-KLM and Lufthansa warned that the moves would "significantly increase the competitive advantage of non-EU airlines and non-EU hub airports compared to their EU counterparts".

The carriers, struggling to overcome the huge hit to business from the coronavirus pandemic, cautioned the plan could spur so-called "carbon leakage"—including seeing airlines fill up in countries on the EU's fringes like Turkey or Britain to avoid the charge. — AFP

## JPMorgan Chase profits surge

NEW YORK: JPMorgan Chase said yesterday that second-quarter earnings more than doubled to \$11.9 billion, as it reported profits from funds that had been set aside earlier in the pandemic for bad loans.

The big US bank, kicking off the earnings season for the sector, benefited from \$3 billion that had been set aside as reserves in case clients defaulted. JPMorgan budgeted \$8.9 billion for bad loans in the year-ago period, when much of the economy remained closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In the second quarter, it reported just \$734 million in charge-

offs for bad loans.

"Consumer and wholesale balance sheets remain exceptionally strong as the economic outlook continues to improve," said Chief Executive Jamie Dimon. But revenues for the period fell eight percent to \$30.5 billion, as the bank's trading business saw much less activity compared with the year-ago level.

JPMorgan scored much higher profits in consumer banking, thanks to the reserve releases.

But home-lending revenue fell and credit card and auto revenues were flat. Dimon alluded to the heavy role of reserve releases in the bank's results, which topped expectations. "This quarter we once again benefited from a significant reserve release as the environment continues to improve, but as we have said before, we do not consider these core or recurring profits," he said. —AFP



NEW YORK: In this file photo the JPMorgan Chase & Co World headquarters are pictured in New York City. —AFP

## N Irish unionists air Brexit bitterness at ceremonial marches

BELFAST: Thousands of pro-UK unionists marched across Northern Ireland on Monday, in a ceremonial tradition freighted with heightened emotion as post-Brexit arrangements stir up ill feeling in the divided province. Marching pipe and drum bands filed through the streets of the British-ruled overseas region marking July 12, the anniversary of the 1690 Battle of the Boyne.

The battle saw the Protestant King William of Orange defeat the Catholic King James II and is celebrated yearly by predominantly protestant pro-UK communities of Northern Ireland. In Belfast, hundreds of musicians and members of the fraternal Protestant Orange Order marched in front of crowds of families waving Union Jack flags in celebrations pared back because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Last year's parades were cancelled but on Monday they went ahead with smaller localized marches. Many of the unionists marching are currently in political turmoil over a post-Brexit "protocol" for Northern Ireland they feel is prying the province loose from its place in the United Kingdom.

Since the start of the year the "protocol" has effectively kept Northern Ireland—and its 1.9 million residents—inside the EU customs union and single market for goods. The special scheme prevented new infrastructure on the border with EU member the Republic of Ireland, a flashpoint in "The Troubles" 30 year-long sectarian conflict between unionists and pro-Ireland nationalists.

But many unionists feel the "protocol" made a hefty concession to nationalists orchestrating a slow slide to a united Ireland and created a border in the Irish sea. At the Belfast march, one band arrived with a banner reading: "North Belfast says 'no' to Irish sea border".

Anger over the protocol fuelled more than a week of rioting in April which stemmed from unionist communities and spread into nationalist enclaves, injuring 88 police.

There were fears the "marching season" which reaches its crescendo on July 12 could herald further unrest. Marches and related bonfire events in the early hours of Monday passed off without reports of violence, however



BELFAST: Spectators watch the bands in the city centre during the 12th July Orange marches in Belfast. July is the main marching day in the Orange Order calendar. The parades mark the 331st anniversary of King William III's victory at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. — AFP

there remain signals in the unionist community that tensions are still high.

"We as a people feel that we're being marginalized in our own country," Orange Order marcher Fraser Agnew told AFP as the Belfast marches prepared to begin. "We feel completely isolated and the British government, Europe, the Irish Republic are all conspiring against us. So it creates this siege mentality which can be a very

dangerous thing." "Unionists are a bit confused, they're a wee bit angry," confided marcher Bobby Rainey.

"They're certainly angry with the protocol, with what they see as the deceit of the English government." UK Brexit minister David Frost has said London wants a "consensual approach" to resolving issues with the protocol, promising to set out the government's approach before July 22. — AFP

## Ukraine to remain gas transit country after Nord Stream 2

BERLIN: German Chancellor Angela Merkel insisted on Monday that natural gas transit through Ukraine would continue even after the controversial Nord Stream 2 pipeline linking the country with Russia is completed. "Ukraine is and will remain a transit country even once Nord Stream 2 is completed," Merkel told a Berlin press conference alongside Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

"There are big worries about this on the Ukrainian side and we take those seriously," she said, adding that Germany would do "everything we can" to guar-

antee the key revenue source for Ukraine.

The nearly finished 10-billion-euro (\$12-billion) pipeline is set to double Russian gas supplies to Germany, Europe's largest economy. But the project is fiercely opposed by the United States and several European countries which argue that it will increase energy dependence on Russia and Moscow's geopolitical clout. The pipeline bypasses Ukraine's gas infrastructure, depriving the nation of around a billion euros annually in transit fees and, Kiev fears, removing a key check on potential Russian aggression in the region.

Speaking in Berlin, Zelensky reiterated that Nord Stream 2 posed "a potential security threat to Ukraine and the region". To soothe tensions, Germany has helped broker a deal that will see Russia's Gazprom pay transit fees to Ukraine until end-2024, regardless of whether it actually uses Ukrainian pipelines.

Germany has repeatedly said it stands ready to play middleman in discussions to ensure Kiev keeps receiving the fees beyond that date. Merkel said Germany would strive to keep Russian gas flowing through Ukraine "in the future". "That's what we promised Ukraine," she said, "and I keep my promises and I think any future German chancellor will as well".

The veteran German leader, who is bowing out at September's general election after 16 years in power, will travel to Washington this week for talks with US President Joe Biden in which Nord Stream 2 is expected to feature heavily. Despite strong criticism of the pipeline, Biden in May waived key sanctions on Nord Stream 2 after concluding that it was too late to stop the project and it was better to seek cooperation with Germany. US officials have previously voiced hope that Germany will agree to outline automatic retaliatory steps that would be triggered if Russia steps up pressure on Ukraine. —AFP

## Summer marketing campaign for Wafra Real Estate clients

KUWAIT: The Marketing Department of Wafra Real Estate Company launched its summer marketing campaign for its customers, in cooperation with many cafes and restaurants and the Kuwaiti National Cinema Company (Cinescape), which includes special discounts, various offers and free gifts, to achieve the highest levels of satisfaction for its customers.

Assistant Marketing Director Shaikha Al-Fadala stated, "It comes out of the desire of many of our customers to spend the summer in Kuwait, especially in light of the difficulties and restrictions of travel, as the campaign contributes to revitalizing the local shopping movement, in addition to achieving the best service and the highest satisfaction rate for (Wafra) customers."



Shaikha Al-Fadala

## BoE matches Fed on lifting dividend curbs

LONDON: The Bank of England yesterday axed pandemic curbs on shareholder dividend payouts in the commercial banking sector, mirroring a move by the US Federal Reserve. British-based lenders had axed billions of pounds in dividends and share buybacks after the BoE requested the move to boost liquidity at the height of the coronavirus crisis.

"Extraordinary guardrails on shareholder distributions are no longer necessary," the BoE said in its latest financial stability report after declaring the resilience of the sector.

The curbs were imposed in March 2020 but loosened in December with the resumption of limited shareholder dividends. "We expect bank boards to be appropriately prudent in distribution they make both to their shareholders and their staff given the vital role banks can play in supporting the recovery," said Sam Woods, BoE deputy governor for prudential regulation.

"That is the message that we're giving to the banks," he told a press conference.

The BoE added that the economic outlook had brightened thanks to rapid vaccinations. At the same time, it expressed caution over risks to the nascent recovery, as Delta COVID variant infections continue to spike.

The update comes after recent Federal Reserve stress tests concluded that the largest US financial institutions had sufficient capital to weather a severe downturn. That cleared the way for US restrictions on dividends and share buybacks to be lifted from this month. The Bank of England yesterday added that it expected UK lenders to continue aiding the recovery from pandemic turmoil, particularly as emergency stimulus measures are withdrawn. —AFP

## Business

# Burgan Bank announces one-year partnership with Scientific Center

## Bank reaffirms its active role in supporting initiatives of environmental awareness and protection

KUWAIT: Burgan bank announced a new dynamic partnership with the Scientific Center of Kuwait (TSCK) - one of the centers established by the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) - as part of the bank's endeavors within its social responsibility program and strategic sustainability initiatives to support the efforts of protecting the environment and raising the public's awareness of environmental issues.

This one-year partnership with the Scientific Center reaffirms the bank's commitment to strengthen the coordination mechanisms upholding the efforts of raising the public's awareness of environmental issues and of the vital importance of actively participating in environmental protection. The partnership aims specifically to provide Kuwaiti youth with the opportunity to take part in a rich educational experience through the TSCK Internship Program in Science Communications, "Be a Science Communicator". The collaboration also extends an initiative to support the production of 12 videos for TSCK's "Discover Kuwait" program, which is shown exclusively on TSCK's social media channels, showcasing the beauty and uniqueness of Kuwait's habitats, flora and fauna.

The "Be a Science Communicator" internship program extends over the months of June and July, and was opened to youth aged 16 to 18. TSCK designed this program as a community capacity building in sup-

port of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) learning, with a focus on helping youth communicate the wonders of science, environmental protection messages, and being a force for change through social media. Participants in the internship program will enjoy a rich onsite learning and capacity building experience on the basic tenets of effective science communication and educational programming. The two-month practical on the job training will expose participants to the best practices in informal education and enhance their critical thinking, communication, creative thinking, and collaborative working skills.

The young interns will also take part in the development, preparation and delivery of TSCK's 2021 summer programming. In addition to the internship program, Burgan is supporting the Scientific Center in the production of the center's "Discover Kuwait" series, aimed at helping to shed the light on the beauty and uniqueness of Kuwait's habitats, flora and fauna. In addition to helping build awareness for Kuwait's natural ecosystems,

the videos also highlight the local efforts of environmental conservation and help present environmental and science related subject matters in a simple, easy-to-understand format, produced in an effort to enrich the community with a fresh and engaging approach to science information that works as a learning resource about Kuwait's ecosystems for the world.

Commenting on this strategic partnership Manager Public Relation - Hessa Hussain Al-Najadah, Burgan Bank, said "Burgan has committed itself to be a firm supporter of environmental protection efforts and awareness raising initiatives through various campaigns and actions targeting all of society in general, but with an eye towards youth as our future leaders. Under its social responsibility program and sustainability strategy, Burgan's partnership with The Scientific Center serves a common goal of raising the public's awareness of the importance of our environment, the issues threatening it, and the ways to ensure environmental protection and sustainability."

Al-Najadah added "Burgan Bank is proud to be an active partner in the efforts aimed at shedding light on environmental issues. This collaboration with the Scientific Center reaffirms our loyalty to this cause, and the steadfast commitment to our core value to be partners in positive change to enhance the overall wellbeing of our community, and to be a major contributor to sustainability and development efforts."

Khaled Al-Ramly, Marketing & Communications Department Manager at TSCK, reaffirmed the center's commitment towards a sustainable future for Kuwait, both through developing skills, knowledge and passion in science in Kuwait's youth, as well as through environmental awareness activities.

"We are confident that this partnership with Burgan Bank will lead to a positive impact in educating the people of Kuwait about the natural ecosystems found in our country, and the lifeforms that are under threat due to various external influences that can be stopped through greater awareness. As a whole, the entire center is committed to building environmental protection awareness, and the urgency to take the protection of the environment seriously."

This partnership underpins Burgan Bank's commitment to its holistic and inclusive sustainability strategy that reflects the bank's dedication to support all the major matters affecting the community's welfare. It also stresses Burgan's keenness to further develop its various social responsibility programs by sustaining impactful collaborations with organizations acting for the same goal of promoting continuous learning opportunities as well as awareness, knowledge and capacity building among the younger generations in particular to prepare the future leaders of change and the driving force of sustainable development and growth.



Hessa Hussain Al-Najadah

## Burgan Bank rewards its Youth account customers

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced a new special offer to its Youth Account customers with a 10 percent discount on their purchases from Unique Hype in line with the bank's commitment to continuously provide its customers with special offers and promotions that fit their lifestyle and aspirations.

Burgan's partnership with Unique Hype, the region's first and largest e-commerce platform specialized in limited edition sneakers and apparel and one of the trendiest stores for streetwear clothing, is part of the Bank's objective to diversify its palette of offers to the Youth account customers so they can enjoy an exceptional lifestyle and shopping experience. All Burgan Bank's Youth account customers are eligible to Unique Hype's promotion applicable on selected items until the end of July 2022. Customers can get the discount by simply using the promo code "Burgan10" when checking out from Unique Hype's website or when shopping from Unique Hype store at Al-Hamra Mall.



LONDON: British business optimism indicator jumped to 112.45 points in June, the highest level since 2005.

## British business confidence soars before reopening

LONDON: British business confidence has soared to a 16-year peak on easing COVID restrictions, a key survey showed yesterday as the economy prepared to fully reopen in one week. Accountancy firm BDO said in a statement that its business optimism indicator jumped to 112.45 points in June, the highest level since 2005. June marked the fifth successive monthly increase, following 109.71 in May, with manufacturers in particular boosted by vaccine-driven optimism. Separately on Monday, the UK government confirmed it will press ahead with so-called Freedom Day next Monday with the lifting of most remaining pandemic curbs in England.

"Businesses are clearly looking forward to the lifting of restrictions on July 19," said BDO partner Kaley Crossthwaite. "After a gruelling year of unpredictable change, the ending of restrictions is timely, although rising COVID-19 cases still leave an element of uncertainty. "The Summer spending surge that could follow will provide a huge boost to the economy, and businesses will be hopeful that the tide is turning over the long term." At the same time, major corporates are ramping up plans for rapid growth, according to a survey of chief financial officers compiled by Deloitte. Expectations for an increase in hiring and investment are at their highest levels in almost seven years, Deloitte revealed Monday. "With the economy reopening, CFOs' perceptions of external uncertainty have dropped below the average of the last five years and businesses have tacked away from the defensive strategies that helped them through the downturn," said Deloitte chief economist Ian Stewart. "The pandemic, like all major shocks, will reshape the economy and we are likely to see years of normal growth compressed into just a few months.—AFP

## New Huawei FreeBuds 4 being released in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Huawei announced yesterday the release of the studio-quality open-fit ANC earphone with air-like comfort - the Huawei FreeBuds 4 - in Kuwait. They provide studio-quality sound, open-fit noise cancellation, air-like comfort as they do not put any pressure on your ears while using them.

The Huawei FreeBuds 4 are compatible with different operating systems including Android and iOS. For a more convenient experience, you can download the Huawei AI Life app to adjust settings or perform various controls, such as wearing detection, quick controls, status query, noise cancellation control, and device management.

The Huawei FreeBuds 4 are available in two colours including Ceramic White, Silver Frost and you would be able to grab them in Kuwait on 5th August 2021 with pre-orders starting on 29th July 2021 at a price of KD 44.900.

### Huawei FreeBuds 4

The Huawei FreeBuds 4 are the earphones that provide studio-quality sound. Huawei's newest earphones come fitted with a fully upgraded 14.3 mm driver unit with a wide frequency range of up to 40 kHz providing you with studio-quality immersive sound that uncovers the rich details of every melody. In addition, they also bass on earphones to a new level with a bass enhancing power engine.

You might sometimes need to take a call when commuting to work during rush hour but the surrounding noise is just too much for you to hear clearly,

or perhaps you are in a crowded shopping mall with loud ambient sound not letting you enjoy your music. The new Huawei FreeBuds 4 features dual-microphone noise cancellation technology to deliver upgraded noise cancellation performance and ensures that the microphones pick up the noise surrounding you with far greater accuracy.

To enhance noise cancellation effectively across different wearing scenarios, the Huawei FreeBuds 4 uses Adaptive Ear Matching (AEM) noise cancellation technology that automatically detects your ear shape and determine the optimum noise cancellation setup, resulting in the most comfortable noise cancellation experience.

The curvature and size of the earphones are optimized and polished at the micro level, which fits the ears better, providing better comfort and enhanced noise cancellation thanks to an airtight seal. Therefore no need to worry about that pressure on your ears when wearing them!

### Smart and personalized cool features

Dual-device connectivity: Huawei FreeBuds 4 supports dual device connection with various kinds of devices such as smartphones, tablets, PCs, smart-watches, and smart TVs under Huawei's all-scenario devices. It also supports dual device connection with smart devices running on different operating systems like Android, iOS, and Windows systems, achieving simultaneous connection with smart devices of different operating systems and brands.

Smart and personalized controls: The Huawei FreeBuds 4 comes with a smart interactive experience. You can effortlessly enable active noise cancellation, adjust the volume, answer calls, press play, and switch songs right from the earphone stems, with simple Swipe/Double tap/Long press touch controls.

Meta Description: Huawei announces the launch of the studio-quality open-fit ANC earphone with air-like comfort Huawei FreeBuds 4.

## Musk defends Tesla's SolarCity deal in US shareholder trial

WILMINGTON, Delaware: Tesla chief Elon Musk defended the electric car maker's controversial 2016 acquisition of SolarCity Monday at the start of a trial on whether the billionaire put his own interests ahead of investors. Musk told a Delaware court that he was not enriched by the Tesla-SolarCity deal and that he did not inappropriately pressure fellow board members to greenlight the transaction, according to CNBC.

A group of Tesla shareholders contends that Musk, who was chairman of both Tesla and SolarCity at the time of the transaction, "poisoned" Tesla's ability to fairly evaluate the purchase, wasting corporate assets in the \$2.6 billion deal and harming shareholders, according to a complaint. The group of investors, which includes union pension funds and other institutional investors, argues that SolarCity was a failing enterprise that faced "likely bankruptcy" were it not for the actions of Musk and other Tesla board members, who also had large equity stakes in SolarCity.

The plaintiffs contend Tesla's board breached their fiduciary duty to Tesla shareholders. They are seeking unspecified monetary relief in the complaint. Plaintiffs have already reached a \$60 million settlement with other Tesla directors originally named in the complaint,



WILMINGTON, DE: Tesla Founder Elon Musk leaves a courthouse after testifying in a court case on July 12, 2021 in Wilmington, Delaware. — AFP

with the payment coming from insurance. This group, which included Kimbal Musk, Elon Musk's brother, did not admit fault. A key question in the trial is whether Musk, who held 22 percent of Tesla's equity at the time, controlled the transaction, which won approval from Tesla shareholders.

Musk told the court that buying SolarCity was part of his "master plan," according to CNBC. "Since it was a stock-for-stock transaction and I owned almost the same percentage of both there was no financial gain,"

## Big Eid sales at LuLu Hypermarket

KUWAIT: To celebrate the auspicious occasion of Eid Al-Adha, LuLu Hypermarket, the largest retailer in the region and named among the world's most powerful retailers, launched the 'Big Eid Sales' promotion at all its outlets in the country. The week-long promotion, held from 14 July to 20 July, drew shoppers from all over Kuwait to participate in what was described as one of the most comprehensive sales offerings of the year. The promotion allowed shoppers to avail of amazing offers during Eid Al-Adha holidays, with an extensive array of products from a wide range of categories being on special offer during the 'Big Eid Sales' bonanza.

Among the range of categories offering promotional pricing during the sales period were electronic products including smartphones, TVs, and other electronic items in the Digi Deals category; Toys, inflatables and game consoles in the Fun at Home category; perfumes and cosmetics in the Fragrant Deals section; choicest cuts of fresh meat in the Meat Feast; a full range of chocolates in the Chocolate Delights category; Items from the hot food counters in the Biryani Fest; and a wide selection of fresh fruits in the Fruit Fest category. In addition to the selections from the above categories, there were special 'Buy-Two get One-Free' offers on garments, footwear, and ladies handbags. This special promotion which started on 30 June is slated to end only on 31 July. Another unique aspect of the Big Eid Sales promotion was that the amazing promotional offers were available to shoppers on both, the online platform at [www.luluhypermarket.com](http://www.luluhypermarket.com) and from offline stores.

Big Eid Sales promotion, which was held throughout the festival period in full adherence to health guidelines issued by the authorities, marked yet another successful promotional event in the long list of promotions and festivals held at LuLu Hypermarket outlets throughout the year. The Big Eid Sales was also a continuation of the Hypermarket's commitment to offer shoppers the widest range of quality products at the most competitive prices in Kuwait.

Lifestyle | Features



In this file photo a protester displays a banner during a demonstration to press for the scrapping of Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) on Lagos - Ibadan expressway, a major link from Lagos to other parts of the country blocked by the protesters. — AFP photos



Basil Abia, Organizer of New Nigeria Movement gestures during a state of the union meeting with other Nigerians via Clubhouse application.



Basil Abia, Organizer of New Nigeria Movement prepares for a state of the union meeting with other Nigerians via Clubhouse application.

# BEING NIGERIAN 101: SOCIAL MEDIA GROUP DEBATES IDENTITY

What does it mean to be Nigerian? In a country of 210 million inhabitants with more than 500 native languages and hundreds of ethnicities that was colonized by the Portuguese and the British, identity can be a daunting question. But using the power of social media, two activists have decided to take it on through a forum called The New Nigerian. Hosted on the platform Clubhouse, the group's 45,000 members can join chatrooms on languages and culture, politics and citizenship, pop culture, technology and well-being. Its creators say the goal is to help subscribers "relearn to be Nigerian".

"Like in a lot of 'Black countries', many people don't know their history and their culture," says Lola Adele-Oso who co-founded the forum with Eniola Mafe. A former activist with the movement to release schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram, Adele-Oso runs a lifestyle brand that promotes everything from apparel to small-group travel. "Who are we? Who are our heroes?" she says. "As citizens, we can't

become a better version of ourselves if we don't know where we come from."

### 'Indifference not an option'

The inspiration for The New Nigerian came during last October's #EndSARS protest movement against brutality by the country's SARS-or Special Anti-Robbery Squad. The protests that followed broadened to a larger call for reform and were the largest in modern Nigerian history before security forces cracked down on demonstrators. A former activist, Mafe's work in technology and sustainability requires her to travel between Geneva and Lagos. "I was in Geneva at the time, my eyes on Twitter, my ears on Clubhouse," says Mafe, "Within the diaspora, we were trying to know what's going on, debunking fake news, organize donations."

"It became soon evident that we could use this platform as a tool. We decided to keep the momentum." The "Lekki killing" of October 20, 2020, when the army opened fire on protesters, marked a brutal

end to popular #EndSARS protests in the streets and also on the Internet. But for Mafe and Adele-Oso, it also became the moment to start awakening consciences with civic and political engagement. "Being politically indifferent is not an option anymore," Mafe says. Within days of being created, The New Nigerian gathered thousands of subscribers, becoming one of the fastest growing communities on Clubhouse.

A platform for live audio content that reports some 10 million weekly active users, Clubhouse lets people create, participate in or just listen to discussions on all kinds of topics. The New Nigerian's subscribers log on to discuss current affairs and life in Africa's most populous country. But the group's chatrooms also host courses on history, Nigeria's different languages, local philosophers and debates on myths from Yoruba culture.

While many of the participants are from the south of Nigeria, the founders say the platform promotes a sense of unity in a country where ethnic and separatist ten-

sions always simmer close to the surface. Some hardliners in southern states have been calling for more independence or even a breakaway for their regions. Mafe describes a "New Nigerian" who is able to embody diverse points of view. "They are very progressive in terms of gender or sexual orientation," says Mafe. "We want to include everyone and we will never be tribalistic. Never."

### 'Hungry for knowledge'

Basil Abia is a 26-year-old political researcher and New Nigerian member who organizes four weekly chatrooms on current affairs topics and Nigerian history. With fellow researchers or invited specialists, they discuss the slave trade and decolonization, but also the heritage of the great Edo kingdoms or the Sultans of Sokoto. The talks draw up to 200 listeners from Nigeria and around the world. "Nigerians are hungry for this knowledge. Sometimes we start at 11pm until 7am! But I have to say... I love talking!" he says. Abia says he was beaten by police during

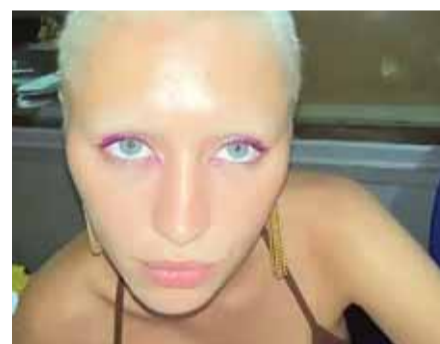
last October's protests. Like Mafe and Adele-Oso, he also identifies the #EndSARS movement as a turning point he says pushed people to take an interest in politics.

"You have to understand the political establishment, the social contract, the principle of justice and human rights, to know who you want as a leader," he says. Since the protests, and with the country's economy hit hard by the pandemic and spiralling inflation, Abia says some middle and upper-class Nigerians have left to live in Dubai, Ghana, Great Britain, the US or Canada. President Muhammadu Buhari's recent Twitter ban dealt a serious blow to freedom of expression and access to information, further discouraging Nigeria's hyper-connected youth. But Abia has decided to stay and help build the new Nigeria of which he dreams and discusses daily. "I dedicated my life, my skills, my education to this country," he says. "I will stay here till I die." — AFP



## Iris Law 'loves' her new blonde buzzcut

The 20-year-old actress admitted her long locks were always a "deciding factor" in how good she felt about herself but after undergoing a radical transformation for her role as Soo Catwoman in upcoming TV show 'Pistols', she no longer has to worry about her appearance. She told British Vogue: "I had a lot of hair - it was very light and fluffy - and it would always be the deciding factor on whether I felt good or not. I just love it like this. "I don't need a hairstylist when I get ready. Bleach it and then it's ready! "It definitely reduces the time it takes to get ready, especially when I'm seeing my friends; I don't have to be in a hurry and, like, scrape my hair back!" Iris only decided to go blonde to hide the botched attempts she'd made at shaving her hair, so she's keen to improve her skills to do it herself in the future. She said: "I've had people bleach my hair and I've done it with my agent because he bleaches his hair as well, so we did it together. But I tried to shave my head



myself and I shaved a huge chunk out, so that's initially why I went to blonde - to hide the chunk I took out! "So I haven't tried to do anything myself since then. I would like to teach myself because there's something empowering about being able to if I'm on holiday or traveling." Iris walked the red carpet at the Cannes Film Festival premiere of 'The French Dispatch' on Monday and was delighted with how her hair complemented her white Christian Dior dress. She said: "This was the first look I tried on and it really stood out. Straight away I knew I wanted to wear it. It's a really beautiful, simple dress, with layered, pleated chiffon. It's chic and classic but it has an interesting twist at the neckline. "I really liked the dress because it's chic and classic. This is my first month being blonde and I love it with the creamy white dress." — Bang Showbiz

## King bans unvaccinated relatives from Thanksgiving vacation

Gayle King plans to "ban" unvaccinated relatives from her Thanksgiving celebrations. The 66-year-old presenter addressed the "problem" of people not taking up coronavirus vaccinations so she's decided to take drastic action with her own family in the hope it will make them change their mind. Speaking to Dr. Anthony Fauci, President Joe Biden's chief medical adviser, on 'CBS This Morning', she said: "I don't know how many more times you can say to people, 'Listen, it will save your life'. "I have this problem with some members of my own family, which I'm now going to ban for Thanksgiving vacation. That's how strongly I'm taking what you're saying." The infectious diseases expert had appeared on the show on Monday to discuss the importance of getting the vaccine, particularly in the face of the highly-contagious Delta variant. He said: "We really to get more people vaccinated because that's the solution. This virus will, in fact, be protected against, with the vaccine." Gayle previously admitted having the vaccine had given her her freedom back because she'd spent the last year "so afraid" to leave the house in case she contracted COVID-19. She said: "I was so afraid to leave the house. We were broadcasting from here, so I'd literally go from my bedroom to the TV room to the kitchen to the bedroom to the TV room. For excitement I'd go stand in the living room and wave at the birds! 'Hi, birds! Hi!' I was so afraid. "But now I am vaccinated. It is my superpower. I am vaccinated. ... I'm taking little baby steps [back into the world]." And the broadcaster admitted she had grown "tired of being scared" and hiding away from the world. She said: "Here's the thing: I'm tired of being scared. Honestly, I've been so afraid, hunkered down here at home. I'm tired of being scared." — Bang Showbiz



## Willow Smith gets 'super excited' by face wash

The 20-year-old singer has a "pretty simple" skin care regime but loves trying out new products and incorporating them into her daily routine. She told Allure: "I have a pretty simple skin-care routine, but I love different products. I get super excited when I get a new face cleanser. Recently, I've been exploring way more with face and lip masks. "The lip masks are really new for me, because I'd never used them before this year. That's a new addition to my skin-care routine. "[I Love Dr. Jart+]. The moisturizing face masks are my everything. I've been implementing that into my skin-care routine at least twice a week." The Anxiety front-woman was introduced to fragrance at a

young age by her mother, Jada Pinkett Smith, who she hailed a "perfume genius" because of her ability to mix her own scents. She said: "My mom was a huge perfume fan. A perfume genius, no pun intended. (Shout-out, Perfume Genius, you're awesome, I love your music.) "Anyway, [my mom] would mix essential oils and make her own perfumes. I remember being young and smelling her and thinking, 'What's the mixture today? Peppermint and clove? Nag champa and chamomile? That was a source of joy for me as a kid." The 'Whip My Hair' singer is the new face of Alien Goddess and she was thrilled to work with Thierry Mugler because of the history of the brand. She said: "I had seen some old photos and videos of fashion shows from Mugler in the past - it was just fire. Even then, they were innovating and doing such unique and different things. "The name feels cosmic and spacey, but the scent is so floral, warm, and earthy, it has both of these extremes. [Plus] the name is Alien Goddess. I so relate to that." — Bang Showbiz

## In from the cold: Nordic cinema breezes into Cannes

Nordic movies are among the hottest properties at Cannes this year, bringing their understated cool to the world's top film festival. On its first full day, Cannes fell head over heels for a Norwegian romantic drama, "The Worst Person in the World", the early favorite for its top prize, the Palme d'Or. Previously unknown lead Renate Reinsve "takes off like a rocket" in the quirky romantic drama, gushed one critic. While Joachim Trier's "gloriously sweet" story almost passes for fast-paced, other Nordic offerings require a bit more work before yielding their subtle pleasures, especially to viewers stepping into the cinemas from the hot and hectic bustle of the Cannes circus.

### 'Mild, tender'

"The Nordics have a mild, tender gaze on the world. It's very discreet," said Sofia Norlin, a Paris-based Swedish director who also writes for film magazine Point of View. "It's like a door that opens slowly to cast light on the shadows, and on the faultlines of life. It's very smooth," she told AFP. Finnish director Juho Kuosmanen, whose "Compartment No 6" is also vying for Cannes' top prize admits that his minimalist style risks slipping below the radar of viewers as they watch a slow train rumbling north in snowbound post-Soviet Russia.

"I worry whether people get those nuances, but if I exaggerated those feelings, the humor and the sadness, then it wouldn't be my film," he told AFP. "I feel I'm always putting on the soft pedal, always doing less, and even less." Nothing much happens at first in the Arctic trip bringing together a Finnish wannabe archaeologist and a rough-and-ready Russian worker who travel from Moscow to "that shithole" Murmansk, as the Russian calls it. "You need to get on the wavelength first, but then you start to see the details," Kuosmanen said. "It's a film

full of love and good humor, but most of it happens at the end. You can't have light without the darkness."

### 'We're not that loud'

Another slow-moving Cannes movie, Icelandic entry "Lamb" by Valdimar Johannsson, brings sumptuous landscapes into the equation in a tale of a couple in a remote corner of Iceland grieving for the loss of a child, and who get a wondrous second chance at parenthood. It's another slow burner, starring Noomi Rapace, more than a decade after the Swedish actress achieved world fame as the badass hacker Lisbeth Salander in the "Millennium" trilogy.

"We're quite minimalistic, we're not that loud," Rapace told AFP. "I'm loud, but I'm the exception," she laughed. Emmy winner Rapace regularly plays in big productions, which include Ridley Scott's "Prometheus" and Guy Ritchie's "Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows", but regularly returns to Scandinavia to shoot arty, independent films, such as "Lamb" in which she plays an Icelandic-speaking character for the first time. "I feel like there's a great wave of amazing film-makers now in Scandinavia," she said. "It feels like a movement, an earthquake. There's a kind of contagious bravery that's spreading."

Mia Hansen-Love displayed a different kind of bravery with her decision to take her French director's eye to the remote Swedish island of Faro for her main competition entry "Bergman Island". The rugged windswept scenery where Ingmar Bergman produced several of his films is not just the backdrop for the story around a couple of film directors looking for inspiration, but a discreet character in its own right. "In that sense, Mia Hansen-Love adopts some of the Scandinavian style of cinema," said Norlin. —AFP



(From left) Finnish actress Seidi Haarla, Finnish director Juho Kuosmanen, Russian actor Yuri Borisov, Russian actress Dinara Drukarova, Finnish actor Tomi Alatalo and Finnish producer Jussi Rantamaki pose as they arrive for the screening of the film 'Hytti No6' (Compartment No6) at the 74th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. — AFP

# 'JERUSALEMA' HIT-MAKER SAYS AFRICA NOW HITTING ITS STRIDE

"Now is the time for Africa to shine, to present our culture to the world." Master KG, the South African DJ-producer behind global hit "Jerusalem", sees bright prospects for Afro-pop. Even at 25, he knows what he is talking about. He made the whole planet dance with a song in a Zulu dialect which he composed while his compatriot Nomcebo Zikode laid down the yearning lyrics, a plea for unity and the coming of the New Jerusalem. The day AFP met Master KG in Paris on one of his trips to Europe, the musician is wearing a yellow-and-blue jacket emblazoned with the words "Wake up Afrika".

"We're just getting started. We're getting on the right path ... with Afro-beat and Afro-pop, we will hear more and more African artists around the planet—there is room for everyone," enthuses the young man, still a little shy, his bespectacled face tucked inside his hoodie. Indeed, the term "Afro-pop" often comes up in the mouths of prominent DJs such as America's Diplo, the powerhouse of the Major Lazer electronic-dancehall hit machine. Artists like Burna Boy from Nigeria or Fally Ipupa from the Democratic Republic of Congo are building reputations far beyond Africa. Master KG, whose real name is

Kgaogelo Moagi, has been ranked by Forbes Africa as being among the 30 most influential personalities aged under 30 on the continent. And he has just released a new track, "Shine Your Light," with two star DJs, the Frenchman David Guetta and the Senegalese-American Akon (on the Elektra/Warner label).

## Life-changer

"Yes, 'Jerusalem' changed my life," Master KG told AFP. "I am here in Paris talking to you! I would not travel the world like I am now without this song." The hit has racked up more than 210 million plays on Spotify and more than 415 million views on Youtube. Stars like Cristiano Ronaldo and Janet Jackson have praised him on social networks. "When I look at the statistics, the numbers, it always surprises me, no one could have predicted this," he comments. For eight weeks towards the end of 2020, "Jerusalem" was the most frequently searched track on Shazam, a software program that identifies a song that is playing.

The success story is well known. Released at the end of 2019, the single got a new lease of life when it went viral on TikTok, garnering seven billion hits. The choreographic dance challenge in the



Master KG (right), the South African DJ behind the global pop hit 'Jerusalem', performs at the Sand Festival held on the beaches of Lake Malawi, in Salima on November 1, 2020. — AFP

video then spread across networks, from nursing assistants in France to monks in Italy. "I would never have thought that the police would be able to dance to my music," laughs the musician, who shows no signs of developing a big head, despite the luxury cars exhibited on his social network channels.

"I already had success before

'Jerusalem', unrelated of course, but then everything becomes more comfortable. The song is gonna generate income for the rest of my life," he said frankly.

## 'Village kid'

In South Africa, Master KG has bought a house for his mother and built one for his grandmother. And life has also

changed for his chosen singer, Nomcebo Zikode. When he contacted her to lend her voice to "Jerusalem", she was thinking of giving up music. Instead, she has just released an album. Master KG also has a recording studio near Johannesburg, which is an unexpected success for one who describes himself as a "village kid", born in Calais, a small town in the northeast of South Africa. He is amazed when he is told that a French town has the same name.

Master KG lived with his mother, a hotel employee (his father is a teacher), and got into music when an uncle gave him his first computer in 2013. He has already released two albums, which he considers more like a cluster of singles. The third, which he hopes to present at the end of 2021, will be more "constructed, prepared". "For the title of the album, the fans must help me, help me find a title, it will be an album from South Africa to the world, rich in the encounters I have had," he says. When told that he risks receiving a colossal number of proposals, he laughs. "There's bound to be one that will stick". —AFP



People exercise at a gym in Seoul, as South Korea announced implementation of level 4 social distancing measures amid concerns of a fourth wave of the coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

## No Psy but BTS play on as Seoul bans fast gym music

South Korean mega-hit "Gangnam Style" may be taken off gym playlists in the greater Seoul region—but K-pop giants BTS can stay under new rules aimed at stemming a rising tide of coronavirus infections. The regulations, aimed at stopping gym-goers breathing too hard or splashing sweat on others, ban gyms from playing music with a faster tempo than 120 beats per minute during group exercises like zumba and spinning. They come as tighter social distancing rules—such as smaller gatherings and shorter store hours—begin to bite this week.

The musical diktat has prompted ridicule and fury, and a list of "safe" K-pop songs is circulating online, which includes the latest hits from BTS including "Dynamite" (114 bpm) and "Butter" (110 bpm). But Psy's "Gangnam Style", at 132 bpm, will have to stay off the workout playlist for now. South Korean infection rates remain low by global standards at little more than 1,000 a day, but are at their highest of the pandemic, with new records

set on three consecutive days recently. That has alarmed authorities in a country where the vaccine rollout has been slow and convoluted, hampered by a failure to obtain supplies.

And while the restriction allows businesses to remain open, gym owners and users alike poured scorn on the measure. "Now I have to worry about the bpm of the song I'm playing," wrote a user in an online club of gym owners. "I guess the virus spreads faster depending on the tempo of the music," another added. And 35-year-old gym-goer Kim Hyun-joon questioned the rule's effectiveness. "I'm grateful that I can still work out at a gym," he said, adding: "Wouldn't most people listen to their own music on their airpods anyways?" The new rules also put a maximum 6 kilometers an hour (3.7 mph) speed limit on treadmills. "Are we going to get speeding tickets?" wrote an online user.

Another user added: "Maybe they'll start placing limits on how fast we walk or run outside." South Korea had previously been held up as a model of how to combat the pandemic, with the public largely following social distancing and other rules, but adherence has waned over time. The country reported 1,100 new infections yesterday, most of them in the capital and its surrounding areas, which are home to around half the South Korean population. The resurgence prompted President Moon Jae-in to apologize to the public on Monday for the tightened rules. — AFP

## Injured baby elephant abandoned by rogue Chinese herd saved

A heavily injured baby elephant left behind by a migrating wild herd in southwest China has been rescued, state media reported yesterday, the latest twist in a chaotic odyssey. The herd of Asian elephants has spent months roaming across Yunnan province, traveling more than 500 kilometers (310 miles) from their home nature reserve in one of the longest ever animal migrations of its kind in China. Since setting off last year, the meandering mammals have stolen villagers' food and trampled crops worth over \$1 million, with thousands of residents evacuated from their path.

Locals sighted the baby elephant—weighing 180 kilograms and born on the lumbering trek—alone on a tea plantation Saturday morning, struggling with an infected injury on its leg. The elephant's wound could have been life-threatening if authorities hadn't arrived and given treatment, state broadcaster CCTV reported. "We gave it anti-bacterial and anti-inflammatory drugs, because its wound still

looks pretty bad," Bao Mingwei, director of the Asian Elephant Breeding and Rescue Center, told CCTV, adding that with a longer period of care it should be able to fully recover. "It's possible that something like rattan spines pricked it and the injuries slowly became infected."

State media footage showed around a dozen rescuers and police surrounding the animal in a rainforest clearing, as they tied its thrashing limbs with rope and loaded it into a van. The elephant was then driven 100 kilometers to a rescue center. Last week, a 10-year-old male elephant who broke away from the herd a month ago was captured and returned to



This handout photo shows a part of a herd elephants which had wandered 500 kilometers north from their natural habitat, walking near Yuxi city in China's southwest Yunnan province. — AFP

## Star says Hollywood must move beyond tokenism for black people

Hollywood star Jodie Turner-Smith said the film industry must go beyond having token black faces on screen and have people of color at every level of the business. The British actress—who played Henry VIII's wife Anne Boleyn in a new television series of the same name—said she had been struck by how few people of color work behind the scenes.

Hollywood should stop trying to tell black people's stories without hiring people of color, she told a "Women in Motion" talk at the Cannes film festival—where her latest sci-fi movie "After Yang" was premiered. "You have to hire producers who understand what kinds of stories we're trying to tell and how to honor those stories so that you don't end up with things that feel like tokenism or strange stereotyping," the "Queen & Slim" star said. "So many times, it's like (producers say), 'We are going to tell a story that involves black people', but there are no black people in the writers' room, and there are no women in the writers' room." She said that some basics were also sometimes lacking.



British actress Jodie Turner-Smith poses during a photocall for the film 'After Yang' as part of the Un Certain Regard selection at the 74th edition of the Cannes Film Festival, southern France. — AFP

## 'Hire people who know'

"When you make casting choices and you hire actors of color in something, you have to hire people who know how to do their make-up, who know how to do their hair, who know how to light them properly," she said. Turner-Smith, 34, who is making "White Noise" at the moment with "Marriage Story" director Noah Baumbach, said film and television had a way to catch up on theatre in the way they used black actors. She won plaudits for playing the fated English queen Anne Boleyn, who was white, in the series for Britain's Channel 5. "I definitely anticipated that there were going to be people that felt a certain way about it," she said.

"We've seen for years and years that in theatre characters being played by people of all different ethnicities, but in TV or film it's something we see much less." The actress fell victim to cat burglars while at Cannes, with police investigating a theft of jewelry from her hotel room. Turner-Smith wore eye-catching gold and diamond jewelry loaned by Gucci to the red carpet premiere of "After Yang" on Thursday. It is unclear if the missing jewelry was Gucci's or the actress's own. Her mother's wedding ring is reported to among the haul. "I didn't think I would be spending 2.5 hours in the police station on my final day in Cannes, but here we are," the actress tweeted late Sunday. — AFP



US rapper Freddie Gibbs smiles as he arrives for the screening of the film "Tre Piani" (Three Floors) at the 74th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. — AFP

## 'Only good rapper in Cannes': Freddie Gibbs makes movie debut

Grammy-nominated hip hop artist Freddie Gibbs has made his movie debut at the Cannes film festival playing a rapper who finds more meaning in country living than in music fame. "Down with the King" stars the 39-year-old American as "Money Merc", a rapper who goes to rural Massachusetts to produce a new album, but instead befriends a local farmer who teaches him how to skin pigs and herd cattle. Written and directed by Frenchman Diego Ongaro, the film and its improbable plot allowed Gibbs to avoid the cliché rags-to-riches role of an urban rapper who makes it big.

"I didn't want to do that shit, because people typecast you," Gibbs told AFP in an interview. "I never wanted to play a rapper in a movie, but this was far more significant than just a rapper movie." Gibbs and his character are alike in many ways, he said, but "Money Merc is an emotional kind of guy. He kind of wears it on his sleeve a little bit more than I do," he said. Director Ongaro, who lives in western Massachusetts, told AFP that "I wanted to make a film with an outsider coming to this place. And I thought it could be a rapper, if possible a real one." Gibbs accepted the role although he acknowledged that rappers and the countryside "don't match at all" and that he wasn't sure the plot would work, but Ongaro "made it happen", he said.

## He doesn't do modesty

"I was doing the thing on the farm and I went, 'OK this shit is real.' And as we went along it just became more real," Gibbs said. "Diego laid this shit out on a platter for me, and all I had to do was bring some rap elements to this character." The film's music is by Gibbs, most improvised during shooting over soul-inspired samples and loops. Gibbs said rapping had always helped him deal with a checkered past—which includes brushes with the law for theft and drug offences—and "Down with the King" turned out to be yet another outlet. "This film was definitely therapeutic for me."

Director Ongaro agreed. "He brought things from his own experience to the table, his upbringing, his past as a dealer, and that all strengthens the authenticity." Next the rapper, who is releasing a new album in the autumn ("probably my best"), plans to play a gangster in a television show. "I can slide into that role kind of easily," he laughed. But he could also see himself as a banker, "or a cop or a lawyer. I can do it all." In the meantime Gibbs said he was not only "the freshest motherfucker on the red carpet" at Cannes, but also the leading rapper in town. "I'm the only good rapper in Cannes. If there's a rapper here he ain't as good as me," he said. "Down with the King" premiered at the festival's ACID sidebar event. — AFP

## Sumatran elephant found beheaded in Indonesia

A critically endangered Sumatran elephant has been found decapitated with its tusks missing in Indonesia, the conservation agency said Monday, as it opened a poaching investigation. The rotting carcass was discovered Sunday at a palm oil plantation in Sumatra's Aceh region and a subsequent autopsy found that the animal had also been poisoned. "The remains of the wild elephant were found in a tragic condition with its head gone," said Rosa Rika Wahyuni, a doctor at the Aceh conservation agency. "We found poison in its digestive system," she added.

It was not clear how long the male elephant, estimated to be about 12 years old, had been dead. Rampant deforestation has reduced the elephants' natural habitat and brought them into increasing conflict with humans, while their tusks are prized in the illegal wildlife trade. There have been several elephant poisoning cases in recent years, including one in 2019 when a Sumatran elephant was found decapitated with its tusks ripped off. —AFP

## Sports

# 'Never apologize for who I am', says Rashford after racist abuse

LONDON: England's Marcus Rashford said he will "never apologize for who I am" in an emotional statement after receiving racist abuse following the side's Euro 2020 final defeat. The Manchester United forward was one of three players, along with Jadon Sancho and Bukayo Saka, who were attacked by racist trolls after missing penalties in Sunday's 3-2 shoot-out defeat by Italy.

Rashford's England team-mate Tyrone Mings criticized British Home Secretary Priti Patel, saying she had "stoked the fire" by defending those who booed players taking the knee. Rashford has become a hero to many outside football by lobbying the British government to provide free school meals for underprivileged children during the coronavirus pandemic.

"I'm Marcus Rashford, 23-year-old black man from Withington and Wythenshawe, South Manchester. If I have nothing else I have that," Rashford wrote in a statement on Twitter. Rashford, who came on late in the second period of extra time, apologized for his penalty miss and said "something didn't feel quite right" when he came to take the kick.

"It's been playing in my head over and

over since I struck the ball and there's probably not a word to quite describe how it feels. Final. 55 years. 1 penalty. History. All I can say is sorry. I wish it had gone differently," he wrote.

"I can take critique of my performance all day long, my penalty was not good enough, it should have gone in but I will never apologize for who I am and where I came from," Rashford added.

## 'Stoke the fire'

Images on social media showed a mural honoring Rashford in his hometown of Withington had been defaced before locals covered the hateful language with messages of support. "Seeing the response in Withington had me on the verge of tears," Rashford said.

He added that he was proud to have worn the England jersey during his side's first major final appearance in 55 years, and grateful for the "brotherhood" that was created in the England camp. Mings criticism is not the first time he has disagreed with Patel.

The Aston Villa star criticized her — after the opening Euro 2020 win over Croatia — for her remarks that taking the knee was "gesture politics". She also refused to condemn the England fans

who booed the team for doing it.

Premier League teams have taken the knee since last year following the murder of George Floyd at the hands of a white police officer in the United States. Patel had said on Monday the racial abuse of the three players was "disgusting" but it did not wash with Mings.

"You don't get to stoke the fire at the beginning of the tournament by labeling our anti-racism message as 'Gesture Politics' and then pretend to be disgusted when the very thing we're campaigning against, happens," tweeted Mings.

Mings remarks received support from Patel's fellow Conservative lawmaker and former defence minister Johnny Mercer. "The painful truth is that this guy (Mings) is completely right," Mercer tweeted. "Very uncomfortable with the position we Conservatives are needlessly forcing ourselves into. Do I fight it or stay silent? Modern Conservatism was always so much more to me. We must not lose our way."

England captain Harry Kane lashed out at those who had posted the racial slurs — following England manager Gareth Southgate who had said the abuse was "unforgivable".

"Three lads who were brilliant all



LONDON: England's forward Marcus Rashford carries a note during the Euro 2020 final football match between Italy and England at the Wembley Stadium in London on Sunday. —AFP

summer had the courage to step up and take a pen (penalty) when the stakes were high," tweeted Kane. "They deserve support and backing not the vile racist abuse they've had since last night (Sunday). If you abuse anyone on social

media you're not an England fan and we don't want you." The racist attacks were strongly condemned by the English Football Association whose president, Prince William, said he was "sickened" by the abuse. —AFP

## Frustrated Suns try to keep Bucks from leveling NBA Finals

MILWAUKEE: A frustrated Phoenix Suns squad, struggling to slow Milwaukee forward Giannis Antetokounmpo, risks losing its NBA Finals lead unless it can find some answers in the next two days. The 26-year-old Greek star scored 41 points and grabbed 12 rebounds to lead the host Bucks to a game three win on Sunday and Milwaukee can level the best-of-seven series at 2-2 with another home triumph tonight.

"It's on us to stop him, give him more resistance," Suns forward Cam Johnson said. It's tough to balance that physically, especially when he's coming at you so hard. "But you just got to do it. We're capable of doing it. We know that. We'll go back, look, see what we need to change and change it."

The Suns will need to adjust to boost their hopes of the first NBA title in their 53-year history. "We know we got to be better," said Johnson. "There's a lot of frustration anytime you lose. You can see it on everybody's

face. It's a terrible feeling. That feeling is going to motivate us to get back out there, get ready for the next one and go right back at them."

The Suns have been resilient in the playoffs, winning nine playoff games in a row after back-to-back losses to the Los Angeles Lakers in the opening round. "We got to be the desperate team next game. We got to bring the fight to them," Johnson said. "We've got to come back and execute better and play with more physicality. We've shown we can do it. It takes poise. We knew this one wasn't going to be easy. (Milwaukee) is a team that's desperate, that wants to fight."

Antetokounmpo has consecutive 40-point games, aided in game two by foul trouble on Suns center Deandre Ayton, whistled for five violations for the first time in the playoffs. "It affected us obviously, but we have to weather the storm," Suns forward Jae Crowder said. "We have to adjust."

"We had to throw a lot of different things at them and it led to us scrambling



MILWAUKEE: Devin Booker (right) and Chris Paul of the Phoenix Suns talk to the media after Game Three of the 2021 NBA Finals against the Milwaukee Bucks on Sunday at the Fiserv Forum Center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. —AFP

and then adjust to that." Suns guard Devin Booker, who sized in game two, went 3-of-14 from the floor and scored only 10 points in Sunday's loss. "I can get better (shots). We'll make that happen," Booker said. "We're going to get back right and be ready Wednesday. We have to come in with the energy and effort. The 50/50 balls, offensive rebounds, protect the paint. That's why it's a series. We have some room for improvement. We have to bring that same effort we had in the first two games and I think we'll be in good shape." —AFP

blung. We have enough bodies to get that job done. We just got to do it collectively and be better individually. We got to man up and do what we've been doing all year, respond to a defeat, to things not going our way." Suns coach Monty Williams expects 22-year-old Bahamas big man Ayton to bounce back for game four. "He had a good game going, but the foul trouble didn't allow for him to continue it," Williams said. "We expect him to play that way again. He'll grow from this. I promise you he will. We have to understand how the refs are calling the game

## Bahamas big man Ayton powers Suns into NBA title hunt

MILWAUKEE: Three years after being the top pick in the NBA Draft, 22-year-old Bahamian big man Deandre Ayton has fine-tuned his talents and made the Phoenix Suns a championship contender. Ayton scored 22 points and grabbed 19 rebounds in the Suns' game-one NBA Finals win but struggled with foul trouble for the first time in the playoffs in a game three loss as Phoenix carries a 2-1 lead into Wednesday's fourth game of the best-of-seven series at Milwaukee.

The Suns, who hadn't reached the finals since 1993, could win their first title since joining the league in 1968. Ayton shakes off pre-game goose bumps with a routine that locks him in upon the on-court challenges. "I really just take three deep breaths, close my eyes and after that, the whole arena is really empty," he said. "I just see my teammates and my coaches. There's a task at hand after that."

Ayton's focus is on having an impact in a game, whether it means points and rebounds or defensive domination. "Just being relentless, doing what I do best. Just being a presence on both ends," Ayton

said of his style. "Defense is what gets me going."

When 16-year veteran guard Chris Paul joined the club, he showed Ayton key details that have enabled him to elevate his game. "Really just approaching the game the right way — always being alert, little things that matter in long stretches of the game, knowing my matchup tendencies and just being a presence on both ends of the floor," Ayton said. "Just putting pressure on the rim and also protecting the rim. I'm having a lot of fun because my guys in there they keep me level and they keep me intent with it."

Ayton learned how to deliver pick-and-roll plays just how Paul wants them and use positioning to enhance his physical skills. "First thing he taught me that I'm going to need in my career for a while is learning angles, how to get people open and learn how to get open and set the screen," Ayton said.

Paul has seen the work ethic and growth in Ayton since his arrival in November. "Just seeing the maturity in him not only as basketball player but as a person," Paul said. "He has the biggest heart, one of the best guys you'll ever meet. The success and the recognition that he's getting is well deserved and I couldn't be happier."

Ayton has learned how to better maximize his body and mind. "I definitely feel every game, body hurting and all that," Ayton said. "I feel every part of this, the physicality throughout the games and just the mental stamina you have to have in between games."



MILWAUKEE: Deandre Ayton of the Phoenix Suns reacts during Game Three of the 2021 NBA Finals on Sunday at Fiserv Forum in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. —AFP

Suns coach Monty Williams was glad Ayton accepted the challenge. "I'm thankful he has allowed the staff to push him the way they needed to push him," Williams said. "I'm happy he has an effect on the game in different ways. It's not just offense. There are games where defensively he impacts the game and covers up a lot of mistakes we make. He's a talented player. His ability to rebound, finish around the basket and then step up and make free throws is something we don't take for granted." —AFP

## Team Australia hands US their second-straight loss

LAS VEGAS: The United States men's team suffered its second straight shocking loss on Monday, losing 91-83 to Australia in a pre-Olympic friendly tournament in Las Vegas. The Americans, whose roster includes a host of NBA all-stars, also lost 90-87 to unheralded Nigeria on Saturday and have now lost four of their last five games dating back to the 2019 FIBA World Cup, where they finished an embarrassing seventh.

Brooklyn Nets star Kevin Durant was held to 17 points for the second consecutive game, and Damian Lillard of the Portland Trail Blazers finished with a team-high 22. Patty Mills, of Canberra, scored 22 points, and Adelaide's Joe Ingles scored 17 for the

Aussies, who shot 53 percent from the floor as a team in the tuneup event for the Tokyo Olympics.

Australia outscored the US 6-0 in the final 30 seconds. Boston Celtics player Jayson Tatum threw up an airball in the final minute, and Durant missed a three-pointer in the waning seconds. Australia, one of the favorites to reach the podium in Japan, has never beaten the US in the men's Olympic basketball tournament in eight tries dating back to 1964. Monday's exhibition win comes 33 years after the US defeated the Boomers 78-49 to win the bronze medal in Seoul, South Korea.

The United States were without three players still active in the NBA



LAS VEGAS: Kevin Durant #7 of the USA Men's National Team plays defense on Patty Mills #5 of the Australia Men's National Team during the game on Monday at Michelob ULTRA Arena in Las Vegas, Nevada. —AFP

finals. The United States, who have won three Olympic men's basketball titles since earning bronze in 2004,

are looking to regain global dominance after finishing in seventh at the 2019 World Cup. —AFP

### News in brief

#### Giroud close to Milan

ROME: French center-forward Olivier Giroud, currently at Chelsea, is close to signing a two-year contract with AC Milan, Italian media reported yesterday. "Giroud is expected to be in Italy on Thursday to undergo medicals and sign the contract," wrote Sky Sport on its website. The daily, La Gazzetta dello Sport, reported that the deal will be worth three million euros per season to Giroud while Chelsea will receive a one-million-euro transfer fee. It wrote that AC Milan coach Stefano Pioli is "eagerly awaiting his arrival" of the 34-year-old, as the team's star striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic, who is 39 and underwent knee surgery in Rome in June, "is still uncertain" for the coming season. —AFP

#### Jabeur auctions racquet

TUNIS: Ons Jabeur, who became the first Arab woman to reach the quarter-finals at Wimbledon last week, announced on Monday that she is auctioning one of her racquets to help hospitals in her native Tunisia fight COVID-19. Jabeur, who will add a personal donation to the amount collected during the sale, said the money raised would be used to buy "drugs and medical equipment". The racquet, which Jabeur used in her Wimbledon victories over Venus Williams, Garbine Muguruza and Iga Swiatek, went on sale Monday for 2,000 dinars (\$720). —AFP

#### Galatasaray denied entry

ATHENS: Turkish side Galatasaray had a wasted trip to Greece for a friendly on Monday when they were denied entry by Athens airport authorities because of unacceptable coronavirus tests. The visitors, who were due to play against Greek champions Olympiakos yesterday, were refused entry despite providing negative PCR test results from within 72 hours. Greek authorities said that the entry protocol from Turkey to Greece requires a molecular test from the previous 24 hours — not 72 hours. Galatasaray allegedly refused to undergo a further COVID-19 test and, after two hours at the airport, flew back to Istanbul, airport authorities said. —AFP

#### Bordeaux avoid relegation

BORDEAUX: Bordeaux and Angers will both play in Ligue 1 next season after their appeals against relegation imposed by France's financial watchdog DNCG were successful, the clubs announced separately on Monday. Bordeaux were spared after the presentation of a recovery plan put together by businessman Gerard Lopez, who is set to take over the club. Bordeaux, who have won six league titles and are one of the biggest clubs in the country, saw former owners American financial group King Street appoint an administrator in April saying they wanted out after investing 46 million euros (55 million dollars) since buying the outfit in 2018 for 100 million euros. —AFP

#### Ohtani makes history

LOS ANGELES: Japanese sensation Shohei Ohtani made history yesterday after being named as both the starting pitcher and leadoff hitter for the American League team in Major League Baseball's All-Star game in Denver. Ohtani, who has electrified baseball this season with a league-leading 33 home runs, is the first player in the history of the All-Star game to be selected as a position player and pitcher. Ohtani took part in the Home Run Derby on Monday, just losing a close showdown with Washington Nationals slugger Juan Soto in the first round. —AFP

## Sports

# 48,000 meals a day: Tokyo tackles feeding an Olympic Village

**TOKYO:** Even under ordinary circumstances, feeding an Olympic Village is a mammoth task, with chefs preparing tens of thousands of meals a day for elite athletes from around the world. But at Tokyo 2020, there's an added pressure: strict coronavirus rules forbid athletes from eating at local restaurants, so it's their only chance to sample Japan's famous cuisine.

"I feel it's a lot of responsibility for us," admitted Tsutomu Yamane, senior director of Tokyo 2020's food and beverages services department. "We want them to enjoy (Japanese food)... but it's major pressure," he told AFP. It's a huge undertaking: the village can host up to 18,000 people at a time and its cafeterias will serve up to 48,000 meals a day, with some open around the clock. Anti-infection rules mean athletes can't go anywhere but the village, training sites and competition venues.

So organizers will provide 700 menu options, 3,000 seats at the main two-storey cafeteria and 2,000 staff at peak hours to meet the needs of all. Menus are largely divided into three categories: Western, Japanese and Asian, which covers Chinese, Indian and Vietnamese options.

## Healthy home cooking

And given Japan's world-famous cuisine, there will be plenty of local flavor. The focus will be on informal dishes rather than high-end dining, with ramen and udon noodles among the staples, said Yamane.

Always-popular ramen will be offered in two of its most famous broths: soy sauce, and miso — the fermented soybean paste that is central to Japanese cuisine. But there may be one big disappointment for Japanese food fans: no sushi with raw fish. Safety rules mean rolls will only feature cooked shrimp, canned tuna, cucumber and pickled plum.



**TOKYO:** This file photo taken on June 20, 2021 shows a view of the main dining hall of the Olympic Village during a media tour of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Village in Tokyo. — AFP

Two other favorites will be available though: grilled wagyu beef and tempura — battered, fried vegetables and seafood. Some less familiar Japanese dishes will also be featured, including two specialties from the western Osaka region: okonomiyaki and takoyaki.

The former is a savory pancake cooked on a griddle that often contains cabbage and pork and is topped with a sweet sauce, mayonnaise, and bonito flakes. Takoyaki are small batter balls filled with octopus. And

there is Japanese home cooking, courtesy of locals who entered a competition to have their dishes featured.

Yoko Nishimura, a 59-year-old mother and housewife from Kamakura outside Tokyo, had almost forgotten about the competition after the Games was postponed. "Then I was contacted and told I was chosen. I could barely believe it," she told AFP.

She was inspired by the summer heat to create a dish of cold somen noodles topped with grilled salmon,

steamed chicken, edamame beans, broccoli, plum paste and grated yam. The dish, she said, "is full of things that are good for the body".

## Gluten-free section

It uses "salmon with its skin on, which has great nutrients like collagen. The edamame beans are full of protein, and broccoli has antioxidants for your body". Other meals chosen include oden — a Japanese stew with a dashi broth base — and a panna cotta made from edamame.

Ingredients used will come from all 47 regions of Japan, including areas hit by the 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster, in keeping with the Olympics' "Recovery Games" theme. While some countries still restrict food from areas affected by the Fukushima nuclear accident, Japan says produce from the region is subject to stricter standards than those used elsewhere in the world and items are rigorously tested.

So while organizers will indicate the origins of food served in the casual dining area, there won't be any specific labeling to mark out items from Fukushima. Meals will cater to just about every religious and dietary restriction, including the first gluten-free section at a Games.

As with everything at the pandemic-postponed Olympics, the virus will cast a long shadow. Seating has been reduced and athletes must keep mealtimes as short as possible. Nishimura is hopeful though that her dish will offer up something restorative. "Athletes coming for the Olympics could lose their appetites because of the hot summer and training hard. They may also feel a lot of pressure from competing in such a big event," she said. "I would even say that eating this (dish) will let them compete in top condition." — AFP

## Outbreak: Managing coronavirus at the pandemic Olympics

**TOKYO:** Tokyo's Olympics will be like no other Games, with the specter of coronavirus hanging over every part of the event, and organizers determined to prevent an outbreak. Here's a look at some of the ways they'll try to prevent infections among some 11,000 athletes, and what will happen if cases do emerge at the Games, which open July 23.

### What safety measures are there?

The latest rulebook for athletes and sports officials is 70 pages long, and the requirements start before they get to Japan. Athletes must test negative for the virus twice within 96 hours of travel, and again when they land. They'll be tested daily while in the country, and they have to leave the Olympic Village within 48 hours of their competition ending.

And there won't be any soaking up the atmosphere: they aren't allowed anywhere except their accommodation and competition venues, with a ban on using public transport. Masks will be mandatory, even on the medal podium, with exceptions only for eating, sleeping, training and competing.

### What about vaccines?

Olympic officials say 85 percent of the athletes and teams staying in the Village will be vaccinated. Getting jabbed is not a requirement, but has been strongly encouraged. The anti-coronavirus rules will be the same for those taking part in the Games, whether they're vaccinated or not. Tokyo 2020 has organized vaccinations for 38,000 officials, volunteers, local media and airport staff, among others.

### What happens if there's an infection?

Athletes will be given daily saliva antigen tests, and if they come back positive or unclear, they'll have a follow-up saliva PCR test, which is more sensitive. If that test is positive, they'll have a nasal and

throat swab PCR test. A third positive result will mean the athlete is out of the Games. They'll have to isolate or be hospitalized, with no chance of rejoining the competition.

### What if you're a close contact?

Things are a bit more complicated for "close contacts" of an infected person. The term only applies to people who have spent 15 minutes or more within one meter of the infected person without wearing a mask. That might include a roommate, or a dining companion but probably not a tennis partner, for example.

Those considered close contacts will face a nervous wait to hear whether they are judged safe to continue participating in the Games. Rulings will be made "case-by-case" and consider whether the close contact is likely to spread infection. If close contacts are allowed to compete, they may face additional restrictions, including being moved to a separate room and eating meals alone.

### What if someone gets really sick?

Medical staff and facilities are key at any Games, but the stakes are higher given the pandemic. Organizers say there will be some 7,000 medical staff, including doctors and nurses, but have declined to specify the number of beds available.

The push to find these resources has been controversial in Japan, given a recent surge in infections that stretched the local healthcare system. To head off that criticism, the International Medical Committee has pledged to bring additional medical staff from outside to reduce pressure on resources.

### Is everyone insured?

Olympic participants from overseas, including athletes, team officials and media, are required to have insurance that will cover medical treatment and repatriation. Olympic rulebooks specify that the insurance must include cover for COVID-19.

Before they enter Japan athletes will need to sign a "written pledge" to obey coronavirus restrictions, and take responsibility for their trip. "Despite all the care taken, risks and impacts may not be fully eliminated," warns the Olympic playbook, which details anti-virus measures. "Therefore you agree to attend the Olympic and Paralympic Games at your own risk." — AFP



**TOKYO:** This file photo taken on July 9, 2021 shows security personnel checking the accreditation and body temperature of a man entering Tokyo Big Sight, the site of the International Broadcast Centre (IBC) and Main Press Centre (MPC) for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, next to a sign illustrating "COVID-19 countermeasures" in Tokyo. — AFP

## Istanbul sets sights on 2036 Summer Games

**ISTANBUL:** The mayor of Istanbul yesterday said he wanted the ancient Turkish city to host the 2036 Summer Olympics after a failed bid for the pandemic-delayed 2020 Games. The fabled capital of the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires boasts strong infrastructure and the distinction of bridging Europe and Asia along the Bosphorus Strait.

But it also suffers from stifling heat and humidity in the summer as well as traffic nightmares for its 15.5 million residents. "Our objective is (to host) the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2036," Istanbul mayor Ekrem Imamoglu told reporters. "I am convinced that we will win."

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) is expected to name the Australian city of Brisbane — the only candidate — as the host of the 2032 Summer Games before the Tokyo Olympics launch later this month. A formal bid could potentially boost the political standing of the popular mayor of Turkey's largest city. Imamoglu is a prominent member of the main opposition party who has become a thorn in the side of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The long-serving Turkish leader is a fan of sports



**TOKYO:** In this file photo taken on June 20, 2021, a reporter looks at the buildings which will host the athletes during the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games, during a media tour of the Olympic Village in Tokyo. — AFP

## Daily tests, cardboard beds: 24 hours at Tokyo's Olympic Village

**TOKYO:** For athletes competing at the Tokyo Games, the Olympic Village will be almost all they see, with strict coronavirus rules preventing them from leaving the compound except to train and compete. Their stay in the village will also be shorter than usual: competitors can only arrive five days before their event, and must leave within 48 hours of winning or losing. Here's what a typical day might look like at Tokyo 2020's waterside mini-city:

### 6:30am

The village is built to sleep up to 18,000 Olympians, coaches and officials. They should wake up refreshed, despite Tokyo's 4:40am sunrise, thanks to thick black-out curtains. As in many Japanese homes, space is limited, however — single rooms measure just nine square meters (100 square feet), and doubles 12 square meters. The beds and partition walls are made from sturdy recyclable cardboard, to be cleared away after the Games when the 21 towers are turned into luxury homes. Perhaps not so good if your neighbor snores, however...

### 7:00am

Time for a daily coronavirus test — a requirement for everyone staying in the village. They will administer the saliva antigen tests themselves and then submit them for processing. A positive result and a second positive on a more accurate PCR test means a trip to the fever clinic, a small prefab building in the center of the village. At the clinic, a third test determines if you are out of the Games and need to isolate or go to hospital.

### 7:30am

Forgetting to wear a mask can be easy, especially early in the morning — but they are mandatory in the village, except when sleeping and eating. On the way to get breakfast, athletes can check an app that shows how crowded communal areas are, including the two floors of the vast 3,000-seat canteen.

### 8:00am

Village residents are asked to eat alone to avoid

spreading potentially contagious droplets. Each seat is screened off with plexiglass. There's an immense selection of food, with traditional Japanese cuisine highlighted. Just about every dietary preference is catered to — vegetarian, halal, gluten-free — with nutritional values clearly indicated.

### 9:00am

The world's top sportsmen and women can train at a huge gym with 600 cardio and weight-training machines. Masks are mandatory even when getting sweaty, and even though the gym machines are cleaned frequently, users are recommended to disinfect them before they start.

### 11:00am

Public transport and walks outside the village are forbidden, so athletes must take dedicated buses from the site — built on reclaimed land in Tokyo Bay — to competition venues or training centers.

### 5:00pm

On their return to the village, Olympic teams can stop off at the "Village Plaza", a wooden annex incorporating traditional Japanese construction techniques. Inside are ATMs, cleaning services, a hairdresser and a cafe, among other conveniences — giving athletes the chance to buy a souvenir, even though sightseeing is off the cards.

### 7:00pm

It's getting dark already. Back at the village, tired athletes can take one of the 17 self-driving shuttles, which circulate the site 24 hours a day, back to their block. Each one can seat 19 passengers and there's a human operator on board just in case.

### 8:00pm

After dinner, athletes aren't obliged to stay cooped up in their rooms. The Village recreation center beckons, with Nintendo consoles and spaces to relax, or they can wander around the waterside park. Having a post-dinner beer al fresco isn't an option, though, as alcohol is forbidden in groups and in public areas. Violations of any rules will be punished, organizers have said — with disqualification from the Games a possibility.

### 10:00pm

Competitors aren't allowed to bring family members with them to the Games. But before bed, they can chat with loved ones back home using free wifi. — AFP



**ISTANBUL:** Mayor of Istanbul metropolitan municipality, Ekrem Imamoglu (center) speaks during a launch event to announce a new sport strategy and future sport plan yesterday in Istanbul. — AFP

## Sports

## Rapinoe spurred by Olympic 2016 exit as US chase double

LOS ANGELES: The bitter memory of defeat is driving Megan Rapinoe and the United States women's football team as they chase an unprecedented double at the Olympics. Five years ago, the US women were bundled out of the Rio de Janeiro Olympics in the quarter-finals, losing to Sweden on penalties in an upset that shattered American hopes of a fourth consecutive gold medal. It marked the first time that the US has failed to reach the gold medal game since women's football was introduced at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics.

"It was terrible," Rapinoe said. "It felt like total failure. We didn't complete the task, we didn't play well and it was a particularly kind of gutting loss in a lot of ways. It was really sad. We had a lot of people in their first major championships, so that was tough to go out

as early as we did. I wouldn't say it left a bad taste in our mouth — it left a fire under people to never let that happen again. It gave a lot of us motivation. Everybody who was in Rio does not want that to be their last Olympic experience."

The ill-fated Rio campaign was a rare blemish on Rapinoe's dazzling record of success at international level. The 36-year-old midfielder is arguably the most recognizable member of an American women's team that has dominated international football for most of the past decade.

A key member of the US team that won the gold medal at the 2012 Olympics, Rapinoe was also a pillar of the squads that won back-to-back women's World Cups in 2015 and 2019. Since making her international debut in 2006, Rapinoe has accumulated 177 caps

with 59 goals and 69 assists.

She will spearhead a US team in Tokyo which is on a 44-game unbeaten streak, having not lost a game since a 3-1 defeat by France in January 2019. A gold medal in Tokyo would make the US women the first team to follow up a World Cup triumph with Olympic gold.

## Pandemic's 'silver lining'

Rapinoe says the enforced break caused by the pandemic has benefited the US women in their quest for the double. "This was a nice silver lining of COVID and the pandemic — to have a year of rest," she said. "Some players played overseas, some players took more time for themselves, time that we never really get, to get our bodies right. I think of all the teams we probably have the most benefit because we would have been so tired after all the wildness of 2019."

The "wildness" of 2019 included her role in the US women's World Cup success, as well as a much-publicized spat with then US President Donald Trump. Rapinoe, who is openly gay, has forged a reputation as an unflinching advocate for social justice causes off the field, from demanding equal pay and conditions for her and team-mates to protesting against racial injustice.

"If there is a barrier in the way, I think I have to bust it down and extend beyond myself," Rapinoe says. "I have people listening to me, so I feel a responsibility to do what I can with what I have to try to make the world better in whatever way I'm able to."

Rapinoe is circumspect about her future playing career, stating repeatedly that she will reassess her options once the Olympics are done and dusted. Nevertheless, she has suggested she may attempt to prolong her career until the 2023 World Cup, when she will be 38. "I want to keep playing as long as I can," she said at the Forbes Power Women's Summit in December last year. "We have this short time in the span of our life to be an athlete. I think sometimes it feels long, like I've been doing this forever — but I don't really want to cut it short. It's an amazing job. Hopefully I can make it to Australia for a World Cup. That idea is pretty enticing, I feel like I'll still be clinging on for that one." — AFP

Tokyo remains to be seen. The International Gymnastics Federation refuses to acknowledge the added difficulty of the move by giving it a start value that is broadly in line with less difficult vaults, meaning that as far as Biles is concerned, there is additional risk without reward. A similar criticism has been leveled at the scoring for Biles' signature double-twisting, double-back beam dismount. Biles believes the scoring of the two moves is being kept artificially low in order to prevent her from running away with the competition. "They're both too low and they even know it," she told the New York Times earlier this year. "They don't want the field to be too far apart. And that's just something that's on them. That's not on me." The mere fact that Biles is returning to defend her title is unusual. At 24, she would be the oldest winner of the Olympic all-around crown since Vera Caslavka won the second of her two gold medals in 1968 at the age of 26 years and 171 days. Every winner of the title since 1976 has been a teenager.

Biles admits that last year's pandemic-induced postponement of the Olympics — and the thought of having to subject her body to another year of punishing workouts to maintain fitness — prompted thoughts of retirement. "I wanted to give up," Biles said earlier this year. "Once it was postponed it was, like, I've gone too far to give up now." Biles says she has also grown in confidence in recent years, often leading criticism of USA Gymnastics (USAG) and the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee over their handling of the Larry Nassar sexual abuse scandal.

In 2018, Biles revealed she was among the hundreds of gymnasts who were sexually abused by Nassar, the former Olympic team doctor who is now serving a life prison sentence for his crimes. Biles has since led calls for USAG and the USOPC to hold a wide-ranging investigation into the scandal.

When USAG tweeted a birthday message to Biles last year, she responded bluntly: "How about you amaze and do the right thing — have an independent investigation." Biles says that her position of prominence helps maintain pressure on USAG and the USOPC. "I'm still here, so it's not going to disappear," she told Glamour magazine recently. "We have power behind it." — AFP



Allyson Felix

## Golden girl Felix readies for Olympic swansong

LOS ANGELES: Whether she is straining every last sinew for the finish line or blazing a trail to ensure better treatment of female athletes everywhere, Allyson Felix has made a career out of fighting. The 35-year-old elder stateswoman of US track and field brings the curtain down on her 17-year Olympic career in Tokyo, ending an odyssey that began when she competed as a teenage prodigy at the 2004 Athens Games.

Felix's fifth and final Olympics will almost certainly see her become the most decorated female track and field athlete in the history of the Games. She is currently tied with Jamaican legend Merlene Ottey with nine medals, a dazzling haul that includes six golds and three silvers.

One more medal in Tokyo — virtually guaranteed given her place in the dominant US women's 4x400m relay squad — will see her pull clear of Ottey. If she wins two or more — another possibility given her likely place in the mixed gender 4x400 relay team — she will overtake Carl Lewis as the most decorated American track athlete in history.

It will be a fitting conclusion to the final phase of a career that has seen Felix become accustomed to battling through adversity, on and off the track. A chaotic, pandemic-disrupted build-up to Tokyo left Felix with nowhere to train at times last year, forcing her to perform improvised sprint workouts on the streets of her neighborhood in suburban Los Angeles.

She booked her place on the US team for Tokyo with a typically gutsy performance at the Olympic trials in Eugene, Oregon in June, digging deep to secure second place with a time of 50.02sec after lagging behind in fourth place heading into the home straight.

## 'I have to fight'

"I told myself before the race that when it comes down to it, I have to fight," Felix said after that performance. "That's been a theme of mine for the past couple years. I was just gonna give my all and leave it all on the track." In the final years of her career, Felix has emerged as a leading voice for the rights of women athletes. In 2019, she made headlines after denouncing long-time sponsors Nike over the company's maternity practices, calling for greater support for female athletes who take time off from the sport to have children. "If we have children, we risk pay cuts from our sponsors during pregnancy and afterward," Felix wrote in a New York Times editorial.

"It's one example of a sports industry where the rules are still mostly made for and by men," added Felix, who gave birth to daughter Camryn in November 18 after an emergency C-section. The effects of Felix's criticisms were striking. Nike swiftly changed its policy, vowing to ensure no female athlete is adversely impacted financially by pregnancy.

Felix meanwhile signed a new sponsorship deal with the Athleta leisurewear company, in a move she says redefines "what sponsorship looks like". Booking her place on the Tokyo team was made sweeter by the fact that daughter Camryn was on hand to greet her at the finish line. Felix says motherhood has been a driving force as she seeks to make the most of the final years of her career. "I wanted to really show her that, no matter what, you do things with character, integrity, and you don't give up." — AFP

## 'Rock bottom'

His aversion to vegetables and fondness for "Black Thunder" chocolate bars are also well known, but when it comes to competition, he is all business. "I just want to give a performance that I'm satisfied with," he said in June. "After that, it's up to the people watching to decide what they think."

Uchimura has struggled with injuries since the Rio Games, and had described his chances of appearing in Tokyo as "a fairy tale" in 2019. But after taking radical action and dropping every event but the horizontal bar, he is now ready to make his dreams come true. "If it hadn't been for that, I don't think I would be here today," he said of his injury struggles. "I think people can come back stronger when they hit rock bottom."

Japan will have to do without him as they try to defend their team title in Tokyo, however. Uchimura recently described himself as "an ancient fossil" compared to newcomers such as 18-year-old Takeru Kitazono — winner of five gold medals at the 2018 Youth Olympics.

But the veteran is now ready to act as a big brother to the new generation. "I'm not competing in the team event, but I feel I have to use my experience in different ways," Uchimura said. "I think I can play a part beyond the actual competition."

After his last Olympics, Uchimura is likely to stick around for one final world championship in Japan this October. He has described himself as "the kind of person who doesn't dwell much on the past". But he did allow himself a moment of reflection after booking his place at Tokyo. "It's something I can't even take in myself," he said. "It's amazing, when you look at it objectively." — AFP



EAST HARTFORD: Megan Rapinoe of the United States is announced during the Send Off ceremony following the Send Off series match against Mexico at Rentschler Field on July 05, 2021 in East Hartford, Connecticut. - AFP

## Reluctant star Dressel set to shine at Tokyo Olympics

LOS ANGELES: Thirteen world titles and a reputation as a worthy successor to Michael Phelps haven't made Caeleb Dressel any more comfortable with fame. But the US swim star will likely just have to get used to it at the Tokyo Olympics, where the 24-year-old could become just the fourth swimmer in history to win seven medals in a single Games. That's a list led, of course, by Phelps's dazzling eight golds in eight events at the 2008 Beijing Olympics. That eclipsed the record seven swimming golds won by Mark Spitz in Munich in 1972. American Matt Biondi won five golds, a silver and a bronze in Seoul in 1988.

Dressel has limbered up for a big Olympic splash with a record eight-medal tally — including six gold — at the 2019 World Championships — adding them to the seven he won at the 2017 worlds. Dressel is certainly interested in transferring that success to the Olympics, even if he's not enamored of the hoopla that surrounds the Games or concerned with cross-over stardom. "I don't very much care for the spotlight," Dressel said before the US trials — where he was impressed, if slightly bemused, that sponsor Toyota displayed a car emblazoned by a Texas artist with an approximation of his intricate tattoos.

Featured in GQ magazine's pre-Olympic coverage, widely touted by US Olympic broadcaster NBC as a face of the American team, Dressel is firmly focused on his job in the pool, a job that hasn't changed despite the one-year pandemic delay of the Tokyo Games.

With the sudden shut-down of competition in March of 2020, Dressel compensated by joining family members in hiking the Appalachian Trail, calling it a life-changing experience. "I feel like I learned a lot more about myself, my family and everything going on around me more on the trail than I did with the Olympic Games," he said. This year Dressel's personal horizons expanded again when he married fiancée Meghan Haala on Valentine's Day — although he let slip at a pre-trials press conference in June that he "never missed a practice for my wedding. I swam the morning of my wedding."

## Day-in, day-out focus

Coach Gregg Troy was quick to point out that was Dressel's decision entirely. "He had the time off," Troy said. "He chose to do it himself." That's a reflection of how Dressel's focus in the pool has remained the same throughout the pandemic delay. "The only thing that's changed for me is instead of 2020 Games it's 2021," Dressel said. "Perspective hasn't changed. Same focus, day-in and day-out, looking for ways to get better, and I'm going to stick to that."

Dressel tackles three individual events in Tokyo — the 50m and 100m freestyle and the 100m butterfly. He's the two-time reigning world champion in all three and the 100m fly world record-holder. There's also a possible four relays on his card as he stands poised to cement an Olympic legacy that began when he earned two relay golds — as the leadoff swimmer in the 4x100m free and a heats swimmer in the medley relay — at the Rio de Janeiro Olympics, where he was sixth in the 100m free. While Phelps was tight-lipped during his career about any uncertainties that gnawed at him, Dressel is up-front about the emotional ups and downs he goes through during meets. After his historic performance at the 2019 worlds he told USA Today: "Part of me is very happy. Part of me wants to cry that I'm done with it. I've got pimples on my face from just the stress of the meet. I'm probably losing some hair." At the US trials in June, where his first final didn't come until the fifth day of the eight-day meeting, he admitted it was an agonizing wait. When he hits the water, none of that turmoil is evident, though Dressel himself says he still feels like the wide-eyed 15-year-old who contested his first US Olympics trials in 2012. — AFP

## Biles tackling History, herself at Olympics

LOS ANGELES: Simone Biles heads into the Olympics bidding to crown the greatest gymnastics career in history with only herself to beat. The 24-year-old American superstar has not lost an all-around competition since 2013, an eight-year era of domination that has encompassed 19 world championship gold and four Olympic golds.

In Tokyo, Biles is poised to become the first woman in more than half a century to retain the all-around title, and could well end up equaling Soviet gymnast Larisa Latynina's record of nine Olympic gold medals. To do that, Biles will need to win four individual events — all-around, floor, vault and beam — while leading the United States to victory in the team competition. Few are betting against her. In fact, Biles has been in a league of her own for so long, she has recently taken to wearing a leotard decorated with silver rhinestones in the shape of a goat's head — a reference to her being regarded by many as the "G.O.A.T." — greatest of all-time. In other sports, that sort of confidence might risk being perceived as arrogance. Where Biles is concerned, it is more a matter of fact. Biles herself says the "G.O.A.T." design was meant to inspire others. "I just hope that kids growing up watching this don't or aren't ashamed of being good at whatever they do," she said in a recent interview. "I want kids to learn that, yes, it's okay to acknowledge that you're good or even great at something."

This year, Biles has underscored her greatness by becoming the first woman ever to pull off a Yurchenko double pike — a complex, gravity-defying vault that no other woman has attempted in competition.

## Risk without reward?

Whether Biles — who already has four signature moves named after her — will attempt the move in

## Gymnastics star Uchimura laser-focused for final Olympics

TOKYO: He's the Japanese gymnastics superstar with a sweet tooth heading to his fourth Olympics, but this summer promises to be a different experience for "King" Kohei Uchimura. The 32-year-old etched his name into Olympic history at the Rio Games in 2016, becoming the first male gymnast in 44 years to retain his all-around title.

He also led Japan to team gold in Brazil, cementing his place as one of his country's most revered athletes. His chocolate-loving, Pokemon Go-playing persona has also made him a favorite with Japanese fans, revealing a different side to the man considered one of the best gymnasts ever.

But persistent shoulder pain has forced Uchimura to adjust his sights on home turf at the Tokyo Olympics, which will certainly be his last. The gymnast, who took up the sport at the age of three, will forgo the defense of his all-around title to compete only on the horizontal bar.

His desire to win more Olympic gold remains as strong as ever though, and his rivals can expect nothing less than laser focus. "If I had given a perfect performance here, it would have been difficult to top that at the Olympics," he said after qualifying for the



RIO DE JANEIRO: This file photo taken on August 10, 2016 shows Japan's Kohei Uchimura celebrating after winning the men's individual all-around final in the artistic gymnastics at the Olympic Arena during the Rio 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro. — AFP

Games at the All Japan Apparatus Championships in June. "It's better to have made some mistakes, to make you more determined to train for the Olympics."

Uchimura took up the sport as a toddler in his native Nagasaki at the encouragement of his parents — both former gymnasts. His iron determination and superhuman concentration soon brought him international success, and he won the first of his 10 world championship golds in 2009. But he also cuts a relaxed figure away from the mat, making headlines at the start of the Rio Games after racking up a 500,000 yen (\$4,500) phone bill playing Pokemon Go on his arrival in Brazil.

## Japan's 'Recovery Olympics' message fades with fan ban

**TOKYO:** Tokyo 2020 was supposed to be the "Recovery Olympics," showcasing rebuilding after Japan's 2011 disaster, but a spectator ban has left Fukushima residents feeling their efforts were all in vain. Japan's bid for the Games specifically cited a desire to show the resilience of areas hit by the 2011 quake, which triggered a tsunami that killed more than 18,500 people and caused the Fukushima nuclear disaster. The first event of the Games — softball — will take place in Fukushima, and it is also a baseball host venue. Initially, organizers had said a spectator ban in Tokyo and surrounding areas would not affect regions in northeastern Japan — but Fukushima's hopes were dashed two days later, when the prefecture's governor said rising infections and pressure on hospital beds had prompted him to ban fans from events. William McMichael, a Canadian lecturer at Fukushima University who has worked for years to educate people about the region and its recovery, said the decision left residents wondering "what we can do."

"There's no way for us to help people understand what's going on in Fukushima," said McMichael, who has lived in the area since 2007. "That was the whole purpose, and it's all in vain now." Fans are currently allowed in limited numbers at other sporting events across Japan, and some Fukushima residents said the contradiction was difficult to understand.

"Things are really bad because of the virus, but I think at least kids should have been able to see some top-class baseball players," said Yumiko Nishimoto, who leads a community project to plant

20,000 cherry trees. "I would have liked them to have tried a little bit harder to find a reason to do it, rather than finding a reason not to do it."

Neighboring Miyagi prefecture, which is hosting the Games' football, is currently set to allow up to 5,000 fans. But local media reported Tuesday that the mayor of Sendai, the prefecture's largest city, has written to organizers asking for spectators to be banned there too.

**'We're not giving up'**  
yesterday, three "Recovery Monuments" were unveiled next to the Olympic stadium in Tokyo, designed to "forge a connection" with the areas worst hit by the disaster. The brightly colored monuments stand over two meters tall and are partly made of aluminum recycled from temporary housing in the affected regions.

Athletes will pass the monuments going into the stadium, and can read the messages of support written on them, as well as write and attach their own. But some Fukushima residents believe the "Recovery Olympics" message has been lost as organizers focus on hosting the event safely during the pandemic. "I think the phrase 'Recovery Olympics' has been forgotten," said Hanae Nojiri, a reporter with a local Fukushima TV station. "I think people hesitate to talk about it because all the effort is going into tackling the virus."

Others are hopeful the message can still get through, with Nishimoto saying local children were brainstorming ways to share their stories of recovery. "We're not giving up on the idea of the Recovery Olympics," she said. — AFP



**TOKYO:** This picture shows the unveiling of the Tokyo 2020 Recovery Monuments, creations symbolizing the gratitude of the Japanese people and in particular those from Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima - the prefectures worst affected by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, during a ceremony in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

## IOC chief praises 'best-prepared Tokyo' as Olympic Village opens

**TOKYO:** Olympics chief Thomas Bach praised Tokyo yesterday as the "best-ever prepared" host city, as athletes began entering the Olympic Village 10 days before the opening ceremony. The final countdown to the Games comes with Tokyo under a coronavirus state of emergency and spectators banned from attending all Olympic events in the city and surrounding regions. International Olympic Committee President Bach, who arrived in Japan last week and spent three days in quarantine, told Tokyo 2020 chief Seiko Hashimoto that organizers were "doing a fantastic job".

"You have managed to make Tokyo the best-ever prepared city for an Olympic Games," he said. "This is even more remarkable under the difficult circumstances we all have to face." The pair met as the first athletes began entering the Olympic Village, which opened yesterday

without any of the welcome ceremonies or media opportunities often seen at the Games.

Organizers declined to even specify which teams were entering or how many athletes were now in the Village. Strict coronavirus rules mean athletes can only enter the Village five days before their events and must leave within 48 hours of winning or being eliminated. Despite the low-key opening, Bach said organizers could "be confident that the stage is set". Aside from the spectator ban in Tokyo and surrounding regions, the public will also be kept out of almost all venues elsewhere in Japan. Athletes, media and officials are subject to regular virus testing and limits on their movement. Polls have regularly found most Japanese would prefer the Olympics to be postponed further or cancelled outright, though opposition has softened in recent weeks. — AFP



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