

# Friday Times

ISSUE NO: 18451

SHAWWAL 23, 1442 AH | FRIDAY, JUNE 4, 2021

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**V O L V O**



## Communicating through Sadu art

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## Photo of the Day



A bird lover trains parrots during a training show on May 28, 2021. — Photo by Ghazy Qaffaf/Xinhua

# V is for Vaccinated

## IN MY VIEW

By Nejouad Al-Yagout  
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The vaccine has given many of us hope. In fact, people around the world are rejoicing, especially after the CDC announced that people who have taken two doses of the vaccine can enjoy a mask-free existence, at least in the USA. Although this does not apply to us as yet (but perhaps will, soon, when enough of us get vaccinated), the news is a welcome tidbit of information amidst a sea of frustration and agony.

Many of us will breathe an audible sigh of relief when we are fully vaccinated; unfortunately, being fully vaccinated does not make a difference to the foreign residents in our country. As we all know by now, the Directorate General for Civil Aviation permits fully vaccinated citizens to travel directly back into the country freely, but this does not apply to expatriates (unless, for the convenience of locals, the expatriate happens to be a domestic helper traveling with a citizen). What is new regarding this rule, however, is that there is now talk to reverse this decision, perhaps by the end of the month. And that is something to rejoice, but the fact that it was implemented in the first place, albeit transiently, is disconcerting.

Understandably, for the overall health of citizens and non-citizens, the airport can close and open as the government or aviation authorities see fit. But this rule should apply to anyone flying in and out of the country. Sadly,

as we have seen in the last few years of rising xenophobia in this country, there are rules for locals and rules for foreigners.

Fully vaccinated expatriates are afraid to leave the country now because they are not sure they will be allowed to return. This may change in the near future, but who wants to take the risk? Jobs and livelihoods are at stake; and so they have to restrict themselves as though they had never been vaccinated in the first place. Some cannot attend funerals or go back to their country for whatever reason, personal or otherwise. If this rule does not change by the end of June, they may even have to stay in the country during the summer, forgoing a much-needed holiday.

Even if the local human rights organizations who have expressed dismay at this rule are able to influence authorities to reverse this decision, what else do we have to contend with in the future when it comes to non-citizens?

Maybe with enough locals speaking out in defense of expatriates, we can finally galvanize the people in power to transform our community. We need to create a harmonious community, a community in which all of us — regardless of our nationality, ethnicity, gender, skin color, or position of privilege — bring joy to one another. We are in these borders together.

And, yes, each country is responsible for its citizens, but let us ensure it does not come at the expense of non-citizens. Let us ensure it does not violate the human rights of another. Let us ensure our decisions do not land us on another list of least favorite countries for expatriates, not for our reputation but for our conscience and for the wellbeing of others. There is a saying that goes: Privilege is when you think something is not a problem because it's not a problem for you personally. Privilege is a blessing, but it is only an asset when it is accompanied by gratitude and justice.

# Kuwait Times

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Local



# SADI 2021: Communication Through arts

**S**adu House recently launched the exhibition of its newest cohort of SADI artists. SADI stands for Sadu Art and Design Initiative and encourages local and regional artists to explore the tradition, culture, motifs and principles of traditional Sadu weaving.

SADI artists 2021 include Fatema Al-Bader, Razan Al-Sarraf, Sheikha Al-Habshi, Ahmad Al-Ajmi and Fay Al-Awadhi. The program is patronized by Sheikha Altaf Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah and overseen by Sadu House Chairperson Bibi Duajj Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.



FEATURE

PHOTO

Local



— Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



## Local



# No travel = a quiet airport for expats

A traveler is seen in the departure hall of Kuwait International Airport in this Aug 1, 2020 file photo. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By Ben Garcia

June is usually the busiest month at the airport, with both expats and locals traveling to escape the scorching summer heat of Kuwait. But this year, like the summer of 2020, the airport is mostly quiet. It is also technically closed after 8 pm, when businesses unrelated to food or medicine have to close.

Only a few flights are allowed, while arrivals are limited to Kuwaitis and domestic helpers. As a result, activities at the airport have been drastically reduced to less than a fourth of regular operations. Some employees are still working from home.

"We are dreaming to return to our normal operations," said Amante Peralta Jr, who has been working as a sales associate at a shop at Kuwait International Airport for the past eight years. "This pandemic brought us to a literal standstill. The last two years have been very hard, sad and emotional. Many of my colleagues were terminated, while others are working from home," he said. Peralta's company usually operates the shop at the

airport 24/7, but work timings have been reduced to only 12 hours.

"This pandemic has been very harsh on people. We are afraid, but we have to work to sustain our families. There has been a drastic change in the attitude of people. Normally, we talked to almost everyone; now we avoid talking to others. The more you keep quiet and maintain a distance, the more you'll be fine and safe. I have to take extra precautions now because I have my family here in Kuwait to protect. My wife and I have two kids and we all want them to be safe. This virus is killing people, but we refuse to be counted among the casualties," he said.

Peralta tested positive for COVID-19 last year. "My whole family suffered from the virus last year. It lasted in our family for a month, then we tested negative," he added. With his experience of the virus, Peralta is now taking extra precautions and avoiding people to be safe.

"My work is at the entry point of people arriving from abroad. We are the first to encounter arriving passengers. If they are

infected from their country of origin, we are next to get it. Even though we have been vaccinated, I am still taking extra precautions," he said. "This new environment, new setup and new lifestyle for everyone is hard, but this is the only way. Most of the people here at the airport are vaccinated as we have been asked to comply with the company's regulations. I can see people wearing facemasks as mandated by the government, but there are a few who don't wear it properly," Peralta observed.

Peralta's colleagues hail from a variety of nationalities, but many of them were terminated and returned to their respective countries. "We had five people working at our small store here; three either moved to other companies or returned to their country of origin. Timings have been reduced to 12 hours. Since we are slowly going back to full operations, the company is trying to hire new staff locally. If the country returns to normalcy, they will get staff from abroad," he said.

Lester Garcia, who previously worked as a wheelchair service assistant at the airport, was laid off during the early days of the pan-

demic. "At that time, hundreds of workers like me were terminated. The termination notice period ended in September last year, but we were given a chance to look for another job. I started working for another company from September 15, but in late November I was reinstated to my previous job. Since there were no arrivals at that time, I was assigned to another department. Many of us who were terminated were recalled to our old jobs, especially after we failed to transfer our visas to other companies," he said.

Their visas are under government projects, which are normally nontransferable. "I started working at a logistics company immediately after being terminated from the airport. But my previous company called me to join them again with the same contract, but I got a new job title as support staff for arriving passengers," Garcia said. He also answers queries of travelers as part of the a Belsalamah project of Kuwait International Airport.

# 1st



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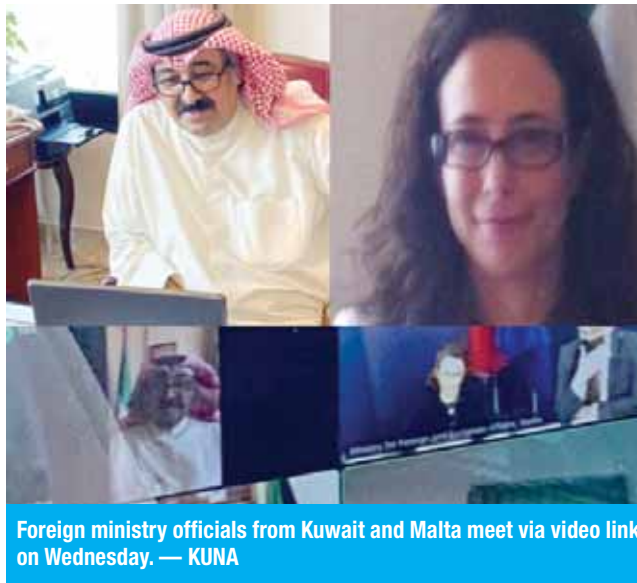
## Local

# Kuwait, Malta agree to strengthen cooperation

**KUWAIT:** Foreign ministry officials from Kuwait and Malta assembled via video link on Wednesday for a fresh round of talks focusing on economic and healthcare ties, in addition to political and security issues. The Kuwaiti side, headed by Assistant Foreign Minister for European Affairs Waleed Al-Khubaizi, engaged their Maltese counterparts, led by Director General for Political, External Relations and European Affairs Fiona Formosa, in talks that yielded some 14 deals designed to push bilateral ties to higher levels.

The coronavirus pandemic was expectedly front and center on the agenda as well, with the talks covering matters that include efforts to fight terrorism and current happenings around the world, said a Kuwaiti foreign ministry statement. Educational ties have shown remarkable improvement as of late, the Kuwaiti diplomat was cited as saying, adding that many Kuwaiti students have increasingly begun to take up academic opportunities on the Mediterranean island.

They agreed on the need for more cooperation in several key sectors, including trade and investment, ahead of similar talks planned for the near future, as both countries seek to bring common goals and aspirations to fruition, added the statement. —KUNA



Foreign ministry officials from Kuwait and Malta meet via video link on Wednesday. — KUNA



**KUWAIT:** Commerce ministry teams inspected construction material stores in Industrial Shuwaikh to check prices and make sure they comply with ministry decisions. Two violations were noted and legal action is being taken.



**KUWAIT:** The commerce ministry closed an office trading in fish for violations and falsifying the country of origin. Legal action is being taken.



**CAIRO:** Egyptian Minister of Youth and Sports honors President of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations Duajj Al-Otaibi. — KUNA

## Otaibi wins presidency of Arab Shooting Federation

**CAIRO:** The general assembly of the Arab Shooting Federation recommended on Wednesday President of Kuwait Shooting Federation Duajj Al-Otaibi for the presidency of the Arab federation for the 2021-2025 period. Otaibi expressed in a statement to KUNA his appreciation to the Arab federations' presidents for their trust in Kuwait to lead the shooting federation in the Arab world for the upcoming period.

"This is a great responsibility; Kuwait will always do its best to be trustworthy for its brotherly countries to contribute in developing Arab shooting," said Otaibi. He directed his thanks to HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the Kuwaiti government for their constant support to Kuwaiti and Arab shooting federations.

Egyptian Minister of Youth and Sports Ashraf Subhi attended on Wednesday the opening ceremony of the Arab Shooting Championship. The tournament will be held in Egypt until June 12 with the participation of 16 Arab countries including Kuwait. On the sidelines of the opening ceremony, Otaibi told KUNA that four Kuwaiti shooters will participate in the championship.

He noted that the Kuwaiti shooters Talal Al-Turqi, Saud Al-Kandari, Mansour Al-Rashidi and Abdulrahman Al-Faihan will compete in the skeet and trap contests. "This championship is considered a primary station for preparation. Afterwards, the players will return to Kuwait for a week before heading to Italy to prepare for participating in the Tokyo Olympics," Otaibi said. He added he has high hopes for the Kuwaiti players and their readiness to reach top places in this tournament and even at the Olympics. — KUNA



## Local

# MPs urge Amir to intervene after Cabinet shuns session

Govt blames lack of coordination • Speaker says he won't bow to 'terrorism'



KUWAIT: Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem calls off the National Assembly session after the government boycotted it yesterday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's political crisis deepened yesterday after the government boycotted a special National Assembly session, prompting opposition MPs to urge HH the Amir to intervene as the speaker said he won't bow to "terrorism". The session was called by 37 MPs to discuss key reforms to the country's nationality law to allow courts to look into revoking and granting Kuwaiti citizenship. Currently, this is considered a sovereign issue and courts are prohibited to take such cases.

As no Cabinet minister was present in the chamber, Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem called off the session on the basis that the constitution requires that at least one minister must be present to convene an Assembly session. A number of opposition MPs strongly protested against the cancellation and called on the speaker to hold the session despite the absence of the government

because there was sufficient quorum in the chamber.

The government said in a statement that it boycotted the session because there was no prior coordination, especially since the session was to debate key amendments to the nationality law that requires the opinions of several government bodies and the judiciary council.

Ghanem said in a statement that 30 Assembly sessions had been called off because of the government's absence since democracy began in Kuwait in 1962. He said the cancellation was based on article 116 of the constitution, which requires that all or part of the Cabinet must be present in the Assembly session for it to be legal.

The speaker harshly blasted some opposition lawmakers and described their actions as "terrorism", adding that "I will not bow to terrorism". He insisted that he only applied the articles of the constitution. Thirty-one opposition MPs issued a statement in

which they accused the speaker and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah of uniting to "prevent the nation from practicing its role in supervision and legislation".

"This represents a direct aggression on the rights of the people and their powers," they said, accusing the speaker of effectively "erasing all the powers of the Assembly". The statement urged HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to intervene and take whatever step is suitable to resolve the issue.

Although the statement did not clearly say what actions they want, but it is understood that they are calling on HH the Amir to dissolve the Assembly and call for snap polls or change the government and the prime minister. Under the constitution, only HH the Amir has the power to dissolve the Assembly, order fresh elections and name a new prime minister. A number of opposition MPs reiterated earlier calls for the speaker and the prime minister to quit.



KUWAIT: Kuwait Fire Force began changing its vehicles' license plates to new red ones as part of the force's strategy to make them more distinct.

# Friday|Times International

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Ethnic killings cloud central Ethiopia's election buildup

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## India submerges unclaimed ashes of 1,200 COVID dead in farewell ritual



KAMLOOPS, Canada: A makeshift memorial to honour the 215 children whose remains have been discovered buried near the facility is seen as orange light drapes the facade of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School in Kamloops, British Columbia. —AFP

## Canada's indigenous peoples demand justice

### Hundreds of shoes highlight horrors of Canadian indigenous schools

**KAMLOOPS, Canada:** On the verge of tears, Stephanie Gutierrez helped place 215 tiny pairs of children's shoes on the steps of the Kamloops courthouse in western Canada—a gesture that the indigenous woman said symbolized her intent “to stand strong for my people.” A week after the remains of more than 200 students were discovered in unmarked graves at the Kamloops Indian Residential School in British Columbia, approximately a dozen indigenous Canadians, mostly women, gathered at the building Wednesday to demand justice via the memorial.

Each pair of shoes represents one of the children who died at the boarding school, set up more than a century ago to forcibly assimilate Canada's indigenous peoples. Gutierrez's grandmother Tillie had attended the school where the Tk'emlups te Secwepemc tribe last week said it had discovered the mass grave site using ground-penetrating radar. “Unimaginable things happened in this school,” said Gutierrez, wearing an orange T-shirt that read “every child matters” and gripping a photograph of her late grandmother. “I'm here today to stand strong for my people, and to stand strong for my grandmother, and to stand strong for those who cannot speak because this is such a tragedy,” she said.

Similar memorials have popped up at churches and government buildings across Canada, including outside parliament in Ottawa, where Prime Minister Justin Trudeau paid his respects on Tuesday.

Gutierrez said she wanted people to understand the pain pro-

voled by the legacy of the Kamloops school. “These children were stolen, they were taken from their families, and they were tortured, and then they were murdered,” she said. The Kamloops school east of Vancouver was the largest of 139 such boarding schools established across Canada in the late 19th century, with up to 500 students attending at any one time. It was operated by the Catholic Church on behalf of the Canadian government from 1890 to 1969, and then was taken over by Ottawa until it closed a decade later. In total, some 150,000 Indian, Inuit and Metis youngsters were enrolled in these schools, where students were physically and sexually abused by headmasters and teachers who stripped them of their culture and language. Today those experiences are blamed for a high incidence of poverty, alcoholism and domestic violence, as well as high suicide rates, in Canada's indigenous communities.

#### 'A lot of emotions'

A truth and reconciliation commission in 2015 concluded that more than a century of abuses at the schools amounted to “cultural genocide.” It also identified at least 4,100 children who died from abuse or neglect while attending a residential school. But it estimates the actual toll is much higher. The British Columbia coroner is now helping the Tk'emlups te Secwepemc tribe establish the causes and timing of the student deaths in Kamloops.

Meanwhile, the grim find has triggered an outpouring of sym-

pathy across Canada for the students' families and communities, with searches for other mass graves being planned. Parents' requests to have their sons or daughters' remains returned home at the time of their deaths had been rejected by the government as too costly. Now, most of the school cemeteries where they are interred have been abandoned. For many indigenous people, the discovery of the unmarked graves has sparked anew grief and anger. Many had long known about the burials, but kept silent for decades as the memories were too painful.

“I was in shock,” said Gutierrez, who said the latest news “triggered me a lot, it brought up a lot of emotions... There are so many people that have been triggered.” “I feel like I'm strong enough to stand here for those who cannot speak. That's why I'm here, so that people know what's going on,” she said. Gutierrez and others deposited the shoes on the steps of the Kamloops courthouse, where a Canadian flag was lowered to half-mast, “to demonstrate that we want justice for these children,” she said. Bernadette Mack, of the coastal Nuxalk First Nation, came to help and show her support, saying: “It's important to raise awareness and educate people (about) residential schools.” News of the discovery “has brought everybody together,” she said. Until then, “some people didn't really believe it happened and this was proof that it did.” “As sad as it is, it's great that people are understanding (now) that it did happen.” —AFP

## International

# Amnesty urges Iraq to account for 643 missing boys and men

## Children risk 'generational catastrophe' from COVID: Watchdog

**BAGHDAD:** Amnesty International yesterday urged Iraq to reveal the whereabouts of 643 Sunni Muslim boys and men abducted five years ago by Shiite paramilitaries fighting the Islamic State group. The men and teenagers disappeared during an operation by the Hashed Al-Shaabi in June 2016 to retake Fallujah in the western desert from the IS, which then held the country's Sunni provinces.

The Hashed have since been integrated into Iraq's state security forces. Witnesses cited by Amnesty International said that on June 3 gunmen wearing Hashed uniforms "took an estimated 1,300 men and boys considered to be of fighting age away from their families".

"At sunset, at least 643 men and boys were boarded onto buses and a large truck. Their fate remains unknown" while the rest alleged they were tortured, the human rights watchdog said in a statement.

On June 5, Iraq's then prime minister Haider Al-Abadi established a committee to investigate disappearances and abuses during military operations to retake Fallujah. "The committee's findings have never been made public," Amnesty said. "For five years, the families of these men and boys have been living in anguish, not knowing the fate of their loved ones, or whether they are even alive," said the London-based rights watchdog.

"The families deserve to know what happened to their loved ones. They deserve an end to their suffering." The Hashed denies having

abducted or arbitrarily arrested people, but its commanders often claim to have jails packed with jihadists, without proving the prisoners really belong to IS.

Sunnis regularly claim to be discriminated against in post-IS Iraq, where thousands of them have been arrested and often sentenced to prison or death for belonging to IS, rightly or wrongly. Today, the Iraqi government is under fire for closing camps for those displaced in the fight against the Islamic State group. "The government has closed 16 camps over the last seven months, leaving at least 34,801 displaced people without assurances that they can return home safely, get other safe shelter, or have access to affordable services," Human Rights Watch said.

The displaced forced to leave their tent cities have often had their homes destroyed or are considered "terrorists" by the authorities and their communities, accusations "without any evidence", HRW said in a statement.

### Generational catastrophe

The coronavirus pandemic has severely affected children's rights worldwide, with young people risking a "generational catastrophe" if governments do not act, a rights group said in an annual survey yesterday. Millions of children have missed out on education because of COVID-19 restrictions while there will be a long term impact in terms of their physical and mental health, Dutch NGO KidsRights said as it launched its annual ranking. The survey ranks



**BAGHDAD:** US Army soldiers watch as fellow coalition soldiers pass by near the entrance to the International Zone in Baghdad. —AFP

Iceland, Switzerland and Finland as best for children's rights and Chad, Afghanistan and Sierra Leone as the worst, out of a total of 182 countries.

Marc Dulleart, founder and chairman of KidsRights, said that the effects of the pandemic on children had "unfortunately exceeded our predictions at the outset last year".

"Apart from patients of the coronavirus, children have been hardest hit, not directly by the

virus itself, but fundamentally failed through the deferred actions of governments around the world," he said.

"Educational recovery is the key to avoiding generational catastrophe," Dulleart added. The group said schools for more than 168 million children have been closed for almost a full year, with one in three children worldwide unable to access remote learning while their schools were shut. —AFP

## Oil refinery fire in Iran capital under control

**TEHRAN:** A major fire that tore through an oil refinery in the Iranian capital had been brought under control yesterday, but was still not completely extinguished. "The fire at the refinery has been brought under control and will be completely extinguished by noon," the official IRNA news agency said, citing Shaker Khafai, spokesman for Tehran Oil Refining Company.

A column of black smoke was still visible over the site of the inferno around midday, AFP journalists reported, although it was not as thick as the day before. Teams of firefighters were seen battling the blaze in footage from the scene broadcast by state television.

The authorities say the blaze broke out at 7.30 pm (1500 GMT) on Wednesday after an explosion caused by a leaking gas pipe, resulting in a huge fire. An investigation is underway.

The refinery is located in a large industrial zone on Tehran's outskirts, only a few hundred meters (yards) from residential areas. It has been in operation since 1968 and has a capacity of 250,000 barrels per day, according to IRNA. Industrial accidents are common in Iran.

On May 23, nine people were injured in a blast at a plant



**TEHRAN:** A picture taken late Wednesday shows fire raging at an oil refinery in the Iranian capital Tehran. —AFP

producing explosive materials in central Iran, local media reported, while three days later, a pipeline explosion at a petrochemical complex near Iran's Gulf coast left one dead. Meanwhile, Iran views arch-rival Zionist entity as the top suspect behind two incidents in the past year at its nuclear sites that Tehran has branded acts of sabotage.

Some in the Islamic republic see the various events as the result of attacks by Jewish security forces, while others consider US sanctions—which almost completely isolate Iran from the rest of the world, complicating the maintenance of industrial facilities—as a more likely cause. —AFP

## ICC prosecutor urges Sudan to hand over Haroun

**KHARTOUM:** The International Criminal Court's chief prosecutor pressed Sudan Wednesday to hand over Ahmed Haroun, accused of war crimes in Darfur, to face trial alongside a fellow ex-regime figure. Fatou Bensouda made the call during a press conference in Khartoum after concluding a landmark visit to Darfur, the first by an ICC prosecutor since the UN tasked the court to probe the conflict there 16 years ago.

The United Nations says 300,000 people were killed and 2.5 million were displaced in the conflict. Haroun is one of several former regime heavyweights charged by the ICC in connection with Darfur, including ex-president Omar al-Bashir, who is indicted for crimes including genocide, and Ali Muhammad Ali Abd-Al-Rahman, leader of the notorious Janjaweed militia.

Abd-Al-Rahman, also known as Ali Kushayb, was charged in 2007, the same year as Haroun. He handed himself in last year after years on the run and appeared in court in the Hague last month. —AFP

## International

# Nicaraguan opposition presidential hopeful Chamorro under house arrest

## Chamorro to seek a nomination from the opposition

**MANAGUA:** Nicaraguan police on Wednesday placed opposition figure Cristiana Chamorro—a possible challenger to President Daniel Ortega in November elections—under house arrest, her family said, after government claims that she was guilty of money laundering.

Chamorro, a 67-year-old journalist, is regarded as a serious challenger to Ortega, though he has not confirmed he will seek a fourth term. Her mother, Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, defeated Ortega for the presidency in 1990 to become the first elected female head of state in the Americas.

Earlier, police had raided Chamorro's home in the capital Managua. After being on site for more than five hours, they placed her "under house arrest, in isolation," her brother Carlos Fernando Chamorro said on Twitter. "Police are still in her home," he added.

A Managua court said earlier it had ordered her detention on accusations of "abusive management, ideological falsehood" and "the laundering of money, property and assets, to the detriment of the Nicaraguan State and society." Press reports said police forcefully kept friends and family of Chamorro, as well as journalists, away from the scene. On Tuesday, prosecutors had accused Chamorro of an array of crimes, and asked for her to be barred from public duties given that she is facing criminal proceedings. Legal experts have denounced an "illegal" procedure, given that the electoral council has made no ruling on her eligibility.

### 'Farce'

The accusations arise from Chamorro's role as the head of a foundation for press freedom, with prosecutors claiming account-

ing "inconsistencies." Chamorro quit the foundation in February, refusing to comply with a new law obliging any person receiving money from abroad to declare themselves to the government as a "foreign agent."

The prosecution opened an investigation against her on May 20 at the request of the government. She has rejected the accusations against her as a "farce" meant to prevent her from running in the November poll, which Ortega is widely expected to contest. Chamorro, who does not belong to a political party, on Tuesday announced she would seek a nomination from the opposition.

Shortly before police entered Chamorro's home Wednesday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken denounced the Ortega government's moves against Chamorro, and said the Central American country deserved "real democracy."

"Arbitrarily banning opposition leader @chamorrocris reflects Ortega's fear of free and fair elections. Nicaraguans deserve real democracy," tweeted Blinken, on a visit to Latin America. The Organization of American States, for its part, warned Nicaragua was "heading for the worst possible elections." It added in a statement: "This process of systematic and repeated violations of the rule of law and of fundamental freedoms delegitimizes the electoral process even before it takes place." The Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights denounced a "violation of human rights."

### 'Witch hunt'

Opposition parties in a joint statement accused Ortega of "unleashing a witch hunt" against candidates because he "fears going to a free, transparent and observed" election. Last month,



**MANAGUA:** Cristiana Chamorro, former director of the Violeta Barrios de Chamorro Foundation and pre-presidential candidate, gives a press conference after the detention of two of her former employees. — AFP

Nicaragua's legislature appointed a majority of governing party-aligned magistrates to the election body that will oversee the November elections.

It has since disqualified two parties. In December the legislature approved a law critics say is aimed at preventing opposition politicians from standing in the election. Sponsored by Ortega, it bars "those who ask for, celebrate and applaud the imposition of sanctions against the Nicaraguan state." — AFP

## 6.1-magnitude earthquake strikes eastern Indonesia

**JAKARTA:** A 6.1-magnitude earthquake struck off the coast of Indonesia's remote Maluku islands yesterday, the United States Geological Survey said, but no tsunami warning was issued. The strong quake hit at a relatively shallow depth of 31 kilometres (20 miles), about 127 kilometres southwest of the city of Ternate. Shallower quakes tend to cause more damage, but there were no immediate reports of casualties. "It was a decent shake, but people weren't panicking," said Ternate resident Nasarudin Amin. "There are warnings about potential aftershocks." Indonesia experiences frequent quakes due to its position on the Pacific "Ring of Fire", an arc of intense seismic activity where tectonic plates collide that stretches from Japan through Southeast Asia and across the Pacific basin.

In January, more than 100 people were killed and thousands left homeless by the 6.2-magnitude quake that struck Indonesia's Sulawesi island, reducing buildings to a tangled mass of twisted metal and chunks of concrete in the seaside city of Mamuju. A powerful quake shook the island of Lombok in 2018 and several more tremors followed over the next couple of weeks, killing more than 550 people on the holiday island and neighbouring Sumbawa. Later that year, a 7.5-magnitude quake and a subsequent tsunami in Palu on Sulawesi island left more than 4,300 people dead or missing. — AFP

## Prosecutors seek 30-year sentence in Floyd murder case

**WASHINGTON:** Prosecutors on Wednesday asked a US judge to sentence the white former police officer convicted of murdering George Floyd, an unarmed Black man whose death last year sparked nationwide protests, to 30 years in prison. Attorneys for the Minneapolis officer, Derek Chauvin, countered with a far different request—a sentence of time served and probation, claiming that their client was guilty of "an error made in good faith."

In court documents sent ahead of the June 25 sentencing hearing, prosecutors in Minnesota called actions by the 45-year-old Chauvin an "egregious abuse" of his position. "Defendant's conduct was also particularly cruel," prosecutors said. They recalled that Judge Peter Cahill had ruled there were four aggravating factors in the case, allowing him to depart from state sentencing guidelines and clearing the path for a tough sentence.

Chauvin was captured on video kneeling on the neck of the 46-year-old Floyd—suspected of using a counterfeit bill—for more than nine minutes until he passed out and died on May 25, 2020, while ignoring the victim's pleas for air and help. The video of Floyd's death, which went viral, sparked huge protests across the United States and around the world against racism and police violence.

After a trial lasting several weeks, Chauvin was convicted of murder on April 20 and immediately jailed. The most serious charge that he was convicted of—second-degree murder—carries a maximum sentence of 40 years in prison. As a first-time offender, Chauvin had potentially faced 12 and a half years in prison



**NEW YORK:** A Black Lives Matter (BLM) protesters holds a placard and shouts slogans during a march on the anniversary of the death of George Floyd, in Brooklyn, New York. — AFP

on that count under the guidelines, but the aggravating factors mean Cahill can opt for a longer jail term.

Lawyers for Chauvin said he was seeking "a probationary sentence with an incarceration period of time served." As an alternative, Chauvin "respectfully requests that the court grant him a downward durational departure," or a sentence lower than what the guidelines suggest, his lawyer Eric Nelson wrote.

Aside from the "long-term damage a prison sentence would inflict upon Mr Chauvin's life prospects, given his age, convictions for officer-involved offenses significantly increase the likelihood of him becoming a target in prison," Nelson wrote. Chauvin "was unaware that he was even committing a crime," he wrote, adding: "In fact, in his mind, he was simply performing his lawful duty in assisting other officers in the arrest of George Floyd." — AFP

## International

# Namibians slam 'disrespectful' deal over German genocide

## 'It was handled in a very clumsy manner'

**WINDHOEK:** Descendants of victims of massacres committed by German colonisers—recently recognised as a genocide—have scoffed at the agreement between the Namibian government and the southern African country's former rulers.

"It's a slap in the face," lamented Namibian economist Salomo Hei, whose forefathers were murdered in the early 20th century. Many Namibians have rejected the outcome of more than five years of negotiations between their government and Germany over events in territory held by Berlin from 1884 to 1915.

"It was handled in a very clumsy manner," Hei told AFP in the capital Windhoek. "There was no regard for the human lives lost." Germany acknowledged last Friday that the settlers had carried out a "genocide" against indigenous Herero and Nama people between 1904 and 1908. The official use of the word was part of a landmark agreement with the Namibian government after years of talks over the massacres, which some historians have labelled the first genocide of the 20th century.

Germany also offered what it called "development" funds—pointedly avoiding the word "reparations"—of 1.1 billion euros (\$1.3 billion) to be paid over the next 30 years. But the terms and wording of the proposed "reconciliation" deal, which requires parliamentary approval, have raised ire among Herero and Nama representatives, who claim they were never invited to the negotiation table.

## Hungarian politicians 'beneath contempt' for renaming streets: China

**BEIJING:** China yesterday blasted Hungarian politicians as "beneath contempt" after Budapest renamed streets over human rights flashpoints from Hong Kong to Tibet in protest against a planned branch of a top Chinese university.

The sprawling project for Fudan University's first European campus has fed growing unease about Hungary's diplomatic tilt from West to East and its soaring indebtedness to China. The four street signs around the planned site now bear names referencing sore topics that draw Beijing criticism abroad for alleged human rights violations.

China's foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin yesterday accused Hungarian politicians of "hyping up China-related issues and hindering China-Hungary cooperation." "Such behaviour is beneath contempt," Wang told a regular press briefing.

The street names are "Free Hong Kong road", "Uyghur Martyrs' road", "Dalai Lama road", and "Bishop Xie Shiguang road" — named after a persecuted Chinese Catholic priest.

Wang's rebuke followed a call by Chinese President Xi Jinping for his country to show a softer face abroad and cultivate a "reliable, admirable and respectable image."

China's foreign ministry routinely decries foreign politicians for not toeing Beijing's line over issues from Taiwan to investigating the cause of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A currently derelict plot in Budapest is set to house the Fudan campus in a half-million-square-metre (five-million-square-foot) complex by 2024, according to a deal signed

"We heard the announcement over the radio and newspapers," said Esther Muinjangué, former head of the Ovaherero Genocide Foundation. "It was never discussed with us," said Muinjangué, who is also deputy health minister, criticising Germany for not directly compensating affected groups.

### Slaughter

German imperial troops descended on Herero and Nama people after they rebelled against colonial rule. In August 1904, soldiers chased around 80,000 Herero into what is now known as the Kalahari Desert, slaughtering their captives. Months later, the German military commander, general Lothar von Trotha, ordered troops to exterminate both groups. At least 60,000 Herero and around 10,000 Nama were killed. Thousands more were sent to deadly concentration camps.

Descendants of the victims want Germany held accountable for the ripple effects of the genocide, which uprooted communities and destroyed livelihoods. "When I drive back to my village I drive through hectares of commercial farms (no longer) owned by Herero people," said Hei, noting longstanding "income disparities" between the Nama, the Herero and the rest of Namibians.

Nama activist Sima Goeieman said the agreement was "disrespectful" and "dug the knife deeper" into historical wounds.



**BERLIN:** File photo shows German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas gives press conference on May 28, 2021 in Berlin. Germany for the first time recognised it had committed genocide in Namibia during its colonial occupation. —AFP

"Social projects are not going to do anything about the trauma," she said. "You want to tell me that 1.1 billion (euros) in development aid is a way of showing remorse?"

Muinjangué, an opposition politician whose grandfather was the result of a rape by a German soldier, questioned the settlement. "How did they quantify the loss of lives, the loss of cattle and land?" she asked. —AFP



**BUDAPEST:** Mayor of Budapest Gergely Karacsony gives a press conference about the renamed streets in 9th district, Ferencváros, close to a territory of the planned Chinese Fudan University campus in Budapest, Hungary. —AFP

between Hungary and the Shanghai-based university's president.

But Budapest's mayor Gergely Karacsony said Wednesday that "we don't want the elite and private Fudan university here at the expense of Hungarian taxpayers." The liberal mayor has previously blasted "Chinese influence-buying" in Hungary and urged Prime Minister Viktor Orban to honour a previous pledge not to force projects on the capital against its will.

Opinion polls show a majority of Budapest residents oppose the plan. The government argues that a prestigious outpost of Fudan University, ranked 100th in the Shanghai Ranking, would permit thousands of Hungarian, Chinese and other international students to acquire high-quality diplomas.

Meanwhile, Beijing is keen to maintain its presence in Hungary, the only EU country to use Chinese coronavirus jabs. Wang said relations between the two countries "enjoy a strong momentum development" and have "yielded fruitful results". —AFP

## UN 'concerned' over detention of Rohingya who fled Bangladesh

**DHAKA:** The United Nations refugee agency said it was concerned by reports that Bangladeshi police had arrested Rohingya refugees fleeing a controversial island camp and that others were hurt in a protest about conditions there. Bangladesh has shifted 18,000 refugees out of a planned 100,000 to the low-lying silt island of Bhashan Char from squalid, cramped settlements on the mainland where 850,000 of them live.

With some of the Rohingya saying they were coerced into being relocated and that conditions on the island are poor, in recent weeks 59 of them were arrested after escaping. The UNHCR said in a statement on Wednesday after a four-day visit to Bangladesh that it "remains concerned about reports of refugees being arrested and detained for attempting to leave Bhashan Char".

While the UNHCR inspected the island on Monday, several thousand Rohingya held a protest against conditions there, with some throwing rocks and smashing windows, police said. The UNHCR said it was "deeply concerned to learn of reports of refugees who were injured" during the demonstrations.

It added that those on the island, which critics say is vulnerable to the cyclones that hit the region, needed "access to meaningful livelihoods opportunities, skills development, education, health and access to cash to facilitate their daily lives".

It added that it "strongly discourages the use of relocation (from the mainland camps) to Bhashan Char as a punitive measure", something which Bangladesh denies doing. —AFP

## International

# 6 asylum seekers illegally housed at a UK ex-military camp: Court

## Danish MPs agree to send asylum seekers outside Europe

**LONDON:** The British government acted unlawfully in its treatment of six asylum seekers housed at a former military camp that failed to meet minimum standards, a judge ruled yesterday. The interior ministry controversially began hosting hundreds of asylum seekers in Napier Barracks, in Kent in southeast England, last September, despite health officials warning it was unsuitable.

Conditions at the former army site were described by asylum seekers' lawyers as "squalid", and almost 200 people tested positive for coronavirus during an outbreak there earlier this year. Six men, all said to be survivors of torture and/or human trafficking, sued the government, claiming that using the camp breached their human rights and could amount to false imprisonment.

Following a two-day hearing in April, High Court judge Thomas Linden ruled in their favor, concluding that ministry claims that the site was adequate were "irrational". "I do not accept that the accommodation there ensured a standard of living which was adequate for the health of the claimants," he stated in his decision, citing COVID-19, fire safety and other issues.

Linden declined to rule that the barracks could never be used to house asylum seekers and limited his findings to the conditions the six men specifically faced. However, he noted: "If the barracks are to continue to be used, there clearly need to be substantial improvements in the conditions there."

A spokesman for Britain's interior ministry, the Home Office, said it would "carefully consider the ruling and our next steps", but that Napier will continue to operate.

The site was used "at extremely short notice" as the pandemic hit

Britain, "to ensure asylum seekers were not left destitute", he added. "It is disappointing that this judgment was reached on the basis of the site prior to the significant improvement works which have taken place in difficult circumstances."

The Home Office and the six men must now try to agree on damages. The court ruling comes as the number of asylum seekers and economic migrants trying to reach Britain by sailing across the Channel continues to increase. The number of people crossing the 21-mile (34-kilometre) stretch of water has almost doubled so far in 2021, with more than 3,100 reaching the English coast in the first five months of the year.

Meanwhile, Denmark's parliament yesterday adopted a law enabling it to open asylum reception centers outside Europe where applicants would live while their case is processed, with the host country also taking them in if granted asylum. Known for having one of Europe's harshest stances on immigration, the wealthy Scandinavian country aims to deter migrants from coming to Denmark at all.

Despite criticism from humanitarian organizations and some leftwing parties, the bill, proposed by Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen's Social Democrats, was adopted by 70 votes to 24.

Under the law, asylum seekers would have to submit an application in person at the Danish border and then be flown to an asylum center outside Europe while their application is being processed by the host country. If the application is approved and the person is granted refugee status, he or she would be given the right to live in the host country, but not in Denmark.

If it is rejected, the migrant would have to leave the host country. No country has agreed to collaborate with Denmark yet, but the gov-



Former residents of Napier Barracks in Kent claimed that their conditions were "inhumane," and that some even attempted suicide. —AFP

ernment says it is in talks with five to 10 countries, without identifying them. Danish media have mentioned Egypt, Eritrea and Ethiopia as possibilities.

Denmark is meanwhile known to be in talks with Rwanda. The two have signed a memorandum of understanding on asylum and migration cooperation, though the document doesn't specifically cover external asylum processing. —AFP

## Macron sees hard choices, refuses to confirm re-election bid

**MARTEL, France:** French President Emmanuel Macron said yesterday that he planned to make "difficult" decisions this summer and again refused to confirm he will seek another five-year term in what is expected to be a hotly contested election next year.

"I can't manage this summer taking it easy," Macron told a group of pensioners in the southern French village of Martel as part of a nationwide tour. "I'm going to have to make some choices, some of them difficult," adding that some could thwart a re-election bid by the 43-year-old centrist whose 2017 victory upended France's political establishment.

"It's too early to say," he answered when asked if he would run, while insisting he remains determined to "carry things out until the end." The president has repeatedly held his cards close to his chest about the 2022 election, even as rivals including far-right leader Marine Le Pen and right-wing heavyweight Xavier Bertrand have announced their candidatures.

Other right-wingers, including former Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier and ex-premier Edouard Philippe could yet enter the fray before the campaign begins in earnest. It would be a major sensation if Macron did not run and his popularity in polls—while not stellar—is respectable compared to predecessors. —AFP

## Crucial test for Merkel's party in regional vote

**BERLIN:** Angela Merkel's conservatives could face a far-right upset at key state polls on Sunday, the last big test of Germany's political mood before the first general election in 16 years not to feature the veteran chancellor. Surveys have the extreme-right AfD neck-and-neck with Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in the eastern state of Saxony-Anhalt, with a recent poll by the Bild daily even predicting the anti-immigration party will for the first time win a regional vote.

Victory for the AfD would be a devastating blow for the conservatives just four months ahead of Germany's national election on September 26, and could further weaken the already fragile standing of Merkel's would-be successor Armin Laschet. "The CDU is in a relatively weak position in the polls, as is Laschet," said political scientist Hajo Funke of Berlin's Free University.

"If it turns out that the AfD is slightly stronger than the CDU on Sunday, then there could be debates about personnel in the CDU, and thus a weakening of the entire situation of the CDU," Funke said.

Merkel's party has been a dominant force in Saxony-Anhalt for decades, topping all but one edition of state elections there since reunification in 1990. In 2016, the CDU scooped 30 percent, forming a coalition with the Social Democrats (SPD) and Greens. The AfD won 24 percent.

But the conservatives have taken a hammering in the polls as Merkel prepares to bow out, hurt by anger over the government's pandemic management and a corruption scandal involving shady coronavirus mask contracts. They are also reeling from a very public tug of war for the post of chancellor candidate between CDU chief Laschet and Markus Soeder, head of the smaller Bavarian sister party CSU. Laschet,



BERLIN: German Chancellor Angela Merkel chats with German Labour Minister Hubertus Heil prior to the weekly cabinet meeting in Berlin Wednesday. —AFP

who prevailed in that battle but has since suffered dismal public approval ratings, faces his first real test in Sunday's election.

### 'Rude awakening'

Even if the AfD wins the vote in Saxony-Anhalt, the party will not be able to govern as all the other parties have ruled out forming an alliance with it. But a win for the far-right party would still be a "rude awakening" for the CDU, as Laschet put it during an appearance on the campaign trail in Magdeburg last week. Although support nationally has stagnated at around 10 to 12 percent for the AfD in recent months, in Saxony-Anhalt—as in other former East German states—the party has long had a strong base of support.

Its recent move to style itself as the party bashing Merkel's tough shutdown measures during the pandemic has also cemented its reputation as the anti-establishment party, attracting support beyond its core base of anti-immigration voters.—AFP

## International

# Malian strongman Goita meets former Tuareg rebels amid crisis

**BAMAKO:** Malian strongman Colonel Assimi Goita met former Tuareg rebels on Wednesday, officials said, amid political uncertainty after the second coup in nine months in the fragile Sahel state. Goita last week deposed the leaders of a transitional government who were themselves installed after a coup in August which toppled Mali's elected president, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita.

The colonel had also led young army officers in ousting Keita, following mass protests over perceived corruption and his failure to quell a bloody jihadist insurgency. The political chaos has stoked fears about the future of a shaky 2015 peace accord, however, which some see as a key element in breaking Mali's cycle of violence. Mali was plunged into conflict in 2012 when local Tuareg separatists, supported by jihadists, revolted in the north of the country.

Islamist violence has since spread to central Mali and neighboring Burkina Faso and Niger. But in talks brokered in Algiers in 2015, several rebel groups, including ex-separatists, inked a peace deal with Mali's central government in a bid to stop the fighting. Implementing this deal is viewed by many as one of the few long-term solutions to the conflict, but it has never been fully implemented.

Goita met late Wednesday a delegation from the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA), according to an aide of the colonel's and officials from the group. The CMA is a mostly ethnic Tuareg alliance that rose up against the central government in 2012 but signed the 2015 accord.

"The CMA was reassured about its concerns and reiterated its availability to support the transition," an official from the group said after the meeting. Opposition figure Choguel Maiga, who is tipped to become prime minister but is known for his opposition to the 2015 peace accord, was also present. An aide to Goita, who also declined to be named, said that "peace, security and reconciliation" were discussed at the meeting.

Meanwhile, the African Union announced it was suspending Mali with immediate effect and threatened the impoverished country with sanctions, after a second military coup in nine months. The putsch has sparked deep concerns over stability in the volatile Sahel region and warnings of economic penalties from across the international community.

The AU "decides... to immediately suspend the Republic of Mali from participation in all activities of the African Union, its organs and institutions, until normal constitutional order has been restored in the country", the body's Peace and Security Council said in a statement late Tuesday. The move follows a similar suspension on Sunday from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

In its statement, the AU called for the military to "urgently and unconditionally return to the barracks, and to refrain from further interference in the political processes in Mali".

It warned that if the military did not hand back power to civilian transitional leaders, "the Council will not hesitate to impose targeted



**ACCRA:** President of Mali's transitional government Colonel Assimi Goita waves from his vehicle as he returns from Accra where he met the ECOWAS (The Economic Community of West African States) representatives. —AFP

sanctions and other punitive measures".

Condemning the coup "in the strongest terms possible", it added it was "deeply con-

cerned about the evolving situation in Mali and its negative impact on the gains made thus far in the transition process in the country". —AFP

## Pirates seize 4 Koreans, 1 Filipino crew off Benin

**ACCRA:** Pirates kidnapped four Koreans and one Filipino crew member from a tuna-fishing vessel close to Benin in the Gulf of Guinea earlier this week, Ghanaian police said. The Gulf of Guinea, a key shipping route extending from Senegal to Angola, accounted for the vast majority of maritime crew abductions last year, with pirates targeting commercial vessels.

The Ghana-registered boat was attacked on Monday although the Ghana navy recovered the vessel and rescued some crew members, Felix Charles Asare, crime officer for the Marine Police Unit told AFP late on Wednesday. "Efforts are under way to rescue the abducted crew members," he said.

"Information we've gathered from the crew members indicate that the pirates took away five other members made up of four Koreans and a Filipino." He said Ghana's navy had been on the alert in the country's territorial waters as pirates intensified attacks. Armed pirates kidnapped five other seamen two weeks ago, stealing valuables after holding the crew for six hours before releasing them, he said.



**ACCRA:** A tug boat manoeuvres in the Autonomous Port of Cotonou in Benin. —AFP

Major international shipping and maritime companies last month called for a coalition to combat piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, including signatories from Europe, Japan, China and India. Several EU nations often have naval vessels in the area, but pirate gangs, mostly Nigerians, are increasingly attacking beyond Nigeria's coastal waters, where they know ships are more vulnerable.

The Gulf of Guinea accounted for more than 95 percent of global maritime kidnappings last year — 130 out of 135 cases, according to the International Maritime Bureau, which monitors security at sea. —AFP

## 11 dead in fresh violence in eastern DR Congo

**BUNIA, DR Congo:** At least 11 people were killed by an armed group in eastern DR Congo, sources said yesterday, bringing the troubled region's death toll to at least 70 since the start of the week, according to an AFP tally. Eleven miners in the gold-rich territory of Djugu, in the northeastern province of Ituri, were killed early Wednesday by a local group called the FPIC, Mungwalu district mayor Jean-Pierre Pikilisende told AFP.

The Kivu Security Tracker (KST), a respected NGO that monitors violence in eastern DR Congo, said 12 people had been executed. Pikilisende said the militia had come to take control over the area, whose gold is mined by poor artisanal diggers.

Ituri and neighboring North Kivu province have been placed under a "state of siege"—a government attempt to stem escalating violence by replacing civilian officials with senior army or police officers.

Fifty-three people were killed overnight Sunday in two Ituri villages, in the region's

worst one-day massacre in recent history, sources there told an AFP correspondent.

The journalist said 21 died in Tshabi and another 32 in Boga, where a camp for displaced people was targeted. Eighty-four shacks in the camp were torched, as were eight stores in nearby Boga, the reporter saw. Fifteen homes were burned in Tshabi.

A number of villagers, including at least four women, were kidnapped. The identity of the attackers remains unclear, as the massacres took place in an area notorious for ethnic tension and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), an armed group that has been linked to the so-called Islamic State.

The ADF has the bloodiest reputation of the estimated 122 armed groups that roam eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), many of them a legacy of wars more than a quarter-century ago. Five other people were killed early Tuesday, and several others, including children, are missing.

On Wednesday, an old man was beheaded in the village of Bulire, near Boga, and two people went missing, a local administrative official said. As of Friday, the KST estimated that at least 1,228 civilians have been killed in Beni territory of North Kivu alone since November 2019, when DRC's armed forces launched a crackdown, splintering the ADF into smaller groups. —AFP

## International

# Ethnic killings cloud central Ethiopia's election buildup

## Insecurity and logistical challenges will make voting impossible

**ATAYE:** As gunfire crackled outside, Genet Webea huddled with her husband and seven-year-old daughter, praying they would be spared in the latest bout of ethnic strife to rock central Ethiopia. But that morning in April, around a dozen gunmen broke down the front door and, ignoring Genet's pleas for mercy, fatally shot her husband in the chest and stomach.

He was one of more than 100 civilians to die in a recent flare-up of violence in the town of Ataye that also saw the assailants torch more than 1,500 buildings, leaving once-bustling streets lined with charred and twisted metal. The destruction continues a pattern of unrest that has blighted the tenure of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, winner of the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize, and now threatens to disrupt elections in which he'll seek a new term.

Ethiopia's polls are scheduled for June 21, but officials say insecurity and logistical challenges make voting impossible—at least for now—in at least 26 constituencies across the country. That includes Ataye, where Abiy's vision of unity for Ethiopia's diverse population of 110 million can seem like a distant dream. Since Abiy became prime minister in 2018, the town has endured at least six rounds of ethnic killings, and ties between members of the country's two largest groups, the Oromos and Amharas, have visibly

frayed, said mayor Agagenew Mekete.

Genet, an ethnic Amhara, told AFP that since the April attack she blanches when she hears the language of her husband's ethnic Oromo killers, saying it conjures the painful image of him bleeding out on their kitchen floor. "I don't want to see or hear them," she told AFP.

### 'It was a war'

A lowland farming town 270 kilometres (167 miles) northeast of Addis Ababa, Ataye's population of 70,000 is majority Amhara, but it borders Oromo settlements in three directions. For Agagenew, the mayor, the relentless violence reflects tensions over lush land used to grow wheat, sorghum and maize.

Ethiopia is Africa's second most-populous country, with different ethnic groups living cheek by jowl in some areas, straining ties as they jostle for land and resources. In recent years tensions have worsened in parts of the country, leading to deadly violence and displacing millions.

Abiy took office vowing to put an end to the government's iron-fisted rule, yet this has created space for violent ethno-nationalists to wreak havoc, Agagenew said. "There has been a looseness after Abiy came to office, in the name of widening the democracy," he said.



**DEBRE BERHAN:** Internally displaced people sit outside of the temporary shelter where they live, in Debre Berhan, Ethiopia, on May 14, 2021. More than 100 civilians died in a recent flare-up of violence in the town of Ataye that also saw the assailants torch more than 1,500 buildings. —AFP

"There is looseness in enforcing the rule of law." Like Genet, he blames the killings partly on the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), a rebel group that lawmakers last month designated a

terrorist organisation. But the OLA denies any presence in the area and says officials falsely invoke the rebels to justify "ethnic cleansing" against ordinary Oromos. —AFP

## Nigeria state in talks to free abducted children

**KANO:** A Nigerian state government said it was negotiating with gunmen who seized 136 children from an Islamic seminary at the weekend, the latest in a string of mass kidnappings in the country. Criminal gangs have often targeted schools in remote areas, where pupils live in dormitories with little security protection, before hauling their victims into nearby forests to negotiate ransoms.

Police said gunmen attacked Tegin town in Niger state on Sunday, arriving on motorbikes and shooting indiscriminately. Niger state police said the criminals killed one resident, injured another before kidnapping children from the Salihu Tanko Islamic school. "We are in touch with the kidnapers to find a way to secure the release of the children. We are negotiating to see how we can arrive at an agreement," deputy governor Ahmed Mohammed Ketso told reporters on Wednesday.

"We are also in contact with the parents. We call on them to be patient, government is making all efforts to secure the release of the children." Ketso also confirmed 136 students had been taken. President Muhammadu Buhari has ordered security forces and intelligence agencies to step up efforts to rescue the children. Buhari "condemned as unfortunate" the kidnapping of children, according to a statement from his spokesman Garba Shehu, and urged all those involved in the rescue operation to do their utmost in securing their immediate release.

The attackers did release 11 of the pupils who were "too



**ANKA:** File photo taken on December, 2019 shows a general ward at the Anka General Hospital where Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) is providing medical assistance to children and women in Anka, near Gusau. — AFP

small and couldn't walk" very far, the authorities previously said. Niger's deputy governor said the government did not pay ransoms, adding that security agencies were "being careful in the pursuit of bandits to avoid collateral damage." Relatives of the kidnapped schoolchildren appealed to the government to help free them.

"My appeal to the government is that they should try to protect our people first and our children first," Sa'idu Umar, whose child was among those abducted, told AFP. "We are hoping that they are going to try harder to bring back our children successfully." Mothers and other relatives crouched, weeping and waiting for the missing children outside the school on Tuesday. — AFP

## MSF warns of humanitarian crisis in Northwest Nigeria

**ABUJA:** Rising violence in northwest Nigeria's Zamfara state is stoking a humanitarian crisis, Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said yesterday. The region has struggled with decades-long communal clashes over resources but more recently some groups have become more violent, looting, stealing and kidnapping for ransom, and people are fleeing to areas where aid groups are struggling to respond.

In a statement, MSF said it had already treated 10,300 children in Zamfara between January and April for severe acute malnutrition, measles, malaria and other conditions. "This is 54 percent higher than in the same period last year," said an MSF doctor, Godwin Emudano. "People here need food, safe water and vaccinations now," said Emudano.

"Families tell us they won't be able to farm for the new season, which means a new cycle of hunger." Nearly 700,000 people were internally displaced in northwest and north central Nigeria in February, including more than 124,000 in Zamfara alone, according to the UN's migration agency IOM. The authorities are struggling to respond in a region that has already recorded the highest poverty rate in Nigeria, the International Crisis Group (ICG) think tank said in a report.

"As of 2019, all seven states in the zone had poverty levels above the national average... Millions lack access to basic health care and clean water, and immunisation coverage is far below national goals," it said. In Zamfara state, criminal gangs known locally as bandits have set up camps in Rugu forest, which they use as a springboard for attacks in neighbouring Kaduna, Katsina, Sokoto, Kebbi and Niger states. Security forces, who are also battling a more than decade-long jihadist insurgency in the northeast of the country, are being stretched thin. — AFP



## International

# India submerges unclaimed ashes of 1,200 COVID dead in farewell ritual

## Some are too poor to carry out the rituals

**BANGALORE:** Wrapped in white cloth and marked only by numbered stickers, dozens of clay pots lay unclaimed at the Sumanahalli crematorium in the suburbs of Bangalore, where the ashes of India's COVID dead have been piling up.

The urns were then transported for a mass riverside immersion ritual with the rest of the southeastern city's uncollected ashes on Wednesday—a total of 1,200 unaccounted virus victims. The Hindu ceremony on the banks of the Cauvery River in the southern state of Karnataka comes as India battles a vicious second wave of infections that has killed 160,000 people in eight weeks, overwhelming the country's healthcare system and crematoriums.

In Hinduism, it is believed that immersing or scattering the ashes in the flowing waters of a river considered to be sacred liberates the soul of the deceased. But families have failed to come forward for hundreds of their relatives' ashes in Bangalore.

Some are too poor to carry out the rituals and others are scared of catching the virus

at packed crematoriums where the pyres are burning without pause, workers say. "In a family, two to three members might have succumbed to corona and some people fear contracting the infection so they don't want to take (the ashes)," Kiran Kumar, a contractor at Bangalore's T.R. Mills Crematorium, tells AFP.

That forced authorities anxious to dispose of the piling remains to take matters into their own hands, organising a ceremony led by Hindu priests and Karnataka state official R. Ashoka in Belakavadi village, located around 125 kilometres from Bangalore. Before their immersion, the ashes were laid on a riverside platform, the clay pots sprinkled with red flowers and surrounded by garlands of yellow marigolds.

Ashoka, the state's revenue minister, dipped the first set of unclaimed ashes in the river. Municipal workers placed the rest in a coracle, a small lightweight boat, and submerged the pots, in some cases without the knowledge of the grieving families who failed to collect them. —AFP



**BANGALORE:** Hindu priests perform the last rites for over 560 unclaimed clay urns containing ashes of people who died due to COVID-19 on the banks of Cauvery River before a mass immersion ritual organized by the government of Karnataka. — AFP

## Sri Lankan officials brace for oil spill from sinking ship

**COLOMBO:** Sri Lankan authorities said yesterday they are preparing for the worst-case scenario of a possible oil leak from the burnt-out cargo ship sinking off Colombo's main harbour. The Marine Environment Protection Authority readied oil dispersants, booms and skimmers in case of a leak from the MV X-Press Pearl, which has nearly 350 tonnes of oil in its fuel tanks. The vessel, which burned for 13 days within sight of the island's west coast, has already caused the country's worst maritime environmental disaster, littering beaches with huge volumes of tiny plastic pellets.

But now that it is sinking, officials fear an even greater ecological crisis if the ship's oil leaks into the Indian Ocean. The bow of the vessel and the bridge are above the waterline while the stern is submerged. "There is no oil leak from the ship yet, but arrangements are in place to deal with a possible spill which is the worst-case scenario," navy spokesperson Indika de Silva told AFP.

An Indian coast guard vessel already in the area has equipment to deal with an oil slick before it can reach the shore, according to the Sri Lankan navy, which has requested additional assistance. The Singaporean operators of the MV X-Press Pearl said the vessel was continuing to slowly sink after efforts to tow it farther from the coast on Wednesday failed.

"X-Press Feeders... can confirm that the ship's aft portion is sitting on the seabed at a depth of about 21 metres (69 feet), and the forward section is settling down slowly," the company said in a statement yesterday. Sri Lanka's private Centre for Environmental Justice (CEJ) said it feared heavy metal pollution in addition to an oil spill from the Singapore-registered vessel, which was carrying 81 containers of "dangerous cargo" including acids and lead ingots.

"There is a chemical soup in that sea area," the CEJ's executive director Hemantha Withanage told AFP. "The damage to the marine ecosystem is incalculable." However, he said the silver lining was that 24 hours after the vessel's engine room submerged there was no visible sign of the oil leaking. And Sri Lanka's navy confirmed that there was no visible bunker oil leak although there was a thin patch of oil on the water, probably from the sludge of burnt lubricants carried as cargo on board. Some oil was spotted near the beaches of Negombo, about 40 kilometres from Colombo.

The inundation of microplastic granules from the ship's containers has already forced a fishing ban and prompted concern for the environment. "The ban is affecting 4,300 families in my village," said Denzil Fernando, the head of the Sea Street Fisherman's Association in Negombo. "Most people live on one meal a day, how long can we go on like this?" Fernando told AFP. "Either the government must allow us to fish or give us compensation." Officials believe the blaze destroyed most of the nearly 1,500 containers on board while some fell overboard. — AFP

## Afghan translators fear being left behind

**KABUL:** With just weeks to go until US and NATO troops complete their withdrawal from Afghanistan, translators who worked for foreign forces tell AFP they are desperate to leave the country. Embassies have issued thousands of visas to Afghan interpreters and their immediate families, but many have had their applications declined — some for reasons they say were never fully explained. Here are some of their voices:

### 'The Taliban will not pardon us'

"When an imam is not safe in a mosque or a 10-year-old girl is not safe in her school... how can we be safe?" asks Omid Mahmoodi, an interpreter attached to US forces between 2018 and 2020. His work in Kabul and the southern Taleban bastion of Kandahar ended after he failed a routine polygraph test and he has since been refused a US visa. Even though scientists agree there is little evidence lie-detector tests are reliably accurate, they are still used by the United States — particularly when hiring people in sensitive roles.

Campaigners say those who have been dismissed by foreign forces deserve to have their visa cases reconsidered, as the Taleban will treat them all as collaborators. "They are tracking us," Mahmoodi told AFP. "The Taleban will not pardon us. They will kill us and they will behead us."

### 'Biggest mistake of my life'

Omar fears that without leaving the country, he will not evade the Taleban for long. He worked for

the US embassy for around 10 years, but his contract was terminated after he also failed a polygraph test. "I regret working for the US. It was the biggest mistake of my life," said Omar, who asked AFP not to use his full name. While dozens of interpreters have been killed and tortured over the past two decades by militants, threats also come from even closer to home.

"My own uncle and cousins call me an agent of America," Omar said. "The French army has betrayed us". At a protest in Kabul last week, 32-year-old Waheedullah Hanifi said French officials turned down his bid for asylum after telling him they did not believe he was in danger, and he has not heard the outcome of an appeal filed in 2019. He worked with the French military between 2010 and 2012, when Paris pulled out its combat troops. "We were the voice... for the French troops in Afghanistan and now they have left us to the Taliban," said the father of two. He is now terrified about being hunted down. "If I stay in the country, there is no chance of survival for me. The French army has betrayed us."

### 'Shoulder to shoulder with the British army'

For those who have been given passage out of Afghanistan, the fight to protect loved ones left behind continues. Jamal, 29, an interpreter for British forces, was shot twice during operations before being granted residency in Britain in 2015 where he settled in Coventry. Six years later, his wife has only just been given clearance by the Ministry of Defence to join him. His father, who worked as a groundskeeper on a British military base, remains in Lashkar Gah, the scene of intense fighting between the Taleban and government forces in recent months. "When you've worked for the British army, when you've stood shoulder to shoulder with the British army, you expect something," Jamal said. — AFP

## International

# Hong Kongers get creative as authorities ban Tiananmen vigil

## Hong Kongers are getting creative

**HONG KONG:** Hong Kongers are seeking innovative ways to commemorate the victims of China's deadly Tiananmen Square crackdown after authorities banned an annual vigil and vowed to stamp out any protests come Friday's anniversary.

Discussion of tanks and troops quelling peaceful democracy protesters in Beijing on June 4, 1989 is all but forbidden in the mainland and there is heavy censorship of the images from the crackdown so well known in the rest of the world. But in semi-autonomous Hong Kong the date has been remembered with huge candlelight vigils in Victoria Park for the last three decades.

Last year's vigil was banned for the first time because of the coronavirus, but thousands defied police and rallied anyway. Much has changed in Hong Kong over the last year as authorities seek to snuff out the city's pro-democracy movement using a sweeping national security law that criminalises much dissent.

This year's vigil has been banned again, ostensibly because of the coronavirus-although Hong Kong has not recorded an unexplained locally transmitted case in more than a month. Officials have also warned that the security law could be wielded against Tiananmen mourners.

So Hong Kongers are getting creative. Local artist Kacey Wong has collected hundreds of spent candle stubs from previous vigils and plans to give them to residents tonight. "It is time to redistribute them to the people of Hong Kong

so they can collect them, preserve them and put them in a safe place," Wong told AFP. Wong has previously turned the candles into artworks but will give them away this year at two stores of local clothing brand Chickeeduck, which sells pro-democracy merchandise.

"Each burned candle contains a person's mourning towards those who sacrificed themselves in pursuit of democracy, as well as one's longing for democracy, a mix of complex emotions," explained Wong. "It's a testimony of hope... I hope they can continue to shine the way towards freedom and democracy."

### Zero tolerance

During last year's vigil, police took a back seat once crowds massed and then dispersed peacefully in Victoria Park-although they later arrested ringleaders, some of whom have since been jailed. Authorities appear to be taking a more proactive approach this year. Police say they plan to have about 3,000 officers on standby and will stop crowds before they gather in the park, which is now overlooked by a new unit of Chinese mainland security agents based in a luxury hotel.

Hong Kong's Security Bureau has warned that attending an unlawful protest can carry five years in jail, and one year for those who publicise rallies. Pro-Beijing figures say popular slogans shouted at the Tiananmen vigils such as "End one-party rule" and "Bring democracy to China"



**HONG KONG:** File photo taken on June 4, 2020 shows activists holding a candlelit remembrance at Victoria Park in Hong Kong, after an annual vigil that traditionally takes place in the park to mark the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown was banned on public health grounds because of the COVID-19 pandemic. — AFP

are now illegal.

Security Minister John Lee has said the security law will be used against anyone who "organises, plans or carries out any illegal means to damage or overthrow the fundamental system under the Chinese constitution". On Tuesday, hygiene inspectors visited a newly reopened Tiananmen museum that is run by the same group organising the annual vigil. The inspectors

said the venue was operating without the required licences and the museum closed its doors the following day. But activists say authorities will struggle to eliminate all acts of commemoration in a city that still seethes with resentment towards Beijing after 2019's huge and often violent democracy protests were stamped out. Historically, the Tiananmen vigil candles are lit at 8.09 pm-representing 1989. — AFP

## Missing Thai activist's sister vows to keep searching

**BANGKOK:** From the moment he was dragged into a car in broad daylight on the streets of Phnom Penh on June 4 last year, nothing has been seen or heard of Thai activist Wanchalearm Satsaksit. Thai and Cambodian police insist they are investigating, but with the probe into his apparent abduction going nowhere, his sister Sitanun has vowed to pursue the truth "to the last".

Rights campaigners say the case sends a chilling signal of Thailand's willingness to pursue political dissidents beyond its borders. Wanchalearm, aged 37 at the time of his disappearance, was wanted by Thai police for running an acerbic anti-government Facebook page and for posting satirical videos criticising Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha.

Sitanun's frustration at the lack of help she has had from the Thai authorities has not dimmed her determination to find out what happened to her brother.

"If Wanchalearm's case was like other cases, where relatives of the victims did not come out to demand (justice) or pursue the case, I think nothing would materialise," she said. "But in my case, I will not let this go." In December she travelled to Cambodia to present evidence to a Phnom Penh court and press for a serious investigation.

### Stalled probe

Wanchalearm was living in self-imposed exile in Phnom Penh, having fled Thailand in the wake of the 2014 coup led by Prayut, the army chief at the time and now prime minister. He was wanted for sedition and for breaching Thailand's Computer Crimes Act, broad legislation which rights groups say is abused to silence critics. Cambodian police say they have made no progress in the case and having refused initially to even launch an investigation-still cast doubt on the idea Wanchalearm was abducted. "We don't have any new information so far. We are trying our best to collect any clues to confirm whether or not such a case happened in Cambodia," Chhay Kim Khoeun, Cambodian National Police spokesman, told AFP.

And he refused to set a timeframe for the investigation to be completed. Korrawat Panprapakorn, director-general of Thailand's Department of Special Investigation, which handles complex and sensitive cases, told local media his team was investigating. But he said that the onus was on the Cambodian authorities to lead the probe, as the incident took place on their territory.

### 'I can't breathe'

Sitanun was speaking to Wanchalearm on the phone as he was bundled into a black SUV by armed assailants on June 4 last year. She heard him shouting "I can't breathe" and muffled noises before the line was cut off 30 agonising minutes later. His disappearance became a rallying point for a youth-led pro-democracy movement in Thailand, which at its peak drew tens of thousands to the streets last year.

The movement demanded Prayut's resignation and changes to the kingdom's military-drafted constitution. Human Rights Watch



**BANGKOK:** File photo taken on August 11, 2020, Sitanun Satsaksit, sister of missing activist Wanchalearm Satsaksit, addresses the media after marking her brother's 38th birthday in front of the Cambodian Embassy in Bangkok. — AFP

says the Thai and Cambodian authorities have been reluctant to investigate a "hideous crime that happened in broad daylight". "The absence of justice for exiled Thai dissidents sends a spine-chilling message that no one is safe and they can end up like Wanchalearm," senior researcher Sunai Phasuk told AFP.

Two bodies with concrete blocks stuffed in their stomachs were found on the Thai side of the Mekong River in late December 2018. The pair were identified after DNA tests as Kraidej Luelert and Chatchan Buphawan, Thai political dissidents living in Laos. At least nine pro-democracy activists living in exile have disappeared in recent years, according to Human Rights Watch. — AFP

# Friday Times Lifestyle

FRIDAY, JUNE 4, 2021

www.kuwaittimes.net



Lets Make  
COVID FREE INDIA

Art teacher Sagar Kambli paints umbrellas with COVID-19 coronavirus vaccination themes to spread awareness about vaccination, at his art school in Mumbai yesterday. —AFP



COVID-19  
Vaccine

**Iraq's last gas bottle delivery  
crooner dreams of stardom**

See Page 23



In this picture members of the Indonesian heavy metal band Voice of Baceprot (VOB), guitarist and vocalist Firda Marsya Kurnia (left), drummer Euis Siti Aisah (center) and bassist Widi Rahmawati (right) pose for photos after a practice session in Jakarta. — AFP photos



Members of the Indonesian heavy metal band Voice of Baceprot (VOB), drummer Euis Siti Aisah (left) and bassist Widi Rahmawati (right) perform during a practice session in Jakarta.

## INDONESIA'S HIJAB HEADBANGERS TRADE VILLAGE LIFE FOR METAL HEAVEN

Indonesia's hijab-wearing, headbanging VOB count some of rock music's biggest stars among their fans, but the all-female heavy metal band faced a tougher battle in winning over their parents. The diminutive trio behind Voice of Baceprot ("Noisy Voice" in English) have spent years honing their skills at music festivals around the world's biggest Muslim majority nation after forming VOB as young teens in 2014. It is a long way from the conservative town in West Java province where they grew up, shrugging off a hostile reaction from neighbours and family members to pursue their passion. "Because of metal music, I have the courage to speak my mind and the confidence to be different," 19-year-old bassist Widi Rahmawati told AFP during a recent jam session.

"When I'm on stage, I can express myself without worrying about the norms that people expect from me". Obeying those norms would have compelled the three women to marry right after high school. "My parents told me that reading was useless, let alone playing music," said the band's bespectacled singer and lead guitarist Firda Marsya Kurnia, 20. "They said that once I got married, my future husband wouldn't tell me to read books, but to cook or clean the house instead." The trio's stubborn determination eventually won over their skeptical parents and they moved to the capital Jakarta last year to hone their talents. "Music is a place for us to gain happiness and share that with other people," Kurnia said. "We're just grateful if the audience gets something, like a message, from our music."



Members of the Indonesian heavy metal band Voice of Baceprot (VOB), guitarist and vocalist Firda Marsya Kurnia (left), drummer Euis Siti Aisah (center) and bassist Widi Rahmawati (right) chat before a practice session in Jakarta.



Members of the Indonesian heavy metal band Voice of Baceprot (VOB), guitarist and vocalist Firda Marsya Kurnia (left), drummer Euis Siti Aisah (center) and bassist Widi Rahmawati (right) during a practice session in Jakarta.



Members of the Indonesian heavy metal band Voice of Baceprot (VOB) chat before a practice session in Jakarta.



Members of the Indonesian heavy metal band Voice of Baceprot (VOB), guitarist and vocalist Firda Marsya Kurnia (left), drummer Euis Siti Aisah (center) and bassist Widi Rahmawati (right) perform during a practice session in Jakarta.

### 'Tough ladies'

The move to the big city comes after their popular 2018 single "School Revolution", which took aim at Indonesia's strict education system. Much of their songwriting these days now focuses on the role of women and environmental issues. VOB's critiques of conservative social values resonate across borders and could win them a bigger international audience, said music expert Yuka Dian Narendra. "The band are a reflection of mainstream Muslim girls in Indonesia," he added. VOB first attracted international attention when online videos of them pumping out song covers caught the eyes of Nirvana bassist Krist Novoselic, Flea from Red Hot Chili Peppers and Rage Against the Machine guitarist Tom Morello.

"We never expected" that kind of attention, said Kurnia. "It felt like a dream." The band has played several online concerts since the pandemic shut down most cross-border travel, including the WOW UK Festival in England and the Global Just Recovery Gathering. They hope their hard-driving tunes will land them a spot at top-tier US music festival Coachella one day, and the chance to collaborate with idols System of a Down. In the meantime, VOB say they'll keep drawing inspiration from the women in their hometown, where many do back-breaking farm work. "The women there are treated like second-class citizens," said drummer Euis Siti Aisah. "But there are lot of tough ladies in our village." — AFP



Members of the Indonesian heavy metal band Voice of Baceprot (VOB), bassist Widi Rahmawati (left), drummer Euis Siti Aisah (center) and guitarist and vocalist Firda Marsya Kurnia (right) pose during an interview in Jakarta.



## California teen shoves bear to protect dogs in viral video

**D**on't try this at home: footage of a California teenager who shoved a large bear off her garden wall to protect her dogs has gone viral. Hailey Morinico said she was lucky to escape in one piece from the encounter with a black bear in Bradbury, northeast of Los Angeles, which was captured on home video surveillance. The footage has featured on US television networks and received almost 10 million "likes" on TikTok social media platform.

Morinico and her mother were gardening when the bear and her two cubs appeared on a low wall, immediately catching the attention of the family's dogs, who rushed at the animal barking. As two bear cubs retreated, the mother bear kept the dogs at bay by swiping with her giant claws, even briefly lifting up one of the smaller canines. When she spotted the altercation, Morinico ran "to see what they're barking at and it's not a dog—it's a bear," she told local television station KTLA. "The first thing I think to do is push the bear. And somehow it worked," said the 17-year-old.

Off-balance, the bear fell off the low wall before retreating with her cubs. Morinico's panicked parents can be heard shouting in the background of the video, with her mother Citlally writing on Facebook that it was "one of the scariest moments in life." A wildlife expert estimated that the black bear weighed about 150 pounds (nearly 70 kilos) and the cubs were only a few months old.

Although black bear sightings are common across parts of California, attacks are rare and typically are defensive in nature, according to the state's wildlife department. Morinico walked away from the encounter with only a sprained finger, but on reflection told viewers that she would not recommend they follow her example. "Do not push bears," Morinico said. "Don't do what I did, you might not have the same outcome." — AFP

## France's David Diop wins International Booker with WWI novel

**F**rench novelist David Diop on Wednesday won the prestigious International Booker Prize for books translated into English with his World War I-set novel, "At Night All Blood is Black". The Paris-born writer became the first French winner of the prize, awarded for a book translated into English and published in the UK or Ireland, in a ceremony broadcast online from Coventry Cathedral in central England. Lucy Hughes-Hallett, chair of the judges, said "this story of warfare and love and madness has a terrifying power".

"We judges agreed that its incantatory prose and dark, brilliant vision had jangled our emotions and blown our minds," she said, adding "it had cast a spell on us". "I'm extremely happy to have won this prize," Diop told AFP in an interview in his native French. "It's very interesting and gratifying for me. This really shows that literature has no borders." The book's translator Anna Moschovakis won half the £50,000 (\$70,850) prize, which recognizes the major role of translators.



This file photo taken in Paris shows French writer David Diop posing during a photo session. — AFP

"It's taken me by surprise," she told AFP. "I'm so thrilled about how this will even further increase the number of people who encounter this book, which I feel so fortunate to have been able to translate." "A translation is neither one nor two people's work, but sort of a collaboration between an author, a translator and the book, which I think is always very exciting," she said. Diop's novel tells the story of two Senegalese soldiers fighting for France in the trenches of World War I. When one, Mademba, is killed, the other, Alfa, descends into ever greater violence and madness. Diop, who was brought up in Senegal, was inspired by the fact that his Senegalese great-grandfather fought in the war but never spoke about his experiences. The book was first published in 2018 with the French title "Frere d'ame" (literally soul brother), a play on words, as it sounds like "Frere d'armes" or brother-in-arms. — AFP

# Slew of auteurs and award-winners for reborn Cannes

A rich crop of past Palme d'Or winners and arthouse favorites are set to return to the Cannes Film Festival in July as organizers announced a bumper selection for its competition yesterday. Among the 24 directors whose films are heading to the Cote d'Azur for July 6-17 are Sean Penn for his new film "Flag Day", Italy's Nanni Moretti (winner in 2001) with "Tre Piani" and France's Jacques Audiard (winner in 2015) with "Les Olympiades". They join three big auteurs that had already been announced: Wes Anderson ("The French Dispatch"), Paul Verhoeven ("Benedetta") and Leos Carax ("Annette").

One silver lining from all the disruption of the past year has been a backlog of cinematic gold that gave organizers some 2,000 films to wade through as they made their selection for the 74th edition of the world's leading film shindig. Another past Palme winner returning to the Croisette is Thailand's Apichatpong Weerasethakul with his first English-language film "Memoria", starring Tilda Swinton. Iran's two-time Oscar winner Asghar Farhadi will also return with "A Hero", while Russia's renowned director Kirill Serebrennikov—who has lately faced significant pressure from authorities—will be in competition with "Petrov's Flu".

They will face a jury headed by US director



Cannes film festival general delegate Thierry Fremaux (left) and French director of the Cannes film festival Pierre Lescure attend a press conference, in Paris, yesterday, to announce the Official Selection of the 74th Cannes Film Festival to be held from July 6 until July 17, 2021. — AFP photos

Spike Lee, who was set to preside in 2020 before the festival was cancelled by the pandemic. The opening film was already known: "Annette" is the first in a decade from French arthouse darling Carax, and his first in English, starring Adam Driver and Marion Cotillard as a celebrity couple awaiting a mysterious child. Verhoeven, meanwhile, promises a touch of scandal on the Croisette with his entry, "Benedetta", about a lesbian nun in a 17th century Italian convent—solid ground for the Dutch filmmaker who has often married art and salaciousness with movies like "Basic Instinct", "Showgirls" and "Elle".

It has been a particularly long wait for Anderson, who was due to present his latest

quirky bauble, "The French Dispatch", at last year's festival. Filmed in Angoulême in southwest France, it was clearly worth waiting for a proper Gallic launch, and could bring a multitude of stars to the red carpet, with Anderson regulars such as Bill Murray and Adrien Brody joined by new additions including Timothee Chalamet, Benicio Del Toro and France's own Lea Seydoux.

## Hopefuls

Also appearing during the fortnight are some special screenings, appearing outside the main competition. They include a documentary about the troubled US filmstar Val Kilmer ("Val") and a new film about 1960s rock

stars "The Velvet Underground" by Todd Haynes. Oliver Stone will present an update to his 1990s classic film about the Kennedy assassination, having reportedly got hold of some new documents, titled "JFK Revisited: Through the Looking Glass". Charlotte Gainsbourg will present a film about her mother Jane Birkin, while Oscar winner Tom McCarthy ("Spotlight") will premiere his new action film with Matt Damon, "Stillwater".

The organizers have also teased the possibility of a major blockbuster appearing during the fortnight, though confirmed that it will not be the much-delayed new James Bond film, "No Time To Die". The press conference also spoke about the health measures that organizers promise will make the festival safe for the mass of film professionals and press—some 18,000 have already applied for accreditation, they say. That is far below the usual attendance, because the normally packed movie marketplace is being held separately and online this year. France's COVID statistics are also currently headed in a reassuring direction and it is due to lift remaining restrictions in time for the event, but organizers say visitors will need proof of vaccination or negative tests every two days during the event. — AFP

## Films competing for Cannes Palme d'Or

Here are the 24 films competing from July 5 to 17 for the prestigious prize awarded by a jury headed by US director Spike Lee.

- "Annette" by Leos Carax, France
- "The French Dispatch" by Wes Anderson, US
- "Benedetta" by Paul Verhoeven, Netherlands
- "A Hero" by Asghar Farhadi, Iran
- "Tout s'est Bien Passe" (Everything Went Well) by Francois Ozon, France
- "Tre Piani" (Three Floors) by Nanni Moretti, Italy
- "Titane" (Titan) by Julia Ducournau, France
- "Red Rocket" by Sean Baker, US
- "Petrov's Flu" by Kirill Serebrennikov, Russia
- "Par un Demi Clair Matin" (France) by Bruno Dumont, France
- "Nitram" by Justin Kurzel, Australia
- "Memoria" by Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Thailand
- "Lingui" by Mahamat-Saleh Haroun, Chad
- "Les Olympiades" (Paris 13th District) by Jacques Audiard, France
- "Les Intranquilles" (The Restless) by Joachim Lafosse, Belgium

- "La Fracture" by Catherine Corsini, France
- "The Worst Person in the World" by Joachim Trier, Norway
- "Compartment No 6" by Juho Kuosmanen, Finland
- "Casablanca Beats" by Nabil Ayouch, France-Morocco
- "Ahed's Knee" by Nadav Lapid, Zionist

- "Drive My Car" by Ryusuke Hamaguchi, Japan
- "Bergman Island" by Mia Hansen-Love, France
- "The Story of My Wife" by Ildiko Enyedi, Hungary
- "Flag Day" by Sean Penn, US — AFP



This combination of pictures created yesterday shows four of the 24 film directors which will compete at the Cannes Film Festival, (from top left to bottom right) Sean Penn for his new film "Flag Day", Italy's Nanni Moretti with "Tri Piani", Russia's Kirill Serebrennikov with "Petrov's Flu", and France's Jacques Audiard with "Les Olympiades". — AFP

## Jodie Foster to be guest of honor at Cannes

US actor-director Jodie Foster will be guest of honor at the Cannes Film Festival in July where she will be given an honorary Palme d'Or, the organizers said Wednesday. "Cannes is a festival to which I owe so much, it has completely changed my life," said Foster in the statement. The two-time Oscar winner first walked the red carpet on the Cote d'Azur aged just 13 when she appeared in the Palme-winning "Taxi Driver" in 1976. Seven of her films have played at the festival, including two that she directed: "The Beaver" in 2011 and "Money Monster" in 2016.

"Although I had directed before, my first time on the Croisette was a defining moment for me," she said. "Showcasing one of my films here has always been a dream... Cannes is a festival by auteur filmmakers who honor artists." Festival president Pierre Lescure said: "Her aura is unparalleled: she embodies modernity, the radiant intelligence of independence and the need for freedom." —AFP



# Iraq's last gas bottle delivery crooner dreams of stardom

In the Karrada district of Iraq's capital, residents awake to a gas bottle deliveryman's dulcet tones — once a country-wide tradition, but now a solo act. "My heart rediscovers love, as if it learnt nothing from past suffering," croons Mountazar Abbas, in homage to famous Iraqi singer Yass Khodr. The 22-year-old is the last gas deliveryman in Baghdad to announce the arrival of his cylinder-laden rickshaw by singing. In doing so, he brings smiles to customers' faces. "When people recognize my voice, they open the door of their home and shout out to me," Abbas told AFP. "Others call me on the phone-but they still ask me to sing."

Carrying on the trade of his father, Abbas has traversed the streets and alleys of this shopping district in the heart of Baghdad since 2007. Ahmad Ali, a 30-year-old grocer, appreciates the tradition of the singing gas deliveryman. "There were many in the past, but it's over," he lamented. Deliverymen nowadays play "pre-recorded music to

announce their arrival", Ali explained. Many broadcast songs by famous artists through loudspeakers. "Frankly, it's annoying," said Ali. So "I buy my supplies from (Abbas)... who has a nice voice," he added with a smile.

## 'Beautiful voice'

The often melancholy choices of deliverymen who opt for pre-recorded songs sometimes triggers online ridicule. "Why do they then want to subject us to sad tunes when they deliver our gas?" asked a mocking Mukhtar Taleb. In the past, there were many singing deliverymen, recalls 55-year-old Kamal, who lives in the Al-Jadida district of the capital. "I used to tell them that they had a beautiful voice and I even encouraged several of them to take part in competitions on the radio."

Under dictator Saddam Hussein, who was deposed in the 2003 US-led invasion, a panel on Iraqi TV and radio would assess singing talents. Comprised of musicians, art critics and



Deliveryman Mountazar Abbas carries a gas bottle in the Karrada district of Iraq's capital Baghdad.

disappeared across much of the wider region too. In Jordan's capital Amman, local authorities have since 2012 required gas vendors to broadcast Beethoven's "For Elise" only, so as to avoid a cacophony of competing sounds. In Lebanon and Syria, vendors would in the past

deliver gas by donkey-drawn cart, announcing their arrival by honking a horn. But nowadays customers just go directly to suppliers. "Everyone does as they see fit. I opted for the traditional way and most of my clients prefer to see me sing," Abbas said. But there is little chance that Abbas will pass the trade onto his own children. "It is a tough and badly paid trade," he said.

Abbas doesn't just sing while at work, but also at home, with friends and at family reunions. He even dreams of becoming a second Hatem Al-Iraqi, an Iraqi singer-songwriter who now lives in Dubai. "Hatem is, like me, originally from Sadr City," a poor district of Baghdad, said Abbas. "And before he became successful, he was in the same trade as me. He had a very beautiful voice... I would like to follow his path." — AFP



Deliveryman Mountazar Abbas unloads gas bottles from his loaded rickshaw.



Deliveryman Mountazar Abbas unloads gas bottles from his rickshaw in the Karrada district of Iraq's capital Baghdad.



Deliveryman Mountazar Abbas carries a gas bottle.



Ivorian-Burkinabe fashion designer Pathe Ouedraogo, known as Pathe'O, poses for a photograph in his store in Abidjan. — AFP photos

## MANDELA'S TAILOR ON MISSION TO BOOST AFRICAN FASHION

Ivorian-Burkinabe tailor Pathe'O can look back on a 50-year career that has seen him rise from self-taught improviser to supplier of Africa's wealthy and powerful, including anti-apartheid torchbearer Nelson Mandela. As well as South Africa's first black president, his richly coloured shirts have graced the backs of Moroccan King Mohamed VI, Rwanda's President Paul Kagame and the continent's richest man Aliko Dangote. Now he's doing his best to

change attitudes to his profession across Africa and create opportunities for the next generation.

"In the minds of many people here, tailoring is a job for people who didn't go to school, a job for failures," Pathe Ouedraogo-his legal name-says with a smile. "But African fashion, African fabrics interest the whole world! There's a wealth of creators and talents," he adds. "We have to move up from cottage industry to mass

manufacture, produce more to move Africa forward."

### 'My parents' blessing'

A tall, slender man at 70 with the face of a wise elder, Pathe'O is never seen without one of his own vibrant shirts. Now at the head of a pocket business empire that stretches across 10 countries and employs 60 people, the father-of-three still shows up every day at the workshops in Abidjan's

working-class district of Treichville, where he first set up shop 50 years ago. Back then, rejected for work in the cocoa fields because of his frail health, he started teaching himself tailoring in a little workspace rented for just a few francs.

Bit by bit he improved, starting to make a wider name for himself by winning the local "Golden Scissors" contest in 1987. Ten years later, Mandela would wear one of his shirts on an official visit to France, the



Dyers pose for a photograph at Pathe'O house in the popular district of Treichville in Abidjan.



Ivorian-Burkinabe fashion designer Pathe Ouedraogo, known as Pathe'O, cuts fabric in his store in Abidjan.



Ivorian-Burkinabe fashion designer Pathe Ouedraogo, known as Pathe'O, poses for a photograph in his store in Abidjan.





Burkinabese stylist Pathe Ouedraogo known as Pathe'O (center) is greeted by models during a fashion show to mark the 50 years of his career in Abidjan.



Burkinabese stylist Pathe Ouedraogo known as Pathe'O is greeted by Ivorian Minister of Sports Claude Paulin Danho (right), Minister of Arts and Culture Arlette Badou N'guessan (second left) and Minister of Education Mariatou Kone (left) during a fashion show to mark the 50 years of his career in Abidjan.



Dyers dye cotton fabric at Pathe'O house.

images prompting new customers to beat a path to his door. It was a heady rise for a man born during French colonial rule in the Upper Volta-later Burkina Faso—who set off aged 19 to make his fortune in Ivory Coast with nothing but “my parents’ blessing” in his pocket, according to his biography “De fil en aiguille” (“From thread to needle”). “I never thought 50 years ago that I’d be here. It’s amazing!” the founder told reporters at a recent press conference in a luxury hotel as he unveiled the book.

**A ‘simple man’**

Now dozens of workers are packed into three large rooms scarcely ventilated by ceiling fans. All the work is done by hand on old cast-iron Singer sewing machines, and Pathe'O moves among the tailors, designers and pressers to check their work and lend advice. “You have to know how to do everything in this trade,” he says. Leon Ouedraogo-no relation-has worked with Pathe'O for 40 years and now runs the shop floor. He calls his boss “a simple man, always ready to talk, who takes time to listen and explain”.



Models present creations of Pathe'O during a fashion show to mark the 50 years of the career of Burkinabese stylist Pathe Ouedraogo.

The founder shows off the intricately patterned cloths dyed in another workshop in the same Abidjan district. Each is known by a familiar name to insiders, from the “speckled” and “speckled print”, to “salad” and “clouds”—as well as the “Faso Danfani” patterns from Burkina.

**‘Gave us pride’**

“You’ve got to keep creating every day, surprise your customers, everyone wants something new,” says Pathe'O. He finds inspiration on the street, from women who go to market decked in multicolored clothes and scarves. Ivorian designer Gilles Toure says that his mentor Pathe'O “gave us pride in wearing African fabrics”. Pathe'O himself

plans to put all his business success and international recognition behind what he calls his “battle” to win respect for Africa’s fashion industry.

He sees it as a key economic sector that could help the continent along its road to development. With a huge, modern new headquarters building in the trendy Cocody district of Abidjan that will also host its charitable foundation, Maison Pathe'O hopes to “bring forth a new generation of African creators”. —AFP



A model presents a creation of Pathe'O.



A model presents a creation of Pathe'O.



This photograph taken during a government organized media tour shows College of Science graduates from Tibet University celebrating their graduation at the Potala Palace Square in the regional capital Lhasa, in China's Tibet Autonomous Region. — AFP photos



This photograph shows a view of the Potala Palace - classified as a World Heritage Site by Unesco in 1994 - in the regional capital Lhasa, in China's Tibet Autonomous Region.

## Higher learning: scripture and football at Tibetan college on roof of the world

**M**aroon-robed Tibetan nuns vigorously debate Buddhist precepts, while monks dash across an astro turf pitch on the roof of the world to kick a football. The Tibetan Buddhist College, one of the highest places of learning on Earth, has over 900 students who study Mandarin, English and political studies. It all takes place under the benign gaze of China's President Xi Jinping, whose portrait festoons the college, which is tucked into a hillside over 3,600 meters (11,800 feet) above sea level. Beijing says it "peacefully liberated" the mountainous region of Tibet in 1951 and insists it has since brought infrastructure and education to a previously underdeveloped region.

Chinese flags and the aphorisms of Xi pepper the college grounds. But there are no signs of Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama who fled the region in 1959 and set up

a government-in-exile in India. AFP joined a government-steered media tour this week to the politically sensitive region. Since 2008, it has been nearly impossible for journalists to visit except on organized trips.

Sporadic protests have broken out in Tibet in recent decades, including some self-immolations by monks in the heart of Lhasa and large protests against Chinese rule in 2008, which left many dead. Rights groups say that now expressing any anti-government views is extremely dangerous, while simmering unrest is quickly stamped out. During the media tour, the college students were glowing in their praise of their education. Monks, nuns and novices rehearsed religious texts, showed off their English and demonstrated traditional Buddhist debates, with the speaker delivering emphatic rhetorical flourishes in a pebbled courtyard.

"I've been here for more than two years, said 32-year-old monk Xirekewang. "We study from 6 am to around 9 pm in the evening. I like studying here and don't feel tired... the life is very good." But China has been accused of deliberately diluting Tibetan culture, including by directing its education system. Critics say freedom of movement and expression is tightly controlled amid an ongoing "sinicisation" of the region.

Academics also say it has become extremely difficult to carry out studies of the region, making it harder to independently assess the quality of life on the ground. "The levels of repression needed to keep a lid on things in Tibet...tells me that things continue to be tense there," said Gray Tuttle, professor of modern Tibet studies at Columbia University. The students were all smiles for foreign media at the well-funded Lhasa cam-

pus which boasts a new astro turf football pitch and running track. The vice president of the university, Gesang Wangdai, told media the college's success is down to China. "I am a party member. I am not a Buddhist-I am a Communist." — AFP



This photograph shows monks engaged in a religious debate, a traditional practice of Tibetan Buddhism, at the Tibet Autonomous Region Buddhist College.



This photograph shows monks studying at the Tibet Autonomous Region Buddhist College.



This photograph shows people in traditional costume standing in Potala Palace Square as the Potala Palace - classified as a World Heritage Site by Unesco in 1994 - is seen in the background in the regional capital Lhasa.



The wedding dress of Diana, Princess of Wales is seen on display at an exhibition entitled 'Royal Style in the Making' at Kensington Palace in London. — AFP

## Diana's iconic wedding dress is star of royal fashion exhibit

Princess Diana's wedding dress for her 1981 marriage to Prince Charles was one of the best-kept secrets in fashion history. The gown sparked such intense interest that young designers David and Elizabeth Emanuel locked the ivory silk dress, which had a 25-foot (7.6-metre) long train, in a safe at night. Plucked from obscurity for the commission of a lifetime, the pair even took to putting dummy bits of fabric in the studio's bins to throw anyone rummaging through them off the scent, according to an exhibition of royal fashion, including Diana's iconic dress, that opened yesterday. The exhibition-Royal Style in the Making-at the Orangery at Kensington Palace, Diana's home until her death in a car crash in Paris in 1997, focuses on the work of designers who dressed not just Diana but also Queen Elizabeth II, Princess Margaret and the Queen Mother.

Trimmed with vintage lace, pearls and thousands of sequins, the train of Diana's dress was the longest ever for a British royal bride and memorably appeared crumpled as she emerged from her carriage at St Paul's Cathedral. Luckily, the designers were on hand to smooth it out. "I think it goes to show that you can plan for everything, but on the day there'll always be something," the exhibition's curator Matthew Storey told reporters ahead of the opening. "It's a very big dress. It was a very small carriage," he said.

### Growing sense of style

In a video at the exhibition, Elizabeth Emanuel recalled Diana phoning to ask her and David to make the dress. "It was one of those strange moments where you know your life is never going to be the same again," she said. The exhibition, which runs until January 2, chronicles some of the hard toil behind the dress, featuring photographs of the seamstresses as well as the keys for the safe where it was safely deposited nightly. The exhibition also highlights Diana's growing sense of personal style and evolution from girlish frills to sleeker, more impactful outfits.

With her wedding dress "she kind of left it to us really", Emanuel said. But another designer she had a close relationship with, David Sassoon, lent the organizers archive documents that show her getting more involved. She scribbled a comment on one drawing: "This in dark blue please" and in a handwritten letter asked for a dress pattern to be altered. In another video, Sassoon recounted that Diana was "very shy" when they first met, but later became "very hands-on in selecting exactly what she wanted". She "understood what the public wanted from the clothes she wore", he said, noting she "loved to break the rules", often not wearing gloves or a hat, as royal protocol required.

Her sons Princes William and Harry loaned both Diana's wedding and going-away dresses to the exhibition. The creators said they did not know whether the pair would attend. Diana would have turned 60 on July 1 and Harry and William are expected to unveil a long-awaited statue of her in a garden at Kensington Palace. The exhibition comes as the princes have recently spoken more about their mother's pain at the end of her marriage and their sense of her legacy. The popular drama series "The Crown" has also recreated some of her most famous outfits. "I think her style is being celebrated again," Storey, the curator, told AFP. —AFP

## Migrants find safe haven with Mexico's hip-hop pastor

Once, Abraham Barberi was known as the "pastor of rappers," host of Christian hip hop concerts targeting young drug dealers in Mexico in hopes of putting them on a different path. Now, he is making headlines by caring for a new flock: more than 200 people from Central and South America who dream of crossing the Rio Grande and migrating to the United States. The Baptist pastor of Matamoros—a Mexican city separated from the United States only by the river—still leads his "hip-hop church," but has transformed his Bautista Sola Scriptura Bible Institute into a temporary bare-bones safe haven for those on the long hard road to a better life. The change at the building with its yellow facade came in February, after authorities closed a refugee camp in the city when its occupants were allowed to cross the border as their asylum applications were processed.



Pastor Abraham Barberi poses for a portrait inside his church in Matamoros, Mexico.

With the formalities taking time to complete, authorities asked Barberi to house the last 56 occupants of the camp. The pastor was himself once an illegal migrant, involved in drug trafficking and crime, and had spent time in prison. Now, with his Bible study center empty due to COVID-19, he found he could not say no. "We were supposed to be open for two weeks only. And in those two weeks, all of them, most of them went across the border," he told AFP. "But meantime new arrivals came to Matamoros, they heard about our shelter. 'You know, people come to our doors, moms with little kids, and what do we do? We can't say 'no, we don't take you.' We have to take them, right? So now, we have over 200 people."

At the institute, the migrants wait in the burning heat of late May for the United States to review or reconsider their asylum requests, and try to forget their plight and their boredom. Some look at their phones. Others admire the energy of their children as they play, savoring the moment. It's been months since Barberi accepted the first refugees, and the Bible Institute still receives new requests for shelter every day. —AFP



The AMC movie theater chain logo on the side of one of its theaters in Largo, Maryland. — AFP

## AMC to reward small investors with free popcorn

Movie chain AMC will offer free popcorn to a brigade of retail investors who have lifted its stock during the so-called "Reddit rebellion," the company announced Wednesday. Citing its hope to be in "direct communication with its extraordinary base of enthusiastic and passionate individual shareholders," the company said it was establishing the "AMC Investor Connect" program for its more than three million shareholders. AMC shareholders who sign up "will be awarded with an initial free large popcorn usable this summer when attending a movie at an AMC theatre in the United States," the company said.

AMC Entertainment has been a prominent example of the surprising 2021 investment trend that has seen select equities soar following a campaign orchestrated by retail investors on Reddit. The movement, which has been called an example of "irrational exuberance" by some observers, has also boosted videogame retailer GameStop. Besides popcorn, other benefits through the program include promotions on discounted items, invitations to special screenings and communications from Chief Executive Adam Aron.

The initiative comes as movie theaters seek to lure back customers after a devastating 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The hope is that coronavirus vaccines will revive interest in movies. "Many of our investors have demonstrated support and confidence in AMC," Aron said in a press release. "We intend to communicate often with these investors, and from time to time provide them with special benefits at our theatres. —AFP

Kids Page

Word Search

**Famous Authors**

DIRECTIONS: Find and circle the famous authors' last names in the grid. Look for them in all directions including backwards and diagonally.



ANGELOU, Mays  
AUSTEN, Jane  
CHRISTIE, Agatha  
DICKENS, Charles  
DICKENSON, Emily  
FAULKNER, William  
FITZGERALD, F. Scott  
HEMINGWAY, Ernest  
JOYCE, James  
KAFKA, Franz

KEROUAC, Jack  
KING, Stephen  
MAILER, Norman  
MELVILLE, Herman  
ORWELL, George  
ROWLING, J. K.  
SHAKESPEARE, William  
SHAW, George Bernard  
STEINBECK, John  
TOLSTOY, Leo

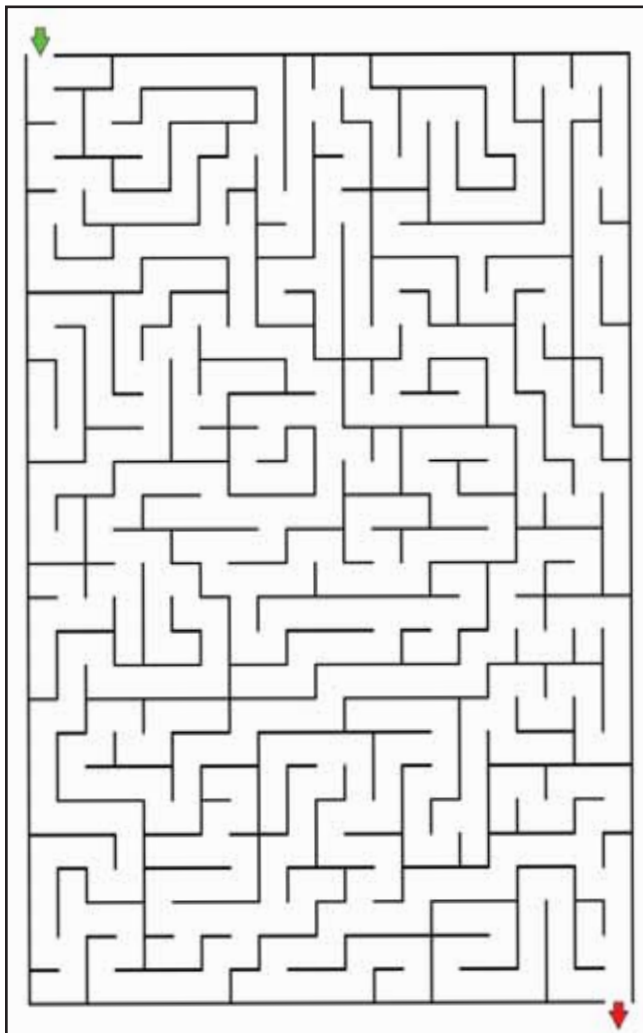
TWAIN, Mark  
VERNE, Jules  
VONNEGUT, Kurt  
WILDE, Oscar  
WOOLF, Virginia



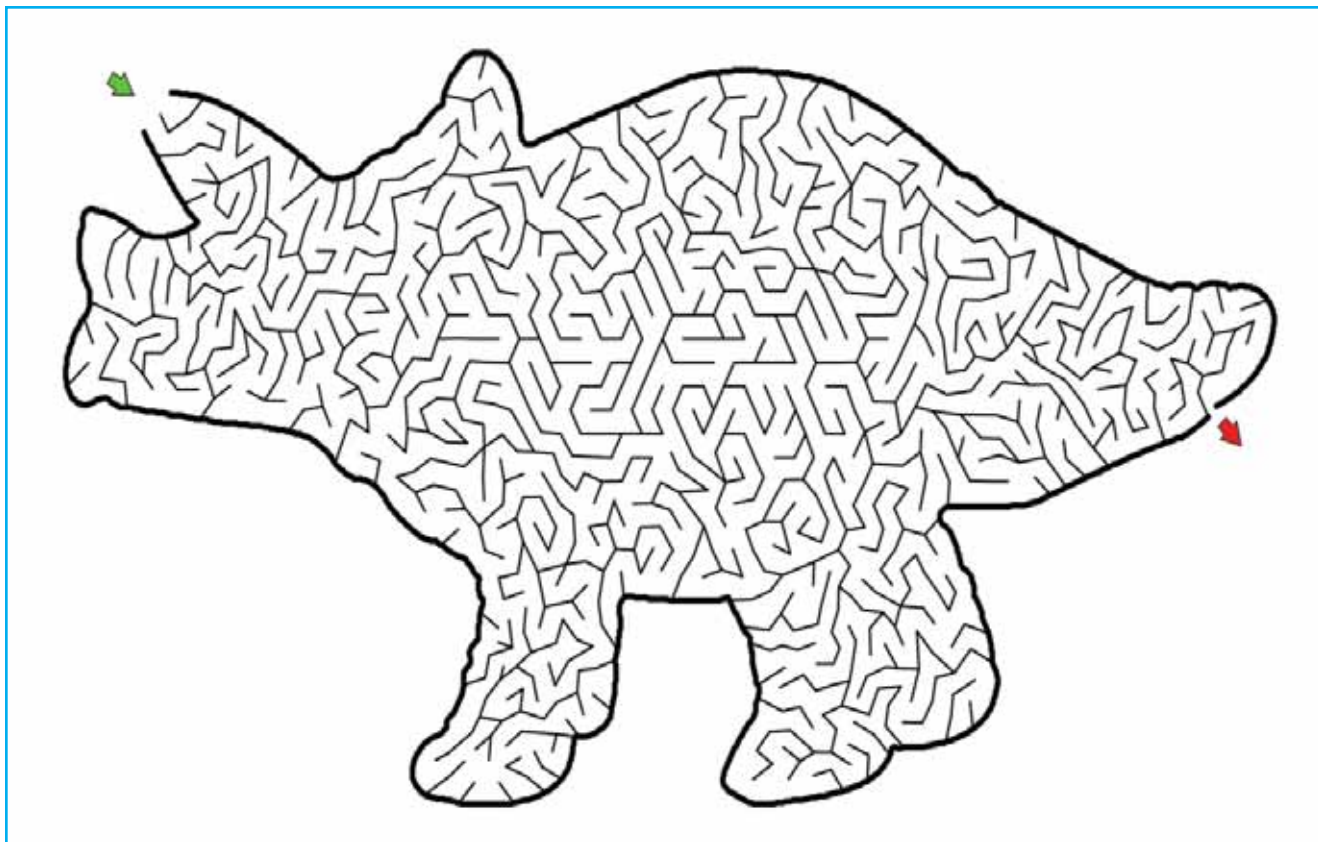
Color It



Kids Mazes












Find the way

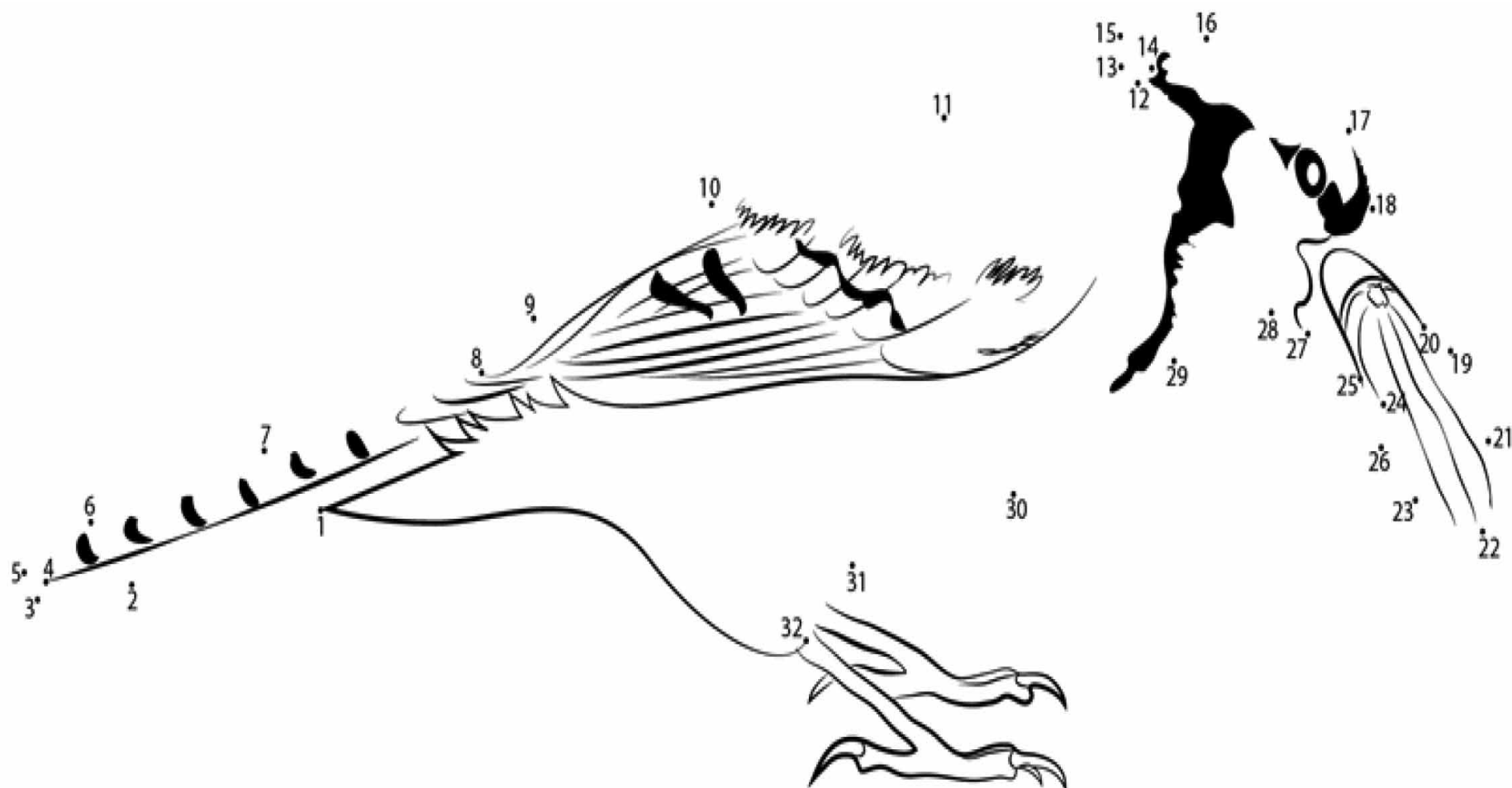


Word Scramble

**NAME THE SHAPE**  
**Word Scrambles**  
 DIRECTIONS: Write the name for each shape on the dotted line using the scrambled letters.

 rcgeenatl	 pengtano	 brumohs
 ecricl	 sreuqa	 airtnle
 hnoaexg	 piumeartz	 gcotano

Join the dots



## Health &amp; Science

# G7 health chiefs discuss vaccine sharing and animal diseases

## Calls continue to ensure fairer global distribution of doses

**OXFORD, UK:** Health ministers from the G7 group of wealthy nations met yesterday in Britain to discuss sharing vaccines with poorer countries, as calls continue to ensure fairer global distribution of doses.

The meeting in Oxford in southern England comes ahead of next week's G7 summit, hosted by the United Kingdom, which is set to be dominated by discussion of the coronavirus pandemic and recovery plans. "We'll be working together with G7 partners to try to meet the objective that a vaccine is made available right across the world," UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock told reporters.

"After all, this is a global pandemic and nobody is safe from it until everybody is safe," he added. The G7 gathering was also set to focus on improving identification of animal-borne infections, given three-fifths of all infections jump from animals to humans. The ministers from Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States vowed to "combat future health threats by working together to identify early warning signs from animals and the environment".

"There will be more diseases that cross that boundary from animals to humans," Hancock added.

"We must be better prepared as a world in the future and that is something that is very much on the table in the discussions." The world's wealthiest countries face growing pressure to do more

to help vaccines reach poorer countries, which do not have enough stocks for comprehensive inoculation programs.

The G7 countries are already committed to support the Covax global vaccine sharing program.

### Strategy scrutiny

However, UNICEF warned last month that the program will find itself 190 million doses short of what it had planned to distribute, and called on the G7 and European Union to do more. Meanwhile in a joint rallying cry this week the heads of the World Health Organization (WHO), World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organization (WTO) urged the G7 to agree a "stepped-up coordinated strategy" on vaccines.

France in April became the first country to donate doses from its domestic supply to Covax, with an initial commitment of 500,000 doses. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Wednesday President Joe Biden will announce within days plans to export 80 million shots to other countries "without any political strings attached".

Although Britain—which has ordered more than 400 million doses of various vaccines—has pledged the bulk of its excess doses to Covax, Hancock said it was not yet ready to donate its extra jabs.

"We don't have any excess doses," he added, noting over half a billion doses of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine had been released for supply



A veterinarian team checks the dead bodies of wild elephants, suspected to have been killed by lightning, on a hillside in Nagaon district of Assam state. —AFP

globally. "But absolutely, we want to lean into this global effort when there is spare capacity."

At a G7 finance ministers meeting in London on Friday, IMF managing director Kristalina Georgieva will present a relatively low-cost plan to

expand vaccination access.

The plan, developed with the WHO and WTO, calls for a financial commitment of \$50 billion—far less than the massive stimulus programs rolled out by some rich nations. —AFP

## Common French bird species face 'unrelenting' drop

**PARIS:** From city centers to rural fields, human activity has decimated populations of France's most common bird species, scientists warned, citing data collected over 30 years by volunteer ornithologists. Between 1989 and 2019 over 2,000 French bird lovers participated in monitoring the nation's 123 most common bird species through the Tracking Common Birds Over Time (STOC) program. The effort is sponsored by the French National Museum of Natural History, whose president Bruno David called the findings "unrelenting".

Over a third of common French bird species are in decline, including the European goldfinch, the European turtle dove, the common house martin and 40 others, the museum reported.

The sharpest drops in populations were on farmlands, where numbers dropped 30 percent in 30 years, followed by urban areas, which saw declines of about 28 percent.

Forest birds have fared somewhat better, with their numbers falling by 10 percent over the last three decades.

Conservation biologist Benoit Fontaine, a researcher at the National Museum, in a press conference Monday described the loss of birds in agricultural territories as a "massacre". —AFP

## First human case of H10N3 bird flu: What we know

**PARIS:** China revealed the first human case of H10N3 bird flu on Tuesday, an announcement that has so far raised no alarm among world health authorities. Here is what we know.

### What was found?

The case of H10N3 bird flu announced by China on Tuesday is the first of its strain observed in humans. "The patient is a 41-year-old male from Jiangsu Province, China," the World Health Organization told AFP in an email. "He developed illness on 22 April 2021 and was hospitalized on 28 April in an intensive care unit. He is currently recovering," it said.

China's National Health Commission (NHC) said the man was diagnosed with H10N3 a month after being hospitalized. "The source of the patient's exposure to the H10N3 virus is not known at this time," the WHO said.

### What is bird flu?

"Bird flu, or avian flu, is caused by influenza viruses that spread between birds," said Nicole Robb of the University of Warwick, cited by the Science Media Centre (SMC). "It can often spread easily between birds, but very rarely causes disease in humans," she said. John W. McCauley of the Francis Crick Institute added: "There is a very wide range of influenza viruses in circulation in birds, much wider than in the main mammalian hosts of influenza: man, pigs and horses."

Two strains of bird flu, H5N1 and H7N9, (first seen in 2013) led to human contamination in Asia through infected birds. Two strains of bird flu, H5N1 and H7N9, led to human contamination in Asia through infected birds.

H5N1 first broke out in 1997, then spread between 2003 and 2011, while H7N9 was first seen in 2013.

Cases of transmission between humans remain extremely rare.

H7N9 has infected 1,668 people and killed 616 since 2013, according to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization. The H5N8 virus, derived from H5N1, was detected in February among workers at a Russian poultry factory after circulating for a few months in several European farms.

McCauley also cites sporadic infection incidents involving the H9N2 and H10N8 viruses across the world over the last 20 years.

### How can humans get it?

"Transmission to humans is usually by direct contact," McCauley says, citing "very close contact with infected birds, poultry or ducks with direct exposure whilst handling them or in preparation of meat from the infected animal". McCauley points to the H5N1 outbreak in 1997 in Hong Kong that was halted by the closure of bird markets.

"Once cooked, infected meat poses a very low threat," he adds.

"As long as avian influenza viruses circulate in poultry, sporadic infection of avian influenza in humans is not surprising," noted the WHO, "which is a vivid reminder that the threat of an influenza pandemic is persistent." As for transmission among humans, Vincent Enouf of the Pasteur Institute says: "Mutations would be necessary as the virus crosses the species barrier."

### What are the risks?

"At this time, there is no indication of human-to-human transmission" of H10N3, the WHO said. "We don't have any information about mutations of this H10N3 virus that could be useful in determining whether it might have the potential to be transmitted among humans," Enouf added.

"Today Chinese authorities say the virus hasn't been detected in other people, which is reassuring," he says. Even among the bird population, where H10N3 has been detected in live bird markets periodically since 2002, the WHO says it is a "low pathogenicity" virus, meaning it causes few signs of illness in its host. —AFP

## Health &amp; Science

# NASA announces two missions to Venus

## Missions to learn how Earth's nearest neighbor became a hellscape

**WASHINGTON:** NASA announced two new missions to Venus on Wednesday that will launch at the end of the decade and are aimed at learning how Earth's nearest planetary neighbor became a hellscape while our own thrived. "These two sister missions both aim to understand how Venus became an inferno-like world, capable of melting lead at the surface," said Bill Nelson, the agency's newly-confirmed administrator. "They will offer the entire science community the chance to investigate a planet we haven't been to in more than 30 years."

The missions have been awarded about \$500 million under NASA's Discovery Program, and each is expected to launch in the 2028-2030 timeframe.

Both missions were picked from a competitive, peer-reviewed process based on their scientific value and feasibility of their plans. DAVINCI+, which stands for Deep Atmosphere Venus Investigation of Noble gases, Chemistry, and Imaging, will gather more detail on the composition of Venus' primarily carbon dioxide atmosphere, to learn how it formed and evolved. The mission also seeks to determine whether the planet once had an ocean. A descent sphere will plunge through the dense atmosphere which is laced with sulfuric acid clouds. It will precisely measure the levels of

noble gases and other elements to learn what gave rise to the runaway greenhouse effect we see today. DAVINCI+ will also beam back the first high resolution images of the planet's "tesserae," geological features roughly comparable with Earth's continents whose existence suggests Venus has plate tectonics. The results could reshape scientists' understanding of terrestrial planet formation.

The other mission is called VERITAS, an acronym for Venus Emissivity, Radio Science, InSAR, Topography, and Spectroscopy.

This will aim to map the Venusian surface from orbit and delve into the planet's geologic history. Using a form of radar that is used to create three-dimensional constructions, it will chart surface elevations and confirm whether volcanoes and earthquakes are still happening on the planet.

It will also use infrared scanning to determine rock type, which is largely unknown, and whether active volcanoes are releasing water vapor into the atmosphere. While the mission is NASA led, the German Aerospace Center will provide the infrared mapper, while the Italian Space Agency and France's Centre National d'Etudes Spatiales will contribute to the radar and other parts of the mission.

"It is astounding how little we know about



This file photo released by NASA shows the planet Venus in a composite of data from NASA's Magellan spacecraft and Pioneer Venus Orbiter. NASA announced two new missions to Venus Wednesday that will launch at the end of the decade. —AFP

Venus, but the combined results of these missions will tell us about the planet from the clouds in its sky through the volcanoes on its surface all the way down to its very core," said Tom Wagner, NASA's Discovery Pro-

gram scientist.

"It will be as if we have rediscovered the planet." NASA's last Venus orbiter was Magellan, which arrived in 1990, but other vessels have made fly-bys since then. —AFP

## EU court raps Germany for dirty air in cities

**BERLIN:** The EU's top court ruled yesterday that Germany continually violated upper limits for nitrogen dioxide, a polluting gas from diesel motors that causes major health problems, over several years.

Germany infringed air quality rules "by systematically and persistently exceeding" the annual nitrogen dioxide limit in 26 out of 89 areas from 2010 to 2016, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) said in its ruling. The European Commission, the EU's executive arm, referred the matter to the ECJ in 2018 after almost a decade of warnings that went unaddressed.

The decision against Europe's top economy echoes a ruling targeting France in October 2019 after the commission stepped up its anti-pollution fight in the wake of the so-called "Dieselgate" scandal that erupted in 2015 with revelations about Germany's Volkswagen.

The motors caught up in the scandal—in which automakers installed special emission-cheating devices into their car engines—are the main emitters of nitrogen oxides that the European Environment Agency says are responsible for 68,000 premature deaths per year in the EU. Nitrogen dioxide is toxic and can cause significant respiratory problems as one of the main constituents of traffic-jam smog.

Under EU rules, member countries are required to keep the gas to under 40 micrograms per cubic meter—but that level is often exceeded in many traffic-clogged European



cities. The judgment opens the way to possible sanctions at a later stage. However the air quality throughout much of Germany has improved in the last five years, particularly during the shutdowns in the pandemic.

The environment ministry said that 90 cities exceeded national pollution limits in 2016 — the final year covered by the court ruling. By 2019, the number had fallen to 25 and last year, during the coronavirus outbreak, it was just six. The case involved 26 areas in Germany, including Berlin, Hamburg, Munich and Stuttgart as well as urban and rural areas in North Rhine-Westphalia, Mainz, Worms/Frankenthal/Ludwigshafen and Koblenz/Neuwied. "Furthermore, Germany infringed the directive by systematically and persistently exceeding, during that period, the hourly limit value for NO2 in two of those zones"—the Stuttgart area and the Rhine-Main region. —AFP

## Allergic to seafood? Don't eat swarming cicadas, US warns

**WASHINGTON:** Multiple recipes featuring cicadas have surfaced in the United States as billions of the bugs emerge from 17 years underground, prompting authorities to warn the hungry and curious to think twice before taking a bite.

"Yep! We have to say it! Don't eat #cicadas if you're allergic to seafood as these insects share a family relation to shrimp and lobsters," said a tweet Wednesday from Food and Drug Administration regulators. Billions of cicada nymphs that have been living underground since 2004 have begun bursting out of the soil to shed their skin, mate, lay eggs and then die, all against the backdrop of the deafening noise that males make to attract females.

US states including Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Indiana and Tennessee have all seen the translucent-winged, red-eyed insects. Their arrival, on a regular cycle every 17 years, has been delayed and spotty this year due to cold temperatures and heavy downpours in some areas.

But the craze for the cicadas has not dimmed—especially among peckish birds, dogs and the occasional human. Bun Lai, a chef and advocate for the sustainable food movement, invited locals for an insect hunt in a Washington park followed by a taste of his fried cicada sushi. "Free cicada hunt and cookout," Bun tweeted. "Bring ingredients to cook with and join me in getting creative or just eat!" —AFP

## Stars

## STAR TRACK

**Aries (March 21-April 19)**

After the emotional havoc you went through over the last few weeks, the period beginning today will be quite soothing. You can take advantage of these smoother, calmer waters to rediscover emotional harmony and improve the balance of your energy flow. Moreover, Aries, if your physical health isn't quite adequate, the weeks ahead should give you a chance to rest and recuperate.

**Taurus (April 20-May 20)**

The celestial configuration is speaking of a new period in which you focus on the way you differentiate yourself from others, Taurus. Are you aware of the aspects that make you unique? If not, meditate on the subject or ask close friends for input. The upcoming weeks are going to teach you a lot about this subject!

**Gemini (May 21-June 20)**

This is the beginning of a new cycle, Gemini. There will be new issues cropping up over the next several days. You may have to rethink certain principles that you've adhered to in your relationships up until now. Upon reflection, you find that you no longer agree with them. It seems that the conventions and social graces required by society are weighing you down.

**Cancer (June 21-July 22)**

This is a pleasant day, Cancer. Indeed, the celestial aspects are predicting that it will be rather radiant, though likely less intense than the past week or so. You probably had some new perspectives to set up in your professional life, and now you will have to get to work setting goals! You were waiting for just this moment? Perfect!

**Leo (July 23-August 22)**

Are you ready, Leo? Are you in shape for what's going to happen? The celestial aspects are heralding a new cycle that will be filled to the brim with activities, new people, and new professional perspectives. Let's hope that you've been able to rest up lately. If you haven't, try to schedule in some afternoon naps!

**Virgo (August 23-September 22)**

Will there be change in you during the next few weeks, Virgo? This is always the question that one asks with this changing planetary environment. It's appealing to think that you may be traveling to exotic locations or perhaps changing jobs and meeting some interesting new people. Anything is possible with these aspects. Enjoy the renewed at-

**Libra (September 23-October 22)**

A new wind is blowing in your relationships, Libra, and you probably won't be too sorry about it! The planets are lining up to signal new beginnings. You will be able to take advantage of your recent reflections and test your new self-image. You likely won't be disappointed by the results. Be happy. You have every reason to be!

**Scorpio (October 23-November 21)**

You will be happy to know that today contains the seeds of change for your love life, Scorpio. Beginning today and for the next month or so, you're likely to be amazed by the turn of events in your relationships with others. The plot thickens as new people and groups emerge on your horizon. The aspect ahead is much less individualistic than usual.

**Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)**

Last month you may have been somewhat more extroverted and sociable than usual, especially regarding your emotional relationships. But beginning today, your attitude will undergo a change, Sagittarius. You will probably be calmer and more reasonable. Your thoughts may begin to focus more on the future than the present. You have about a month to firm up your plans.

**Capricorn (December 22-January 19)**

As a person who loves to experiment with new ideas and discover new people, you will be delighted with the period that is now beginning. Since communication, togetherness, and sociability will rule the next few weeks, it will be a perfect time to get out and show off your gifts. You will have a ball, Capricorn!

**Aquarius (January 20- February 18)**

Today's overall outlook is positive for you, Aquarius. You can expect to focus on giving a little more character, expression, or enrichment to your domestic life. You may redecorate a part of the house or find new leisure activities for the children. Don't be reluctant to suggest something original. They will probably enjoy it!

**Pisces (February 19-March 20)**

You're embarking on a phase devoted in large part to your love life, Pisces! Make this time completely fulfilling by introducing fresh new ideas. Don't let these pleasures grow stale. The cycle ahead is extremely auspicious for romance. It's a good time to take a trip, just the two of you. If you're single, you may meet an uncommonly interesting new person.

## Country Codes

Afghanistan	0093	Iran	0098
Albania	00355	Iraq	00964
Algeria	00213	Ireland	00353
Andorra	00376	Italy	0039
Angola	00244	Ivory Coast	00225
Anguilla	001264	Jamaica	001876
Antigua	001268	Japan	0081
Argentina	0054	Jordan	00962
Armenia	00374	Kazakhstan	007
Australia	0061	Kenya	00254
Austria	0043	Kiribati	00686
Bahamas	001242	Kuwait	00965
Bahrain	00973	Kyrgyzstan	00996
Bangladesh	00880	Laos	00856
Barbados	001246	Latvia	00371
Belarus	00375	Lebanon	00961
Belgium	0032	Liberia	00231
Belize	00501	Libya	00218
Benin	00229	Lithuania	00370
Bermuda	001441	Luxembourg	00352
Bhutan	00975	Macau	00853
Bolivia	00591	Macedonia	00389
Bosnia	00387	Madagascar	00261
Botswana	00267	Majorca	0034
Brazil	0055	Malawi	00265
Brunei	00673	Malaysia	0060
Bulgaria	00359	Maldives	00960
Burkina Faso	00226	Mali	00223
Burundi	00257	Malta	00356
Cambodia	00855	Marshall Islands	00692
Cameroon	00237	Martinique	00596
Canada	001	Mauritania	00222
Cape Verde	00238	Mauritius	00230
Cayman Islands	001345	Mayotte	00269
Central African Republic	00236	Mexico	0052
Chad	00235	Micronesia	00691
Chile	0056	Moldova	00373
China	0086	Monaco	00377
Colombia	0057	Mongolia	00976
Comoros	00269	Montserrat	001664
Congo	00242	Morocco	00212
Cook Islands	00682	Mozambique	00258
Costa Rica	00506	Myanmar (Burma)	0095
Croatia	00385	Namibia	00264
Cuba	0053	Nepal	00977
Cyprus	00357	Netherlands (Holland)	0031
Cyprus (Northern)	0090392	Netherlands Antilles	00599
Czech Republic	00420	New Caledonia	00687
Denmark	0045	New Zealand	0064
Diego Garcia	00246	Nicaragua	00505
Djibouti	00253	Niger	00227
Dominica	001767	Nigeria	00234
Dominican Republic	001809	Niue	00683
Ecuador	00593	Norfolk Island	00672
Egypt	0020	Northern Ireland (UK)	0044
El Salvador	00503	North Korea	00850
England (UK)	0044	Norway	0047
Equatorial Guinea	00240	Oman	00968
Eritrea	00291	Pakistan	0092
Estonia	00372	Palau	00680
Ethiopia	00251	Panama	00507
Falkland Islands	00500	Papua New Guinea	00675
Faroe Islands	00298	Paraguay	00595
Fiji	00679	Peru	0051
Finland	00358	Philippines	0063
France	0033	Poland	0048
French Guiana	00594	Portugal	00351
French Polynesia	00689	Puerto Rico	001787
Gabon	00241	Qatar	00974
Gambia	00220	Romania	0040
Georgia	00995	Russian Federation	007
Germany	0049	Rwanda	00250
Ghana	00233	Saint Helena	00290
Gibraltar	00350	Saint Kitts	001869
Greece	0030	Saint Lucia	001758
Greenland	00299	Saint Pierre	00508
Grenada	001473	Saint Vincent	001784
Guadeloupe	00590	Samoa US	00684
Guam	001671	Samoa West	00685
Guatemala	00502	San Marino	00378
Guinea	00224	Sao Tome	00239
Guyana	00592	Saudi Arabia	00966
Haiti	00509	Scotland (UK)	0044
Holland (Netherlands)	0031	Senegal	00221
Honduras	00504	Seychelles	00284
Hong Kong	00852	Sierra Leone	00232
Hungary	0036	Singapore	0065
Ibiza (Spain)	0034	Slovakia	00421
Iceland	00354	Slovenia	00386
India	0091	Solomon Islands	00677
Indian Ocean	00873	Somalia	00252
Indonesia	0062	South Africa	0027



## Business

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# EU air lobbies fear summer travel chaos

## Travellers could wait hours before boarding planes due to health checks

**PARIS:** A year after the coronavirus pandemic emptied airports, air travel associations fear chaos during Europe's summer holiday season as travellers could wait hours before boarding planes due to health checks.

Strict controls are still in place at most European airports even though vaccination campaigns are making progress and infection rates are falling. The International Air Transport Association (IATA) reported last week that on average, people travelling at peak times now stay twice as long at airports—three hours—compared with 2019.

That time is generally spent checking in, passing security and immigration controls, picking up checked bags and making it through customs. And there's the new reality: Airlines having to check passengers' COVID tests, temperature and other health documents.

The wait time has increased even though the volume of traffic is "only about 30 percent of pre-COVID-19 levels", an IATA statement said. The sector lobby group warned that time spent in airports could swell to five hours and 30 minutes if traffic rebounds to 75 percent of its pre-pandemic level, and even longer "without process improvements".

### Eight-hours?

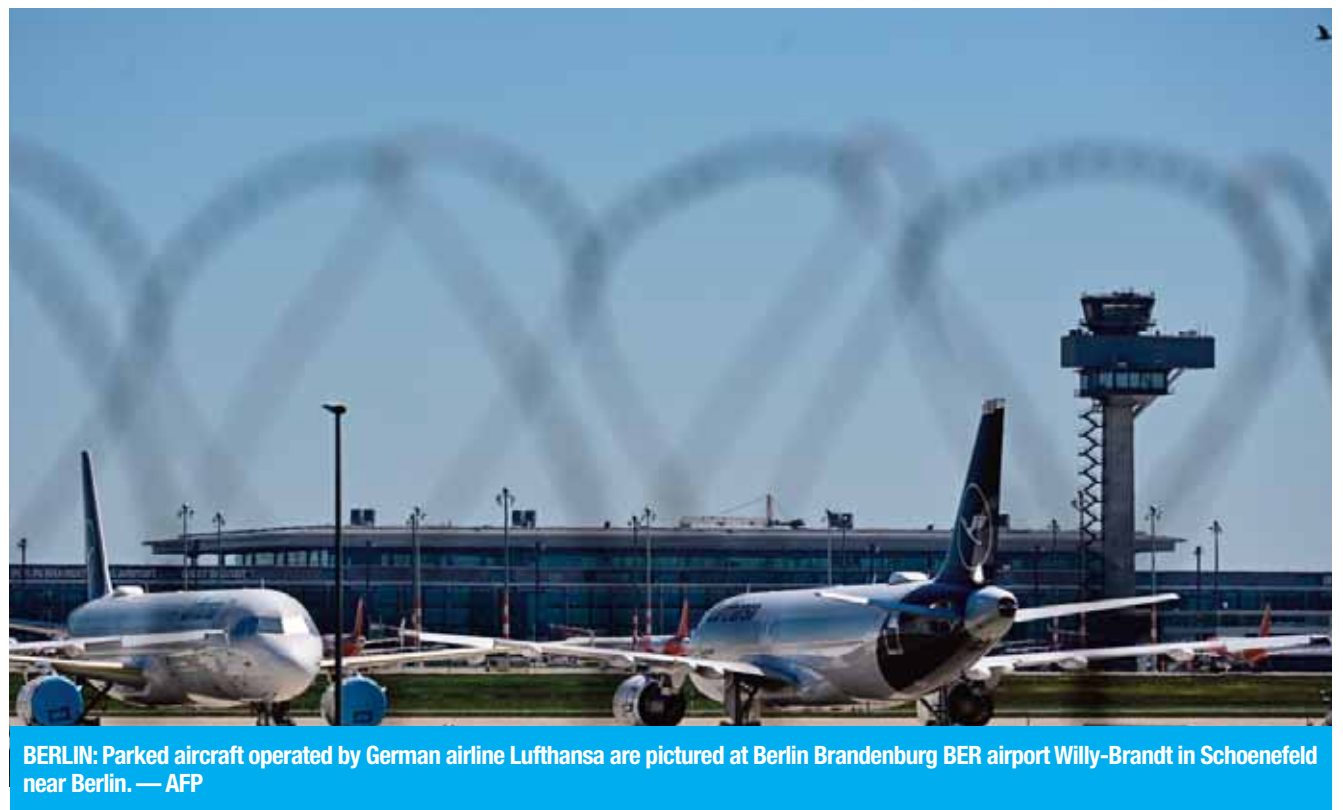
If traffic fully returns to normal, the IATA estimates people could spend up to eight hours getting to their planes and back out at their destinations. Such a nightmare scenario may not come to pass: The European branch of Airports Control International (ACI Europe) expects 125 million people to travel by air in August, almost half the level recorded two years earlier.

Eurocontrol, the organization tasked with air navigation security on the continent, forecasts the level in August to be between 46 and 69 percent of that in August 2019, depending on how the health crisis plays out in the next two months. Eurocontrol set its median level at 57 percent.

The EU Digital COVID Certificate—showing whether a traveller was vaccinated, has immunity from a previous infection or passed a coronavirus test—will be rolled out on July 1 in an effort to make travel smoother within the 27-nation bloc.

The health checks have made flying more complicated after the industry made efforts in recent years to reduce travel hassles by scrapping paper tickets and using online check-in or automatic identity controls. "The level of both uncertainty and complexity in planning for the restart is just mind blowing for now," said ACI Europe director general Olivier Jankovec, whose association represents 500 airports on the continent.

"With each passing day, the prospect of travellers enduring



**BERLIN:** Parked aircraft operated by German airline Lufthansa are pictured at Berlin Brandenburg BER airport Willy-Brandt in Schoenefeld near Berlin. — AFP

widespread chaos at airports this summer is becoming more real."

Verification of COVID tests, passenger location forms and quarantine documents "vary depending on their point of origin and destination, based on rules which remain largely unaligned and unstable across Europe," ACI Europe noted. In France, border police now systematically check identity papers, even for passengers within the Schengen passport-free travel zone, and machines that do it automatically have been shut down.

Airport authorities are focused meanwhile on keeping passengers moving, in particular at inspection points aimed at detecting potentially dangerous objects and liquids.

Immigration control remains under the state's authority. "At the top of my list of concerns are talks with the interior ministry on how to keep this summer from becoming an apocalypse in terms of passenger delays," said Augustin de Romanet, head of the Paris

airport group ADP.

### 'Shouldn't pose a problem'

A French airport source was less alarmed, however. "Certain kinds of measures will be eased... That is what the European health certificate is for, it will ease travel and eliminate the health control phase on three-quarters of flights," said the source, who requested anonymity.

In addition, "given the volume of traffic, which is not huge, and that not as many airport terminals will be operating, it should not pose a problem" for those who manage the flow of passengers, the source added. Noting the stiff competition between European airports, the source suggested that "ADP and the airlines are sounding the alarm to put pressure on the French government" for lighter health measures. —AFP

## Business

# Motorbike blues: Guinea struggles to crack down on two-wheel taxis

## In Conakry, motorcycle taxi drivers, police embroiled in a game of cat and mouse

**CONAKRY, Guinea:** Tension is high these days on the streets of Conakry, where motorcycle taxi drivers and police are embroiled in a game of cat and mouse. Two-wheeled taxis are essential for anyone who wants to avoid the West African capital's notorious traffic jams.

Responding to demand, many young men have committed their savings or borrowed heavily to buy a motorbike and ply informally for trade. But police say the fast-spreading, illegal and chaotic business poses a threat to road safety and have launched a crackdown.

They have barred all motorbike taxis from Kaloum—the most lucrative area, where ministries and other government buildings are located. The order, announced on May 5 and effective the following day, punishes offenders with fines and even the confiscation of the motorbike itself.

Since then, motorbike taxis and police have been trying to outsmart each other—two-wheel drivers dart into Kaloum, pick up a passenger and speed away without getting pulled over. Not infrequently, things turn physical, when Conakry's police, who have a reputation for brutality, seize a recalcitrant driver and put the handcuffs on him.

An AFP reporter last month saw a long line of young men outside the offices of the traffic police, waiting to recover their motorbike after coughing up a fine of 200,000 Guinean francs (\$20.4 / 16.7 euros) — a huge sum in one of the poorest countries in the world. Such punishment can have a crippling effect on young men who are already struggling with poverty and massive unemployment.

One taxi driver is Abdoul Karim Bah, a 27-year-law graduate, said, "My brother, who is a trader, supported me throughout my university studies. He bought me a motorbike and said, 'Go on, find a way to get by, like all the unemployed graduates of your age.'" On average, driving a motorcycle

taxi earns between 100,000 and 125,000 francs a month. But just a quarter or a fifth of that—around \$3 / 2.5 euros—is left after the driver pays for the bike's loan or rental, fuel and other running costs.

### Kick out the jams

The motorbike taxis are widely appreciated by the public. A trip to and from Kaloum aboard a two-wheeler is not necessarily cheap. The price can be almost triple that of a four-wheeled taxi, if one assumes that the fare in the conventional vehicle is shared among a large number of passengers.

But where the motorbikes score is in saving time—they can nip in and out of the jams on Kaloum, located on a peninsula whose entrance is a chokepoint.

The police have a different viewpoint, saying that informal motorbike taxi drivers are a plague—and a perilous one, too. "(They) create chaos wherever they go," said Issa Camara, a captain with the traffic police.

"They pull over whenever they want and however they like—it's a real problem for traffic police and other road users." Since the start of the year, more than 100 people have died across the country in accidents involving motorbike taxis, a senior police official said.

Mamadou Bailo Toukara, an official with the association of motorcycle taxi drivers in the district of Ratoma said that only a fraction of the city's two-wheeled taxi business are licensed. "We have huge problems in managing and monitoring the spread of motorbike taxis in Conakry," he said.

"Anyone who has failed in life, all the unemployed graduates who have never learned to drive a motorbike, have rushed into this business—it may generate income but it's extremely dangerous."



**CONAKRY:** A young girl sits with a motor-taxi driver at a taxi stop in Conakry. Hopping on a two-wheeled taxi is crucial for anyone who wants to avoid the notorious traffic jams in Conakry. —AFP

Members of licensed associations wear a numbered bib whose color denotes the district where they are based—but even these professionals have occasional run-ins with the law. An administrative official in Kaloum said the scale of the phenomenon, as well as petty corruption, meant that it was impossible to crack down—"even if you put a policeman on the back of every motorcycle taxi." —AFP

## Huawei launches a new range of products globally

**KUWAIT:** Huawei launched a range of Super Device new products yesterday giving consumers access to a seamless and truly intelligent experience across multiple devices in all different types of scenarios.

While there are more smart devices in our lives than ever, the experience they provide often isn't smart. Siloed systems tend to complicate interconnectivity and operations, which have ultimately led to a fragmented user experience. The Super Device experience is designed to address this problem. It provides a common language for different kinds of devices to connect and collaborate, providing users with a more convenient, smooth, and secure experience. It uses distributed technology to meet the varied needs of all types of different devices with a single system, enabling flexible deployment as needed. It also combines previously independent devices into a cohesive and holistic Super Device that integrates all hardware and resources to freely leverage the capabilities of its component devices based on the user's real-time needs.

At yesterday's event, Huawei launched a range of smart watches and tablets powered by HarmonyOS 2, including the Huawei Watch 3 Pro, the new 12.6-inch Huawei MatePad Pro. In addition, it also released the Huawei FreeBuds 4, its next-generation open-fit Active Noise Cancellation (ANC) wireless Bluetooth earbuds,

and two high-end monitors, the Huawei MateView and the Huawei MateView GT.

### Huawei Watch 3 Pro

Huawei's brand-new flagship smart watches Huawei Watch 3 Pro redefines fashion on your wrist. Featuring a curved glass screen and 316L stainless steel case, this stylish watch comes complete with a brand-new 3D rotating crown that senses different levels of pressure and provides haptic feedback in response to user input, making the watch both comfortable to wear and easy to operate. The Huawei WATCH 3 Pro also allows you to make and receive phone calls and listen to music by sharing the same phone number and data plan with your smartphone, without worrying about running out of battery since in addition to featuring an e-sim it also boasts a long life battery.

Huawei has also worked closely with Emirates, one of the world's leading international airlines to develop an app, which provides Huawei Watch 3 Pro users convenient access to their Emirates booking details and flight status. This is the latest step in Emirates' ongoing partnership with Huawei, and builds on the recent launch of its mobile app. The watch app allows customers to get quick updates with a simple glance at their smartwatch, further adding to a seamless customer experience on the move.

The Huawei Watch 3 Series also serves as a professional fitness & health manager that supports more than 100 workout modes. In addition to a broad range of healthcare support options, the watch can now monitor skin temperature with a new, high-precision temperature sensor. It also supports fall detection and SOS functions so users can monitor and manage their health in real time.



### Huawei Watch 3 | 3 Pro

The new Huawei MatePad Pro features a gorgeous 12.6-inch OLED FullView Display and has a 90% screen-to-body ratio, the highest among all tablets currently available on the market. Every display comes with incredibly high color accuracy, delivering a crisp, color-accurate picture that is on par with professional displays. The new Huawei MatePad Pro also has an ultra-high contrast ratio of 1,000,000:1, and supports DCI-P3 color gamut.

Equipped with the Kirin 9000 series chipsets, the Huawei MatePad Pro delivers incredible levels of performance. Supported by the distributed data management and task scheduling capabilities of HarmonyOS, the tablet can work together seamlessly with smartphones and PCs to double your productivity and creativity in different scenarios, whether you are in the office or at the drawing board. The Huawei MatePad Pro also supports Multi-screen Collaboration with PCs. The tablet can become a drawing board in Mirror mode and a monitor in Extend mode. It also supports cross-device file dragging and dropping, delivering a more efficient and collaborative multi-device experience.

### Huawei MatePad Pro

An entirely new interactive experience:

Huawei Super Device experience is also exemplified through various software, connectivity, and software integration. With Huawei super control center, consumers can easily toggle all connections including Bluetooth and Wi-Fi easily with one touch. Apart from that, Huawei took controlling music to the next level as well. In the audio control panel, consumers are able to access all favorite music through different music platforms in one place. You can easily toggle between your different music applications to play your favorite songs/lists easily.

## Business

# Russia gathers thousands for business forum despite COVID

## Russian Davos attracts investors from around the world

**SAINT PETERSBURG, Russia:** A flagship economic forum has returned to Saint Petersburg, with Russia aiming to signal it has moved beyond the coronavirus pandemic and is open for business despite political tensions.

The Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF), often dubbed the Russian Davos, officially starts yesterday and is the country's main showcase for investors, attracting political and business leaders from around the world.

It has been hosted every year since 1997 — cancelled only in 2020 due to the pandemic — in the hometown of President Vladimir Putin, who is expected to speak at the forum in person on Friday. "The forum is very important for the image of the city, the restoration of the economy's growth and the revival of tourism," Saint Petersburg governor Alexander Beglov told the RIA Novosti news agency.

The scale of the forum will be smaller than previous years, with the number of participants capped at 5,000. In comparison, the 2019 SPIEF was attended by over 19,000 people from 145 countries, according to organizers. At the forum previously attended by leaders of China, France and India, Putin will

be joined via videolink by Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz and Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, the Emir of Qatar, which has sent one of the biggest delegations this year.

The reduced attendance also comes after a turbulent year for Russian diplomacy, as relations with the West — which have been deteriorating since the annexation of Crimea in 2014 — reached a new low following the poisoning and imprisonment of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny.

But Russian officials now say that "bad politics should not be allowed to interfere with good business", said Chris Weafer, analyst and founder of Macro-Advisory consultancy firm. According to Weafer, one of the messages at this year's SPIEF is that "Russia has turned a corner and has learned from the last seven years" characterised by low oil prices and sanctions.

### Handshakes, no masks

The forum comes almost a year after Russia lifted its strict lockdown that was imposed last spring when the coronavirus swept across the country. Since late summer most virus restrictions have been lifted with authorities opting to protect the economy and pin hopes on Russia's Sputnik V jab that was registered in August.



Participants attend a session of the St Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF) in Saint Petersburg yesterday. — AFP

The country still continues to record an average of 9,000 new infections every day. To ensure virus safety at the forum, all participants

this year are required to test negative for the coronavirus before they enter the site. Inside, masks are required at all times. — AFP

## Mango Mania at LuLu Hypermarket

**KUWAIT:** The annual 'Mango Mania' festival that celebrates the best of mangoes from across the world was held from 2 to 11 June at LuLu Hypermarket, the undisputed heavyweight in the region when it comes to hypermarket retailing.

The event was inaugurated at the Al-Rai branch of LuLu Hypermarket on Wednesday, 2 June by the Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Sibi George, in the presence of senior management of LuLu Hypermarket in Kuwait. Held across all LuLu Hypermarket outlets in Kuwait, the 'Mango Mania' promotion has grown more popular through the years, and has become a yearly-event that is eagerly awaited by customers. This year, the relaxing of restrictions following the recent downward trend in COVID-19 infections in Kuwait, allowed shoppers to feel more comfortable attending the festival. Nevertheless, the entire event was organized in full adherence to all existing health guidelines.

A major draw of the annual 'Mango Mania' festival is that it allows shoppers to

sample, select and purchase the finest mangoes and mango-related products from across the globe. This year was no different, with more than 50 varieties of mangoes on display, shoppers could pick and choose from an international smorgasbord of mangoes ranging from sour to sweet to super-sweet and in riot of rainbow colors. The wide range of luscious and exotic mangoes on display during the 10-day mango festival included all-time favorite Indian brands such as Alphonso, Badami, Mallika, Totapuri and Rajapuri, as well as choicest mangoes from tropical mango paradises worldwide.

This year, in addition to mangoes in all their glorious colors and tastes, there was also a wide selection of mango-related products on special offer during the promotion, including mango juices and smoothies, mango halwa, mango payasam, mango snacks, mango curries, mango salads, mango pickles, and even mango cakes, mousse and muffins as well as mango swiss rolls.

Committed to bringing shoppers the finest selection of international products at competitive prices, LuLu Hypermarket has over the years built a large base of discerning customers looking for the widest choice of high-quality affordable products. It is no surprise that these loyal patrons turned up in large numbers to participate in the celebration of global mangoes at the 'Mango Mania' festival.



KUWAIT: Indian Ambassador Sibi George inaugurates the annual 'Mango Mania' festival in the presence of senior management of LuLu Hypermarket in Kuwait.



## Business

# Supply bottlenecks and worker shortage challenge US recovery

## American businesses remain optimistic despite Fed warning

**WASHINGTON:** American businesses remain optimistic about their recovery from the pandemic, but a Federal Reserve report shows supply disruptions and labor shortages have begun to boost prices and crimp output. The survey of firms nationwide released Wednesday gave a generally upbeat view of the US economy's comeback from the turmoil created by COVID-19, helped by vaccinations that have allowed a broad return to normal business.

However, the experiences reported in the "beige book" survey of economic conditions also highlight the bumpy road companies face as they try to ramp up. The widespread access to COVID-19 vaccinations contributed to the "somewhat faster rate" of economic expansion in recent weeks, the Fed, but "significant supply chain challenges continued to disrupt production."

While hiring increased in most of the Fed's 12 regions, employers continued to struggle to fill open positions, which "prevented some firms from increasing output" and in a few cases forced cuts in hours of operation. The report, prepared ahead of the Fed's next policy meeting June 14-15, likely will intensify worries about how the central bank will respond to rising prices.

Fed officials have repeatedly stressed that price spikes are expected to be temporary, largely due to the rebound from the sharp declines in the early stage of the pandemic last year and to hiccups in restarting the economy and supply chains. The Fed's preferred inflation measure jumped 3.6 percent in April compared to a year earlier, but officials remain confident the rate will drop closer to two percent in coming months.

Investors are worried the price pressures will oblige the central bank to tap the brakes on its easy money policies, despite assurances

from Fed policymakers that they have no plans to pull back on their stimulative bond-buying program or raise borrowing rates. While the beige book notes that selling prices increased only moderately, "input costs rose more briskly," and increased across the board, intensified by supply issues.

However, strong demand allowed some businesses to pass much of the cost increases along to their customers.

### Wage mismatch

Meanwhile, hiring challenges were seen nationwide, and the Fed noted that "a growing number of firms offered signing bonuses and increased starting wages to attract and retain workers." While some business groups have blamed increased jobless benefits for undercutting employers, many analysts point to difficulties with accessing schooling and childcare as key issues keeping some workers on the sidelines.

In a blog post Wednesday, former White House economists Jason Furman and Wilson Powell said a combination of factors were driving the labor shortages. "One of the major sources of lagging supply was likely that workers have not returned to jobs as quickly as employers have opened up new jobs," they said. But the Fed survey also reflected a wage mismatch between workers and employers.

In the Minneapolis district, "A Minnesota staffing firm with multiple offices said every location had at least 100 job openings." However, "Job service contacts reported low wages as a moderate or significant barrier keeping job seekers from taking available jobs."

And in Cleveland, one staffing company "turned away prospective clients that offered starting wages of less than \$13 per-hour because he



**WASHINGTON:** A survey of firms in the US released Wednesday gave a generally upbeat view of the economy's comeback from the turmoil created by COVID-19. —AFP

will not be able to find anyone at that wage."

Economist Diane Swonk of Grant Thornton said the beige book showed demand continues to improve faster than supply. "It's going to be a hot summer for prices and wages—real test is whether we see shortages persist," she said on Twitter. —AFP

## Yellen calls for standardizing green investments

**WASHINGTON:** US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen called yesterday for clear standardized systems of measuring green investments, as countries strive to meet their climate goals. Environmental, social and governance (ESG) fund assets have grown from \$10 billion in 2015 to \$246 billion in March 2021, she said. Yellen urged global partners to "unlock progress towards greater ESG clarity and transparency so these investments can play a key role in closing the infrastructure gap and lowering global emissions."

"Poor quality or availability of ESG data and lack of standardized ESG metrics are often cited as barriers to further deployment of sustainable finance," she said, addressing a meeting of G20 member states convened to discuss infrastructure investment. She said a lack of clear measurement could lead to "green washing," the practice of exaggerating environmental and emissions measures to appear more climate friendly and attract investors. Yellen added that the G20 was not only working to develop indicators that incorporate ESG considerations but also "resilience and life cycle cost." Sustainability-linked debt issuances "have grown at an annualized rate of 60 percent over the last eight years," Yellen said, deeming it essential to "do more." "In order to mobilize additional investments into clean infrastructure, investors are demanding clear and comparable ESG data and metrics," she said. —AFP

## Oil builds on gains on bullish demand hopes

**NEW YORK:** Oil prices extended their rally Wednesday on growing expectations for demand as the global economy recovers, while equities rose in Europe and edged higher in the United States. Crude futures in New York closed at \$68.83 a barrel, their highest level since October 2018, while futures in London climbed to their highest level since May 2019. The rally comes a day after the so-called OPEC+ group confirmed its production plan amid optimism of increased consumption in a reopening global economy.

On Tuesday, OPEC+ agreed to continue lifting output in July, having started slowly doing so in early May. "The demand picture has shown clear signs of improvement," said Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman.

But not everyone is sold yet on this bullish demand picture.

"The jury is still very much out on just how fast oil demand will recover," said a note from Louise Dickson, oil market analyst at Rystad Energy. "The prevailing market expectation is that oil consumption will outpace supply by summer, but the demand euphoria is still receiving daily doses of reality as COVID-19 cases are boundlessly spreading in India and other parts of Asia."

The bump in oil has given a fillip to energy firms, though broader US stock markets have struggled to advance much. Major US indices eked out gains, with energy equities the biggest winner, while health, industrial and materials sectors all pulled back.

Investors have been torn between optimism over the recov-



ering economy and worries over higher inflation. "We're in a bit of a holding pattern, where the major indices remain just below all-time highs but the momentum hasn't been there for a test of those levels," TD Ameritrade market strategist JJ Kinnahan said in a trading note.

"It's understandable, really, when you consider the possible ramifications of the data coming up not just this week with jobs but next week with May consumer prices," he added. In Europe, London, Paris and Frankfurt indices all rose, with the CAC 40 in Paris hitting its highest closing level this year.

Tokyo, Sydney, Seoul, Taipei and Jakarta all rose, with Manila surging more than three percent on reports the government plans to ease some containment measures. However, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Singapore, Mumbai, Bangkok and Wellington dipped. —AFP

## Sports

# 'Good omen' for Benzema despite penalty miss on France return

**NICE:** Karim Benzema said he was happy with his performance despite a missed penalty as he made his first France appearance in almost six years in Wednesday's 3-0 Euro 2020 friendly win over Wales in Nice. Benzema had been left out of Didier Deschamps' squad since Oct 2015 due to his alleged role in a blackmail plot.

Kylian Mbappe, Antoine Griezmann and Ousmane Dembele were on the scoresheet for the World Cup winners against the Euro 2016 semifinalists, who had Neco Williams sent off for handling the ball in his area. "I felt good throughout the match. It's a good omen for what's to come. The key is to create chances, win and do better the next time to score more goals," Benzema told television channel TF1.

"I felt a lot of pride and joy in wearing the shirt again. I wanted to play and to show what I can do tonight on the field," he added. Deschamps handed goalkeeper Hugo Lloris his 100th start as captain but midfielder N'Golo Kante was rested after winning the Champions League with Chelsea on Saturday. Deschamps' counterpart Robert Page, standing in for regular boss Ryan Giggs as the former Manchester United winger faces charges of assault, kept Juventus

midfielder Aaron Ramsey on the bench having last played in Serie A in April.

Benzema, who had scored twice against Armenia at the Allianz Riviera on his last international appearance, forced a save from Danny Ward after four minutes. His 82nd cap took a turn for the worse after 22 minutes despite his shot that resulted in Liverpool defender Williams' red card and a penalty. The Real Madrid forward stepped up but Ward saved the spot-kick superbly low to his right.

Les Bleus stepped up the pressure with an extra man and broke the deadlock 10 minutes before the break. Adrien Rabiot's shot from outside the box was pushed away by Ward but Mbappe poked home the volley for the opener. Griezmann doubled the lead three minutes into the second half with a curled effort past a fully-stretched Ward.

Dembele claimed his side's third goal - and just his fourth for his country - with 11 minutes left after Benzema's shot fired back off the post. France face Bulgaria on Tuesday before opening their Euro 2020 campaign by playing Germany in Munich on June 15. Wales host Albania tomorrow before heading to Baku to play Switzerland on June 12. — AFP



**NICE:** France's forward Karim Benzema misses to score on a penalty kick during the friendly football match between France and Wales at the Allianz Riviera Stadium on Wednesday. —AFP

## Alexander-Arnold injured as England beat Austria

**MIDDLESBROUGH:** Trent Alexander-Arnold could miss Euro 2020 after the England defender suffered a thigh injury in Wednesday's 1-0 friendly win against Austria. Liverpool right-back Alexander-Arnold limped off late in the second half after injuring himself while clearing the ball. The 22-year-old looked emotional as he needed assistance to hobble around the Riverside Stadium pitch.

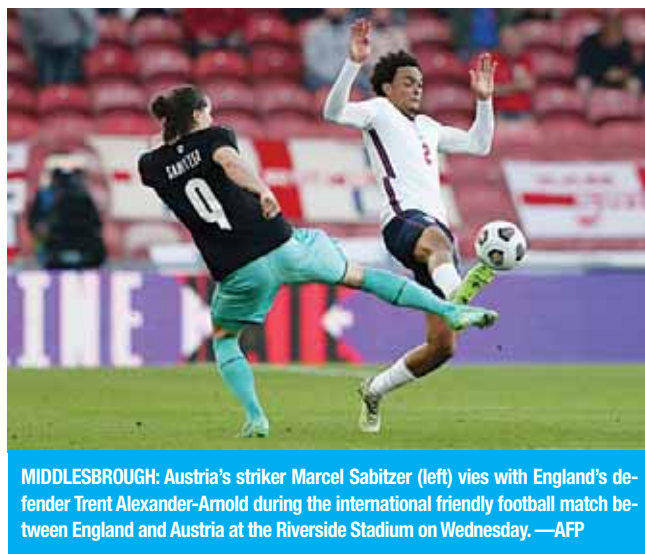
Southgate admitted he was concerned over Alexander-Arnold's chances of making the tournament as he awaited tests over the next 24 hours. "We're going to have a look. Clearly it's not a good sign to see him come off in the way he did," Southgate said. "We'll have to assess him. I think it's a thigh but the medical team are assessing him. "It's not a good sign to see him have to walk off as he did. We'll know more in 24 to 48 hours. We don't know the full extent. The last thing you want is to see him come off in the way he did."

Alexander-Arnold, who finished the season in fine form, is one of four right-backs in the England squad after being selected despite reports he would be left out. Kieran Trippier, another of the right-backs, was used at left-back against Austria, while Reece James and Kyle Walker would also be in contention to start if Alexander-Arnold is ruled out.

Unable to call on players from Chelsea, Manchester City and

## Depay rescues Netherlands against depleted Scotland

**FARO, Portugal:** Memphis Depay scored twice to salvage a 2-2 draw for the Netherlands in a pre-Euro 2020 friendly on Wednesday against a Scotland side missing seven players following mid-



**MIDDLESBROUGH:** Austria's striker Marcel Sabitzer (left) vies with England's defender Trent Alexander-Arnold during the international friendly football match between England and Austria at the Riverside Stadium on Wednesday. —AFP

Manchester United following their European finals, Southgate sent out an experimental team. It was Bukayo Saka who staked a claim for a place in the starting line-up for their tournament opener against Croatia at Wembley on June 13. The 19-year-old Arsenal winger was a lively presence on the left flank and capped his eye-catching display with a composed second half finish for his first England goal. "It's an amazing feeling for me, probably the biggest moment of my career," Saka said.—AFP

fielder John Fleck's positive COVID-19 test. Celtic center-back Jack Hendry drilled in from 20 yards to give Scotland an early lead in Faro with his first international goal, but Depay soon equalized with a crisp volley.

Kevin Nisbet put the Scots back ahead after coming on as a substitute on the hour, also netting his first Scotland goal in just his second appearance. David Turnbull curled just over and Craig Gordon made a fine save from Patrick van Aanholt's deflected strike. However, the Scotland goalkeeper was rooted to the spot as Depay bent an 89th-minute free-kick around the wall to snatch an equalizer for the Dutch.—AFP

## Hummels, Mueller end Germany exile in Denmark draw

**INNSBRUCK, Austria:** Mats Hummels and Thomas Mueller made their return to international football after a two-year exile on Wednesday as Germany were held to a 1-1 draw by Denmark in a friendly ahead of Euro 2020. Borussia Muenchengladbach midfielder Florian Neuhaus gave the Germans a second-half lead in Innsbruck.

RB Leipzig forward Yussuf Poulsen equalized for Denmark after a superb pass from Inter Milan playmaker Christian Eriksen. Hummels' return helped tighten the German defense which had leaked 18 goals in their previous 11 internationals, but the Dortmund defender was unable to stop Poulsen equalizing.

"It was a mixed team performance," said head coach Joachim Loew. "We defended well, better than in previous matches, but we made life difficult for ourselves. "It was a little bit of carelessness that led to Denmark's goal." In the build-up, Danish coach Kasper Hjulmand claimed Germany have the "potential" to win this year's European Championship.

However this was a solid, rather than spectacular display by the Germans, who play world champions France in Munich on June 15, then face holders Portugal four days later in Group F. The Germans were without a quartet of Premier League stars. Chelsea's Kai Havertz, Timo Werner and Antonio Ruediger, as well as Manchester City midfielder Ilkay Gundogan, were rested after Saturday's Champions League final. Germany had the best chance of a goalless first half when Bayern Munich winger Serge Gnabry hit the crossbar with a long-range shot a minute before the interval.—AFP

## Sports

# Sixers, Hawks and Jazz advance in NBA playoffs

**LOS ANGELES:** The Philadelphia 76ers, Atlanta Hawks and Utah Jazz powered into the conference semi-finals of the NBA playoffs on Wednesday as an electrifying display from Luka Dončić took the Dallas Mavericks to the brink of a series victory. Seth Curry's 30-point display helped the Sixers shrug off the injury absence of Joel Embiid as the top seeds completed a 4-1 playoff series win over the Washington Wizards with a 129-112 win in Philadelphia.

The fifth-seeded Hawks brought the New York Knicks' season to an end with a 103-89 victory at Madison Square Garden to clinch the best-of-seven series 4-1 after a bruising contest. The Sixers and Hawks will now meet for a place in the Eastern Conference finals. In the Western Conference, top seeds Utah outclassed the Memphis Grizzlies 126-110 to wrap up a 4-1 win in the best-of-seven series, with Donovan Mitchell's 30-point haul steering the Jazz into the next round.

But the individual performance of the night came at the Staples Center, where Slovenian prodigy Dončić erupted for 42 points to help the Mavericks to a 105-100 win over the Los Angeles Clippers. It was the fifth straight road victory of a roller coaster series, and leaves the Mavericks 3-2 ahead with two games to play. "I played terrible at the end but we got a win and that's all that matters," said Dončić, who wants Dallas to replicate their away form in game six in Texas. "We've got to play like we play on the road," he said.

## 'Team win'

Tim Hardaway Jr was the only other player to crack double figures for Dallas with 20 points. The Clippers meanwhile were left ruing a costly late missed layup by Nicolas Batum with less than 10 seconds remaining which would have given them a 102-101 lead. Instead the Mavs defence held firm to leave the Clippers needing to win their final two games to stay alive.

Elsewhere on Wednesday, Philadelphia shrugged off the news of Joel Embiid's knee injury to dispatch Washington. "It was a great team win," Sixers coach Doc Rivers said afterwards. "I just love how we played. We got down early, but no panic set in. They really believed they were the better team today. They played with that kind of confidence. It was what you would call an all hands in, team win for sure."

After a tight first half, Philadelphia pulled clear in the third period, outscoring the Wizards 38-31. Another burst of scoring midway through the fourth period sealed the contest, with Curry, Ben Simmons and Tobias Harris scoring six unanswered points to put Philadelphia 118-100 ahead with just under six minutes to play.

## Young sinks Knicks

Harris finished with 28 points while Simmons completed a triple double with 19 points, 10 rebounds and 11 assists. Dwight Howard, Tyrese Maxey and Furkan Korkmaz also made double figures. Rivers reserved



**SALT LAKE CITY:** Jordan Clarkson #00 of the Utah Jazz shoots the ball against the Memphis Grizzlies during Round 1, Game 5 of the 2021 NBA Playoffs on Wednesday. — AFP

praise for Simmons' performance. "I keep saying it - stick with him, he's a hell of a player," Rivers said. "He just does so much for the team, he really does."

Bradley Beal led the Wizards scoring with 32 points while Russell Westbrook was unable to add another triple double to his season tally, falling just

short with 24 points, 10 assists and eight rebounds. In New York, Trae Young delivered a 36-point masterclass for Atlanta in an ill-tempered victory at the Garden. Players from both sides scuffled as they left the court at half-time in a game peppered with technical fouls. —AFP

## Ancelotti a 'different' man following Real Madrid return

**MADRID:** Carlo Ancelotti said he was returning to Real Madrid a "different" person after being appointed for a second spell in charge of the Spanish giants. The 61-year-old was chosen as the replacement for Zinedine Zidane, with Ancelotti leaving Everton after 18 months at Goodison Park. "I want to thank the president. I'm very happy to come back here, I feel that I'm at home here," Ancelotti said as he was unveiled at Wednesday's news conference.

The Italian won the Champions League in his first stint in Madrid between 2013 and 2015, before taking over at Bayern Munich and then Napoli. "Carlo Ancelotti is not the same as he was six years ago. I'm different, I have six more years of experience. Positive and negative," he said. "I was happy at Everton, at a family club. But negative experiences can also make you grow. My first spell here, I remember all that very clearly."

"The matches won, the triumphs, the difficult moments as well, the day of my departure, the day I first arrived. Five years have passed, but coming back here is always something very special," he added. "I have the same feelings as I had when I first arrived. But now, I'm more certain and more confident." —AFP



**Carlo Ancelotti**

## Red Bull braced for Mercedes backlash

**BAKU:** Baku's street circuit is the medieval backdrop for Formula One's latest round of jousting between resurgent Red Bull and a Mercedes team anxious to move on from their Monaco misery. The Azerbaijan Grand Prix returns to the calendar for the first time since 2019 with Red Bull drinking in the view from atop the world championship standings.

Max Verstappen's first Monaco triumph coupled with an insipid weekend for seventh-placed Lewis Hamilton saw the Dutchman deftly turn a 14-point deficit into a four-point advantage in the race for the 2021 drivers' crown. In the constructors' standings Red Bull transformed a 29-point deficit into a one point lead as they regained the summit for the first time since 2013.

Unsurprisingly team principal Christian Horner was pleased as punch. "For us to come out leading both championships is beyond expectations," said the chief architect of Red Bull's revival. "When (Mercedes) have an off day it's important for us to bank a lot of points."

While Monaco's narrow twisting street circuit makes overtaking notoriously difficult, Baku is an altogether different proposition. Boasting the longest straight - 2.23 km with speeds up to 370 kmh - of any circuit, Sunday's race will be fast and furious. And one where Mercedes can expect to rub some shine back on their Silver Arrows. "It's been a strong track for Mercedes in the past. We're not under any illusions, we are sure they are going to bounce back fast," forecast Horner.

## 'Nothing comes easy'

Mercedes have taken pole and won three of the four grand prix staged in the former Soviet state's ancient capital on the Caspian Sea. But a different driver has taken the chequered flag each time, with Nico Rosberg in 2016, Daniel Ricciardo in 2017, Hamilton in 2018 and Valtteri Bottas, consigned to a DNF by a stubbornly immovable wheel nut in Monaco, the winner in 2019.

Verstappen is hoping to continue that sequence but has yet to do better than fourth. He concedes the venue for the sixth leg of the season is "probably



**BAKU:** Red Bull's Dutch driver Max Verstappen attends a press conference ahead of the Formula One Azerbaijan Grand Prix at the Baku City Circuit yesterday. —AFP

not a favorite of mine if I'm honest". "I've never been on the podium there so it's time to change that," said Verstappen, who has two wins this term to Hamilton's three. He added: "Taking the lead in the championship feels good but we need to be there at the end of the final race, that's all that matters."

After their total dominance stretching back to 2014 and all 14 titles Toto Wolff, Mercedes' team principal, is relishing the fight with Red Bull. "We love the battle. It's just what the doctor ordered after the past seven years," he said. "Weekends like Monaco are the ones that keep you coming back for more," he added. "Nothing comes easy in this sport, and that's why we love it."

One man nodding in agreement at that last comment is Charles Leclerc, who planted his Ferrari at the front of the Monaco grid, only for his race to end with a cracked left-rear driveshaft hub, the unfortunate legacy of his crash in qualifying, on the warm-up lap. But with his qualifying form and teammate Carlos Sainz finishing second Leclerc left his home race far from downcast. "We are coming back from quite far if we see last year, so we've done a good job to be improving race by race. we are on the good road." —AFP

## Sports

# Tokyo 2020 chief says Games '100%' on, with 50 days to go

**TOKYO:** The Tokyo Olympics are "100 percent" certain to go ahead, the chief organizer said yesterday, but warned that a major coronavirus outbreak mid-Games could slam the door shut on fans. Tokyo 2020 president Seiko Hashimoto made the comments exactly 50 days before the pandemic-postponed Olympics, which remain plagued by public opposition.

"I believe that the possibility of these Games going on is 100 percent that we will do this," Hashimoto told BBC Sport, adding that fans could be locked out during the Games. "The biggest challenge will be how we can control and manage the flow of people," she said. "If an outbreak should happen during the Games times that amounts to a crisis or an emergency situation then I believe we must be prepared to have these Games without any spectators."

Overseas fans have already been barred, and a decision on whether to allow domestic spectators is expected after Tokyo's coronavirus state of emergency ends on June 20. Despite the lingering uncertainty, organizers marked 50 days to the July 23 opening ceremony by revealing details of the medal ceremonies, including podiums made with recycled plastic. They also released the victory music for the gold-medalists.

"We have 50 days left. I feel like I can hear the sound of the athletes' footsteps heading to Tokyo," Hashimoto said at the ceremony in the Ariake arena, a Games venue. "We're fully ready and prepared with infection prevention measures, so please feel safe and reassured coming to Japan," she added. "And for Japan to feel safe in welcoming you, I ask you, all the athletes, to be responsible with your actions, to follow the rules."

## 10,000 volunteers quit

Japan has seen a smaller COVID-19 outbreak than many countries, with just over 13,000 deaths. Around three percent of the population has been fully vaccinated. But organizers face persistent domestic opposition, with around 80 percent of people in national polls backing a further delay or cancellation. Hashimoto earlier told Japan's Nikkan Sports daily that postponement was not an option, and a cancellation was virtually inconceivable.

"If various countries around the world experience very serious situations, and delegations from most countries can't come, then we wouldn't be able to hold it," she said. "But conversely, unless such a situation emerges, the Games will not be cancelled." Organizers confirmed yesterday that around 10,000 of the 80,000 Games volunteers had quit - many over coronavirus concerns, according to Tokyo 2020 CEO Toshiro Muto, as well as for scheduling or other logistical reasons.

Some also dropped out in protest at sexist remarks by Hashimoto's predecessor, who was forced to resign in February after saying women talk too much in meetings. Organizers have said the reduction in volunteers will not affect the Games because the event has been scaled back. As well as the ban on non-domestic fans, the number of overseas officials and participants has been cut by about half, to around 78,000, with calls for further reductions.

Olympic officials are looking to build positive momentum as the Games draw nearer, with Australia's softball team this week becoming the first athletes to arrive in Japan. But in a sign of the challenges ahead, a member of Ghana's Under-24 Olympic football team tested positive upon arriving for a friendly late on Wednesday, the Japan Football Association said.



**TOKYO:** The countdown clock for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games is displayed with 50 days before the opening ceremony outside a Tokyo station yesterday. —AFP

All of Ghana's team, who will play Japan's U24s on Saturday, tested negative in the 72 hours before their departure. Japanese swimmer Daiya Seto said Hashimoto's comments had given him confidence for the final stage of his preparations. "Hashimoto said that the Games wouldn't be cancelled or postponed. As an athlete, if you believe that they're going to go ahead, then you can prepare for it in the best way possible," he said. "I want to make the most of the 50 days I have left, so that I can do myself justice when I race." —AFP

## Baffert gets 2-year Kentucky Derby ban over doping case

**LOS ANGELES:** Legendary US trainer Bob Baffert was banned from the Kentucky Derby for two years on Wednesday, hours after confirmation of a positive drugs test against his winning horse Medina Spirit in this year's race. A statement from Churchill Downs Inc, which operates the Kentucky Derby, said Baffert would be barred from entering horses at the track until the end of the 2023 Spring Meet.

It means Baffert - one of the most successful trainers in US racing history - will not be allowed to enter the Kentucky Derby until the 2024 season. Baffert, 68, has been at the center of a doping scandal after Medina Spirit tested positive for a banned steroid after powering to victory in last month's Derby. It marked the fifth time in the past year that a horse trained by Baffert has failed a doping test. In its statement announcing Baffert's suspension, Churchill Downs said the ban was necessary to preserve confidence in the integrity of the sport. "Reckless practices and substance violations that jeopardize the safety of our equine and human athletes or compromise the integrity of our sport are not acceptable and as a company we must take measures to demonstrate that they will not be tolerated," said Churchill Downs chief executive Bill Carstanjen. —AFP



**Bob Baffert**

## Serena survives scare as Tsitsipas, Medvedev advance

**PARIS:** Serena Williams survived a French Open scare to extend her latest bid for an elusive 24th Grand Slam singles title with a three-set victory over Mihaela Buzarnescu on Wednesday, while men's fifth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas and world number two Daniil Medvedev also reached the third round. The 39-year-old Williams, who has been one short of Margaret Court's all-time record of most major trophies since 2017, brushed off a second-set blip to win 6-3, 5-7, 6-1. The American, seeded seventh, will play compatriot Danielle Collins for a last-16 berth as she looks for a fourth French Open crown, but first since 2015. "It was good competition, she was playing well and I was playing well," said the former world number one, who has withdrawn injured mid-tournament on two of her last three visits to Roland Garros.

Williams has already seen two of her likeliest title rivals either fail to start the tournament or pull out in unprecedented circumstances. World number three Simona Halep, who defeated Williams in the 2019 Wimbledon final, withdrew before the event with injury. The biggest story of the week so far has been world number two Naomi Osaka's shock withdrawal after a press boycott, saying she has been suffering with "bouts of depression" since her breakthrough triumph over Williams in the controversial 2018 US Open showpiece match.

Williams started well on Wednesday with a comfortable opening set, but paid for missing seven of eight break points in the second as world number 174 Buzarnescu forced a decider. But she double-faulted on break point in the first game of the third set and Williams cruised to the finish line.

## Tsitsipas lays down early marker

Tsitsipas, regarded as the favourite to reach the final from his half of the draw, put in a strong display to dispose of Spaniard Pedro Martinez 6-3, 6-4, 6-3. The Greek, who lost an epic semi-final to Novak Djokovic last year,



**PARIS:** Serena Williams of the US returns the ball to Romania's Mihaela Buzarnescu during their women's singles second round tennis match on Day 4 of the French Open tennis tournament on Wednesday. —AFP

next faces big-serving American John Isner. "We're here at a Grand Slam and it's a big opportunity... But of course it's going to be a challenge," said the 22-year-old Tsitsipas, who has never reached a major final. He has won his last three meetings with Isner.

Medvedev bounced back from losing the first set to American Tommy Paul in style by romping to a 3-6, 6-1, 6-4, 6-3 victory. The Russian, who had never got past the first round in four previous appearances, will eye a fourth-round spot against US 32nd seed Reilly Opelka. After a sloppy opening set, the two-time Grand Slam runner-up was far too strong for Paul, breaking his 52-ranked opponent eight times. Sixth seed Alexander Zverev was in scratchy form but did enough to see off Russian qualifier Roman Safiullin in straight sets. The German, last year's US Open runner-up, will take on Serbia's Laslo Djere in the third round after a 7-6 (7/4), 6-3, 7-6 (7/1) victory. Zverev had needed to fight back from two sets down in his opening match against qualifier Oscar Otte. "I'm happy to be through in three sets," he said. "I'm happy not to have played another five-setter. I think it's going to be important for me during the course of this tournament." —AFP



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