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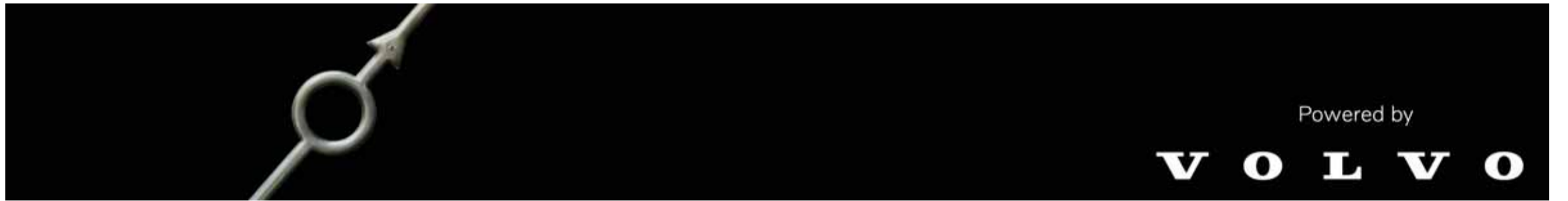
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# Kuwait inks COVID vaccine deals with Moderna, J&J

## Kuwait to operate direct flights to UK • Museums, cultural centers to reopen

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait has contracted with US pharmaceutical companies Moderna and Johnson & Johnson to supply it with their coronavirus vaccines, Minister of Health Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah said on Sunday. In an interview with Kuwait TV, Sheikh Basel expected delivery of Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines in the last quarter of this year. Commenting on the delay in the delivery of vaccine doses from certain producers, the minister argued that around 75 percent of vaccines produced are given to only 10 countries, while the remaining go to countries around the world.

Sheikh Basel said the delay in receiving vaccines is not a problem faced only by Kuwait, but also all Gulf states and many other countries. He

assured those waiting for the second jab of the AstraZeneca vaccine that the vaccine doses have arrived and are stored in the country. The producer, however, recommended pre-usage tests, he said, noting AstraZeneca is expected to deliver the test results on June 8.

If the results are positive, vaccination will start directly, Sheikh Basel stressed, pointing out that the ministry has a plan to vaccinate the 200,000 people who are waiting for the second dose in 10 days. But if AstraZeneca demands more time to send the results, beneficiaries will have the choice of getting a second dose of the Pfizer vaccine, he said.

"We are approaching herd immunity, but there are challenges, including the lack of vac-

cines," Sheikh Basel said. Controlling this pandemic needs a fair distribution of vaccines to all countries to stop the mutation of the virus, he explained. The minister affirmed that the country's pandemic situation is stable, despite registering new infections on a daily basis, like in other countries. He noted that the ministry records all positive cases with or without symptoms, unlike many other countries, which register only those who have symptoms.

Sheikh Basel lauded the implementation of preventive measures across the country, hoping for continued abidance by these measures until the end of the pandemic. Cooperation by citizens and expats helped the ministry implement preventive and precautionary measures and

protected the medical system over the past 16 months, he said.

Meanwhile, the Cabinet decided yesterday to operate direct flights to the United Kingdom from Sunday, June 13, with adherence to health precautions against COVID-19. The Cabinet tasked the Directorate General of Civil Aviation to organize the direct flights to the UK (Kuwait-London-Kuwait) at a frequency of one flight per week for each airline, according to a statement posted by the government communications center on Twitter. The Cabinet also decided to reopen museums and cultural institutions and facilities from Sunday, provided visitors and staff adhere to anti-COVID measures. — KUNA



Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah

## Motorbike delivery drivers in outdoor work ban gray area

By Nawara Fattahova

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait imposes an outdoor work ban every year from June 1 until August 31, which prohibits anyone from working outdoors in direct sunlight between 11 am and 4 pm. The ban, based on ministerial decree 535/2015, is however often ignored by employers. Traditionally, construction workers bore the brunt of the 11 am-4 pm exposure, while street cleaners are also often outdoors after 11 am.

But a new class of workers in Kuwait is now facing one of the hottest, hardest summers yet, operating in direct sunlight during the banned hours - delivery drivers on motorbikes. The Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) does not list specif-

ic professions that are prohibited to work during the banned hours. Instead, it refers to the decree, which specifically notes that no one should work outdoors in direct sunlight during these hours.

PAM announced it will inspect various locations where work is typically performed outdoors, most often at construction sites. But what about delivery drivers on motorbikes who are on the move? They may be indoors while waiting to pick up and deliver food, but they also spend considerable time on the road in direct sunlight. When asked specifically about motorcycle delivery drivers, PAM authorities declined to answer.

Lawyer Mishari Al-Eyada confirmed that the work ban applies to motorcycle deliverymen too. "The decree states that no employee should work in outdoor areas in weather conditions that make work very difficult. Driving a motorcycle under direct sunlight is considered a violation," he told Kuwait Times. Sanctions apply on the employer and not the employee. "If such a violation is observed by PAM, the employer will pay a KD 100 penalty.

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**KUWAIT:** Handout photo provided by Kuwait Human Rights Society show motorcycle delivery drivers working outside during the outdoor ban hours. (More pics on Page 4)

## Kuwait's GDP shrank 8.9% last year: CSB

**KUWAIT:** The Central Statistical Bureau announced in a report released yesterday that Kuwait's gross domestic product declined by 8.9 percent in 2020 compared to 2019, where the estimated value with constant prices amounted to KD 36 billion (\$118.8 billion). In comparison, the value in 2019 was estimated at KD 39.5 billion (\$130 billion).

The Kuwaiti economy shrank by 11.2 percent in Q4 2020 compared to Q3 with constant rates, while decline in current prices amounted to 20.2 percent in Q4 2020 compared to the same quarter of the previous year. Contribution of the oil sector to the GDP with current prices in Q4 amounted to KD 2.8 billion (\$9 billion) or 33.4 percent, while this value increased to KD 4.6 billion (\$15 billion), with a contribution proportion amounting to 51.1 percent with fixed prices.

Value of the oil sector in Q4 2020 with current prices rose by 3.4 percent compared to Q3, while the contribution value reached 2.1 percent with constant prices compared to Q3. GDP of the non-oil sector with current prices in the last quarter of 2020 showed a decline of 2.5 percent compared to the same quarter of the previous year, and growth by 13.2 percent for Q3 2020.

Meanwhile, oil companies' budgets and exploration and production activities shrank by 30 percent in 2020 compared to 2019 due to repercussions of the pandemic. Turki Hamash, a petroleum, exploration and production expert at the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC), said during a virtual seminar organized by the oil ministry yesterday that the value of investments, exploration and production was estimated at \$382 billion in 2020. — KUNA

## MP wants details about decision on expats aged 60+

By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** MP Adnan Abdulsamad yesterday asked the minister of commerce and head of the Public Authority for Manpower about reported amendments to a decision that bans the renewal of work permits of expats who have reached 60 years of age

and do not have a university degree. Abdulsamad asked the minister if the decision has been amended and the categories covered by the amended decision. He also inquired if the reported amendments stipulate imposing any fee and its value.

The lawmaker asked if the amendments require elderly expats to have a mandatory health insurance at private hospitals, and if the new rules will apply to all expats aged 60 years and above. He also asked if the new amendments have been carefully studied to assess their impact on rising prices and the cost of manpower.

Abdulsamad's query comes at a time when media reports indicate that the manpower authority is currently studying the decision, which affects over

50,000 expats who have lived most of their lives in Kuwait. The authority has reportedly formed a committee of experts to review the decision and is expected to impose fees that could be as high as KD 1,000 a year to renew the work permits of such workers.

Meanwhile, the National Assembly is scheduled to hold its regular session today amid continued tensions between opposition lawmakers on one hand and the government and Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem on the other. Opposition lawmakers prevented the previous two sessions from taking place by occupying the seats reserved for Cabinet ministers, prompting Ghanem to cancel the sessions.

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## 43 killed as Pak express trains collide

**DAHARKI, Pakistan:** At least 43 people were killed and dozens injured yesterday when a packed Pakistani inter-city train ploughed into another express that had derailed just minutes earlier, officials said. Several people were trapped for hours in the mangled wreckage left by the collision near Daharki, in a remote part of rural Sindh province, before rescue workers with specialist equipment could reach them.

Huge crowds from nearby villages gathered around the carnage of the overturned Pakistan Railways carriages, with twisted and shredded metal scattered across the ground, along with piles of luggage. The double accident happened around 3.30am (2230 GMT) when most of the 1,200 passengers aboard the two trains would have been dozing.

Continued on Page 2



**DAHARKI, Pakistan:** Security personnel carry out rescue operations at the site of a train accident in northern Sindh province yesterday. — AFP



## Local

# Kuwait Amir, top leaders condole with Pakistan on trains' accident

## Kuwait Amir receives Minister of Education



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Minister of Education Dr Ali Al-Mudhaf and the ministry's new Undersecretary Ali Al-Yaqoub. — Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets Minister of Education Dr Ali Al-Mudhaf and the ministry's new Undersecretary Ali Al-Yaqoub.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets Minister of Education Dr Ali Al-Mudhaf and the ministry's new Undersecretary Ali Al-Yaqoub.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has addressed a cable to Pakistani President Arif Alvi expressing deep condolences on victims of the two trains' accident in Sindh southern Pakistan. His Highness the Amir prayed for His Almighty's mercy for the victims, wished their next of kin patience and the injured speedy recovery. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable of identical content to the Pakistani president. A similar cable was addressed to the Pakistani president by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-

Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

In other news, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Seif Palace yesterday the Minister of Education Dr Ali Fahad Al-Mudhaf who presented the ministry's new Undersecretary Ali Mohammad Al-Yaqoub on the occasion of taking office. Minister Mudhaf also presented the new undersecretary to His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah in separate meetings yesterday. — AFP

## Kuwaitis should contact EU embassies for travel procedures: Diplomat

KUWAIT: Kuwaitis wishing to travel to EU countries this summer need to contact embassy of country of destination to inquire about procedures, following EU recommendations on easing some travel restrictions, an EU diplomat said yesterday. Acting Charge d'Affaires of the European Union Mission to Kuwait Gediminas Varanavicius said the European Commission recommended last month that EU member ease some travel restrictions for tourists coming outside EU.

The recommendations include allowing tourists coming from countries with a low-risk epidemiological situation and people fully vaccinated with approved vaccinations by the European Medicines Agency: Pfizer-BioNtech, Moderna, Oxford-AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson, at least 14

days before arrival, he said. The information required at the vaccination certificates for non-EU countries should include personal information, vaccine type and doses dates, he said, pointing out that children are exempted from vaccination certificates, but must conduct COVID-19 swab test.

Easing does not necessarily mean lifting some measures such as tests and quarantine, as Varanavicius advise Kuwaitis to inquire about measures regarding easing travel restrictions from embassy directly. Regarding EU Digital COVID Certificate, Varanavicius said that it will be implemented on July 1st, 2021, noting that some European countries have already started using it, as it facilitates movement within European countries for EU members only. — AFP

## Motorbike delivery drivers in outdoor...

Continued from Page 1

If the violation is repeated, the penalty will be doubled," Eyada said.

Kuwait Society for Human Rights (KSHR) has already recorded 117 violations of outdoor work since the ban came into effect on June 1, including 53 violations of deliverymen on motorcycles, 27 of street cleaners and 16 of construction workers - all of them working during the banned hours in direct sunlight. The KSHR observation team visited 30 construction sites and found 21 guards liv-

ing in tents not equipped with air conditioners or even fans.

KSHR is observing violations since the decree was issued in 2015, which are posted on their Twitter account. "If we find that the same violation is repeated, we will contact PAM. Unfortunately, we only have a few members so we can't cover all areas. But photos and complaints are also sent by the public and we publish them on our social media accounts," KSHR member Abdulrazzaq Al-Azazi told Kuwait Times.

KSHR members have also observed ice cream vendors working under the hot sun. "The ice cream vendor is considered as self-employed, so nobody is forcing him to work during the ban period. The vendors told our team that they only work in the summer, so they have to work during this time," Azazi said.

## 43 killed as Pak express...

Continued from Page 1

"We tumbled upon each other, but that was not so fatal," Akhtar Rajput, a passenger on the train that derailed, told AFP.

"Then another train hit us from nowhere, and that hit us harder. When I regained my senses, I saw passengers lying around me, some were trying to get out of the coach. "I was disoriented and trying to figure out what happened to us when the other train hit," Shahid, another passenger, told AFP.

The Millat Express was heading from Karachi to Lala Musa when it derailed, its carriages strewn over the tracks as the Sir Syed Express from Rawalpindi arrived minutes later in the opposite direction, smashing into it. Most of the dead were pulled from the derailed train, officials said. Umar Tufail, a senior Daharki police officer, said 43 people were killed and dozens injured.

A spokesman for Pakistan Railways put the toll at 33, but communications with the crash site were difficult because its remote location. One rescue worker described having to stand on top of his vehicle to get a phone signal. Local farmers and villagers were the first to join passengers in trying to pull survivors from the crumpled carriages, reaching into broken windows and roof hatches.

A clip aired on a local channel showed medics giving an intravenous drip to a conscious passen-

ger whose lower torso was trapped between crushed carriage benches. The dead were laid out in rows on train seat benches and covered in traditional scarves.

The accident happened on a raised section of track surrounded by lush farmlands. Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid, a former railways minister, said the track where the accident occurred was built in the 1880s and described it as "a shambles". Current minister Azam Swati described the section of railway as "really dangerous", but said authorities had been waiting to upgrade the network with funding from the multibillion-dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project. "In case there is a delay (with funding), we will rebuild this track with our own money," he said.

The Pakistan army and paramilitary rangers from nearby bases were at the site to help. Prime Minister Imran Khan said he was "shocked" by the accident and promised a full inquiry. Gul Mohammad, who works with the Edhi Foundation ambulance service, said communication problems were hindering the coordination of the rescue efforts. "I am talking to you as I stand on the rooftop of my ambulance for better signal," he told AFP.

Train accidents are common in Pakistan, where the network has seen decades of decline due to corruption, mismanagement and lack of investment. The majority of train passengers in Pakistan are working-class people who cannot afford the quicker bus journeys. More than 300 people were killed and 700 injured in 1990 when an overloaded 16-carriage inter-city train crashed into a stationary freight train near the city of Sukkur in Sindh. — AFP

## India's foreign minister due tomorrow

By Sajeev K Peter

KUWAIT: India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar is scheduled to arrive in Kuwait tomorrow on an official visit. The visiting minister is expected to deliver a message to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah from India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi on ways to bolster deep-rooted bilateral relations between the two countries, according to sources in Delhi. Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah had visited India in March.



India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar.

Jaishankar's visit will be the first by a top Indian official to Kuwait since HH Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah became the Amir of Kuwait last September following the passing of the late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. During Sheikh Nasser's visit to India, the two sides constituted a joint commission chaired by the foreign ministers of both countries. Both sides have agreed to establish joint working groups under the joint commission to strengthen cooperation in several fields such as trade, investment, oil and petrochemicals, defense and culture.

As India battles a second wave of the coronavirus pandemic, Kuwait has reaffirmed the country's commitment to stand with India and has extended critical support by providing relief materials, especially oxygen. Jaishankar has expressed India's appreciation for the support extended by Kuwaiti authorities by providing relief materials and medical oxygen through ships.

India is among the largest trading partners of Kuwait and bilateral trade was worth \$10.86 billion during 2019-20. India's imports, mainly oil, were worth \$9.6 billion during this period. Kuwait was the 10th largest oil supplier to India during 2019-20 and met 3.8 percent of the country's energy needs, Kuwait is also home to more than 900,000 Indian expatriates.

## MP wants details about decision on...

Continued from Page 1

Eight grillings are on the agenda of the session, including four against HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah. The Assembly decided on March 30 to postpone grillings against the prime minister until the end of 2022, but opposition lawmakers say the decision is illegal and against the constitution.

Leading opposition MP Hasan Jowhar said in a statement yesterday that the opposition lawmakers have reached a deadlock in dealing with the prime minister and the speaker. He said the solution to the dilemma is for the government to resign or dissolving the Assembly and holding snap polls.

MP Abdulaziz Al-Saqabi yesterday asked Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Sabah on why the Kuwait Health Office in London signed a contract with a company that deals with the Zionist entity. He said the office signed a contract with AXA insurance company, which has investments in a Zionist arms company and in banks financing Jewish settlements.



DAHARKI, Pakistan: Security personnel gather at the site of a train accident in northern Sindh province yesterday. — AFP



Local

## Sixteen rescued from burning Firdous house

**KUWAIT:** Firemen rescued 16 people, including eight children, from a house fire in Firdous Sunday evening, Kuwait Fire Force said. Ardhiya and Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh firemen dealt with the incident and no injuries were reported, it said in a statement. Meanwhile, firemen evacuated a building in Jahra following a fire that took place Sunday evening as well no injuries were reported as Jahra firemen battled the blaze successfully, Kuwait Fire Force noted.



**KUWAIT:** Damage at the Firdouse house after the fire was extinguished.



Damage left by a fire inside the Jahra building.

### Photo of the Day



**KUWAIT:** A picture taken in Kuwait City shows the sun sets behind the Kuwait towers at the gulf road yesterday. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

# Second batch of newly recruited Filipino domestic helpers arrives

## First batch arrived on May 24 as helpers' shortage continues

By Ben Garcia

**KUWAIT:** More than 100 newly-hired domestic helpers from the Philippines arrive today (June 8, 2021); the second batch of arrivals from the Philippines of newly-recruited workers arranged by Kuwait to fill the shortage of domestic helpers in the country. The first batch of helpers arrived on May 24, 2021. "They have planned twice-weekly flights from Manila to bring back returning domestic helpers and newly-hired household service workers," a source from the Philippine Embassy told Kuwait Times yesterday.

In February this year, Ali Al-Shammouh, Secretary General of Kuwait Union for Domestic Labor Offices, told Kuwait Times there is a shortage of approximately 160,000-180,000 helpers. He said the shortage existed even prior to the coronavirus pandemic, but worsened when the airport was closed during the lockdown last year. Many domestic helpers left the country following the reopening of the airport on one-way tickets.

The arrival of newly recruited domestic workers took place after the Philippines agreed to open the recruitment of household service workers from Manila in April this year. Sending domestic helpers to Kuwait from the Philippines was temporarily suspended due to problems encountered by some of its workers, prompting Manila to demand more protection and come up with a new tri-party agreement, which will be used when the workers come for employment. Provisions of the contract, mostly dictated by Manila, safeguard the rights of both workers and employers.

A source at Kuwait International Airport told Kuwait Times they are expecting more than 100 newly-hired Filipino domestic helpers to arrive today along with returning domestic workers. "This is the only flight arriving from the Philippines, a planeload of housemaids, as other workers are still barred from entering the country," the source added.

According to a recruitment agency secretary who spoke on the condition of anonymity, the newly-hired workers will go straight to hotels to quarantine for 14 days. Staff of National Aviation Services (NAS) and BelSalamah online platform will handle domestic helper arrivals at the airport. As per Kuwait rules, the helpers must undergo a swab test after a day's stay at the hotel. There will be no face-to-face interactions with the recruitment agency owners or secretaries during the 14-day quarantine, but they will be in contact through SIM cards provided by the airlines free of charge, with free local calls and Internet connection.

One to three days before the end of the 14-day quarantine, the workers will undergo another PCR test. If the test is negative, the hotel will automatically inform their employers about the end of quarantine, and they will be collected by the employers from the hotel. Then the employers are required to bring the workers to their respective agencies for other formalities. The workers are informed of their rights and are told to call the agency for assistance if needed.

Employers must pay around KD 900 charge for recruitment plus around KD 500 for the 14-day hotel quarantine. In the event of a positive PCR result, they are required to stay at the hotel for an additional 14

days. "A new domestic helper who arrived on May 24 did not pass the swab test, so the employer will pay KD 490 again for 14 days of additional quarantine, because she will not be allowed to leave the hotel until she is clear," the agency secretary said.

#### Tri-party provisions

Provisions in the new tri-party contract include providing the housemaid with decent and appropriate housing equipped with all the necessities, providing suitable food and clothing, providing medical treatment in case of sickness pursuant to the healthcare insurance system of Kuwait, salary must be paid at the end of the month - not less than the designated amount signed by both parties, compensating the housemaid in case of injury while during work, employers must issue a valid residency for the duration of contract, handle all the expenses to bring the housemaid, and in case of death, the employer must also bear the expenses of the deceased body.

The new tripartite contract also mentions that the employer is not allowed to assign the worker outside Kuwait without an agreement from the worker. The housemaid is also allowed to use the phone outside working hours, provided that she maintains the privacy of the household and in a manner consistent with public morals. Working hours must be 12 hours daily and employers must allow the housemaid to rest for eight continuous hours.

#### Recruitment ban

On Jan 3, 2020, the Philippines implemented a ban

on sending domestic workers to Kuwait following the death of Jeanelyn Padernal Villavende on Dec 28, 2019. The ban was lifted a month later after consultations with the Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), the filing of appropriate charges against the perpetrators and after Manila and Kuwait City agreed the full implementation of a harmonized employment contract for Filipino domestic workers.

On Dec 30, 2020, a death verdict by hanging was handed by the criminal court to a Kuwaiti woman who killed Villavende. The woman's husband was sentenced to four years in jail for covering up and not reporting the crime. As of June 2020, there were nearly 680,000 domestic workers in Kuwait - 325,000 from India and nearly 150,000 from the Philippines.

Kuwait had allowed the return of domestic helpers with valid visas but stuck abroad starting Dec 7, 2020. An online platform named 'BelSalamah' was launched to facilitate the return of domestic workers from so-called 'high-risk' countries, in line with specific procedures and mechanisms that take into account the required health measures.

The platform aims to decrease the cost of return that the sponsor will pay, in addition to relocating the 14-day quarantine to be in Kuwait instead of a transit country. Local and their international partner agencies are allowed to charge employers up to KD 990 for hiring new domestic helpers. As of June 2020, there were nearly 680,000 domestic workers in Kuwait - 325,000 from India and nearly 150,000 from the Philippines.

## NBK shows remarkable success in staff COVID-19 vaccination campaign

**KUWAIT:** National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) announced a remarkable success of the campaign it launched over the past months to encourage its employees to get the COVID-19 vaccine, with the percentage of employees who received one or two doses of the vaccine reaching 82 percent of total employees, reflecting the high responsibility and awareness of the bank's employees to combat the pandemic.

According to the results of the bank's recent surveys, the last samples showed that 8 percent of total employees are willing to receive the vaccine or already registered in the vaccination platform, whereas 10 percent are undecided, unwilling or from the categories that should not receive it.

The survey about the level of employees' awareness of and confidence in the precautionary health measures taken by the bank under the work resumption plan showed a significant increase in the level of employees' awareness of the precautionary health measures taken by the bank to 94 percent, as well as an increase in the level of employees' confidence in these measures to 88 percent.

The Executive Management thanked the bank's employees for their strong sense of responsibility towards their colleagues, families and society as shown in the noticeable interest in receiving the vaccine or registering for it as soon as possible, in order to eradicate the pandemic and return to normal life.

On this occasion, Emad Al-Ablani, General Manager of Group Human Resources at National Bank of Kuwait said: "Since the beginning of the pandemic, NBK has been making unwavering efforts to ensure the safety of its employees through several initiatives and campaigns to ensure a safe work environment and help contain the spread of the virus."

As the largest private sector institution, NBK has a

national responsibility to act as a role model, as the bank is one of the first private sector institutions to launch a program to encourage employees to receive the vaccine to actively support the country's national vaccination drive, he added.

Ablani pointed out that the bank's employees showed high awareness and responsibility to speed up the process of achieving herd immunity and accelerate the pace of social and economic recovery by ensuring to get vaccinated.

"We are always urging our employees to maintain their health and safety through the awareness messages regularly published on the bank's various digital platforms, and posters displayed at its headquarters and branches. Additionally, as part of our social responsibility, we publish and support awareness campaigns on social media, with a view to encourage people to get the COVID-19 vaccine, in support of the national efforts to eliminate of the virus and return to normal life," he mentioned.

Ablani noted that the bank ensured a thorough sterilization process of all its facilities, as well as applied health controls at all its branches, in addition to conducting many surveys to assess employees' awareness of and confidence in the precautionary measures implemented by the bank.

#### Direct communication

Over the past months, the bank enhanced direct communication with its employees and provided them with reliable and credible information about the safety, effectiveness and



side effects of available vaccines, including information about approved vaccines and how to register for the vaccine, in cooperation with the concerned authorities in Kuwait. In addition, through its social media platforms, the bank held several discussion sessions with doctors and leading public health figures to share scientific information and answer employees' inquiries about the effectiveness of the vaccine, and how it contributes to returning to normal life.

Moreover, the bank's executive management and different department heads shared their vaccination experiences through videos published on internal communication channels with a view to support vaccination efforts and encourage employees to get vaccinated.

#### A key supporter

In addition to encouraging its employees to receive the vaccine, NBK continued its initiatives to support the national vaccination drive over the past months. In this context, the bank donated shelters and outdoor waiting areas, as well as fridges for vaccination centers in all the governorates of Kuwait, in addition to the main vaccination center in Mishref. NBK's donations also included providing golf carts to transport people receiving the vaccine to and

from the car parks at the Kuwait Vaccination Center located in the Kuwait International Fairground.

Over the past months, NBK participated in campaigns aiming to boost the volume and diversity of available sources of information about COVID-19 vaccination and combat misleading information. NBK also donated KD 1 million to procure ventilators and a fully equipped mobile hospital.

NBK recognizes the importance of improving the health and safety of its key stakeholders, including employees and customers, as an integral part of its sustainable development approach. To this end, the bank continuously updates its health and safety policy developed based on regional and international best practices in relation to health and safety matters.

The bank also raises the motto of "employees' health and safety first" in all measures and decisions that have been taken since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic. This is manifested in launching many programs and activities that focus on promoting a healthy lifestyle and raising awareness on the importance of conducting medical examinations for the bank's employees to avoid physical and psychological exhaustion during the pandemic.



Emad Al-Ablani



## Local

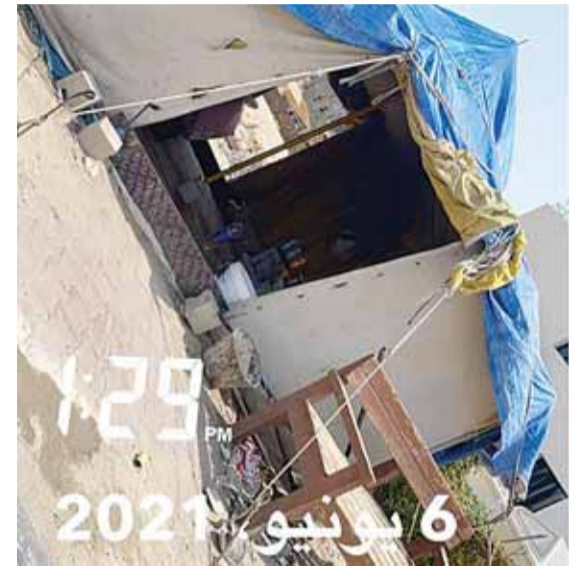
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## Oil companies' budgets trimmed amid crisis: Expert

KUWAIT: Oil companies' budgets and exploration and production activities shrank by 30 percent in 2020 in contrast to 2019, due to repercussions of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), according to an authoritative expert. Turki Hamash, expert of petroleum, exploration and production at the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), said during a virtual seminar, organized by the Kuwaiti Ministry of Oil yesterday, that the value of investments, exploration and production was estimated at \$382 billion in 2020. He predicted that expenditures would restore the pre-pandemic level, \$530 billion, after the oil price hit \$65 per barrel.

On the link between oil prices and volume of explorations, he indicated that this theory remained controversial, also noting that the drop of prices would require some time to detect any impact on explorations. Prices' decline is usually accompanied by higher hazards, thus prospected returns turn less, Hamash noted, adding in such situations, international companies slash exploration budgets and shift work to regions of less dangers and costs. Patterns of crude oil's demand and supply had drastically dropped since start of 2020 until the end of May 2021 — amid the coronavirus crisis — along with major drop of consumption, much deeper than the output proportions.

The situation was also marked with rise of crude reserves. Oil markets witnessed rise in proportions of consumption and pricing in June 2020, coinciding with easing of coronavirus-related travel constraints in addition to slashing the oil output by the OPEC+ alliance and decline of the production in the US. On the impact of the virus crisis and drop of shale oil prices, Hamash said that the US output of the crude oil fell by some one million barrels per day — including 330,000 barrels of shale oil — settling at seven million bpd. —KUNA



KUWAIT: These handout photos provided by Kuwait Human Rights Society show construction, cleaning and delivery workers working outside during outdoor ban hours in Kuwait.

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## ACK successfully held its first virtual career fair

KUWAIT: The Alumni and Career Placement Center at the Australian College of Kuwait (ACK) successfully held its first virtual career fair on 26th and 27th of May 2021. The fair witnessed the participation of more than 50 companies from different sectors in Kuwait, and served as a great platform for networking, career, and internship opportunities for its students and alumni. The fair was also successful because of the generous contribution and sponsorship of its platinum sponsors such as Kuwait Finance House, Boubyan Bank, National Bank of Kuwait, The Kuwaiti Danish Dairy Company, Gulf Bank, and Al-Sayer Facilities Company and gold sponsors Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait, Khibra, Commercial Bank of Kuwait, and Alargan International Real Estate Company.

Continuing on the footsteps of the annual career fair,

this year's virtual career fair sought to give students and alumni the same opportunity to be in touch with companies and recruiters despite the challenges presented by the global pandemic and the shift from a traditional fair to a digital platform.

The move in platforms has provided many benefits to both students and employers, and streamlined the career application process. Students were able to easily submit their resumes online and get in touch with recruiters directly, and recruiters were able to update their vacancies in real time. Besides the tools to ease the application process, the Fair also included various workshops and webinars to further enrich attendees. The virtual career fair platform will remain online until June 30, 2021 for students and employers to continue benefiting from it.

Commenting on the success of the fair, Dr Ayad Salhi, Assistant to the President for Student Relations, said: "I am utterly pleased with the positive feedback we received from the companies and attendees on how we did despite the unprecedented challenges of the global pandemic, which required outstanding dedication and innovative efforts from the Alumni and Career Placement team who has never failed to continuously improve their services."







Thousands homeless as S Lanka floods death toll hits 17

## Fujimori edges ahead in tight Peru presidential vote

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GUATEMALA CITY: US Vice President Kamala Harris waves alongside Guatemala's Minister of Foreign Affairs Pedro Brolo upon arrival at the Aeropuerto Internacional La Aurora in Guatemala City. Kamala's visit to Guatemala and Mexico this week will bring a message of hope to a region hammered by COVID-19 and which is the source of most of the undocumented migrants seeking entry to the US. —AFP

# US VP in Guatemala with message of 'hope'

## Harris to have 'honest' discussions with the two leaders

**GUATEMALA CITY:** US Vice President Kamala Harris arrived in Guatemala Sunday, bringing a message of "hope" to a region hammered by COVID-19 and which is the source of most of the undocumented migrants seeking entry to the United States.

Harris, who will also visit Mexico, is making her first journey abroad as President Joe Biden's deputy with an eye toward tackling the root causes of migration from the region — one of the thorniest issues facing the White House.

She landed at an air force base outside Guatemala City on Sunday evening, where she was greeted by Foreign Minister Pedro Brolo and US Ambassador William Popp. "I am here in Guatemala City for my first international trip as vice president," she wrote on Twitter following her arrival in the city, where she will meet with President Alejandro Giammattei as well as community and business leaders.

Giammattei extended a "most cordial welcome" to Harris. "I am certain that it will be a successful visit and that we will continue to strengthen bilateral relations for the benefit of our peoples," he tweeted. Nancy McEldowney, Harris' National Security Advisor, said the trip was part of efforts to "restore American leadership around the world."

The United States would seek to develop an agen-

da that "takes into account the need to grow the Guatemalan economy, to deal with the climate crisis and food insecurity that has resulted, to work to combat poverty, violence and corruption," she added. Harris has said she hopes to have "honest" discussions with the two leaders about corruption, crime and violence.

Giammattei, speaking to CBS ahead of the visit, said Harris "doesn't hold back, which is good. She is frank." Detentions of undocumented travelers along the US-Mexico border, including unaccompanied minors, hit a 15-year high in April. Nearly 180,000 people were intercepted — more than 80 percent of them coming from Mexico or the so-called Northern Triangle of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. "We have to give people a sense of hope ... that if they stay, things will get better," Harris has previously said, after Biden tasked her with leading diplomatic efforts on the issue in March.

### Vaccines, TPS, Title 42

Donation of coronavirus vaccines by the United States to the region is also expected to be up for discussion. Harris addressed the subject over the phone with Giammattei and Lopez Obrador on Thursday, just before Biden announced the shipment of a first batch

of six million doses to be distributed in Central America and the Caribbean through the global Covax program. Others will be sent directly from Washington to partner countries such as Mexico.

For security and democracy expert Rebecca Bill Chavez, "a real commitment" on the number of doses destined for the Northern Triangle would be "one very positive outcome" of Harris's trip. Another potential topic is the possibility of granting Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to Guatemalans living in the United States, allowing them to work legally. And there could be talk in Mexico of ending "Title 42," a Trump-era coronavirus policy allowing the immediate deportation of undocumented migrants — even those who arrive seeking asylum.

### 'A lot tougher'

The vice president's trip to Central America is part of the Biden administration's promise of a more humane immigration policy — in contrast to the hard-line approach taken by his predecessor Donald Trump.

But Harris faces challenges even more complicated than the ones Biden dealt with as Barack Obama's vice president, when he was charged with handling the same matter. "The conditions have deteriorated dramatically since 2014," said Michael Shifter, president of

the Inter-American Dialogue think tank, referring to a worsening economic situation and increasing violence, both exacerbated by the pandemic.

Harris's work is "a lot tougher," Shifter said, "because the (country) partners are far more problematic." The relationship between Washington and San Salvador has been tense since the Salvadoran Legislative Assembly, led by the ruling party, fired judges and the attorney general on May 1, and after the US labeled members of President Nayib Bukele's government corrupt.

And Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez was implicated in cocaine trafficking in a New York court earlier this year.

A group of 18 US Democratic senators wrote a letter to Harris ahead of her trip. "Ensuring stability in Central America directly supports the national interests of the United States," said the group, led by Foreign Relations Committee head Bob Menendez.

The Republican opposition on the other hand has accused Biden of creating a "crisis" on the country's southern border by failing to rein in immigration. Congress must still decide whether to approve the \$861 million Biden has asked for next year as part of his \$4 billion plan to take on the issue of undocumented immigration. —AFP

## Merkel party wins big in state poll

**BERLIN:** German Chancellor Angela Merkel's centre-right party yesterday celebrated a thumping win over the far right in the last regional vote before a general election that also exposed the weaknesses of the Greens, their main rivals at the national level.

The Christian Democratic Union (CDU) under new party chief Armin Laschet won around 37 percent of the vote in Saxony-Anhalt on Sunday, preliminary results showed, well ahead of the second place anti-immigration, anti-Muslim AfD party on around 21 percent. The Greens, who are polling neck-and-neck with the Union alliance between the CDU and its smaller Bavarian CSU for the national election, scored a disappointing result of around six percent.

The outcome in the former East German state is a huge boost for conservative would-be chancellor Laschet ahead of Germany's general vote on September 26 — the first in 16 years not to feature Merkel.

"Laschet is still a long way from the chancellor's office," the Sueddeutsche Zeitung daily said. But the poll result has brought him "much closer to it".

Saxony-Anhalt's premier, Reiner Haseloff of the CDU, said the party did well in Saxony-Anhalt, this nascent reversal of fortunes in favour of the CDU will likely continue," he said.

### Pre-vote jitters

Nominated as conservative chancellor candidate in April, Laschet inherited a series of problems including

anger over the government's pandemic management and a corruption scandal involving shady coronavirus mask contracts. At Germany's last regional elections in March in Rhineland-Palatinate and Baden-Wuerttemberg—the CDU suffered its worst-ever results in both states. Laschet himself has also suffered from weak popularity, following damaging infighting within the conservatives for the chancellor candidate nomination and his own missteps with pandemic management.

The strife within the conservative ranks had contrasted starkly with the Greens, who in a show of harmony had nominated Annalena Baerbock as their chancellor candidate. That had left Laschet trailing behind Baerbock in terms of popularity nationally.

But Spiegel Online said "the voters in Saxony-Anhalt have given Laschet an invaluable gift." After his lousy start as chancellor candidate, it was clear that he would not be a man drawing euphoric optimism for his campaign. Rather, the motto was to sit it out," it said. "What he needs above all is calm, and now he has it."

### Derailed

For the Greens, however, Die Zeit newspaper said Sunday's result "brought them back again to where they often land in eastern Germany: on the ground". Baerbock's initial popularity after her nomination had fired up speculation that she could seize Merkel's job from the CDU, and polls ahead of Sunday's vote had predicted the party doubling its share. But it only slightly improved its score, deepening the party's recent woes at the national level.

Baerbock last month admitted she had failed to declare around 25,000 euros (\$30,400) in supplementary income to parliament, something that her critics have leapt on as a sign of hypocrisy from a party championing more transparency in politics. The daily Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung this week also pointed out inaccuracies in positions listed on her CV, prompting Baerbock to adapt the list on the Greens' website.

Friedrich Merz, a prominent CDU member, crowed that the "Baerbock train has derailed". The Tagesspiegel daily also forecast a rocky road ahead for the Greens. Sunday's showing "could be a quiet harbinger that despite all the euphoria surrounding a Green chancellor candidate, the coming weeks could be difficult". —AFP

## #SheikhJarrah: From Jerusalem neighbourhood to global hashtag

**JERUSALEM:** For decades, Sheikh Jarrah was just another neighbourhood in Zionist-annexed east Jerusalem, but its story has gone viral online since protests flared against the planned expulsion of Palestinians from houses there.

"We have managed... not just to shed light on settlement in Jerusalem but also on the rights of Palestinians to defend themselves, their right to resist the occupier, and their right to their own narrative," said Muhammad el-Kurd. The 23-year-old poet and writer, one of those facing the loss of their homes, has worked tirelessly to publicise the issue and in the process gained more than 180,000 Twitter followers and more than half a million on Instagram.

"From the beginning of the campaign our discourse has been extremely clear," Muhammad el-Kurd told AFP. "We are talking about colonialism and settlement—not just about human rights abuses." He was speaking to AFP days before Zionist police detained him and his twin sister and fellow activist Mona el-Kurd for several hours on Sunday. Both siblings were later released and returned home amid renewed protests, an AFP reporter said.

While in detention, Mona had been "threatened in an attempt to stop her carrying on with her legally permitted activities", family lawyer Nasser Odeh said. The protests in Sheikh Jarrah spread early last month to the city's Al-Aqsa mosque compound, sparking a crackdown by the security forces against Palestinians there.

That triggered an 11-day war between the Zionist state and Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip, which in turn sparked protests in many countries in support of the Palestinians. The hashtags #SheikhJarrah and #SaveSheikhJarrah went viral. Celebrities from actors Mark Ruffalo and Viola Davis to Manchester City footballer Riyad Mahrez have posted about the neighbourhood on social media.

### 'Unprecedented change'

While Palestinians and their backers see the issue as a microcosm of the wider conflict over land, Zionist settlers

and their supporters have labelled it a mere property dispute, to be decided by Zionist courts.

Zionist occupied east Jerusalem in 1967, later annexing it in a move never recognised by the international community. Under the law, Jewish groups can claim land that belonged to Jews before the foundation of Zionist state 1948, even if Palestinian families have been living there for decades.

Palestinians whose ancestors became refugees in the 1948 war have no means to retrieve their homes or land. Kurd called the situation in Sheikh Jarrah "a tiny sample of Zionist settler colonialism in Jerusalem and Palestine in general".

"Everybody was able to see that we are up against a racist legal system that was written to protect and support settlers," he said. Jewish right groups Ir Amim says up to 1,000 Palestinians in Sheikh Jarrah and the nearby Silwan district face being displaced. Kurd, highly articulate in English and studying for a Masters' degree in the US, spoke to AFP outside his house, half of which was taken over in 2009 by a Jewish settler.

Behind him, Zionist flags fluttered on a home taken over by settlers after his neighbours were evicted. Despite that, "we've seen an unprecedented change in public opinion worldwide," he said. "People have started to understand the Sheikh Jarrah case and about colonialism in general in Jerusalem... Even if we don't manage to save the homes, we've done something bigger."

Kurd said the huge uptick in viewership and followers showed there was a "thirst for the Palestinian reality". Palestinian families in the neighbourhood say they were given the keys to their homes by the UN Palestinian refugee agency and Jordan, which controlled east Jerusalem from 1948 to 1967. Last month, as tensions in Jerusalem mounted during the build-up to the Gaza fighting, the Jewish supreme court postponed a hearing in the Sheikh Jarrah cases until further notice. But Kurd said he had no faith in the Jewish judiciary. —AFP



## International

# Change of status quo by use of force in Nagorno-Karabakh cannot bring lasting peace in the region

On 28th May 2021, an article titled "Republic of Azerbaijan marks this year 103rd anniversary of its Republic" was published in Kuwait Times.

One would normally assume such articles are about the celebration of a festive day for a country. It did not, however, serve the purpose of the writers. Their main goal, apparently, turned to be attacking Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh with baseless allegations, as well as hidden and unacceptable territorial claims towards Armenia.

We are not going to comment on the obvious falsifications of history in the article, but it is mandatory to present the readers with the true picture and the reality about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, particularly the recent war and its aftermath.

From 27th September to 9th November 2020, Azerbaijan launched a 44-day-long full-scale war of aggression against Nagorno-Karabakh with full support of Turkey and the involvement of foreign terrorist fighters relocated from Syria and elsewhere. For many years, Azerbaijan did not even hide that its strategic goal was to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by force. On the highest official levels, they constantly kept on making statements full of hatred and clear manifestations of genocidal intent against the Armenian people. Moreover, they would cynically claim that "international law does not work in the world today, and international treaties are just a piece of paper, having no value."

During the 44-day war, Azerbaijan, in clear defiance

of their international obligations and commitments and despite three ceasefire agreements brokered by Russia, France and the United States, continued the offensive using prohibited cluster and white phosphorus munitions.

Amnesty International's crisis response experts identified M095 DPICM cluster munitions, used by the Azerbaijani armed forces. The Cultural Centre of Shushi, as well as several cultural, religious, and numerous civilian infrastructures were reportedly destroyed by LORA long-range quasi-ballistic missiles.

On 9th November 2020, the Prime Minister of Armenia joined the statement of the Presidents of the Russian Federation and Azerbaijan on the cessation of hostilities and the deployment of Russian peacekeeping forces in Nagorno-Karabakh. The document was aimed at establishing a ceasefire and ensuring security.

The above-mentioned article, however, has a totally distorted picture and comments of the points of the statement, which expose the subsequent steps of Azerbaijan in blatant violation of the provisions of the trilateral statement.

Despite the fact that article 9 of the trilateral statement clearly stipulates that all prisoners of war should have been released immediately after the cessation of hostilities and despite numerous calls from the international community, Azerbaijan continues to use Armenian prisoners of war as a tool

against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Moreover, Azerbaijan initiated against them fabricated criminal cases thereby openly violating both the norms of international humanitarian law and its obligations under the trilateral statement of 9th November 2020.

Furthermore, the armed forces of Azerbaijan have violated the state border of the Republic of Armenia in the Syunik province on 12th May 2021 under the pretext of "demarcation and delimitation", thus infiltrating in to the sovereign territory of Armenia up to 3.5 kilometres. Similar incursions took place into the Gegharkunik province of Armenia.

To this date, the Azerbaijani troops continue their illegal presence in the Syunik and Gegharkunik provinces of the Republic of Armenia in violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Armenia. This encroachment of the Azerbaijani armed forces into the sovereign territory of Armenia, in flagrant violation of international law, poses a serious threat to security and stability in the region and beyond. The Armenian Government is trying to resolve the situation peacefully to avoid further escalation and casualties. However, the restraint of the Armenian side should not be seen as a sign of tolerance towards attempts to seize its sovereign territory. The Azerbaijani troops must unconditionally withdraw from the territory of Armenia to their initial positions.

Any action, with the use or threat of force cannot lead to sustainable peace and security. The current situation in Nagorno-Karabakh is the result of a flagrant violation by Azerbaijan of several core principles of International law, namely, refraining from the threat or use of force, peaceful settlement of disputes, equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Being refused of their basic rights to equality, dignity, self-determination and peaceful life in their homeland, the people of Nagorno-Karabakh are subjected to similar sufferings as the people of Palestine. It is therefore lawful for both peoples to count on the support of international community in ending this oppression.

There should be no illusion that the results of the use of force, accompanied by war crimes and violations of international humanitarian law, can ever become the basis for a lasting and sustainable peace in any region. Durable and sustainable peace can only be achieved through a comprehensive settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which must include defining the status of Nagorno-Karabakh based on the realization of the inalienable right of its people to self-determination; ensuring the safe and dignified return of the displaced population to their homes; and preservation of the region's cultural and religious heritage.

—From the Armenian Embassy in Kuwait

# Fujimori edges ahead of Castillo in tight Peru presidential vote

## Peru's new leader will need to tackle a country in crisis

**LIMA:** Right-wing populist Keiko Fujimori held a narrow lead over radical leftist Pedro Castillo following a partial vote count in Peru's presidential election on Sunday. With 52.9 percent of the vote counted after 42 percent of polling stations were tallied, Fujimori edged ahead in a seesaw battle for the presidency after Ipsos pollsters declared a "statistical draw" following an earlier exit poll and quick count.

Peru's new leader will need to tackle a country in crisis, suffering from recession and with the worst coronavirus fatality rate in the world after recording over 184,000 deaths among its 33 million population. Peruvians will also look to the winner to end years of political turbulence after four presidents in the last three years, and with seven of the last 10 of the country's leaders either having been convicted of or investigated for corruption.

Piero Corvetto, head of Peru's top electoral body (ONPE) warned that many polling stations from rural areas—Castillo's stronghold—had yet to be tallied. "They haven't counted our votes yet," Castillo told supporters in Tacabamba, in the northern Cajamarca region where he lives. An exit poll by Ipsos after voting ended at 7:00 pm (0000 GMT) showed Fujimori just ahead with 50.3 percent, sparking protests from Castillo supporters outside the ONPE offices in the capital Lima.

But three hours later the pollsters released a quick count that showed Castillo in front with 50.2 percent, bringing scenes of joy and celebrations to the northern Cajamarca region. Castillo, 51, had earlier urged his supporters to "stay calm."

"Seeing how small the gap is, it is essential to maintain prudence and I say that for all Peruvians," added Fujimori, who had earlier been seen hugging family and campaign staff following the exit poll. Both candidates promised to respect the results when voting earlier in the day.

## Suu Kyi to go on trial next week

**NAYPYIDAW:** Ousted Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi will go on trial next week, her lawyer said yesterday, with the Nobel laureate facing an eclectic raft of charges, from possessing unlicensed walkie-talkies to flouting coronavirus restrictions during elections last year. Myanmar has been in uproar since Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy (NLD) government were ousted in a February 1 coup, with near-daily protests and a nationwide civil disobedience movement.

Almost 850 people have been killed by the military, according to a local monitoring group. Suu Kyi, 75, will go on trial on Monday in Naypyidaw, where she is charged with violating restrictions during last year's election campaign and possessing unlicensed walkie-talkies. Proceedings will start on June 14 and are expected to wrap up by July 26, according to her legal team. Suu Kyi's lawyers have been allowed to meet with her just twice since she was placed under house arrest, with weeks of delays to her legal case.

"We will get testimonies from plaintiffs and witnesses starting from next hearing," yesterday, lawyer Min Min Soe said after meeting her in the capital Naypyidaw. Suu Kyi will also appear in a separate trial slated to begin on June 15, where she is charged with sedition alongside ousted president Win Myint and senior NLD leader Dr Myo Aung, the lawyer said.

There was a heavy police presence around the Naypyidaw council compound, close to where the court is located, with roadblocks along streets leading to the area, an AFP reporter said. Suu Kyi "asked all (people) to stay in good health," Min Min Soe added. The ousted leader faces a separate charge of violating a colonial-era secrecy law—a case that is pending in a court in the commercial hub Yangon.

### Show trial

"Groundhog day again," Myanmar analyst David Mathieson told AFP, adding that proceedings in the jun-

### 'Too tight'

"We're not going to know (the winner) until the last vote" is counted, political scientist Jessica Smith told AFP. "It's still very unsure, the difference is too tight and we have to wait for the official result." Castillo, 51, had topped the first round of voting in April, when the pair both caused a surprise by reaching the second round, and he was also narrowly ahead in the latest opinion polls before Sunday's vote.

At the height of the political storm in November last year, Peru had three different presidents in just five days. Two million Peruvians have lost their jobs during the pandemic and nearly a third of the country now live in poverty, according to official figures. For voters, this was a choice between polar opposites. Fujimori, 46, represents the neoliberal economic model of tax cuts and boosting private activity to generate jobs.

Fujimori's bastion is the capital Lima, while Castillo's bulwark is the rural deep interior. Trade unionist schoolteacher Castillo has pledged to nationalize vital industries, raise taxes, eliminate tax exemptions and increase state regulation. He voted in Tacabamba following a breakfast with his family. Favored by the business sector and middle classes, Fujimori tried to portray Castillo as a communist threat, warning that Peru would become a new Venezuela or North Korea should he win. Castillo pointed to the Fujimori family's history of corruption scandals. Keiko Fujimori is under investigation over campaign funding in her 2011 and 2016 presidential bids and has already spent 16 months in pre-trial detention. Her father is serving a 25-year sentence for crimes against humanity and corruption.

### 'It won't be easy'

"If Keiko is eventually elected, you can't forget that this 50 percent is not her real support but rather a reaction from an electorate that is afraid of what her opponent represents," Smith told AFP. Whoever wins will have a hard time governing as Congress is frag-



**LIMA:** Peruvian right-wing presidential candidate Keiko Fujimori (C) and her vice-presidential co-candidates former congressman Luis Galarreta (L) and lawyer Patricia Juarez (R) make a statement to the press calling for unity, invoking for prudence, calm and peace while waiting for official results in the vote count. —AFP

mented. Castillo's Free Peru is the largest single party, just ahead of Fujimori's Popular Force, but without a majority. "It won't be easy (for Fujimori) given the mistrust her name and that of her family generates in many sectors. She'll have to quickly calm the markets and generate ways to reactivate them," added Smith. If Castillo triumphs, he'll have to "consolidate a parliamentary majority that will allow him to deliver his ambitious program."

But in either case "it will take time to calm the waters because there's fierce polarization and an atmosphere of social conflict," analyst Luis Pasaraindico told AFP. Some 160,000 police and soldiers were deployed to guarantee peace on election day as 25 million people were due to vote, plus another one million from the Peruvian diaspora living in 75 countries around the world. The new president will take office on July 28, replacing centrist interim leader Francisco Sagasti. —AFP

## Mexico president suffers setback in legislative elections

**MEXICO CITY:** Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's party lost its absolute majority in the lower house in elections Sunday, initial results indicated, marking a setback to his promised "transformation" of the country. The vote was seen as a referendum on his more than two years in office overshadowed by the coronavirus pandemic and cartel-related violence.

Dozens of politicians have been murdered in the months leading up to the polls for the lower house of Congress, 15 of 32 state governors and thousands of local politicians. On the eve of the elections, gunmen killed five people helping to organize voting in southern Mexico, while two human heads were left at polling stations in the border city of Tijuana on election day.

Early results suggested Lopez Obrador's Morena party was set to take between 190 and 203 of the 500 seats, the National Electoral Institute said, though it could still secure an absolute majority with its allies. The ruling coalition has had a two-thirds supermajority in the lower house of Congress that enabled Lopez Obrador to amend the constitution without negotiating with his opponents. Without it, he faces a tougher time pushing through his planned reforms, including seeking greater energy independence for Mexico. "It's a defeat for Lopez Obrador—not overwhelming—but it does weaken him and his project because it requires constitutional reforms," said political analyst Jose Antonio Crespo. "It's an important victory for the opposition because it was able to capitalize on the discontent, although the reality is that people voted against Lopez Obrador, not for his opponents," he told AFP.

### Opposition gains

A coalition of three opposition parties was set to increase its number of lower house seats to between



**MEXICO CITY:** Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador shows the results of Sunday's midterm elections at the National Palace in Mexico City yesterday. —AFP

181 and 213, the National Electoral Institute said. That would still be behind Morena and its allies, which were projected to control 265-298 seats. Lopez Obrador was elected in 2018 for a term of six years, vowing to overhaul Mexico's "neoliberal" economic model, root out corruption and end profligacy by a privileged elite.

But his presidency has been largely dominated by the coronavirus pandemic, which has left more than a quarter of a million people dead in Mexico and devastated the economy. While the 67-year-old president himself continues to enjoy public approval ratings above 60 percent, Mexican voters often use midterm elections to punish the ruling party.

"They never had a plan and they still don't," said Claudia Cervantes, a hospital worker, said of the government's handling of the crisis. But some other voters such as Tania Calderon were willing to give Morena more time. "Without the pandemic, the government would have done better," the 37-year-old said. Mexico's economy, the second-largest in Latin America, plunged by 8.5 percent in 2020 in the worst slump in decades, although the government predicts a rebound this year. —AFP



**NAYPYIDAW:** File photo taken on May 24, 2021 and released by Myanmar's Ministry of Information on May 26, detained civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi (L) and detained president Win Myint (R) during their first court appearance in Naypyidaw, since the military detained them in a coup on February 1. —AFP

ta-backed court would be little more than "a show trial." "It's all about an illegal regime discrediting a democratically elected leader on trumped up charges that would embarrass a tin pot dictatorship anywhere else." Suu Kyi spent more than 15 years under house arrest during the previous military rule before her 2010 release.

Her international stature diminished following a wave of military violence targeting Buddhist-majority Myanmar's marginalised Muslim Rohingya community that displaced more than a million people, but the coup has returned Suu Kyi to the role of cloistered democracy icon.

Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing has justified his power grab by citing alleged electoral fraud in the November poll, which Suu Kyi's NLD won in a landslide. The junta has previously said it would hold fresh elections within two years, but has also threatened to dissolve the NLD.

The continuing violence in Myanmar has pushed some in the anti-junta movement to form a so-called "People's Defence Force" (PDF) in their townships—made up of civilians who fight back against security forces with homemade weapons. —AFP



## International

# Delhi, Mumbai loosen lockdowns as India virus crisis eases in cities

## 'Businesses at our malls are coming back slowly'

**NEW DELHI:** India's capital New Delhi and financial hub Mumbai began a gradual easing of restrictions yesterday as coronavirus infections in the country fell to a two-month low. Hospitals in the cities — which have a combined population of some 40 million — were overwhelmed by a deadly COVID-19 wave in April and May, with severe shortages of oxygen and other critical medicines. The huge spike saw India report record-breaking numbers of cases and deaths to become the second worst-hit nation after the United States with just under 29 million infections.

Authorities in Delhi and Mumbai, as well as other cities and states, had imposed restrictions on movement and activities to combat the surge. "We have to stay safe from coronavirus infections and also bring the economy back on track," Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal tweeted Monday as some shops and malls reopened.

The city's metro services were operating at 50 percent capacity and roads quickly filled up with vehicles, but local shopping areas remained quiet. The northern city was reporting an average of 25,000 daily cases during its peak. It fell to 381 infections on Sunday, officials said. Kejriwal also announced that city officials would conduct door-to-door visits to enrol people aged over 45 for vaccinations.

### 'Welcome step'

Maharashtra, India's richest state of which Mumbai is the capital, eased restrictions based on infection rates and hospital bed occupancy. In Mumbai — where the caseload soared to 11,163 in early April — there were just 794 new infections on Sunday. Malls were reopened in the city with restrictions, but were fully operational in cities with lower infection rates such as Nagpur and Aurangabad. "This is a step in the right direction," said Rajendra Kalkar of Phoenix Mills, which manages three shopping centres in Maharashtra.

"Businesses at our malls are coming back slowly. This is a very welcome step for thousands of mall staff and retail employees." The Hotel and Restaurant Association of Western India estimated that more than two million jobs were lost during the Maharashtra



**MUMBAI:** A staff member wearing protective gear attends a customer after personal grooming services were allowed to resume at a hair salon in Mumbai yesterday. — AFP

lockdown. "We are very happy to open our doors again today," the restaurant manager of the Mumbai branch of popular eatery Social, who gave his name as Malay, told AFP.

Experts warn that while the crisis has eased in Delhi, Mumbai and other major cities, the disease is still spreading in rural areas and in some southern and north-eastern states. The death toll — which usually lags infection figures by several weeks — was still at elevated levels, they added. "Currently, the states with high test-positivity rates like Kerala and Tamil Nadu need to maintain the restrictions as any major easing can be risky," com-

but about 161,000 people were still unable to return to their homes. The flooding in the area was exacerbated by the illegal filling of low-lying lands reserved for stormwater retention, they added. Residents of Kelaniya, on the outskirts of Colombo, waded through waist-deep waters, while some used makeshift rafts and oars to get around on streets which now resembled canals.

In Malwana, just northeast of Colombo, Hassen Maulavi told AFP he had to negotiate flooded streets for an urgent medical appointment yesterday, from his partially submerged two-storey home. Soldiers yesterday rescued 27 people marooned in a region north of Colombo, after earlier operations to pluck hundreds of people from their flooded homes over the weekend.

The Disaster Management Centre said conditions overall appeared to be improving yesterday, although a mudslide warning remained for the 10 districts. In the central Kegalle district, rescuers said they were guided by a pet dog to a home where four members of a family had been buried by a mudslide on Sunday.

All four-aged between 23 and 57 — had died, the officials added. While Sri Lanka's monsoon is seasonal, the nation-a member of the 48-country Climate Vulnerable Forum-faces more frequent floods as a result of global warming, experts have warned. — AFP

munity health expert Rajib Dasgupta told AFP.

India yesterday reported just over 100,000 fresh infections — after several days of 400,000-plus cases in May — and nearly 2,500 deaths. The health ministry said total deaths were just under 347,000 so far, although experts warn the actual toll could be much higher and there have been claims of undercounting. India has administered just under 233 million vaccine shots against COVID-19 so far, but experts say the mass inoculation drive needs to be stepped up to combat the spread of the virus in the nation of 1.3 billion people. — AFP

## Rohingya on Bangladesh island feel trapped, fear monsoons: HRW

**DHAKA:** Rohingya refugees kept on a Bangladesh island fear they will be exposed to torrid conditions during the upcoming monsoon season, and are struggling with "inadequate" health and education facilities, a Human Rights Watch report said yesterday. About 18,800 refugees have been moved from the Cox's Bazar region — where around 850,000 people live in squalid and cramped conditions after fleeing Myanmar — to the low-lying silt island of Bhashan Char in the Bay of Bengal. A spokesman for the prime minister's office told AFP that another 80,000 Rohingya would be shifted to the island soon. The Bangladesh government has insisted the relocation is voluntary, with the island safe from cyclones and its facilities far better than the Cox's Bazar camps. But Human Rights Watch said, after interviewing 167 refugees, that they had been moved "without full, informed consent" and prevented from returning to the mainland.

The refugees also spoke of a shortage of health facilities and education for their children, the 58-page report said. Others feared the monsoon season starting in June could expose them to high winds and flooding on the island. Human Rights Watch acknowledged that Dhaka had been "generous and compassionate" in sheltering the Rohingya — many of whom fled Myanmar after a brutal military crackdown in 2017 — but that their rights should be protected. "The Bangladesh government is finding it hard to cope with over a million Rohingya refugees, but forcing people to a remote island just creates new problems," Bill Frelick, HRW's director of migrant and refugee rights, said in a statement. "International donors should assist the Rohingya, but also insist that Bangladesh return refugees who want to return to the mainland or if experts say island conditions are too dangerous or unsustainable."

Bangladesh Foreign Minister A.K. Abdul Momen hit back at the report, telling AFP that "whatever resources we have, we have tried to provide the best of services to these people". "Their nations are very developed... If they have so much sympathy, let them take them back to their country," Momen said of the New York-based Human Rights Watch. "I am sorry we cannot have better facilities because we are not a rich country. We cannot afford to provide more things." On Friday, a boat filled with dozens of Rohingya landed off the Indonesian coast after a months-long journey — the latest in a wave of arrivals from the cramped camps in Bangladesh. Bangladesh police have also arrested Rohingya trying to flee Bhashan Char, while thousands protested against conditions on the island last week during a visit by the UN refugee agency. — AFP

patriots. "Saying that is the same as saying nothing, I'm sick of it," one Weibo user commented Monday on a post by state-run tabloid Global Times about Wang's statement.

"You should send two fighter jets to escort them!" another user urged. China's diplomats and official propaganda have in recent years encouraged an assertive, belligerent form of nationalism, with officials tweeting insults and conspiracy theories about diplomatic rivals and state TV gloating at the chaos caused by protests and coronavirus outbreaks abroad.

After years of increasingly bellicose language, President Xi Jinping last week called for a change in tone from China. He urged the nation to show a softer face abroad, cultivating a "reliable, admirable and respectable image". — AFP

## Thousands homeless as S Lanka floods death toll hits 17

**COLOMBO:** Army relief workers in aluminium dinghies handed out rice and other food to residents in submerged parts of the Sri Lankan capital as the death toll from monsoon floods across the country rose to 17 yesterday. The monsoon hits the South Asian country twice a year, bringing vital rain for irrigation and hydro-power generation, but it can be deadly and destructive.

At least 17 people have died since Friday, after heavy downpours inundated 10 of the country's 25 districts. "Our kitchen is still flooded and we managed thanks to cooked food distributed by the military," Kusuma Dahanayake told AFP by telephone from Gampaha, the worst-affected district, just outside Colombo. The 73-year-old said it was the worst flooding she had experienced at her home since she moved there in 1995.

Officials said floodwaters in the area were receding,



**COLOMBO:** Residents make their way through floodwaters after heavy monsoon rains in Kelaniya, on the outskirts of Colombo on June 6, 2021. — AFP

## China vents anger at US Senators' visit to Taiwan

**BEIJING:** China expressed fury over US Senators visiting Taiwan to donate coronavirus vaccines, saying it could embolden "separatist forces" on the island. Beijing sees democratic, self-ruled Taiwan as part of its territory which is to be seized one day, by force if necessary, and rages at any diplomatic attempts to recognise it as an independent nation.

A delegation of three US lawmakers made a stopover on Sunday in Taipei, where they announced Washington would donate 750,000 coronavirus vaccine doses to Taiwan. The gift came as Taiwan accuses China of hampering its efforts to secure vaccines, saying it is part of Beijing's ongoing campaign to isolate the island.

Foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said China "expresses strong dissatisfaction (toward the visit) and has lodged a solemn representation". He also urged the United States to "be prudent when dealing with the Taiwan question and avoid sending any erroneous signals to separatist forces" on the island. But the relatively tepid statement from a ministry notorious for its pugnacious responses to any diplomatic overtures to Taiwan awoke the scorn of China's online

### News in brief

#### Four on trial in Paris

**PARIS:** Four men went on trial in Paris yesterday over the Islamist murder of a police officer on the Champs-Élysées avenue on the eve of France's 2017 presidential election. Xavier Jugele was sitting at the wheel of a parked police bus when Karim Cheurfi pulled up in a car, got out and shot him dead through the windscreen on April 20, 2017. Cheurfi, a 39-year-old French jihadist who became radicalised in prison while serving time for robbery and attacks on the police, was himself shot dead by police minutes later. The brazen assault, which Cheurfi carried out on behalf of the Islamic State (IS) group, caused outrage in France, which was already reeling from a wave of attacks by radical Islamists. Shortly after Jugele's death it emerged that he had been among the first responders at the Bataclan theatre in Paris on November 13, 2015, where IS gunmen massacred 90 concertgoers.

#### Japan arrests Russian crew member

**TOKYO:** Japan's coastguard said yesterday it has arrested a Russian crew member over a collision that killed three local fishermen, in the latest maritime dispute between the neighbouring countries. The collision of a Russian ship and a Japanese boat happened late last month off the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido. A Russian crew member was brought to Japan while officials investigated, and has now been formally arrested, a spokesperson from the Monbetsu coastguard office in Hokkaido said. "We have arrested a 38-year-old Russian third officer over allegations of death caused by professional negligence," she told AFP.

#### Thailand launches vaccination push

**BANGKOK:** Thailand launched a mass COVID-19 vaccination drive yesterday as it seeks to beat a third wave of infections and reboot its vital tourism industry, which has been devastated by pandemic travel curbs. The kingdom plans to give out some six million jabs in June, initially focusing on Bangkok—where the country's current third wave began—and the tourist island of Phuket. The push comes as the government faces criticism over the slow pace of its vaccination strategy—less than three million of the 70 million population have got a shot—and concerns over supplies. Shopping malls and supermarkets were among the 25 vaccination sites in action around the sprawling capital, which is aiming to inoculate up to 70,000 people a day, mostly with locally produced AstraZeneca shots. — AFP

## Tribal fighting in S Darfur kills 36

**KHARTOUM:** Weekend clashes between Arab and non-Arab tribes in South Darfur have killed at least 36 people and left dozens wounded, according to state media and witnesses. The fighting broke out on Saturday between the Arab al-Taisha and ethnic African Fallata tribes in the remote Um Dafuq area of South Darfur, witnesses said. Official news agency SUNA said calm was restored by yesterday. "Military forces were deployed to the areas of clashes to resolve the conflict between Fallata and Taisha tribes which left 36 killed and 32 wounded," SUNA reported late Sunday citing South Darfur officials.

It was not immediately clear what triggered the clashes but similar fighting often erupts in the Darfur region over land and access to water. "We heard the sound of heavy weapons throughout the fighting," which broke out Saturday and continued on Sunday, Um Dafuq resident Eissa Omar told AFP by telephone. The vast Darfur region, located in western Sudan, has been the scene of similar bouts of violence in recent months.

In April, at least 132 people were killed in West Darfur fighting between members of the Massalit tribe and Arab communities, forcing authorities to impose a state of emergency. In January, renewed clashes between Arab and non-Arab tribes in the West and South Darfur regions killed more than 250 people. The violence came as Sudan navigates a rocky transition following the toppling of long-time president Omar al-Bashir in April 2019, following mass protests against his rule.

The transitional government installed after Bashir's ouster has been pushing to end long-running conflicts including in Darfur. It signed a landmark peace agreement with multiple key rebel groups in October, and it is currently in talks to forge peace with the remaining two holdout groups.

The recent violence in Darfur appeared not to involve any signatories to the October peace deal. On December 31, a hybrid United Nations and African Union peacekeeping mission ended its operations in Darfur. The end of peacekeeping patrols sparked protests by fearful Darfuris in late December.

Darfur was the site of a bitter 2003 conflict pitting African ethnic minority rebels against Arab nomads backed by the Khartoum government under Bashir. The deadly conflict—which killed some 300,000 people and displaced 2.5 million—subsided over the years but inter-ethnic clashes still occasionally erupt. — AFP



# Business

TUESDAY, JUNE 8, 2021

## Zain launches child online safety campaign 'Internet Monsters'

### Over 30% of Internet users are children!

**KUWAIT:** Zain Group, a leading mobile innovator in seven markets in the Middle East and Africa, announced the launch of its latest social media campaign entitled 'Internet Monsters', which aims to further raise awareness on child safety online, at a time of increased online activity. The online campaign is based on classic fairytales to which modern twists have been added to depict what is occurring in the modern digital world.

Zain engaged the services of an artist to create and depict the telco's take on the classic children's stories of Snow White, Hansel and Gretel, Cinderella, and Little Red Riding Hood, showcasing the villains in each story in a digitized manner, with them emerging from laptop screens, smartphones, tablets and TV screens (gaming). The digitization of the classic stories, reflected against a backdrop of different digital mediums, is meant to help children visualize and relate to the threats faced online, and understand that there are ways to counter them.

Over 30 percent of all Internet users are estimated to be children and given the expansion of broadband access, this number is only set to rise over time. The COVID-19 pandemic has also resulted in many more children coming online as physical school classes have been restricted and more children are learning online, increasing the threat landscape for exposure to detrimental content and threat actors.

The main objective of Zain's latest child online safety campaign is to reiterate the importance of this issue, and advocate for parents and caregivers to stay vigilant and aware of the risks, emphasizing that people are not always who they might present themselves to be online.

Bader Al-Kharafi, Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO, commented, "Child Online Safety is of great importance for Zain given the millions of children that are online every day using



- **Bader Al-Kharafi, Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO,** "We are fully committed to address the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 16.2 calling on ending all forms of violence against children by 2030."
- 'Internet Monsters' Social media campaign is a cyber-twist to classic fairytales
- Zain focused on raising awareness and advocating for parents to stay vigilant and aware of the risks to ensure children are safe online

digital devices across our footprint. We are dedicated to playing our key role in addressing this especially that our region has one of the highest share of youth in the world, coupled with a rising broadband connectivity rate. We are fully committed to address the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 16.2 calling on ending all forms of violence against children by 2030."

Jennifer Suleiman, Zain Group's Chief Sustainability Officer commented, "Zain aims to empower millions of young people across our footprint, enabling them to reach their maximum potential. Part of this objective is keeping them safe from harmful content and people, and one of the pillars of our Corporate Social

Responsibility and Sustainability strategy, Generation Youth, contains initiatives that are dedicated to child online safety."

Suleiman continued, "Zain is actively involved in activities geared towards creating and supporting ecosystems that foster the well-being of young people to ensure sustainable, inclusive growth and social cohesion in our region. As a leading Internet services provider, it is our responsibility to ensure that children are as safe as possible online and through social media campaigns such as Internet Monsters, we look to continue raising awareness on this critical topic to children and caregivers."

Zain has been a major advocate on issues related to raising awareness of child online safe-

ty through initiatives and collaborations that include the following:

- To raise awareness and better educate individuals on the importance of child online safety, in 2020, Zain launched a social media campaign and an internal announcement promoting tools and resources that offer tips and advice on how they can keep their children safe online.

- In collaboration with the Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development, Zain published a collective report on child online safety that highlighted the risks and harms that children face online and provided actionable recommendations to address the abuse and exploitation that children face online.

- In June 2020, Zain established a three-year partnership with UNICEF, signing a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to work towards the advancement of the rights of children in the region. Zain and UNICEF will collaborate based on their respective expertise on strengthening activities around child rights. The MoU covers aspects on online gaming, raising awareness on child online safety and convening stakeholders on online protection.

- Through its partnership with UNICEF, Zain collaborated to create a Child Online Safety Booklet for school students and children. The goal of the booklet is to educate children on the risks that they might be exposed to while being connected online or while gaming. In addition, the booklet gives tips and recommendations on what to do and not to do while online. This booklet was developed for Zain eSports to disseminate to any partnership where children are key players.

The Internet Monsters campaign is currently live on all Zain Group and country operations' social media channels: [www.facebook.com/zain](http://www.facebook.com/zain); [www.twitter.com/zain](http://www.twitter.com/zain); [www.youtube.com/zain](http://www.youtube.com/zain); [www.instagram.com/zaingroup](http://www.instagram.com/zaingroup); [www.linkedin.com/company/zain](http://www.linkedin.com/company/zain)

## Amazon's Jeff Bezos to go to space on Blue Origin flight

**WASHINGTON:** Amazon founder Jeff Bezos announced yesterday he will fly into space next month on the first human flight launched by his Blue Origin rocket firm. "Ever since I was five years old, I've dreamed of traveling to space. On July 20th, I will take that journey with my brother," Bezos said on his Instagram account.

Blue Origin said Bezos and his brother Mark will travel on the first crewed flight of the company's New Shepard capsule.

The company is auctioning off the third spot, and that bidding is already at \$2.8 million with nearly 6,000 participants from 143 countries. The trip will last a total of 10 minutes, four of which passengers will spend above the Karman line that marks the recognized boundary between Earth's atmosphere and space.

After lift-off, the capsule separates from its booster, then spends four minutes at an altitude exceeding 60 miles (100 kilometers), during

which time those on board experience weightlessness and can observe the curvature of Earth from space. The booster lands autonomously on a pad two miles from the launch site, and the capsule floats back to the surface with three large parachutes that slow it down to about a mile an hour when it lands.

New Shepard has successfully carried out more than a dozen uncrewed test runs launching from its facility in the Guadalupe Mountains of West Texas. The reusable suborbital rocket system was named after Alan Shepard, the first American in space 60 years ago. The proceeds from the auction will go to Blue Origin's foundation, Club for the Future, which aims to inspire future generations to pursue careers in STEM. After the auction for the first flight, Blue Origin will offer places for sale.

### Billionaire rivalry

The automated capsules with no pilot have six seats with horizontal backrests, placed next to large portholes, in a futuristic cabin with swish lighting. Multiple cameras help immortalize the few minutes the tourists experience weightlessness while taking in the Earth's curvature.

Blue Origin has not yet published its prices but its clientele is expected to mainly be wealthy individuals. Virgin Galactic, the company founded by British billionaire Richard Branson, is also



In this file photo the CEO of Amazon Jeff Bezos gestures as he addresses the Amazon's annual Smbhav event in New Delhi. —AFP

developing a spacecraft capable of sending clients on suborbital flights. Some 600 people have booked flights, costing \$200,000 to \$250,000.

Elon Musk's SpaceX is planning orbital flights that would cost millions of dollars and send people much further into space. Bezos announced earlier this year that he is stepping down as chief executive of Amazon to spend more time on other projects including Blue Origin. He has a very public rivalry with Musk, whose Space X has already begun to carry astronauts to the International Space Station and is a competitor for government space contacts. —AFP



RIYADH: Saudi Aramco is raising money to help pay an annual dividend of \$75 billion, a key revenue source for the Saudi government, Aramco's biggest shareholder.

## Saudi Aramco in debut Islamic bond sale

**RIYADH:** Saudi Aramco yesterday began its first dollar-denominated Islamic bond sale, state media said, as the energy giant seeks to raise cash to fund its hefty dividend payments.

The sale of sukuk, or Islamic bonds compliant with the Muslim faith, will end on June 17, the official Saudi Press Agency said, without specifying how much cash Aramco is seeking to raise. The sale comes after two previous bond offerings that were not compliant with Islamic law—a debut \$12 billion sale in 2019 and an \$8 billion offering in November last year.

The company is raising money to help pay an annual dividend of \$75 billion, a key revenue source for the Saudi government, Aramco's biggest shareholder. Aramco, the kingdom's cash cow, pledged to pay the dividend when it sought to generate interest in its debut initial public offering on the Saudi bourse in December 2019.

But company finances came under pressure last year, when crude prices tanked as the coronavirus pandemic sapped global demand. Last month, Aramco declared a 30 percent jump in first quarter profit, thanks to a recovery in oil prices, but the company's free cash flow fell short of the \$18.75 billion dividend obligation for that period. Aramco is pushing to raise cash as Riyadh faces a ballooning budget deficit and pursues multi-billion dollar projects to diversify its oil-reliant economy. In April, Aramco said it had struck a \$12.4-billion deal to sell a minority stake in a newly-formed oil pipeline business to a consortium led by US-based EIG Global Energy Partners. —AFP

## Tourists delight as Spain opens up to vaccinated travellers

**MALAGA:** Hoards of beaming tourists were flying into the sun-soaked resort of Malaga yesterday after Spain opened its borders to all vaccinated travellers from all over the world. "We're thrilled, delighted. We love Spain, the sun, the food and everything about it," said Irish holidaymaker Gillian Ford, who flew in from rainy Dublin after being fully vaccinated.

"You only live once so you need to get out and enjoy," she said before heading off to the beaches of Marbella with her husband Edward. In throwing open its borders, Spain is hoping the influx of visitors will revitalize its all-important tourism sector that has been battered by the pandemic.

With vaccination rates rising across Europe, many are hoping it will be a busy summer for tourism, and by mid-morning there was a steady flow of arrivals at Malaga airport in the southern Andalusia region, among them German, Irish and Belgian tourists. At least 20 international flights landed in the morning, with the arrivals delighted to finally be able to hit the beach after more than a year of lockdown.

"I haven't left Belgium for a year," says 73-year-old Rose Huo, a Belgian national who came to visit her sister who lives in southern Spain. "It's always bad weather in Belgium, it's always raining but here it's always sunny.. We'll still have to be very careful but it's a start!"

Under the new rules, anyone who has completed their vaccinations at least 14 days before travel is allowed into Spain. Europeans who haven't yet been vaccinated, who could already enter Spain with a negative PCR test taken within 72 hours, can now come with a cheaper antigen test taken in the 48 hours prior to arrival. Under cloudless blue skies on Marbella beach, 20-year-old Irish student Alex Walsh, who took a PCR test before flying, said he felt safe to travel given the number of people being vaccinated. "I couldn't wait to get here, I'm just very relieved and happy," he told AFP, saying he was "sick of being in Ireland" and had flown in from Dublin with a group of friends.

### Eyeing a 'spectacular recovery'

Heavily-dependent on tourism, Spain saw its economy contract by a sharp 10.8 percent in 2020, one of the worst performers in the eurozone, with its key tourism sector battered by the pandemic travel restrictions. But this year, Spain—the world's second-most popular destination after France—has said it is expecting to welcome 45 million travellers. By the end of April, the country had only counted 1.8 million



Tourists walk holding inflatable mattress at Palma Beach in Palma de Mallorca yesterday. —AFP

visitors, official statistics show, although those in the tourism sector are confident that the numbers will surge over the summer. Jose Luis Prieto, president of Spain's travel agents' union (Unav) is hoping for a "spectacular recovery" after a punishing year. In recent weeks, tour operators in Britain, France and Germany-Spain's three main markets—had been receiving many enquiries, he said.

After months of closures, hotels and restaurants from the Costa del Sol to the Canary Islands have been reopening, and airlines have resumed flights to routes that were dropped at the height of the pandemic. —AFP



## Business

## Surging inflation, economic rebound test ECB's mettle

## Governing council expected to hold interest rates at historic lows

FRANKFURT: Surging inflation and an economic rebound as virus curbs ease will be in focus when European Central Bank policymakers meet Thursday, testing their commitment to keeping pandemic-era stimulus measures in place. The ECB's 25-member governing council is widely expected to hold interest rates at historic lows and leave its massive bond-purchasing schemes unchanged at the upcoming meeting.

But with a brighter outlook on the eurozone horizon as more people are vaccinated and businesses reopen, observers will be eager for clues on when the ECB might start winding down, or "tapering", its crisis bond buys.

The ECB's 1.85 trillion euro (\$2.2 trillion) pandemic emergency bond-purchasing programme (PEPP), its main weapon in the fight against the virus fallout, is set to run until March 2022. ECB president Christine Lagarde's Thursday press conference will likely be a tightrope walk between striking an upbeat tone about the region's recovery while stressing the need for ongoing support, observers said.

Lagarde will try to avoid "the T-word", according to ING bank economist Carsten Brzeski.

"Even if economic developments would in our view clearly justify at least having a first tapering discussion, the sheer mention of such a discussion could push up bond yields further and consequently undermine the



BRUSSELS: President of the European Council Charles Michel arrives to attend an interconstitutional video conference with President of the European Central Bank (ECB), the European Commission President and President of the Eurogroup. — AFP

economic recovery," he said. A similar debate is raging in the United States, where minutes from the Federal Reserve meeting in late April showed that some officials believe the US economy may soon be healthy enough to start trimming asset purchases.

the first five months this year, said customs authorities. "It's still a fairly healthy set of numbers," Jonathan Cavenagh, senior market strategist at Informa Global Markets, told Bloomberg TV. "We know that global demand is still recovering and that trend is likely to continue towards the end of the second quarter and into the third quarter as the major developed economies open up." The lower-than-expected export figure was likely due to port disruptions due to tighter Covid-19 control measures in late May after the coronavirus was detected among staff.

"I think there was some disruption in May from ports," ING chief economist for Greater China Iris Pang said, referring to recent congestion at southern China's Yantian port. Pang added that the Suez Canal incident—when a stranded mega-ship blocked the critical maritime artery for six days in March—had also affected China's export and import trade. Electronics shipments have bolstered Chinese exports, rising 31.9 percent on-year in the January to May period, although growth in demand for textiles—including masks to guard against the virus spread—have eased, dropping 10.3 percent.

Nomura chief China economist Lu Ting noted that factors behind import growth include rising commodity prices and strong yuan appreciation. Authorities said yesterday that the volume and prices of iron ore, crude oil and soybeans imports have risen. China's overall trade surplus came in at \$45.53 billion in May, an on-year decrease of 26.5 percent. — AFP

## Chinese exports up 28%, imports hit decade-high

BEIJING: China's exports rose 27.9 percent in May while imports grew at the fastest pace in more than a decade as the global economy powers back from the pandemic crisis, official data showed yesterday. Demand for China's goods has bounced after economically painful lockdowns last year due to the Covid-19 crisis, and as vaccines are rolled out across much of the world. The figures are also boosted by last year's low base of comparison when the coronavirus was spreading rapidly. Exports from the world's second largest economy posted strong growth but came in lower than expectations of 32.0 percent.

"To be honest, that is a cracking number by anybody's standard and show that global demand remains robust," said OANDA's Jeffrey Halley. In May, import growth hit its highest rate since January 2011, coming in at 51.1 percent on-year, also slightly below expectations of a Bloomberg poll of analysts.

But still, imports and exports to China's major trade partners including Southeast Asia's ASEAN bloc, the European Union and the United States have risen in



A cargo ship loaded with containers leaving a port in Haikou, in China's southern Hainan province. China's exports rose 27.9 percent in May while imports grew at the fastest pace in more than a decade as the global economy powers back from the pandemic crisis, official data showed yesterday. — AFP

## Stocks tightly bound after Yellen rate comments, G7 plan

LONDON: Stock markets barely moved while the dollar dipped yesterday after US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen downplayed fears over the prospect of higher interest rates triggered by a spike in inflation. Investors weighed also moves over the weekend by the G7 group of wealthy nations towards an eventual global minimum corporate tax rate aimed firmly at tech giants seen as not paying enough. Wall Street stocks opened on a muted note while European shares were up. Asia finished the day mixed.

US oil prices meanwhile sneaked above \$70 per barrel for the first time in 2.5 years as the pandemic-hit global economy pushes on with its recovery. "Inflation remains squarely in focus and the largest potential source of investors' angst and market volatility this week," noted Neil Wilson, chief market analyst at Markets.com.

While optimism about the global economic recovery and vaccine roll-outs have spurred markets, trading floors remain worried that the rebound will cause strong price rises and in turn force the US Federal Reserve and other central banks to hike borrowing costs or "taper" their stimulus measures. "Until the Federal Reserve is more vocal about tapering, investors will be happy to continue buying the dips in stocks and sell the rips in the

dollar," said Fawad Razaqada, market analyst with ThinkMarkets.

Razaqada said any noticeable pickup in consumer prices "could hurt risk appetite somewhat as it may lead to speculation over tapering". Yellen told Bloomberg News that US President Joe Biden should push ahead with his \$4.0-trillion recovery plan for the world's top economy even if it triggers high inflation that leads to interest rate rises. Yellen said any inflation spike in reaction to Biden's massive plan to revitalize the US economy would be transitory and that higher interest rates would actually be positive. "If we ended up with a slightly higher interest rate environment, it would actually be a plus for society's point of view and the Fed's point of view," the former Federal Reserve chair said in an interview Sunday with Bloomberg.

"We've been fighting inflation that's too low and interest rates that are too low for a decade," she said, adding she wanted them back to a normal level. While higher rates raise the cost of borrowing for governments, businesses and individuals, they boost the profits of banks and other lenders and increase the value of people's deposited savings. Yellen was speaking after returning from a meeting of G7 finance ministers in London which endorsed a global minimum corporate tax rate of at least 15 percent, rallying behind a US-backed plan targeting tech giants and other multinationals.

Traders shrugged off lower-than-expected Chinese trade growth figures for May, as imports still expanded at the fastest pace in more than a decade, up 51 percent year-on-year. Exports grew by 28 percent. "To be honest, that is a cracking number by anybody's standard and show that global demand remains robust," said OANDA's Jeffrey Halley. — AFP

## 'Uncertainty'

Italian central bank governor Ignazio Visco gave a hint of the ECB's thinking last week when he said that "uncertainty over the timing and the strength of the recovery require that financial conditions remain supportive for a long time."

Central banks' huge monthly bond purchases are aimed at keeping borrowing costs low to spur spending and investment. On top of PEPP, the ECB is also hoovering up 20 billion euros a month in government and corporate bonds under a pre-pandemic scheme to boost growth and drive up inflation. The Frankfurt institution has also offered ultra-cheap loans to banks and set its bank deposit rate at minus 0.5 percent—meaning lenders pay to park excess cash at the ECB.

The ECB's goal is to push inflation "close to, but below" two percent, a target that has been out of reach for years. But consumer prices have risen rapidly in recent months, driven by soaring energy prices and temporary factors including a shortage of semiconductors and pent-up demand as different sectors exit shutdowns.

## Inflation overshoot

Inflation in the 19-nation euro area hit 2.0 percent in May, overshooting the ECB's benchmark to reach its highest level in nearly three years. ECB officials have

stressed they are holding their nerve, pointing out that core inflation, which strips out energy and other volatile items, remains muted.

Lagarde has pledged that the ECB will "look through" what is forecast to be a brief surge in inflation. The bank will also unveil its latest quarterly forecasts Thursday, with observers saying inflation data could be revised upwards from the current 1.5 percent for 2021 and 1.2 percent for 2022.

Economic growth estimates are predicted to stay broadly unchanged at 4.0 percent this year and 4.1 percent in 2022. After a weaker than expected first quarter, marked by a sluggish start to Europe's vaccine rollout and the emergence of more contagious virus variants, economists are optimistic about the rest of the year.

Eurozone manufacturing is booming, the labor market is healing and business confidence surveys in key economies Germany, France and Italy are positive, said Berenberg Bank chief economist Holger Schmieding. But he predicted that the ECB would stick with its current pace of bond purchases a while longer. "The economy looks set to run full throttle shortly. But as the current spike in headline inflation so far reflects only temporary factors, the ECB can afford to keep the pedal on the metal for another three months," Schmieding said. — AFP



A general view of the mini diamond market in the Lupatapata territory, on the outskirts of Mbuji-Mayi, Lupatapata, in the Democratic Republic of Congo. — AFP

## DR Congo diamond mining giant struggles to revive its glory days

MBUJI-MAYI, DR Congo: Once the home of DR Congo's state diamond company MIBA, the town used to be filled with free-spending miners and their families, who brought a giddy touch of prosperity to remote Kasai-Oriental province. But at the end of last century, MIBA—the Bakwanga Mining Company—began to go into a long downward spiral, taking the town with it.

Poor management, crumbling infrastructure, embezzlement and looting, especially during the two Great Congo Wars between 1997 and 2003, left MIBA crippled by debt and at the mercy of plummeting commodity prices. It shut down at the peak of the 2008 financial crisis, resuming operations in 2011, but remains a shadow of its former self. From an annual output averaging six million carats—mainly of industrial diamonds—in the early 2000s, production was no more than 500,000 carats in 2008 and half that in 2011. Today the situation in Mbuji-Mayi is a far cry from the 1980s, when some 40,000 workers and their families drew their sustenance from the company.

MIBA owes several months of back pay to its employees, according to staffers who requested anonymity. "When the company was still operating, the roads and houses were maintained. When the corrugated roofs were rusted, they were automatically replaced," said one resident, Mpo Bilenga, outside his dilapidated home.

Bilenga, a former driver for the company, has been retired since 2012 but says he is still waiting to receive a pension for "services rendered". But the 70-year-old is not banking on it: "We don't know our fate... several of us have died without receiving a pension," he said.

Set up in 1961, MIBA is 80 percent state-owned, while a Belgian company, Sibeka, has a 20-percent stake. A government audit published in May 2020 revealed "serious dysfunction".

## Injection of cash

Last August, President Felix Tshisekedi, who himself hails from the Kasai region, moved to release \$5 million "to revive this company that was once the pride of the entire nation". The injection of cash has allowed MIBA to get back on its feet, the company's technical director Raphael Mukadi Tshindundu told AFP, adding however that it was not enough. "The mine is operational, exploitation is under way, but at a minimal level," he said. The first \$3 million went to "rehabilitating" a diamond processing plant at Disele and the purchase of a new one with an hourly capacity for 200 tons of ore, Tshindundu said. But the plant, manufactured in China, is still to be assembled at the Disele site, stored in containers or in the open air for now. Operations have resumed in only one of the company's 13 zones.

Joseph Kazadi, MIBA's operations manager, said the zone "may easily have more than 40 million carats (of diamonds) and by itself represents 78 percent of MIBA's kimberlite reserves."

The extracted ore is trucked to the Disele washing plant, about 10 minutes away on a clay road. Mud and sand are washed away before the ore is passed through a vibrating sieve at a rate of 50 tons an hour, working 24/7, Mukadi said. The stones then head to a "diamond sorting office"—a modest space that looks like the inside of a container but is one of the most closely monitored in the entire country.

Employees and miners undergo thorough searches on their way in and out, leaving their bags and phones at the door. Silence reigns as a dozen employees bend over their work, sorting the stones according to their quality. Meanwhile, the resumption of activity by MIBA appears to have little impact on the people of Mbuji-Mayi. "If MIBA's activity had really resumed, we would have felt it, life would have resumed, money would circulate," said Alphonse Ilunga, a diamond buyer at the nearby Lupatapata market, where diamonds gathered by freelancers are bought and sold. For her part Regine Kanyeba, the wife of a MIBA worker, has just one demand: "That they pay their workers' wages so we can pay our children's school fees." — AFP



WASHINGTON, DC: In this file photo the Tesla logo is seen outside of their showroom in Washington, DC. Tesla has abandoned a plan for an ultra-deluxe Plaid+ version of its Model S vehicle, according to founder Elon Musk. — AFP

## Tesla scraps plan for ultra-luxe Plaid+ model

WASHINGTON: Tesla has abandoned a plan for an ultra-deluxe Plaid+ version of its Model S vehicle, according to founder Elon Musk. Musk said in a tweet Sunday that the juiced-up Plaid is "just so good," that there is no need to go further with the Plaid+ model. The planned Plaid+ priced at \$150,000 would have achieved a range of 830 kilometers (515 miles) with an acceleration to 96 kilometers (60 miles) per hour in just two seconds.

The Plaid model set to go on sale June 10 will sell for around \$120,000 with a range of 624 kilometers, with the same acceleration capacity as the Plaid+. "Model S goes to Plaid speed this week," Musk tweeted. "Plaid+ is canceled. No need, as Plaid is just so good."

He claimed the new model is the "quickest production car ever made of any kind." Tesla's move comes as all automakers struggle with a shortage of parts, especially microprocessors, which have been hitting a variety of manufacturing and technology sectors. The electric car maker set production and delivery records in the first quarter, with the auto industry upstart's Model 3 becoming the best-selling "premium sedan" in the world, according to Musk. — AFP



## Business

# France fines Google \$267m over online ad dominance

## US tech giants face growing pressure in Europe

PARIS: France's competition regulator fined Google 220 million euros (\$267 million) yesterday after finding it had favored its own services for placing online ads at the expense of rivals, as US tech giants face growing pressure in Europe.

The penalty is part of a settlement reached after three media groups—News Corp, French daily Le Figaro and Belgium's Groupe Rossel—accused Google in 2019 of abusing a dominant market position over ad sales for their websites and apps. The competition authority determined that Google gave preferential treatment to its own ad inventory auction service AdX and to Doubleclick Ad Exchange, its real-time platform for letting clients choose and buy ads.

"It is the first decision in the world to look into complex algorithmic auctions processes through which online display advertising works," the authority's president Isabelle de Silva said. Media groups looking to sell ad space on their internet sites or mobile apps using rival platforms often found that Google's services were unfairly competing against rivals, using a variety of methods.

For example, regulators found that Doubleclick would vary the commission it took when making a sale based on prices offered by other so-called ad servers. At the same time, Google arranged for AdX, its own supply-side platform (SSP), to give preferential treatment to offers emanating from Doubleclick—effectively squeezing out rivals such as Xandr or Index Exchange.

"These very serious practices penalized competition in the emerging online advertising market, and allowed Google not only to maintain but also to increase its dominant position," De Silva said.

### 'First in the world'

Media groups saw their online ad revenues crimped "even though their economic model is also strongly weakened by the decline in sales of print subscriptions and the decline in associated advertising revenue" in the shift to online news, it said. Le Figaro eventually dropped its complaint last November, but News Corp, owner of The Wall Street Journal, and Rossel pressed ahead.

"We need regulation because today we are not defending ourselves with the same weapons," Rossel's commercial and marketing director Thierry Hugot told AFP last week. Google did not contest the findings, and the regulator said the company has committed to operational changes including improved interoperability with third-party ad placement providers.

"As part of these commitments, we are reaffirming our promise not to use data from other SSPs to optimize bids in our exchange in a way that other SSPs can't reproduce," Maria Gomri, legal director at Google France, said in a statement. "We will be testing and developing these changes over the coming months before rolling them out more broadly, including some globally," she added.

The fine represents just a tiny fraction of the \$55.3 billion in revenue booked by Google in the first quarter of this year alone, mainly from online ad sales. The ruling comes as American technology firms are drawing closer scrutiny from European authorities, which are giving themselves new resources to better understand the complex workings of fast-evolving markets. Last week, Germany's competition regulator said it was expanding an antitrust investigation into Google and its parent company Alphabet to include Google News Showcase, a service aimed at increasing revenue for



PARIS: In this file photograph, a man takes a picture with his mobile phone of the logo of the US multinational technology and Internet-related services company Google. France's competition regulator fined Google 220 million euros (\$267 million) yesterday. —AFP

media publishers. Facebook also found itself targeted last week by parallel competition inquiries from the European Union and Britain, into whether the social media giant uses data from advertisers to unfairly dominate the online classifieds market.

Google had already been fined 150 million euros by the French regulator in December 2019

over "opaque" operating rules for its advertising platform, which were deemed to be applied in "an unfair and random manner." And in December last year, Google as well as Amazon were fined a total of 135 million euros by France's privacy watchdog for placing advertising cookies on users' computers without consent. —AFP

## Biden likely to drop corporate tax hike to fund jobs plan

WASHINGTON: In an effort to win Republican support for President Joe Biden's infrastructure and jobs plan, the White House signaled it was willing to negotiate over his pledge to increase the corporate tax rate. The Washington Post reported Biden offered to drop his proposal to return the top corporate tax rate to 28 percent—where it had been before a Republican-backed tax cut in 2017 — from its current 21 percent level, something the opposition party strenuously opposes. Citing sources familiar with the discussions, the newspaper said the offer was made in a private White House meeting on Wednesday with Republican Senator Shelley Moore Capito, as the president looks for opposition support for his spending plans.

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki however said Biden has not entirely give up on the corporate tax increase which he sees as "a viable pay-for."

But she said "those pay-fors can be moved around," signaling there could be some flexibility in the current negotiations. "We have a range of means for moving the president's ideas and proposals forward," she said, noting that Biden is scheduled to talk to Capito again Friday. "The President remains committed to his goal of signing a bill into law... by the summer." The Washington Post however said Biden would instead focus on a 15 percent minimum tax that would target corporations which are profitable but pay little in taxes to the federal government.

Biden has long stressed that corporations need to "pay their fair share" and vowed not to raise taxes on Americans making less than \$400,000 a year. Both corporate tax measures were included in his budget blueprint presented last week, which showed increasing the top tax rate would bring in at least \$86 billion starting in 2023, while a minimum tax would raise \$10 to 15 billion a year. The US leader, who campaigned on his ability to work with Republicans, has proposed a more than \$2 trillion plan to create jobs through investments in roads and bridges while also funding green technology, expanding broadband internet access and daycare, and fixing household water supplies.

However, Republicans are pushing for a smaller and more narrowly-focused bill limited to traditional public works projects. Psaki rejected the counteroffer to pay for some of the spending through increased fees. "We're not going to go down the road of user fees or other areas that would raise taxes on the American people." Capito's staff did not respond to a request for comment from AFP. —AFP

## US official warns cyberattacks are 'here to stay'

WASHINGTON: The US commerce secretary appealed Sunday for vigilance from the private sector in the face of increasingly serious cyberattacks, saying the threat is "here to stay" and may even worsen.

"I think the first thing we have to recognize is this is the reality, and we should assume—and businesses should assume—that these attacks are here to stay and if anything will intensify," Gina Raimondo said on ABC's "This Week."

Analysts say the hackers behind a series of recent cyberattacks—targeting a major US oil pipeline, a global meatpacking giant and even the Irish health service—are likely based in Russia. Aides say President Joe Biden will raise the issue during an upcoming European trip, first at a G7 meeting of leading democracies beginning Friday in Britain, then with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Geneva on June 16.

Raimondo, asked whether the US should be taking a more aggressive stance on cyberattacks—even perhaps contemplate military action—replied that "all options are on the table." "This is a top priority and all of us in the cabinet and the National Security Council are focused on it and considering all possible consequences."

She added that "we won't stand for a nation supporting or turning a blind eye to a criminal enterprise." The recent cyberattacks on major targets like the Colonial Pipeline, which brings gasoline to much of the US East Coast, have sharply focused attention on the problem, long bubbling below the surface as companies and government entities have suffered so-called ransomware attacks, often paying ransoms without reporting them. Mark Warner, a Democrat who chairs the Senate intelligence committee, called Sunday on NBC for greater transparency—requiring companies to report cyberattacks—and for the establishment of international norms.

He urged debate on possibly making it illegal for companies to pay ransoms to cyberattackers. FBI director Christopher Wray recently underscored the severity of the problem, saying there were parallels with the September 11, 2001 attacks on the US by Al-Qaeda, which killed 2,977 people. Energy



WASHINGTON: In this file photo US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo speaks at an event on high-speed internet. The US commerce secretary appealed Sunday for vigilance from the private sector in the face of increasingly serious cyberattacks, saying the threat is "here to stay" and may even worsen. —AFP

Secretary Jennifer Granholm, asked on Sunday if US adversaries had the ability to shut down its power grid, told CNN: "Yes, they do. I mean, I think that there are very malign actors who are trying."

"Even as we speak, there are thousands of attacks on all aspects of the energy sector and the private sector generally." —AFP

## Nigeria directs broadcasters to delete Twitter

ABUJA: Nigeria has directed all TV and radio stations to "suspend the patronage of Twitter immediately," describing its use as unpatriotic, the country's National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) said yesterday.

The government of Africa's most populous country said it was suspending the platform on Friday, two days after the US social media giant deleted a tweet from the president's account for violating its rules.

"Broadcasting stations are hereby advised to de-install twitter handles and desist from using Twitter as a source... of information gathering for news," NBC's director Armstrong Idachaba wrote in a statement. "It would be unpatriotic for any broadcaster in Nigeria to continue to patronize the suspended Twitter as a source of its information."

More than 39 million Nigerians have a Twitter account, according to NOI polls, a public opinion and research organization. Minister of Foreign Affairs Geoffrey Onyeama summoned diplomats

for a meeting Monday in the capital Abuja, after the EU and several countries issued a joint statement voicing concerns with the Twitter ban.

"Banning systems of expression is not the answer," the EU, US, Britain, Canada and Ireland said in the statement late on Saturday. The statement added it was "precisely the moment when Nigeria needs to foster inclusive dialogue and expression of opinions, as well as share vital information in this time of the COVID-19 pandemic."

### President's tweet deleted

The government's suspension came after Twitter on Wednesday deleted a remark on President Muhammadu Buhari's account in which he referred to the country's civil war five decades ago in a warning about recent unrest. The presidency denied that the Twitter suspension was a response to the removal of that post.

"There has been a litany of problems with the social media platform in Nigeria, where misinformation and fake news spread through it have had real world violent consequences," a presidency spokesman Garba Shehu said in a statement. Shehu said the removal of Buhari's tweet was "disappointing" and that "major tech companies must be alive to their responsibilities."

Twitter said it was "deeply concerned



Nigeria's National Broadcasting Commission has directed all broadcast stations in Nigeria to suspend the patronage of Twitter immediately.

by the blocking of Twitter in Nigeria" and that it would work "to restore access for all". International human rights groups have also condemned the move, which followed previous attempts by the government to regulate social media.

"VPN app" was the second most searched trend Saturday on Google in Nigeria, as virtual private networks can enable Twitter users to bypass the ban. Nigeria warned however that it would prosecute violators.

"Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Abubakar Malami, has directed for immediate prosecution of offenders of the federal government ban on Twitter operations in Nigeria," spokesman Umar Jibrilu Gwandu said. The platform has played an important role in public discourse in the country, with hashtags #BringBackOurGirls after Boko Haram kidnapped 276 schoolgirls in 2014, and #EndSARS during anti-police brutality protests last year. —AFP

## Taiwan tech sector hit by virus outbreak

TAIPEI: A leading Taiwanese chip testing and packaging company said yesterday that all its migrant employees have been suspended from working for around two weeks to contain a coronavirus outbreak. At least 206 employees, mostly migrant workers, at facilities run by King Yuan Electronics Company (KYEC) in northern Miaoli county have tested positive, according to

the government.

The cluster is the first major outbreak in Taiwan's semiconductor industry, which is operating at full capacity to meet a worldwide shortage. KYEC employs more than 7,000 people, including around 2,100 migrants, and counts some top international tech firms as clients, such as Intel, Qualcomm and Nvidia. KYEC said in a filing to the Taiwan Stock Exchange that its June output and revenue are expected to drop 30-35 percent due to the suspension of work.

Local media raised concerns that the suspension could impact the global chip shortage as KYEC's business is a key final step in the semiconductor supply chain. Two other tech firms in Miaoli have also reported infection clusters and

suspended migrant workers.

Taiwan's semiconductor factories have been struggling to plug a pandemic-driven shortage of chips that power essential electronic devices. The water-intensive facilities are running at full capacity, even as Taiwan suffers its worst drought in decades, although recent heavy rains have brought some temporary relief. Taiwan emerged largely unscathed from the pandemic last year with just a few hundred cases and single-digit deaths thanks to one of the world's best coronavirus responses.

But it is now battling a sudden outbreak. Infections have jumped to more than 11,000 with 286 deaths in over a month after a cluster initially detected among airline pilots spread. —AFP



TAIPEI: A leading Taiwanese chip testing and packaging company said yesterday that all its migrant employees have been suspended from working for around two weeks to contain a coronavirus outbreak. —AFP



## Business

# Boursa Kuwait holds 'Corporate Day' in collaboration with HSBC

## 54 prospective investors from 26 firms meet with 11 companies listed on the exchange

KUWAIT: Boursa Kuwait organized a virtual 'Corporate Day' in collaboration with HSBC, one of the world's largest banking and financial services institutions, from 1-2 June 2021. During the two-day conference, held virtually due to the continuing spread of the coronavirus pandemic, 11 companies listed on the Kuwaiti stock exchange, including Boursa Kuwait, met with 54 prospective investors from 26 of the world's leading investment banks and asset management firms.

Over two days, the participating Kuwaiti companies, which include the National Bank of Kuwait, Kuwait Finance House, Gulf Bank, Boubyan Bank, Burgan Bank, Mobile Telecommunications (Zain), Agility Public Warehousing, Mabane, HumanSoft, Jazeera Airways, and Boursa Kuwait Securities Company, held over 150 meetings with prospective investors including commercial banks, mutual funds, hedge funds, pension funds and insurance firms. The meetings provided international investors the opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of the benefits and prospects of investing in Kuwait and offered deeper insights into the financial performance and business strategies of the publicly traded companies. Head of Markets Sector at Boursa Kuwait Noura Al-Abdulkareem said that the hosting of the Corporate Day event came as part of the company's ongoing commitment to developing and sustaining a strong and efficient financial market thriving on liquidity and transparency.

She added, "The conference has enabled us to effectively put issuers in touch with prominent



Noura Al-Abdulkareem



Naim Azad Din

investors from around the globe for investment opportunities, making a further step forward in our effort to create an attractive platform that benefits all market participants. I would like to thank HSBC and the listed companies for joining us on this event. Boursa Kuwait is committed to seeking new partnership opportunities to launch more value-adding initiatives in the future and contribute to the growth of the Kuwaiti capital market in particular and the wider national economy in general."

During its participation in the event, Boursa Kuwait highlighted its recent milestones, financial performance, and company strategy, as well as shedding light on its plans to develop a more transparent and solvent capital market through the implementation of a slew of operational and regulatory enhancements and the adoption of technology to raise the bourse's profile regionally and globally.

Commerce and Industry, with the quarterly and annual draws also reviewed by Ernst & Young.

### Annual grand prize

To increase their chances of winning, account holders must either keep their account with a minimum deposit amount of KD 200, or increase their Al-Danah savings - the more deposits into an account, the more chances accumulated over time. Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account holders also have the opportunity to enter and win cash prizes all year long through monthly, quarterly and annual draws.

### Opening an Al-Danah Account

To enter the upcoming draws, Gulf Bank customers can open an Al-Danah account today with only KD 200. To open an Al-Danah account, existing Gulf Bank customers can apply through Gulf Bank's online and mobile banking services, or book an appointment at their nearest branch by using the new "Visit Gulf Bank" app for a faster and more convenient branch visit. New customers can also open an Al-Danah account by visiting their nearest Gulf Bank branch or by scheduling an appointment through the app.

### Deposit more for more chances to win!

With Gulf Bank, depositing into an Al-Danah account is easier and more secure than ever, as clients can deposit into their accounts through the following channels: Online/Mobile Banking App which includes the ePay service, ATMs and ITMs, the Customer Contact Center at 1805805 which is available 24/7, in addition to the free standing order service from other Gulf Bank accounts.

Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account is open to both Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents of Kuwait. A minimum of KD 200 is required to open an account and the same amount must be maintained for customers to be eligible for the upcoming Al-Danah draws. If the customer's account balance falls below KD 200 at any given time, a KD 2 fee will be charged to the account monthly until the minimum balance is met. Customers who open an account and/or deposit more will enter Gulf Bank's Al-Danah draws throughout the year, for cash prizes totaling up to more than KD 2 million.

## Gulf Bank announces 10 winners of Al-Danah monthly draw for May

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank held its monthly Al-Danah draw on Sunday to announce the winners for March. The 10 lucky winners received cash prizes of KD 1,000 each. The winners are:

Taherah Mohd Abbas Husain  
Huda Abbas Al-Bandar Al-Hamad  
Lloyd Lara Hernandez  
Hamad Soud Abdulaziz Al-Hassan  
Maen Abdulwhab Abdullatif Al-Mattooq  
Jasim Muter Jaber  
Yousef Mohammed Asep Supriatna  
Waleed Awadh Saif Al-Nami  
Tareq Mohammed Hassan Al-Baghli  
Rawan Mustafa Mohd Al-Kandari

The Al-Danah account is one of the most rewarding savings accounts in Kuwait, with its periodic draws that award valuable prizes and multiple benefits for account holders. Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account offers monthly opportunities to win KD 1,000 to ten lucky winners, in addition to two quarterly draws with KD 100,000 prizes each, a semi-annual draw prize of KD 1,000,000 and a grand draw prize of KD 1,500,000.

### Numerous benefits

The Al-Danah account is the only account that rewards customers for their loyalty by providing loyalty chances. Loyalty chances are the total chances gained in the previous year, which are then transferred to the current year to reward customers for their loyalty to the bank.

Accordingly, all chances gained by existing Al-Danah customers in 2020 (from January 1 to December 31, 2020) have been transferred to the 2021 draws. It is also worth noting that all account draws are attended by a representative from the Ministry of

## ABK raises investment awareness in 'Let's Be Aware' campaign

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) in line with the Central Bank of Kuwait and Kuwait Banking Association's 'Let's Be Aware' campaign, aims to raise awareness around available banking and financial services in the country, and also make customers aware of their rights.

The campaign aims to demystify the various categories of investment products available, while at the same time highlighting the potential risks inherent to each. For this campaign, ABK introduces and compares various investment products and asset classes, empowering the consumer to be more involved in the investment process. Kuwaiti banks provide a world-standard range of products and services that allow for low-risk investment, and at the same time provide options for customers based on their risk appetite.

Investment funds allow participants to invest in a range of asset types with a view to achieving profits. These funds are typically managed by a specialist in the selection of assets, and funds can be made up of shares, bonds, commodities, and currencies. An investment savings account is an account in which a customer deposits the funds that they wish to save for the future. The bank, in turn, invests the funds, and deposits the returns into the account at predefined intervals. These accounts are open-ended and liquid, meaning customers can withdraw available funds at any time.

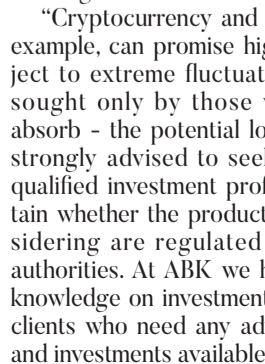
Short and long-term investment plans enable customers to prepare for significant expenses such as children's education, property purchases, or retirement. These products are designed for customers to use their money to make more money, by investing to gain returns. In any investment product, the initial deposit - or the principal and the returns earned through this exercise, are returned to the customer at the end of the defined term. All investments carry risk, and the degree varies by the type of investment prod-

uct selected. Most banking products are regulated by a supervisory authority, and are thus considered safer. Unregulated financial products such as cryptocurrencies, which are not subject to the supervision of any central bank or regulatory authority, can be less safe.

Cryptocurrencies have recently captured enormous investor interest, for the potential of great returns, which is tempered by their possibility of suddenly collapsing in value.

"ABK is proud to play a role in this important awareness campaign, which aims to empower consumers with information as they invest in their financial wellbeing and stability. It is easy to get drawn into products that offer impressive returns, without considering the risks to one's hard-earned money, and this initiative serves to make investing a careful, considered process," said Ammar Khajah, Area Manager - Retail Banking Division.

"Cryptocurrency and foreign exchange dealing, for example, can promise high returns, but they are subject to extreme fluctuations in value and should be sought only by those who understand - and can absorb - the potential losses. Individual investors are strongly advised to seek the advice and counsel of qualified investment professionals, and to first ascertain whether the products and services they are considering are regulated and approved by financial authorities. At ABK we have a team with a wealth of knowledge on investments, and we are ready to assist clients who need any advice on the various products and investments available," he added.



Ammar Khajah

### Milestones

Commenting on the event, Boursa Kuwait's Chief Financial Officer Naim Azad Din said, "Over the past few years, Boursa Kuwait has reached several milestones that have had a tremendous impact on its growth and objectives. The company's financial and operational performance led to it becoming more flexible, especially during the period of uncertainty brought upon by the pandemic, and with the consolidation of the Kuwait Clearing Company, Boursa Kuwait has diversified its operations, providing further testament to the resiliency inherent within its business."

Naim Azad Din continued, "This is our second Corporate Day as a company listed in the 'Premier' Market. The event has offered us an excellent opportunity to highlight Boursa Kuwait's potential to create value for prospective investors' portfolios and gain the confidence of the international investment community, in addition to gathering significant insights into their needs and expectations, which will inform our future initiatives."

Boursa Kuwait's series of Corporate Days showcases some of the standout listed companies and the investment opportunities that reside in the Kuwaiti capital market. Putting these companies in touch with some of the world's leading investment firms and financial institutions, the events aim to highlight these companies' financial health and business strategies and outlooks helping investors gain an in-depth understanding of the benefits and opportunities of investing in Kuwaiti companies.

Since its inception, Boursa Kuwait has worked diligently to create a credible exchange built on efficiency and transparency, creating a liquid capital market, a progressive exchange platform and developing a comprehensive set of reforms and enhancements that has allowed it to compete on an international level. Over the past three years, the company has rolled out numerous market reforms and new initiatives as part of its comprehensive multi-phase market development (MD) plans.

Since it was established by the Capital Markets Authority to take over the responsibilities of the Kuwait Stock Exchange in 2014, Boursa Kuwait has worked diligently to build a progressive exchange platform based on efficiency and transparency, with a view to creating long-term value for the company's stakeholders in the economic, social and environmental dimensions.

Guided by a mission-driven strategy that focuses on developing the market in line with international standards, Boursa Kuwait has successfully introduced innovative investment tools, reinforced transparency, and restructured the market to increase its competitiveness and liquidity. The company's market developments and enhancements have contributed to the reclassification of the Kuwaiti capital market to "Emerging Market" status in the world's top three indices, strengthening Kuwait's position as a leading financial center in the region. A self-listed exchange, Boursa Kuwait is the first government entity in the country to successfully undergo privatization.

## CBK bonds and related Tawarruq

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the most recent issues of CBK Bonds and related Tawarruq at a total value of KD 280 million for six months with a rate of return at 1.25 percent.

## Johnson faces aid cut rebellion on eve of G7

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson is facing his first possible parliamentary defeat since his 2019 landslide election, over cuts to the overseas aid budget, just days before hosting the G7 summit.

Breaking a manifesto promise, Johnson's Conservative government - which enjoys an 80-seat majority - insists it must slash spending on aid by billions of pounds this year to help mend pandemic-battered public finances. But the decision to no longer meet its legally enshrined commitment to spend 0.7 percent of gross national income (GNI) on British overseas aid has sparked a rebellion within the ruling party. Dozens of Tory lawmakers oppose to the move, including former prime minister Theresa May, who argue the cut to 0.5 percent of GNI would leave Britain as the only member of the Group of Seven wealthy nations not meeting the target.

The rebels believe they have the numbers to inflict a humiliating defeat on Johnson when parliamentary votes on related legislation later, in the same week that he hosts G7 leaders at a summit in Cornwall, southwest England. "The eyes of the world are truly upon us," lawmaker Andrew Mitchell, a former international development secretary who is spearheading the rebellion of dozens of Conservatives, wrote in The Guardian.

"But in this moment Britain is found wanting, because we have removed a foundational piece of our own global leadership," he added, noting it was the only G7 country to be cutting aid.

"We are doing it at a time when both the need for aid around the world is rising and when other countries are stepping up," Mitchell said the cuts are already having a "devastating effect" on projects around the world. "In crisis situations, these cuts will result in hundreds of thousands of preventable deaths," he added.

Britain dished out around £15 billion (\$20 billion) in overseas aid last year before the cut of around £4.5 billion was implemented. Meanwhile emergency pandemic support measures have sent UK annual borrowing rocketing to the equivalent to 14.5 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) - the highest level since World War II. The government has said it will return to 0.7 percent of national income - a broader measure than GDP - "when the fiscal situation allows".

But critics fear the cut could become more permanent, and argue its impact is too severe to institute even temporarily. Alongside May, Britain's other living former leaders - David Cameron, Gordon Brown, Tony Blair and John Major - also oppose the reduction.

"It's a life and death issue, we're actually deciding who lives and who dies," Brown told BBC radio yesterday. "It makes absolutely no economic sense, but particularly no moral sense," he added.

Brown called government claims that the public supported a temporary cut "a myth". "I think people know that while charity begins at home, it should never end at home, because we've got responsibilities and benefits from working with the rest of the world." — AFP

## Ooredoo Business offers 'fleet management solutions' for firms

KUWAIT: The rapid development and emergence of new technologies, impose constant and changing challenges on companies that aim to benefit from integrating these latest technologies into the company's strategy in order to sustain its competitive advantage and achieve its vision. Moreover, almost all companies have different needs based on the unique challenges they face. Depending on how robust a vehicle tracking system's feature-set is, it can provide a wide variety of benefits that support businesses operate more efficiently and safely.



Sulaiman Al-Humoud

Ooredoo Business, the trusted technology partner for your business solutions, has taken yet another step towards helping companies to improve their customer service and improve productivity, by utilizing the information being a core asset. Therefore, Ooredoo announced its partnership with One Source, a multi-dimensional company which specializes in automated systems for remote

tracking, monitoring and management of fleets of vehicles, containers and people. The partnership will enable Ooredoo to offer its customers the "Fleet Management Solutions" which will improve the company's efficiency at fair cost. Providing complete solutions for real-time GPS fleet management and vehicle security applications using an online application.

The Ooredoo "Fleet Management Solution" adapts a robust GPA tracking software that is designed to track, monitor and manage vehicles, trucks, cargo, bicycles, and people in real time. It also provides unique features such as: real-time tracking, sending alerts and real-time notifications for various activities.

When industries like transportation, construction, specialty services, delivery, implement and integrate the vehicle tracking system into its business; it will reduce the company's operational costs, increase its productivity and maximize efficiency.

Sulaiman Al-Humoud, Senior Manager, Enterprise Value Management, Ooredoo Kuwait, said: "Today, we are witnessing an increasing importance of information and data. Through our partnership with One Source and through adding the "Fleet Management Solutions" to our portfolio, we will enable companies to achieve competitive advantage, increase productivity, and increase sales".

## Burgan Bank reveals winner of Al-Thuraya salary account draw

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced yesterday Hamoud Mohsen Mubarak as the lucky winner of the draw prize of Al-Thuraya Salary Account monthly draw.

The draw rewards new and existing customers who transfer their salary to Burgan Bank by offering them a chance to win KD 10,000 every month. Each account holder has one chance to enter the draw.

The Al-Thuraya account holders have the option to hold money in Kuwaiti Dinar and other major currencies and can access account-related services such as standing orders, loans and credit cards, and benefit from the discounts and offers throughout the year. Customers wishing to open the Al-Thuraya account can do so by simply visiting the nearest Burgan Bank branch and obtain all the necessary details, or simply call the bank's call center on 1804080.





White sands cover a beach of Detwah Lagoon, on the far west of the Yemeni island of Socotra, listed as a wetland of global importance under the Ramsar convention.



Mounds made by crabs are pictured on the white sands of Detwah Lagoon, on the far west of the Yemeni island of Socotra.

Centuries-old umbrella-shaped dragon's blood trees line the rugged peaks of Yemen's Socotra—a flagship symbol of the Indian Ocean archipelago's extraordinary biodiversity, but also a bleak warning of environmental crisis. Forests of these ancient trees are being decimated by increasingly intense storms, while replacement saplings are gobbled by proliferating goat herds, leaving the fragile biological hotspot vulnerable to desertification. "The trees bring water, so they are so important," said Adnan Ahmed, a mathematics teacher and tour guide whose passion is Socotra's famous flora and fauna.

"Without trees, we will be in trouble." Lying in turquoise seas between Arabia and Africa some 350 kilometres (215 miles) south of Yemen's coast, Socotra is home to over 50,000 people and has remained relatively untouched by the bloodletting of the civil war raging on the mainland. Naming it a World Heritage site in 2008, UNESCO described the main island as one of the world's "most biodiversity rich and distinct". It has also been dubbed the "Galapagos of the Indian Ocean". Ahmed said islanders traditionally don't fell dragon's blood trees for firewood, both because they perpetuate regular rainfall and because its blood-red sap is medicinal.

But scientists and islanders warn that the trees will largely die out within decades, buckling under pressure from global warming driving cyclones, as well as invasive species and overgrazing. "Goats eat the seedlings, so young trees are only found on cliff faces in the most inaccessible places," said Ahmed. The trees take nearly half a century before they reproduce, he explained. "If nothing is done, it will not take long before all are gone," he said.

#### 'Running out of time'

The shrinking forests are a canary in the mine for Socotra's environmental challenges, said Belgian biologist Kay Van Damme, from the University of Ghent. "It remains a treasure trove of biodiversity," said Van Damme, chair of the Friends of Socotra support group. "But we may soon be running out of time to protect Socotra's most iconic flagship species." Each lost tree drives a reduction in the hydrological cycle on which all life depends. Islanders say trees have been battered by storms more ferocious than anyone remembers.

At Diksam, on the high plateau surrounding the Hagher mountains, running

## Yemen's unique 'dragon's blood' island under threat



An endangered Egyptian Vulture perches on the dead branches of a Dragon's Blood Tree, snapped in storms on the Diksam Plateau in the center of the Yemeni island of Socotra, a species found only on the Indian Ocean archipelago. — AFP photos

like a spine along the 130-kilometre (80-mile) island and 1,500 metres (4,900 feet) high, dead trees lie scattered like bowling ball pins. Other local species are just as hard hit by storms and overgrazing, including the 10 endemic species of frankincense tree. Gales have torn through nearly a third of the trees in the Homhil forest over the past decade. Without replanting efforts, the forest "will be gone in only a few decades", Van Damme said. One study found the number of frankincense trees had plummeted by 78 percent in this area between 1956 and 2017.

"The immune system of Socotra is

now compromised," he said, but added, "there is still hope." Landslide scars caused by vegetation loss are now a common sight. "If the trend continues, future generations might be able to visit a Socotran frankincense tree only in a botanical garden, accompanied by a little plaque saying 'extinct in the wild'", Van Damme added. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) warns that Socotra is under "high threat", and the "deteriorating" situation will be "accelerated by climate change". Islanders are already feeling the impact of changing weather patterns.

Abdullah Ahmed, from a small fishing village near Shuab, a cluster of solidly built coral-stone homes, said the 40 residents were threatened both by extreme high seas and landslides. They have built a new village 10 minutes' walk from the sea. "Waves in the last storms smashed the windows of our home," the 25-year-old said, describing how his family had sheltered terrified in caves for days. "The last monsoon was worse than anyone had experienced."

#### 'We have a chance'

But with effort, the worst impact can be slowed and some Socotris are doing what they can to protect their island. Adnan Ahmed peered over the chest-high stone wall of a community-run dragon's blood tree nursery, a football-pitch sized area enclosed against goat invasions. Inside are dozens of knee-high saplings. Resembling pineapple plants, they are the painstaking result of at least 15 years' growth. "It is a start, but much more is needed," he said. "We need



A flowering bottle tree, or desert rose, is pictured at Homhil in the northeast of the Yemeni island of Socotra, part of the flora found only in the Indian Ocean archipelago.

support." Sadia Eissa Suliman was born and raised at the Detwah lagoon, listed as a wetland of global importance under the Ramsar wetlands convention.

"I saw how the lagoon was changing," said the 61-year old grandmother, who watched swathes of trees being chopped down, plastic being dumped and fishing nets trawling the water, a critical nursery for young fish. "Everyone said someone else would do something," she said. "But I said, 'Enough: I will do it, and people will see the difference.'" She now helps the community enforce a fishing ban and raises funds to enclose trees and to tackle littering.

Scientists are also determined Socotra will not just become another case study of loss. "We have a chance as humans to not mess this one up, otherwise we've learnt nothing from other examples of huge extinctions on islands," Van Damme said. "Socotra is the only island in the entire world where no reptile, plant or bird that we know of has gone extinct in the last 100 years. We have to make sure it stays that way." — AFP



Children climb a Dragon's Blood Tree on the Diksam Plateau in the centre of the Yemeni island of Socotra.



A youth holds up the red resin of the Dragon's Blood Tree on the Diksam Plateau.



A Dragon's Blood Tree provides shade on the Diksam Plateau.



A youth holds up the red resin of the Dragon's Blood Tree on the Diksam Plateau.



An Egyptian Vulture, an endangered bird, sits on a sign promoting the importance of the protection of nature at Aher in the northeast of the Yemeni island of Socotra.



# Yemen's Socotra, isolated island at strategic crossroads



Fishing boats are pictured at the village of Qaban on the far west of the Yemeni island of Socotra.

Only goats seeking shade now use the long-abandoned lines of Soviet-era T-34 tanks, but the rusting relics point to the strategic value that Yemen's Socotra islands hold for foreign powers. The archipelago's remote location helped it forge its astonishing nature millennia ago—a third of the main island's plants are unique, from bulbous bottle and cucumber trees to alien aloes. But the 130-kilometre (80-mile) long island—the biggest in the Middle East region—also oversees busy global shipping lanes at the crossroads between Africa and the Arabian Peninsula.

With mainland Yemen wracked by civil war, Socotra is under the rule of the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC), part of a UN-recognized unity government, but who want an independent South Yemen. But it is the United Arab Emirates (UAE) that is in de facto control. It bankrolls salaries and major infrastructure projects, ranging from schools and hospitals to communication systems and docks. The STC's banners are dwarfed by far larger UAE flags fluttering at police checkpoints, while newly erected communication masts link phones directly to UAE networks, not Yemen.

#### Overlooking cargo routes

It is not only oil tankers that must pass Socotra from the Gulf to the Red Sea and the Suez Canal. The island

also lies on seaways from Pakistan's Gwadar port—a stepping stone on China's trillion-dollar Belt and Road infrastructure initiative giving Beijing access to the Arabian Sea-to Djibouti and into east Africa. Sea routes are key for shipping hub Dubai, one of the UAE's emirates, where the logistics industry makes up more than 14 percent of GDP, according to official statistics. While the UAE's footprint is increasingly clear, its exact intentions are opaque, and the government did not respond to AFP questions about its role.

But beyond its strategic value, Socotra is also surrounded by rich fishing waters, where trawlers—long deterred by the deadly pirates from nearby Somalia—are now operating. And, while nearly three-quarters of the island has environmental protection, there are vast white beaches unscrupulous tourist developers would die for. For centuries, Socotra was known by traders as a source of frankincense—some islanders suggest its name comes from the Arabic for "market of resin"—but the island was cut off during monsoon months by rough seas.

It was an isolation that gave rise to legends. In the thirteenth century, Italian traveller Marco Polo described Socotra as a feared pirate base, and its inhabitants as "the best enchanters in the world". Last century it was first a British colonial outpost, then a Soviet base.

But for decades, few others visited.



A lagoon is pictured outside the Hadibo, the main city on the Yemeni island of Socotra.

When British historian Tim Mackintosh-Smith visited in the 1990s, sailing from the mainland on a two-day journey, "not a lot had really changed for eons", he said. He recorded the Socotri language, with its roots in ancient south Arabia. While Socotra is some 350 kilometers (215 miles) south of Yemen's coast, it lies closer to Africa; it is just 230 kilometers from Somalia.

Socotra's ancient culture, blending Arabia with Africa and India, evolved

with the unique environment. "It was an ark of a very ancient human existence from the South Arabian mainland a couple of thousand years ago," Mackintosh-Smith told AFP.

When he pulled out a disposable lighter to smoke a pipe, it sparked "astonishment" among islanders. The island is "a symbiosis of an extraordinary biodiversity with cultural and linguistic diversity," he said. "We sailed around under enormous cliffs plunging to the

sea... staying in stone houses with roofs made of tree branches and beams of ancient wrecks," he said. "To our eyes it seemed absolute pristine."

#### 'Pristine' to clogged

Islanders say things changed rapidly when an airport opened from 2003. Today, plastic water bottles and bags clog up creeks near villages, and steady streams of tourists arrive on a weekly two-hour flight from Abu Dhabi. The visitors post pictures on social media of the island's stunning—but incredibly fragile—beauty. Balancing the protection of the environment with the needs of people for roads, healthcare, jobs and opportunities is a hard task.

"Socotris are proud of their heritage, and are keen to protect it," said Saeed Salim Abdulrahman, who is completing a degree translating oral histories from the Socotri language into Arabic and English. But rapid changes have sparked fears the island's age-old equilibrium has been damaged. Poring over faded photographs at the Socotra Folk Museum at Riqeleh, Abdulrahman showed how fast Socotra had shifted in just a few decades. "On an island, everything depends on something else," said Abdulrahman. "Now some people look at the island's resources and say, 'how can I make money from it?'" — AFP



Boats are pictured at Qalansiyah on the west of the Yemeni island of Socotra.

## Georgia mourns iconic scriptwriter and puppeteer Rezo Gabriadze

Georgians mourned yesterday the death of famed scriptwriter, puppeteer and painter Rezo Gabriadze whose internationally acclaimed productions deeply marked the Caucasus nation's cultural landscape. He died Sunday aged 84, his family told the First Channel of Georgia's public television. A rare example of intellectual and artistic freedom in the tightly-controlled Soviet empire, Gabriadze's creative work

spanned cinema, theatre, painting and literature. Georgian President Salome Zurbashvili led tributes to Gabriadze yesterday writing on Facebook that "Georgian culture has suffered an immense loss."

Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili expressed condolences to Gabriadze's family, calling him "a great artist whose huge talent produced numerous masterpieces." "Warmth, kindness, and love have been the fulcrum of Rezo

Gabriadze's creative work," he said in a statement Sunday. Gabriadze's friend, writer and linguist Levan Berdzenishvili, yesterday praised to AFP Gabriadze's "luminous and versatile talent that combined incomparable humor and melancholy." Gabriadze wrote 35 screenplays over his decades-long career including iconic Soviet-era comic films like cult science fiction movie "Kin-dza-dza" and "Mimino," a tale of a provincial helicopter pilot's bid to fly commercial airliners

in Moscow.

Gabriadze won worldwide recognition and international acclaim touring with numerous plays he staged in Tbilisi's Puppet Theatre, which he founded in the Georgian capital in 1981 and headed until his death. His theatrical productions included the Autumn of Our Springtime, based on his post-WW2 childhood memories in his native city of Kutaisi. The New York Times described another production, The

Battle of Stalingrad, as a "timeless elegy with the delicacy of lacework whose effect is beautiful, poignant and lingering." Gabriadze was awarded Georgia's pre-eminent decoration in the fields of arts and literature, the Rustaveli Prize, and the French Order of Arts and Letters. — AFP

## Trucks line roads to block wild elephants in SW China

Long rows of trucks have lined roads in southwestern China to try and block the path of 15 wild elephants that have caused havoc on the outskirts of a city of millions. The elephants wandered 500 kilometres north from their natural habitat—the Xishuangbanna National Nature Reserve in Yunnan province—and have stomped through rural communities near the provincial capital Kunming, home to more than eight million people. State broadcaster CCTV on Sunday showed a long convoy of trucks parked along a small countryside road, lined on both sides by lush

green foliage, in a bid to keep the herd away from densely populated areas.

"We are here to block the elephants," one truck driver in a red vehicle told CCTV. "Traffic police officers said they need some trucks. As long as I'm needed, I will stay here." Authorities have also mobilized thousands of people to track the herd's movements with drones and infrared cameras. CCTV showed the elephants wandering casually into villagers' backyards over the weekend, leaving flattened trees and crumpled garage doors in their wake. "The herd was wandering in the village all day long," one nervous villager told CCTV.

"We came out and saw an elephant about three meters tall. It really scared us." State TV showed food and bowls scattered on the floor of one kitchen after an elephant had trampled through. Since mid-April, the elephants have wrecked around 56 hectares of crops, causing an estimated 6.8 million yuan (\$1.07 million) in losses, CCTV said. It is not clear exactly why they migrated from their original habitat.

Chinese social media users have been captivated by the journey and have

widely speculated on possible causes. One user on the Twitter-like Weibo platform posted a screenshot of several news articles about rainforest destruction in the elephants' habitat, writing: "I hope officials can give a response." It received more than 31,000 likes since it was posted Sunday. "The media always focus on the 'cute' aspect of the elephants' migration, which I find quite disgusting," read a reply that received over 6,000 likes. "Normally animals migrate when there's not enough to eat."

The wild elephant population in southwestern Yunnan is around 300, up from 193 in the 1980s, reported official news agency Xinhua. But there have been more reports of such elephants wandering into villages and harming crops in recent years, with the plants they usually eat gradually replaced by non-edible varieties as forests expand, said local officials. — AFP

## 'I May Destroy You' scores string of BAFTA wins

British TV series "I May Destroy You" and its director Michaela Coel won a slew of awards at the annual BAFTAs Sunday for its depiction of a young black writer piecing her life back together after suffering a sexual assault. The 12-episode series broadcast last summer on the BBC and HBO tells the story of Arabella, whose sexual assault occurs while she is celebrating at a London bar with friends. On Sunday it was garlanded with the best mini-series and editing awards, with Coel herself taking best leading actress, director and drama writer.

Coel paid particular tribute to Ita O'Brien, the show's "intimacy director". She said O'Brien was crucial to "making the space safe for creating physical,



emotional, and professional boundaries so that we can make work about exploitation, loss of respect, about abuse of power, without being exploited or abused in the process." The intimacy director role is "essential for every production company that wants to make work exploring themes of consent," Coel added. Held partly online with a scattering of live audience, the ceremony left acclaimed Netflix series The Crown empty-handed. The fictionalized account of the modern British royal family had been nominated for four categories, including Helena Bonham Carter for best supporting actress as Princess Margaret. — AFP



## Sports

# Gauff 'dreams big, aims higher' at French Open

**PARIS:** Coco Gauff became the youngest Grand Slam quarter-finalist in 15 years yesterday when she defeated Tunisia's Ons Jabeur at the French Open claiming she "dreams big but aims higher". Gauff, 17, swept to a 53-minute 6-3, 6-1 win and takes on Barbora Krejickova of the Czech Republic for a place in the semi-finals.

At the age of 17 years and 86 days, Gauff is the youngest woman to reach the last eight of a Slam since Nicole Pietrangeli who made the quarter-finals at Roland Garros in 2006 aged 17 years and 44 days. She is also the youngest American woman to book a place in the last eight in Paris since Jennifer Capriati in 1993.

"You know, my message has always been 'dream big and aim higher'. I think that today was honestly coming from that message of aiming higher," she said. "I could easily have said I'm satisfied with the fourth round and everything, but today I think I just came in more hungry and wanting more compared to my last times I have been in the fourth round."

In a composed performance on Court Philippe Chatrier yesterday, the American teenager broke her fellow former junior champion three times without facing a break point herself. "I am super happy to reach my first Grand Slam quarter-final. I played really well today," said Gauff who has yet to drop a set at the

tournament. Gauff came into the French Open on the back of a clay court title in Parma. "Parma taught me how to close out matches and how to deal with pressure," added the American who also discovered Monday that she had claimed a place on the US team for the Tokyo Olympics.

Gauff made her breakthrough famously at Wimbledon in 2019 when she was just 15. She was the youngest woman ever to qualify for the tournament and backed it up by reaching the fourth round, defeating childhood idol Venus Williams on the way.

Later that summer, she melted the hearts of a tough New York crowd when she collapsed in tears into the consoling arms of Naomi Osaka after losing to the Japanese star in the third round. Gauff then claimed her maiden title at Linz and this year in Paris is playing at a career-high ranking of 25 in the world.

While the tennis world focuses on her age, Gauff insists she is more interested in what happens on court. "I don't really care if you guys talk about my age or not. I'm 17. That's the truth," she said. "I promise you my opponents probably don't care about how old I am. They want to beat me just as bad regardless of my age, and I want to beat them just as bad regardless of their age. I'm only going to be 17 once, so you might as well talk about it while I'm 17." — AFP



**PARIS:** Coco Gauff of the US returns the ball to Tunisia's Ons Jabeur during their women's singles fourth round tennis match on Day 9 of The Roland Garros 2021 French Open tennis tournament in Paris yesterday. — AFP

## Perez wins as Verstappen, Hamilton KO'd by Baku

**BAKU:** Red Bull's Sergio Perez won a chaotic Azerbaijan Grand Prix on Sunday as both Max Verstappen and Lewis Hamilton failed to finish. Sebastian Vettel for Aston Martin and Pierre Gasly for Alpha Tauri completed the unexpected podium after the streets of Baku lived up to their reputation for delivering an afternoon of drama and tension.

Verstappen crashed with five laps to go and the sixth race of the season at his mercy. Hamilton then locked up at the restart when on target for second. As the dust began to settle on the banks of the Caspian Sea, Verstappen retained his slender four point lead in the drivers' standings.

His team-mate Perez gained his first win since joining Red Bull and the second of his career. "I'm so happy for today. Normally Baku is pretty crazy but I have to say sorry to Max. He deserved the win today and it would have been good for the team to get a 1-2, but the win is a fantastic result." Perez inherited the lead when Verstappen's left rear tyre shredded triggering a high-speed crash in the straight as he was set to collect his second consecutive win and third of the season. "Tyre!" shouted a distraught Verstappen on the team radio. After a red-flag stoppage lasting more than half an hour to clear debris from Verstappen's stricken car, the grand prix resumed from the grid with a two lap sprint to the chequered flag.

### 'Magic switch'

Hamilton looked to have the measure of Perez but the Mercedes seven-time world champion spun off at turn one, leaving the band to play the Mexican rather than British national anthem. Pole-sitter Charles Leclerc came in fifth ahead of Fernando Alonso for Alpine and Japanese rookie Yuki Tsunoda celebrating his highest finish for Alpha Tauri in seventh. Hamilton was 15th and out of the points for the first time since Austria in 2018.

"Naturally it's quite a humbling experience," said Hamilton. "We've worked so hard to come back into the top 10 and I put everything on the line but just lost out in the end. I clipped a switch that places the brakes off so I just went straight on at turn one on the restart. I'm very sorry to the guys and girls in the team. I had no idea that I've even touched the 'magic' switch."

There was a somber start to proceedings with a minute's silence for Max Mosley, the former FIA boss who died last month, and Mansour Ojeh, McLaren's influential majority stakeholder, who died earlier



**BAKU:** Red Bull's Mexican driver Sergio Perez wins the Formula One Azerbaijan Grand Prix at the Baku City Circuit in Baku on Sunday. — AFP

Sunday. Leclerc made a slick start, but Hamilton was lurking and the world champion surged past the pole-sitting Ferrari going into turn one at the start of lap three.

Verstappen executed an identical maneuver to move past Leclerc and into second on lap seven. Hamilton came in for a pit stop on lap 12, rejoining having swapped soft tyres for hard in fourth - another

car costing him vital seconds on his exit from the pits.

Verstappen and Perez followed suit, leaving Vettel in charge. The German four-time former champion came in eventually to leave the two Red Bulls being hunted down by Hamilton approaching the midway point of the 51-lap contest.

The only driver not to have pitted was Lance Stroll, but the Canadian was back in the pits in the medical car on lap 31 after a high-speed smash on the straight when his left rear tyre shredded. "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Get me out of this place on the track. Puncture, I

## Mayweather barely breaks sweat in 'training session' with YouTuber Paul

**MIAMI:** Floyd Mayweather predictably dominated YouTube star Logan Paul on Sunday in an eight-round exhibition fight in Miami before admitting it could have been his final performance. Mayweather, who weighed in at 155 lbs with his opponent tipping the scales at 189.5 lbs, produced a slick performance much to the delight of the crowd at Hard Rock Stadium in Florida, although the fight was deemed a draw.

Intermittent rain throughout the evening failed to put a damper on the 44-year-old Mayweather's first performance since beating Japanese kickboxer Tenshin Nasukawa in December 2018. With the likes of former heavyweight champion Evander Holyfield watching on from ringside, the 26-year-old Paul lasted eight rounds against Mayweather, who barely broke a sweat. This was declared an exhibition, rather than a licensed bout, which meant there were no judges and the only way to triumph was to stop or knock out the opponent within the eight three-minute rounds. While Mayweather outclassed Paul and delivered a number of punishing blows, he failed to land a knockout punch and without any judges to keep score, the bout was called a draw.

Mayweather had ended his boxing career in 2017 with a record of 50-0 after beating UFC star Conor McGregor in Las Vegas. Paul was taking part in his third fight after two encounters against fellow YouTuber KSI. Mayweather claimed afterwards this could be his final appearance, saying "I wanted to give people a show and he was fighting to survive."

"This was like a training session, really. Just going the distance was a win for him. He can grapple and was good at holding. When a guy that size is holding you, it's hard to get him off you. If they are happy with grappling and holding for eight rounds, that's good for them," he said. "I had fun, he did too. It was cool. When the money comes, we will see who the winner is. Will I make a comeback? Absolutely not. I have retired from the sport of boxing. I probably won't do an exhibition again either."

Paul, who tried to wear down Mayweather with his extra weight, did well to last eight rounds and enjoyed some moderate success but his opponent's experience and boxing know-how was too much. "I am going into the Hall of Fame, I have nothing to prove," said Mayweather. "I hope the fans were pleased. I have been in this sport for so long, I was letting people see I can come out at the age of 44 and bring almost 30,000 to the stadium and bring good pay-per-view numbers. I am not going to perform like I was 19, it's all about growth and aging. I can't fight like when I fought people like Gatti and people like that. It's sad Manny Pacquiao is coming out to fight again."

"I could have pressed really hard but it was fun. His whole goal was to survive and that was a win for him. If he's happy, so be it. In the history books I will always be the greatest. If he would have fought more, it wouldn't have lasted eight rounds." Paul enjoyed being in the ring with one of the best of all time, even if he was on the wrong end of too many heavy shots. "He was slower than I thought, father time is catching up with him perhaps," said Paul. "I knew if it went the distance I won technically but I hit him with a good shot in the first round but surviving against Floyd Mayweather is something and I am happy." — AFP



**MIAMI:** Former world welterweight king Floyd Mayweather (right) and YouTube personality Logan Paul fight in an eight-round exhibition bout at Hard Rock Stadium in Miami, Florida on Sunday. — AFP

## Kuwait wins gold in Arab shooting tournament

**CAIRO:** Kuwait skeet shooting team comprising of Mansour Al-Rashidi, Saud Habeeb and Abdullah Al-Torqi won first place and the gold medal at the Arab Championship in Egypt. Second place went to Saudi Arabia and third to Qatar, while the host country Egypt

ended up in fourth place. Kuwait, Palestine, Tunisia, Qatar, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Mauritania, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Yemen, Libya and UAE are participating in the competition, in addition to hosts Egypt. The tournament will continue until June 12.



**CAIRO:** Kuwait's Team in blue on the podium: Mansour Al-Rashidi, Saud Habeeb and Abdullah Al-Torqi.

## Ice vests, coconut water as Pakistan Super League feels heat in UAE

**KARACHI:** Pakistan Super League cricketers will have to contend with soaring temperatures and empty stadiums when the COVID-hit Twenty20 competition resumes far from home in Abu Dhabi tomorrow. With day-time temperatures hitting 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit), some players will wear ice vests on the field, while bowlers have been told to drink coconut water, a natural coolant.

The T20 cricket league was halted in Pakistan in March after seven players and support staff tested positive for COVID-19, and restart efforts stalled as the country was hit by a third wave of the virus. The PSL will now be completed in the intense heat of the Gulf summer but, with the earliest games starting at 5pm, PCB CEO Wasim Khan said the conditions weren't "unplayable". "There will be ice vests, packs, ice collars, regular drink intervals to make sure that players are kept safe and healthy," said Khan. "But it's not in a position which is unplayable. It's 38-40 degrees but by five o'clock in the evening it cools down a little bit." The United Arab Emirates will also host the remainder of the suspended Indian Premier League in September and October, while India is considering moving the October-November T20 World Cup to the Gulf country.

After exploring the possibility of resuming in the UAE, the Pakistan Cricket Board almost canned the PSL's sixth edition entirely because of visa problems for players and camera crews travelling from Pakistan, India and South Africa. All three countries are all on the UAE's "red list", with direct scheduled flights banned and compulsory quarantine for passengers arriving on charters. "It's tough to organise these matches under COVID... bringing crew and players from around the world and then following the stringent protocols," said former Pakistan all-rounder Wasim Akram, president of defending champions Karachi Kings. "Everybody has done a great job, and we are now about to start." — AFP



## Sports

# Euro 2020 set to capture continent's attention but pandemic challenges remain

PARIS: The COVID-19 pandemic was responsible for its postponement but, with the health situation on the continent gradually improving, the delayed Euro 2020 finally kicks off on Friday in Rome when Italy host Turkey while Cristiano Ronaldo and Portugal prepare to defend the title they won in France five years ago.

When the action gets underway in front of a planned 16,000 fans at a quarter-full Stadio Olimpico the overwhelming feeling for European football's governing body UEFA will be of relief following the unprecedented decision to put the tournament on hold last year.

This time the month-long competition — being staged for the first time in 11 cities across Europe rather than in just one or two host countries — will focus the attention of the continent as it begins to open up for its summer season, with coronavirus infection rates dropping and vaccinations picking up pace.

Yet challenges remain, especially after UEFA chose to stick with the pan-European format. Dublin and Bilbao were dropped from the list of host cities after refusing to give guarantees over spectator numbers, but Seville stepped in for the latter while Dublin's games went to London and Saint-Petersburg.

The remaining venues — Amsterdam, Baku, Bucharest, Budapest, Copenhagen, Glasgow, London, Munich, Rome, Saint-Petersburg and Seville — have all confirmed fans will be allowed to fill between 25 and 100 percent of capacity, with the exception of Munich, which said it aims to host at least 14,500 fans at the Allianz Arena. While the threat of more contagious variants remains, Munich's mayor Dieter Reiter said in April there had been "no promises, of any kind, to guarantee spectators".

## 'Europe is back'

Despite it all, UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin has been bullish, insisting Euro 2020 will be safe. "It

will be the perfect opportunity to show the world that Europe is adapting. Europe is alive and celebrating life. Europe is back," he said recently. The clearest illustration of that is set to come from Budapest, where the brand-new, 68,000-seat Puskas Arena will be packed to capacity.

Hungary claims its swift vaccine rollout, partly thanks to its use of Chinese and Russian vaccines alone among European Union members, means the games — including France against Portugal on June 23 — will be safe. The fact Prime Minister Viktor Orban is football mad has helped. "We have beaten the third wave," Orban said recently.

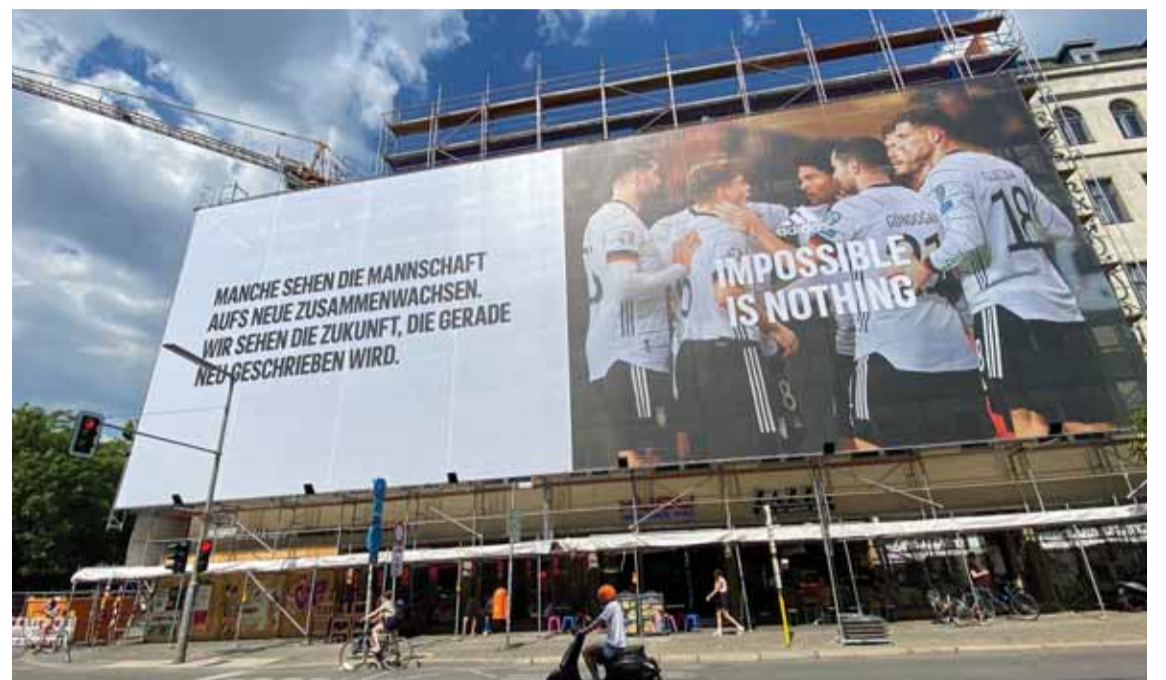
## Busquets blow for Spain

Nevertheless, the pandemic is not over, and coronavirus continues to cast its shadow. Organizers have made it clear that no travel exemptions are being granted for ticket holders, meaning those entering countries from abroad could have to quarantine on arrival.

Concerns over possible virus clusters led to UEFA allowing nations to name expanded squads of 26 players. On Sunday, Spain captain Sergio Busquets tested positive for COVID-19 and left their training base. Busquets faces 10 days in quarantine, ruling him out of Spain's opening game against Sweden in Seville on June 14.

It comes after the Netherlands dropped goalkeeper Jasper Cillessen from their squad because of a positive test. "We don't know how long it will take until he is 100 percent fit again. I don't want to take any risks in that respect," Dutch coach Frank de Boer said.

Luck when it comes to COVID-19 but also injuries at the end of a long season could prove crucial in determining who goes all the way to the final week in London — Wembley is the venue for both semi-finals as well as the final on Sunday, July 11.



BERLIN: A person rides a scooter past a building under construction covered in a massive billboard with an advertisement featuring the German national football team ahead of the upcoming UEFA Euro 2020 football championships in Berlin's Kreuzberg district on Sunday. — AFP

Portugal are hoping to emulate neighbors Spain's success in 2008 and 2012 and successfully defend the title they won at Euro 2016. Ronaldo is 36 now but is still going strong and is supported by outstanding talents like Joao Felix, Bruno Fernandes and Bernardo Silva. They are in the same group as Germany as well as France, the World Cup holders who are hoping to repeat their achievement of two decades ago, when they went to Euro 2000 as world champions and

added the European title.

Les Bleus have Karim Benzema back after a long international exile and they look a fearsome proposition as they target a tournament double. England have the carrot of knowing both semi-finals and the final will be played at home, while Belgium are the top-ranked team in the world and Italy as well as the Netherlands are eager to impress after failing to qualify for recent tournaments. — AFP

## Belgium, Netherlands win final pre-Euro 2020 friendlies

PARIS: Belgium and the Netherlands completed their Euro 2020 preparations on Sunday with respective wins over Croatia and Georgia. Belgium, the world's top-ranked side, beat the 2018 World Cup runners up 1-0 thanks to a first half goal from in-form Romelu Lukaku, fresh from winning the Serie A title with Inter Milan. Roberto Martinez's side will be one of the favorites to win what would be their first ever major international trophy and line up in Group B alongside Denmark, Finland and Russia. In a tight match it was Lukaku, 28, who was the difference between the two sides in a cagey contest, and he was unlucky not to open the scoring in the 31st minute with a wonder goal.

Holding off three Croatia defenders, Lukaku unleashed a curling shot which looked to be heading in before it crashed out off the bar, with Yannick Carrasco's header on the rebound also thudding onto the woodwork. However he gave his side the lead seven minutes later when he pounced following confusion in the Croatia penalty area and lashed home his 60th international goal. Few clear-cut chances came along after that, but Lukaku should have netted his second of the night with a minute remaining when his close-range header was somehow kept out by Croatia goalkeeper Dominik Livakovic. The Dutch had an easier time of it with a 3-0 win over Georgia.

Frank de Boer's team will be aiming to make a big impression at their first major tournament since the 2014 World Cup and play all their Group C matches with Ukraine, Austria and North Macedonia in Amsterdam.

They took the lead in the 10th minute through a Memphis Depay penalty and the Lyon forward was unlucky not to double his tally six minutes later, with Giorgi Loria pulling off a marvellous save to deny him. Loria made another magnificent stop just before the break, tipping away Frenkie de Jong's long-range drive which was arrowing into his top right-hand corner.

Wout Weghorst did make it two 11 minutes after the restart when he collected impressive Depay's well-timed through ball and lashed home from close range. Loria continued his superb display between the sticks with another great save from Depay's drilled effort from the edge of the area, but couldn't stop Ryan Gravenberch from adding a third with 14 minutes left.

The 35-year-old had again denied Depay, this time from inside the area, but Ajax teenager Gravenberch followed up to nod home and complete the victory. Denmark also got into the tournament on a high after seeing off Bosnia and Herzegovina 2-0 in Brondby. Goals from Martin Braithwaite and Andreas Cornelius were enough for Kasper Hjulmand's side to grab the win ahead of their opening Group B fixture with Finland in Copenhagen on Saturday. Austria drew 0-0 with Slovakia while Scotland scraped a 1-0 win over 10-man Luxembourg ahead of their first major international tournament appearance for 23 years. — AFP



MIDDLESBROUGH: England's striker Marcus Rashford (second right) celebrates scoring his team's first goal with England's defender Tyrone Mings (third right) during the international friendly football match between England and Romania at the Riverside Stadium in Middlesbrough, north-east England on Sunday. — AFP

## Southgate braced for more boos of England taking knee

MIDDLESBROUGH: England manager Gareth Southgate admitted the boos that met his side taking the knee ahead of Sunday's 1-0 friendly win over Romania in Middlesbrough sadly came as no surprise. There was a similar reaction to the Three Lions performing the gesture against racial injustice before Wednesday's clash against Austria, which also took place at the Riverside Stadium.

Southgate made an impassioned plea on Saturday for fans to respect the players' stand on the issue, but insisted England will continue to take the knee before kick-off in all of their matches at Euro 2020 no matter the reaction. A crowd of 22,000 will attend all three of their group games at Wembley with restrictions still in place on the number of supporters allowed to attend due to coronavirus restrictions. Taking the knee, initially performed by NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick, has become commonplace in top level football matches over the past year.

However, the vast majority of those matches have been behind closed doors. "I sadly expected what happened to happen," said Southgate. "It's not going to stop what we are doing or what we believe or my support for our players and staff. We're going to have to live with that. Moving forward it's pointless me going into any further detail on it."

Once the action got underway, Marcus Rashford's penalty earned an unconvincing win after Southgate named an experimental team. Five players who are not

## USA beat Mexico 3-2 to win inaugural CONCACAF Nations League

DENVER: The United States beat Mexico 3-2 to win the inaugural CONCACAF Nations League Sunday, with a wild extra-time finish featuring a penalty from Christian Pulisic and a penalty save from substitute keeper Ethan Horvath.

The United States came from behind twice — from 1-0 and from 2-1 down — to force extra time before a raucous crowd at Empower Field. The score was knotted at 2-2 after regular time and in the 114th minute Chelsea striker Pulisic put the United States ahead for the first time when he converted a penalty awarded after a VAR review.

Six minutes later Andres Guardado's attempt from the spot — awarded after VAR confirmed a handball

part of his final squad for the European Championship made an appearance at some point in the game. There is still one place up for grabs in Southgate's 26-man squad due to an injury to Trent Alexander-Arnold.

James Ward-Prowse, Ben Godfrey and Ben White were all given the chance to further their case from the start, while Jesse Lingard and Ollie Watkins came off the bench in the second-half. Ward-Prowse did the most to justify a place in the squad with an all-action display in midfield and the Southampton skipper's delivery from set-pieces was also on show.

Dominic Calvert-Lewin powered his in-swinging free-kick against the crossbar before Jadon Sancho also struck the woodwork. At the other end Sam Johnstone had an impressive England debut as he made a smart save from Nicole Stanciu to ensure Southgate's men did not trail at the break.

Liverpool captain Jordan Henderson made his return from 106 days out injured at half-time for a much-needed 45 minutes for his match fitness. Jack Grealish was England's one constant menace as the Romanians repeatedly resorted to hauling down the Aston Villa man. However, that tactic cost them the only goal when Grealish was clipped by Tiberiu Capusa as he broke into the box. Rashford, who became the 125th man to captain England, took responsibility from the spot to send Florin Nita the wrong way.

Johnstone then had to make a stunning stop to earn his clean sheet by turning Andrei Ivan's fierce effort over. Henderson took the captain's armband from Rashford and also took control of penalty taking duties 12 minutes from time with the Manchester United forward having been replaced by Lingard. Calvert-Lewin wanted the ball after he was chopped down by Vlad Chiriches, but Henderson pulled rank. However, he is still waiting to score his first international goal after 59 caps as Nita made a good save low to his right. —AFP

by Mark McKenzie in the penalty area — was turned away by Horvath. By then, Mexico's Argentinian coach Gerardo "Tata" Martino had been sent off, apparently for draping an arm over Panamanian referee John Pitti as he checked the video on the tackle by Carlos Salcedo that brought down Pulisic in the box.

The decision to grant the penalty prompted Mexico fans to shower the pitch with debris. Mexico had been quick out of the blocks, seizing a 1-0 lead in the second minute through Jesus Corona. Gio Reyna answered for the United States in the 27th — minutes after Mexico thought they had gone up 2-0 on a header by Hector Moreno that was disallowed upon VAR review because he was a hair offside.

That set the stage for Reyna, the 18-year-old Borussia Dortmund midfielder, who fired in the rebound when Weston McKennie's header off a Pulisic corner kick rebounded off the post. Second-half substitute Diego Lainez restored Mexico's lead in the 79th, slotting a shot past Horvath who had come on in the 67th when Steffen departed with an apparent leg injury. Once again the United States pulled level, McKennie slipping a header past Mexico keeper Guillermo Ochoa into the side net. The two sides remained deadlocked after regular

## Turkey's conquest of Europe rests at maestro Calhanoglu's feet

ISTANBUL: Turkey's hopes of conquering Europe and winning their first international title rest at the feet of free-kick maestro Hakan Calhanoglu whose repertoire features the kind of silky skills the football-mad nation craves. Calhanoglu is just one of the stars of a squad that many view as Turkey's new golden generation. The Turks' best international performances include a semi-final appearance at Euro 2008 and a third-place finish in the 2002 World Cup. But a trophy has remained tantalizingly out of reach.

Calhanoglu plays for AC Milan and will be keen to shine his brightest when the Turks travel to Rome to play Italy for their Group A opening match in the pandemic-delayed Euro 2020 on June 11. The 27-year-old's Milan contract is expiring and he will have a chance to show off against some of his old Italian teammates and opponents. Scouts from Manchester United will be among the many suitors watching with interest to see just how good Calhanoglu has become. Calhanoglu burst onto the global stage when he scored with a mesmerizing free-kick from more than 40 meters out against Dortmund while playing in the Bundesliga for Hamburg in 2014.

The Dortmund players had not even bothered to set up a wall because an attempt on goal seemed so audacious. Further gems for Bayer Leverkusen as well as AC Milan and Turkey have established Calhanoglu as one of the most feared free-kick takers in the world.

## 'I like responsibility'

But it would be a mistake to reduce the German-born Calhanoglu to a compilation of pretty goals on YouTube. He has always had lightning-quick feet. Now he has developed into a technician who reads the game as if he were hovering above the pitch.

He delivers precision passes and fans adore him because he usually spares no effort while pressing in defense. Calhanoglu also brings needed experience to a rejuvenated squad and is one of Turkey's most capped players. But it has not all been smooth sailing for Calhanoglu and the men in red. He has occasionally been benched by coach Senol Gunes after being accused of giving more to his clubs than country.

Calhanoglu admitted last year that he felt "resentful" toward Gunes for not giving him as much responsibility as he enjoyed in Milan. "I like to take responsibility," he told reporters in March. "What matters to me above all else is the collective game." Calhanoglu succeeds the more tempestuous Arda Turan in wearing the Number 10 shirt for the "Milli Takim". —AFP



BRUSSELS: Belgium's forward Romelu Lukaku shoots and scores during the international friendly football match between Belgium and Croatia at the King Baudouin Stadium in Brussels on Sunday, ahead of the EURO 2020/2021 tournament. — AFP



# Sport Times

TUESDAY, JUNE 8, 2021

## Clippers win game seven to eliminate Doncic and Mavs

**LOS ANGELES:** Kawhi Leonard finished with 28 points, 10 rebounds and nine assists as the Los Angeles Clippers won game seven at home with a 126-111 win over the Dallas Mavericks to punch their ticket to the second round of the NBA playoffs.

Los Angeles withstood a 46-point performance from Mavericks star Luka Doncic on Sunday to take the Western Conference series 4-3, finally cashing in on home court after the road team had won each of the first six games.

"It's all about the moment," Leonard said. "You got to be aggressive all night and don't try to make the game be perfect. We never gave up. We wanted to get better and we did it, especially on the defensive end."

Marcus Morris scored 23 points and Paul George tallied 22 and dished out 10 assists for the fourth-seeded Clippers in front of a pandemic-limited crowd of 7,300 at Staples Center arena in downtown Los Angeles.

The Clippers advanced to the second round to face the top-seeded Utah Jazz with game one tonight in Salt Lake City. The NBA will crown a new champion this season after the Los Angeles Lakers were eliminated on Thursday.

The Clippers are the sixth team in NBA history to lose the first two games of a series at home and win a series. "It was a total team win. We wanted this moment," said Clippers coach Tyrone Lue. "It was a great test for us, making us battle tested going into the second round. That was a great win for us."

Doncic continued his superb play in

the series despite playing with a sore neck suffered in game four. He added 14 assists and seven rebounds Sunday in his first game seven in just the second playoff series of his young career. The Mavericks also lost to the Clippers in the first round last season. "We gave everything," Doncic said. "I'm very proud of this team. Obviously I hate losing. We hate losing, but I'm proud of my team."

Dorian Finney-Smith had 18 points and 10 rebounds and Kristaps Porzingis finished with 16 points and 11 rebounds for the Mavericks, who had a chance to close out the series on Friday in game six but lost 104-97. Doncic scored 29 points in the first half on 10-of-14 shooting from the field, including four threes. But he managed just six points in the third quarter.

Los Angeles led 100-85 at the end of the third, and then extended their lead to 19 points with just over nine minutes left in the fourth. Dallas cut the lead to 114-107 with two minutes to go but Reggie Jackson answered with a clutch three pointer and the Clippers closed it out from there.

At Philadelphia, Trae Young scored 35 points and the Atlanta Hawks held off a late rally to beat the 76ers 128-124 in the opening game of their second-round series. Young, who averaged 29 points a game in the first round of the playoffs, pushed the visitors to a 19-point lead with eight minutes remaining only for Atlanta to struggle down the stretch and barely hang on for the victory.

The Hawks grabbed a 1-0 lead in the best-of-seven Eastern Conference



**LOS ANGELES:** Kawhi Leonard #2 of the LA Clippers and Luka Doncic #77 of the Dallas Mavericks embrace after the game during Round 1, Game 7 of the 2021 NBA Playoffs on Sunday at STAPLES Center in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

semi-final series with game two at Philadelphia tonight. The series winner will face Milwaukee or Brooklyn to determine a berth in next month's NBA Finals.

Bogdan Bogdanovic and John Collins each added 21 points for the Hawks while Clint Capella added 10 points and 11

rebounds for Atlanta. Cameroonian center Joel Embiid started for the Sixers after missing the final game of Philadelphia's first-round series against Washington with a right knee injury.

Embiid scored a game-high 39 points with nine rebounds and four assists while Seth Curry added 21 points and Tobias

Harris had 20 points and 10 rebounds and Australian guard Ben Simmons had 17 points and 10 assists. "They hit us in the mouth to start the game," 76ers coach Doc Rivers said. "They were the more aggressive team. They were the more physical team. They got off to a better start." —AFP



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