



**3** MoU major step to help Indian domestic workers: Jaishankar



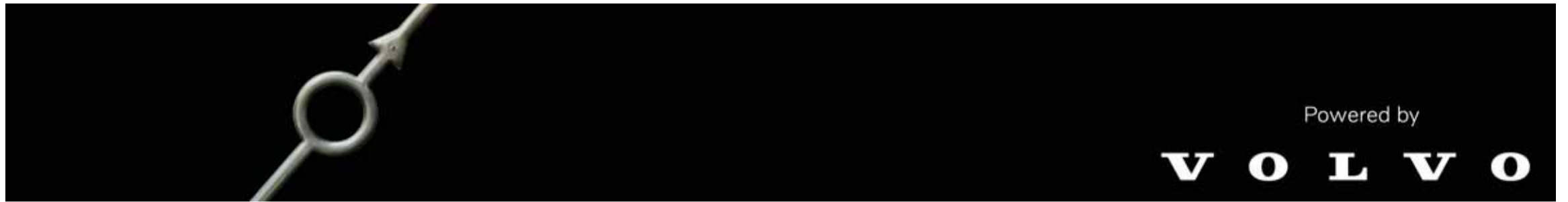
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# No salary since February for hundreds working in Kuwait

## Contracting company employees deployed to public bodies struggling to survive

By Nawara Fattahova

**KUWAIT:** Hundreds of security guards, porters and cleaners working at public institutions haven't received their salaries since February. All of these employees work in the public sector but are employed by a private company that has a contract with these public institutions and is in charge of paying their salaries.

"I haven't received my salary for the past three months and am surviving on charity. Also, my family back in Egypt is suffering as I couldn't send them money all these months and they depend on me. I didn't file a case against the employer at the shuon

(labor department) as I'm afraid that I may be deported," a security guard working at a location of the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources told Kuwait Times.

The security guard, who preferred to remain anonymous, said he has been working in Kuwait for the past 16 years. "I'm working with the same company since I came to Kuwait. They were paying properly, but during the last two years, they began delaying the payment of our salaries, but were still paying. But since February they stopped paying," he explained. Around 300 guards, porters and cleaners working for the company at PAAAFR have not received their salaries since February.

Another employee from Bangladesh who serves tea and coffee at a Jahra municipal office and employed by the same company said he hasn't received his salary since March. "Although I haven't received my salary for the past two months, I am surviving as I have a part-time job. But I wasn't able to send money to my family back home," he said.

According to the employee, who asked to remain anonymous for fear of reprisal or deportation, around 100 employees working at the Jahra municipal office haven't been paid since March. "These employees are employed by the same company and work as porters, office boys and security guards. They are mostly from Bangladesh, India and Egypt, with salaries of between

KD 150 to KD 200," he explained.

In April, a social media post by a group of security guards who work at the ministry of education went viral in Kuwait. In the post, the men complained that they had not received their salaries for the past five months. The Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) followed up the case and their employer had to pay their salaries within a few days.

But that outcome is rare. More often, those who publicly complain of unpaid salaries are fired or deported or have their visas canceled by their employers. Failure by employers to pay wages for months at a time is a common problem in Kuwait, especially among companies contracted with the government.

### News in brief

#### No 'Delta' cases in Kuwait

**KUWAIT:** There are no proven cases in Kuwait so far of the Delta coronavirus variant, previously known as the Indian variant, the health ministry underlined yesterday. The announcement is based on the health ministry's findings after an ongoing in-depth laboratory review, according to a ministry statement. An announcement will be made in the event of the presence of any new variants, it added. — KUNA

#### 1,437 new cases, 4 deaths

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait said 1,437 people tested positive for COVID-19 with four related deaths yesterday, taking total cases to 326,451 and deaths to 1,817. Another 1,317 people recovered from the virus, taking total recoveries to 308,829. The number of people hospitalized with the virus currently stands at 15,805, with 161 of them in intensive care units. Some 10,067 swab tests were conducted over the past day, taking total tests to 2,741,423. Kuwait reported 1,657 new COVID cases and three deaths on Friday, and 1,709 cases and four deaths on Thursday. — KUNA

#### Moh: Glucophage is safe

**KUWAIT:** The health ministry maintains that the drug used to treat type two diabetes - under the brand name Glucophage - is safe. The ministry has not issued any decision to pull the medication off the shelves, and it continues to be available at pharmacies, clinics and hospitals, it added in a statement. — KUNA

#### Gold seal forgers arrested

**KUWAIT:** The interior ministry said criminal detectives and the financial crimes department, in cooperation with the ministry of commerce and industry, busted an Asian gang that forged the commerce ministry's gold seal. Investigations revealed the involvement of several gold shops selling gold pieces with forged seals. (See Page 4)



## Haj allowed for 60K vaccinated residents, foreigners barred

**RIYADH:** Saudi Arabia announced yesterday it will allow 60,000 residents vaccinated against COVID to perform this year's hajj, but Muslims from abroad will be barred for a second straight year. The hajj - a must for able-bodied Muslims at least once in their lives - typically packs millions of pilgrims into congested religious sites and could be a major source of contagion amid the coronavirus pandemic.

This year it would be "open for nationals and residents of the kingdom, limited to 60,000 pilgrims", the hajj ministry said, quoted by the official Saudi Press Agency. The pilgrimage, scheduled to be held in July, would be limited to those who have been vaccinated and are aged 18-65 with no chronic illnesses, it said. Only up to 10,000 Muslims took

part in the hajj in July last year, a far cry from the 2.5 million who participated in the five-day annual pilgrimage in 2019 before the pandemic.

"In light of what the whole world is witnessing with the coronavirus pandemic... and the emergence of new variants, the relevant authorities have continued to monitor the global health situation," the health ministry said. "Considering the large crowds that perform hajj, spending long periods of time in multiple and specific places... requires the highest levels of health precautions."

Saudi Arabia said those wishing to perform the hajj would have to apply online, without specifying how many foreign residents would be among the 60,000 pilgrims. In 2020, foreigners were 70 percent of the pilgrims, while Saudis made up the rest. The kingdom said later that it had informed other countries of the decision not to allow pilgrims from abroad. "There was great understanding," its deputy hajj minister, Abdulfattah bin Sulaiman Mashat, told a news conference. "Arrangements for this were based on the kingdom's keenness on the pilgrims' health and the safety of their countries."

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RIYADH: Saudi Deputy Minister of Hajj and Umrah Abdulfattah Mashat speaks at a press conference yesterday. — AFP

## G7 takes on China and plan to battle new pandemics

**CARBIS BAY, United Kingdom:** The G7 yesterday unveiled US-led plans to counter China in infrastructure funding for poorer nations, and a new accord to battle future pandemics, as the elite group advertised Western unity at its first in-person summit since 2019. President Joe Biden is touting a message of revived US leadership on his first foreign tour, declaring "America is back" after the tumultuous administration of Donald Trump.

"We're on the same page," Biden told reporters as he met French President Emmanuel Macron on the summit sidelines, pushing to rally the West against a resurgent China and recalcitrant Russia. Asked if other G7 leaders agreed with him about a US diplomatic renaissance, Biden pointed to Macron, who replied: "Definitely."

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CARBIS BAY: (From left) Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, President of the European Council Charles Michel, US President Joe Biden, Japan's Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Italy's Prime Minister Mario Draghi, France's President Emmanuel Macron, President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen and Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel pose for a family photo at the start of the G7 summit on Friday. — AFP

## India's first COVID home test launched

**LONAVLA, India:** Indian start-up Mylab Discovery Solutions hopes that its inexpensive COVID-19 home test kit - the country's first - will help the massive South Asian nation better track the pandemic's spread

among its 1.3-billion people. CoviSelf was launched earlier this month and is the first home testing kit to be approved in India, which is slowly emerging from a brutal second wave that overwhelmed its hospitals and crematoriums, with almost 30 million infected so far and over 350,000 dead.

But many experts suspect that the real numbers are much higher, blaming insufficient testing and inaccurate recording of the cause of patient deaths. The start-up, which also makes PCR tests to

detect HIV infections, says that widespread access to CoviSelf - sold for 250 rupees (\$3.40) - would reduce pressure on overburdened laboratories and improve infection tracking.

The kit uses a nasal swab and a QR code to connect to a mobile app which reveals results in 15 minutes, and sends the details to the Indian Council for Medical Research, the scientific agency leading the government's response.

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LONAVLA, India: Dr Shrikant Pawar, Head - Serology and Microbiome, displays a pack of CoviSelf on June 10, 2021. — AFP



## Local

# Speaker hails IPU's condemnation of Zionist colonization policy

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem returned home Friday after holding talks with President of Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Duarte Pacheco on Palestine in Geneva. Applauding IPU's condemnation of Jewish's actions and violence in Palestine, Speaker Al-Ghanem thanked Pacheco for instructing the IPU's

Committee on Middle East Questions to investigate the incidents and situation in Palestine. He also welcomed Pacheco's decision to visit Palestine and meet officials in Gaza, according to Ad Dustour news network.

The meeting came in response to recommendations issued by the urgent meeting of the Arab

Parliament on May 12, to discuss the Jewish escalation in Palestine. "The number of Palestinians killed in 51 days, exceeds the number of Jews killed in the past 51 years," Al-Ghanem noted.

On his part, Pacheco underlined the strong ties between IPU and Kuwait's National Assembly. He called on Zionists to abide by the international law

and the UN resolutions, including the two-state solution. He also affirmed refusal to Jewish's settlement expansion, adding that it is destroying peace efforts. Pacheco called on the international community to condemn Zionist's attacks on Al-Aqsa Mosque and the excessive use of power against Palestinians in Gaza. — KUNA

## IWG holds informative virtual meeting on the topic of 'Well-Being'

**KUWAIT:** The International Women's Group- Kuwait held an interesting and informative virtual meeting on the topic of 'Well-Being' as their final event of 2020-2021.

Mrs. Ambreen Mustafa, spouse of the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, delivered her final address as president of IWG and welcomed Mrs Cristiana Turchetti Baldocci, spouse of the Ambassador of Italy, as the incoming IWG president for 2021-2022.

In her address Mrs Mustafa thanked Sheikha Hanouf Bader Al Muhamad Al-Sabah, spouse to HE Minister of Foreign Affairs, Honorary President of the International Women's Group- Kuwait (IWG), for her invaluable guidance and support throughout the challenging times faced by all during the pandemic. She also thanked Sheikha Hanouf for taking part in her earlier farewell and handover ceremony wherein Sheikha Hanouf lauded the exceptional creativity, resilience and hard work of the IWG. Mrs Mustafa praised the outstanding teamwork of the IWG board, echoing Sheikha Hanouf's comments that the IWG had emerged stronger and was the only organization of its kind in Kuwait which had produced, without fail, interesting and inspiring monthly programs for its members

throughout the year.

Acknowledging the importance of teamwork, Mrs Mustafa talked about the awards ceremony held earlier for the friends of the IWG who supported the organization throughout the year. Her final thanks were for the IWG members whose constant encouragement, interest and appreciation gave meaning and purpose to the events.

Mrs Layla Boulos, IWG PR Coordinator, acting as master of ceremonies, then proceeded to introduce the virtual program on 'Well-Being'. Presented live from The Netherlands by Mrs Xandra Spijker, Life Coach and Mindful Analyst and former IWG board member.

Very familiar with life in Kuwait, having just recently returned to The Netherlands after many years, Mrs Spijker covered topics on nutrition, physical activity, stress, energy and happiness; highlighting daily simple changes that can be made for a healthier life. Closing her informative presentation by reminding members to be kind to themselves and to use their day wisely, saying that 'Happiness' is not a goal to be reached only at the 'end of the horizon', but rather in 'the everyday small things' that create fulfillment in life.

An interactive and highly enjoyable question and answer segment was fol-



lowed by a short quiz and prizes. To the further delight of members, Ms Noura Fawzi Al Nadji, fitness instructor and personal trainer, also presented a segment of daily toning and stretching exercises to complete the 'Well-Being' segment.

In keeping with the theme of the program, the IWG board members had together compiled a short segment on 'Happiness' and each included a picture with a caption of what happiness means to them. The proceedings concluded with well-wishes to all for a safe, healthy and happy summer break and the commitment to coming back in September to yet another productive, informative and enjoyable IWG membership year.



## Firemen fight fire in Jleeb



**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Fire Force said six fire centers participated in fighting a fire in five traditional houses in Jleeb yesterday morning. It added the houses were used for occupational, industrial and

storage purposes despite their residential status. Firemen faced various difficulties including lack of organization of the area and wind speed. The fire was put out and no injuries were reported.



## Haj allowed for 60K vaccinated...

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Riyadh is accelerating a nationwide vaccination drive as it moves to revive tourism and host sports and entertainment events, pandemic-hit sectors that are a bedrock of the "Vision 2030" program to diversify its oil-reliant economy. It has approved the Pfizer/BioNTech, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson and AstraZeneca vaccines.

## India's first COVID home...

Continued from Page 1

"It has been designed so people can do it at home. So the contents of the kit are simple, the way to dispose of it is simple, the way to perform it is simple," said Shrikant Pawar, Head of Serology & Microbiome at Mylab.

At the firm's factory in the hillside resort town of Lonavla in western India, masked and gloved work-

In May, only inoculated or immunized citizens were allowed to travel abroad, after the kingdom lifted a ban on overseas trips introduced at the start of the pandemic. The kingdom has also said that from Aug 1, vaccinations would be mandatory to enter government and private establishments, including education institutions and entertainment venues, as well as to use public transport.

In a relaxation of coronavirus curbs last October, Saudi Arabia opened the Grand Mosque for prayers for the first time in seven months and partially resumed the all-year-round umrah pilgrimage. The limit on umrah pilgrims is 20,000 a day, with a total of 60,000 worshippers allowed to perform daily prayers at the mosque. — AFP

ers ran detailed quality checks on the kit's components before shipping them out to pharmacies across the country. "Our current production capacity is 10 million tests in a week", Pawar told AFP, with the kit also sold on Flipkart, a Walmart-backed online behemoth.

"If the market demand goes high, we will be able to cater to more tests a week and yes, we are also planning to go overseas, so it will be available in international markets as well." But with the kit only accessible to smartphone users, its impact may be limited, especially as the pandemic makes deeper forays into rural India, where mobile networks are weak and Internet penetration remains low. — AFP

## G7 takes on China and plan to battle...

Continued from Page 1

Promising to "collectively catalyze" hundreds of billions of infrastructure investment for low- and middle-income countries, the G7 leaders said they would offer a "values-driven, high-standard and transparent" partnership. Their "Build Back Better World" (B3W) project is aimed squarely at competing with China's trillion-dollar Belt and Road infrastructure initiative, which has been widely criticized for saddling small countries with unmanageable debt but has included even G7 member Italy since launching in 2013.

"This is not just about confronting or taking on China," a senior US official said. "This is about providing an affirmative, positive alternative vision for the world." German Chancellor Angela Merkel, whose nation has huge investments in China, called it an "important initiative" that was much-needed in infrastructure-poor Africa. "We can't sit back and say that China will do it but it's the G7's ambition to have a positive agenda for a number of countries in the world which are still lagging behind... I welcome it," she said.

Britain meanwhile hailed G7 agreement on the "Carbis Bay Declaration" - a series of commitments to curb future pandemics after COVID-19 wrecked economies and claimed millions of lives around the world. The collec-

tive steps include slashing the time taken to develop and license vaccines, treatments and diagnostics for any future disease to under 100 days, while reinforcing global surveillance networks. The G7 - Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States - will formally publish the pact today, alongside its final summit communique containing further details on the B3W.

"The #CarbisBayDeclaration marks a proud and historic moment for us all," British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Twitter. "Under this agreement, the world's leading democracies will commit to preventing a global pandemic from ever happening again, ensuring the devastation caused by COVID-19 is never repeated," he said.

World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, criticized in some quarters for being too accommodating towards China where the coronavirus originated, welcomed the health pact. And he said the UN agency would examine a British proposal to create a "Global Pandemic Radar" to send early warnings of future outbreaks. However, aid charity Oxfam said the declaration "does nothing to address the fundamental problems that are preventing vaccines being accessible to the vast majority of humanity".

The G7 leaders are expected to pledge to donate one billion vaccine doses to poor countries this year and next - although campaigners say the rollout is much too slow to end the crisis sooner. The leaders are also set to issue new commitments on climate change, including financial aid for the developing world, in the buildup to the UN's COP26 environmental summit in Scotland in November. — AFP



Local

# MoU major step to help Indian domestic workers: Jaishankar

India FM chairs conference of regional Indian ambassadors in Kuwait



KUWAIT: India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar chairs a conference of Indian ambassadors in the Gulf region and Iran in Kuwait on Thursday.



KUWAIT: Sheikh Ahmed Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah and S Jaishankar jointly launch the year-long joint celebrations of the 60th anniversary of India-Kuwait Diplomatic relations.

By Sajeev K Peter

**KUWAIT:** The memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed between Kuwait and India Thursday is an important step as it would help streamline and strengthen the position of Indian domestic workers in Kuwait and bring them within the ambit of a legal framework, India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said Friday.

Kuwait and India signed an MoU on recruitment of Indian domestic workers in Kuwait. During his three-day visit, the minister called on HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and held talks with Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Ahmed Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah and Minister of Commerce and Industry Abdullah Issa Al-Salman. Jaishankar also chaired a conference of Indian ambassadors in the Gulf region in Kuwait Thursday and virtually addressed the Indian community Friday evening before wrapping up his visit to the country.

In an interview with Kuwait Times, the visiting Indian minister touched upon various topics, ranging from the dynamic Kuwait-India relations to matters related to the Indian diaspora. "The connect between India and Kuwait is millennia old. A few centuries ago, our forefathers were travelling between our shores and trading with each other. They had vibrant exchanges and as a result they got to know each other's cultures, languages, values, arts and much more. They have built this relationship on mutual trust and respect," Jaishankar said.

He said the role played by the leadership of the two countries in building the strong relationship is also of para-

mount importance. "The former Amir, HH Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, was amongst those leaders whose personal contributions to the strengthening of this relationship are immense. With his demise, the State of Kuwait lost a great statesman, India lost a great friend and the Indian community in Kuwait lost a caring leader. It is not for no reason that he was bestowed the award of Global Humanitarian Leader by the United Nations. He took special care of the Indian community in Kuwait and we in India are grateful for that warmth and affection. The gesture of declaring national mourning upon his death was just a token of our gratitude towards a great leader," Jaishankar stated.

**First visit**

"This is my first visit to this beautiful and friendly country of Kuwait. I have been received with so much warmth and affection - I am touched and honored. I had excellent official engagements yesterday with the leadership of the country. I have had a number of interactions with my counterpart and dear friend Sheikh Dr Ahmed Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Kuwait. We have always had open and friendly conversations. Although his visit to India was a short one, we made significant progress in strengthening our bilateral relations," the minister said.

The ministers announced upgradation of the joint ministerial commission to the level of foreign ministers following their talks on Thursday, making a quantum leap in the countries' bilateral engagement. "We have also agreed to set up new joint working groups across various fields. An MoU for cooperation

on the recruitment of domestic workers was also signed. There is excitement, enthusiasm and more importantly optimism on both sides to take our partnerships to newer heights," Jaishankar pointed out. He said India greatly values the role being played by Kuwait in contributing to the stability of the region.

**Fighting the pandemic**

During the second wave of peak infections, Kuwait offered an uninterrupted supply of medical oxygen to India. There was excellent cooperation at the executive level as well, which saw smooth operationalization of a sea-air bridge between the two countries. "I am truly grateful to Kuwait for this special gesture. Kuwait has provided more than 500 metric tons of medical oxygen to India. The country has been very prompt and efficient in that. It is actually a proof that international partnerships and cooperation are not just phrases, but they make a difference in opening new vistas of cooperation," Jaishankar said. In April 2020, India had sent a 15-member rapid response medical team to Kuwait to assist the country in jointly fighting this pandemic. "India and Kuwait stood true to their historical, close partnership. We will continue to work closely with our partner Kuwait in this joint fight against the pandemic," he added.

Jaishankar said the Gulf region is India's extended neighborhood. "The region, and its peace and stability, will continue to remain crucial for the progress and the development of our country. We have shared views on many of the global issues, be it our commitment to reform the world order to reflect the realities of the 21st century

and our keenness to work together to address contemporary challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, sustainable development and terrorism," he affirmed.

Significantly, the Indian foreign minister chaired a meeting of Indian ambassadors in the region in Kuwait on Thursday. The Indian ambassadors to Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain and Iran arrived in Kuwait to attend the conference.

**Diaspora matters**

"People-to-people relations form the core of the bilateral relations between our two countries. There are close to a million Indian nationals working and living here peacefully," Jaishankar said. "Nonetheless, given the size of the community, there are bound to be some issues or matters concerning the Indian diaspora that featured in our bilateral talks. I am pleased to say that we have made progress on these issues." He said the Indian community in many ways defines India abroad, adding he is confident that the Indian community will continue to be an effective bridge between India and Kuwait as the bilateral relationship expands.

Jaishankar said India is already one of the fastest growing major economies in the world and one of the most preferred destinations for global capital. "We are at an inflection point of economic growth. We have set ourselves a target of a GDP of \$5 trillion. In this context, my message to Kuwaiti investors is simple. Invest for a shared future in one of the most enterprising societies in the world. Invest in our growth story and our strong fundamentals and watch your capital grow," he concluded.

## Unity and healing

Message of Ambassador of the Republic of the Philippines to Kuwait on Philippine Independence Day 2021



Mohd Noordin Pendosina Lomondot

I wish to express my warmest greetings to the 220,000-strong Filipino community in Kuwait on the 123rd anniversary of the Proclamation of Philippine Independence. It has been 123 years since General Emilio Aguinaldo declared independence from Spain, paving the way for the establishment of Asia's first republic.

While we take stock of the freedoms that we now cherish, this day also reminds us of our continuing struggle to be free from the Coronavirus disease. It is through bayanihan, the collective will and action of the Filipino people, that today's celebration carries the theme: "Kalayaan 2021: Spirit of Freedom in Unity and National Healing."

I take this opportunity to express my sincere and profound appreciation to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and the Government of the State of Kuwait for their continuous hospitality extended to almost a quarter of a million overseas Filipinos who have made Kuwait their second home, especially during the pandemic.

In April 2020, the Philippines became the first country that benefited from the Kuwaiti government's amnesty program for undocumented residents, bringing home more than 2,200 Filipinos. In December 2020, when the Kuwaiti government rolled out its COVID-19 vaccination program, among the first who received their shots are Filipino frontliners.

Since the opening of diplomatic ties in 1979, the relations between the Philippines and Kuwait have been cordial and friendly as the two countries are continuously endeavoring together in taking significant steps to further boost and strengthen their diplomatic relations.

The Philippines-Kuwait Agreement on the Employment of Domestic Workers was signed in Kuwait in May 2018 to protect the rights and promote the welfare of Filipino domestic workers. Three years on, we hope to live up to the noble intentions of this agreement, including the full implementation of the new Standard Contract for Domestic Workers.

The friendly relations between the Philippines and Kuwait will always remain strong based on trust, confidence and mutual cooperation.

I express my faith that the Philippines and Kuwait, linked by historical and people-to-people ties, could overcome any issue and would continue to work together to achieve our mutual goals and interests.

May the Almighty continue to bless the Philippines and Kuwait. Mabuhay!

## BB concludes 'Second Blood Donation Campaign'

**KUWAIT:** In line with its corporate social responsibility and under the patronage of Al-Ahmadi Governor Sheikh Fawaz Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Burgan Bank recently concluded the "Second Ahmadi Governorate Blood Donation Campaign" in collaboration with the Department of Blood Transfusion Services at the Ministry of Health.

Held with the aim of raising national awareness of the importance of donating blood throughout the year to support the Blood Bank as well as its life-saving impact, the blood donation campaign was held at the Headquarters of the Cooperative Blood Transfusion Center at Al-Adan Hospital under the slogan "A drop of your blood... a life for others". The organizers were keen to apply precautionary measures and take all

necessary preventive actions to ensure everyone's safety in light of the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Manager - Public Relations at Burgan Bank, Ms Hessa Hussain Al-Najadah said: "As part of our ongoing social responsibility and commitment to the health sector in Kuwait, Burgan Bank is proud to have sponsored and supported the second Ahmadi Governorate blood donation campaign entitled "A Drop of Your Blood... a life for others". We are thrilled about the success of this campaign, organized for the second year in a row by Al Ahmadi Governorate and we are grateful for every effort made. This year, a large number of donors participated and contributed to saving the lives of many patients who are in dire need of blood transfusions, reflecting their humanitarian and noble acts. Given the current circumstances and the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, everyone adhered to the preventive measures and we have succeeded in preserving a large amount of blood supply. Burgan Bank will continue to cultivate a culture of voluntary blood donation within the community, to become a source of life for all patients and aid those in need of a drop of blood.

Director of the Technical Office in Ahmadi Governorate and the General Supervisor of the campaign, Ibrahim Al-Fodri stated that the campaign celebrates "World Blood Donor Day" and that the slogan reflects their ongoing mission to saving many lives by increasing storage and creating a sustainable blood supply at the blood bank. "I would like to thank all of the officials, the civil society and other volunteers for their hard work and commitment to continuing to support our humanitarian goal, especially after the success of the first campaign that was organized in October 2020."

Burgan Bank's support of this initiative falls under its dynamic full-fledged community program entitled 'ENGAGE' - Together to be the change. This program sheds light on important aspects affecting every segment of the society by promoting social welfare through educational, cultural and health driven initiatives. Burgan Bank's approach to 'ENGAGE' begins with a vital principle that as a leading Kuwaiti financial institution, its conduct and policies should be aligned with the needs and interests of the community.

## MoI warns citizens, residents of unstable weather

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait's Ministry of Interior (MoI) called on citizens and residents to keep a wary eye on the currently unstable weather. In a press release yesterday, the ministry urged citizens and residents to remain vigilant for their safety and not to hesitate in seeking help via the MoI emergency number 112, or Civil Defense number 1804000 for any assistance. It also advised sea-goers to call the Coast Guard number 1880888 in case of emergency. —KUNA





THE LEADING INDEPENDENT  
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF  
ESTABLISHED 1961

Founder and Publisher  
YOUSUF S. AL-ALYAN

Editor-in-Chief  
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EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432  
ADVERTISING : 24835616/7  
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## Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Boats docked on the Souq Sharq marina in this file photo. —Photo by Fouad Al-Shaikh

## News in brief

## Kuwait's FM congratulates UAE on UNSC seat

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr. Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah on Friday conveyed to his UAE counterpart Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed the political leadership's utmost congratulations on the UN Security Council 2022-2023 non-permanent seat. During a telephone call, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Nasser, who doubles as Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs, voiced the State of Kuwait's full support to the UAE in championing its endeavors to preserving international peace and security. The UAE garnered 179 out of the total 193 votes. —KUNA

## Amir congratulates Philippines on nat'l day

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday sent a cable of congratulations to the President of the Philippines Rodrigo Duterte on his country's national day. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah also sent similar cables. —KUNA

## VO Creative Hub to welcome Kuwaiti talents

KUWAIT: In the presence of Her Excellency Sheikha Ohoud Salem Al Ali Al-Sabah, Chairman of VO, Alina L. Romanowski, US Ambassador to Kuwait, and Ms Riham Al Ayyar, CEO of VO, the first Kuwait-based integrated youth platform for incubating young talents, has softly launched its all-inclusive, fully equipped, and high-tech Creative Hub. The studios will officially be inaugurated to welcome Kuwaiti talents on 20 June, 2021.

The US Ambassador's visit to VO's Creative Hub included an exclusive tour of the hub's

studios and a meeting between VO's team and the US Embassy's Commercial Officer, Deputy Counselor for Economic Affairs, and staff members.

"The idea of VO came in light of our strong belief that Kuwait possesses so many hidden talents and gifts that need to be unleashed and given the opportunity to grow. Kuwait is more than capable of positioning itself globally and diversifying its economy through its younger generations. Our country's resources are way beyond oil and gas. Kuwaiti youth are capable, they are full of talents, and can support the renaissance of Kuwait," stated Sheikha Ohoud Al-Sabah.

During their meeting, the US Ambassador praised the efforts of VO and the potential of Kuwaiti youth and stated: "We're excited to hear about VO Studio's new model of inspiring young people and supporting them through the journey of their own creativity," said Ambassador Romanowski. "It's important for countries to create conditions where entrepreneurship and innovation are possible. This is where the creative industries can play a key role," she added.

"As a global leader in innovation and entrepreneurship, the United States is working to help Kuwait harness its greatest resource - its youth - to meet Kuwait's objectives under Vision 2035. The US Department of State offers many initiatives and exchange programs that can support Kuwait's creative capital. Programs like American Film Showcase and Arts Envoy bring US and Kuwaiti artists, filmmakers, and musicians together for collaborations and trainings that help Kuwait's youth build their skills and gain international exposure for their work," the US Ambassador said.

Discussing the potential opportunities of collaboration between VO and the US Embassy in Kuwait, the CEO of VO, Ms Riham Al Ayyar, explained that VO is unlike any other youth platform. VO is building an upcoming generation that is equipped to go beyond borders and challenge all the constraints of Kuwait's development. "Our goal is to open a gateway of opportunities for



KUWAIT: Sheikha Ohoud Salem Al Ali Al-Sabah, Alina L. Romanowski, US Ambassador and Riham Al Ayyar seen during the launch of Creative Hub.

Kuwaiti youth through collaborations with local and international entities so we can start exporting our talents to the global market," stressed Ms Al Ayyar.

VO, the integrated youth platform and Kuwait's first talent incubator, was founded in July 2020 as a result of a fruitful collaboration between Sheikha Ohoud Al-Sabah and Riham Al Ayyar aiming to empower local talents and position them in the global market. The platform has already broken the record in supporting multiple Kuwaiti talents, including the production of a song bringing Kuwait talents and prominent celebrities, called 'BRAVO', that crossed above 13 million views on YouTube in a week.

VO provides an academic program for Kuwaiti youth to identify and nurture their talents, an all-inclusive creative hub to empower and express their ideas, and a 'smart' app to promote their creative productions on a seamless, high-tech and efficient digital platform.

## Ministry of Commerce raids gold shops



KUWAIT: Large quantities of gold confiscated during the raid. —M@I photos

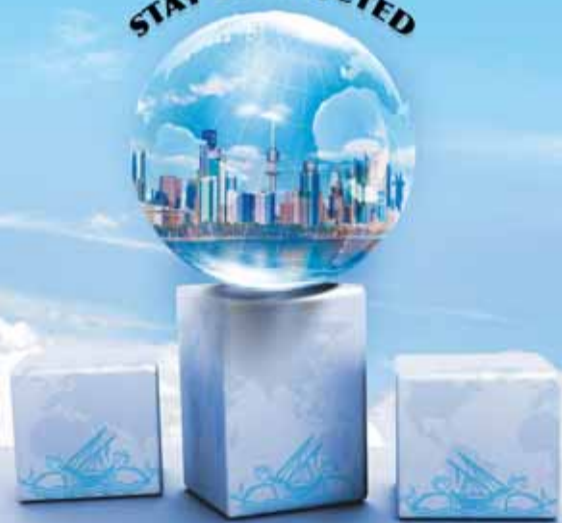
KUWAIT: Interior Ministry Relations and Security Information Department said criminal detectives and financial crimes department, in cooperation with Ministry of Commerce and Industry busted an Asian gang specialized in forging the Ministry of Commerce gold seal.

Investigations revealed the involvement of

several gold shops selling gold works that carry forged seals. The Ministry of Commerce inspectors went to the shops and found large quantities of the works carrying forged seals. Those involved in the forgery were arrested and sent to the public prosecution for further action.

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Armed cattle thieves kill 53 villagers in northern Nigeria

## Pakistani cleric detained for threatening Malala

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CARBIS BAY, UK: Britain's Queen Elizabeth II (right) speaks with US President Joe Biden and US First Lady Jill Biden and leaders of the G7 during a reception at The Eden Project in south west England Friday. —AFP

# Biden's charm offensive at G7

## President jokes with leaders as he draws line under Trump era

CARBIS BAY, UK: "Everybody in the water!" President Joe Biden joked to his fellow G7 leaders at a family photo on the beach, underlining an assured transformation in tone from the antagonistic Donald Trump. Where Trump alienated and exasperated, undermining the Western alliance at every turn, Biden declared that "America is back!" after starting his first foreign tour as president in Britain. US service personnel were standing stiffly to attention in respect for their commander-in-chief as Biden addressed them on Wednesday at an air force base in eastern England.

"Please, at ease," he said, urging them to relax. "I keep forgetting I'm president." It was hard to imagine such an avuncular line ever coming from Trump, and G7 leaders have been equally at ease in the company of the 78-year-old former senator and vice president. Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson, one of the few foreign leaders praised by Trump, called Biden "a big breath of fresh air".

French President Emmanuel Macron, after contesting a years-long battle of wills with Trump, eagerly grabbed Biden by the arm for a good-natured chat after Friday's G7 photo at Carbis Bay in southwest England. With Britain going ahead with the elite club's first in-person summit in nearly two years, Biden is back in his element having amassed decades of foreign policy experience: glad-handing on the world stage. The oldest president yet, he has sometimes stumbled over his words in the initial stages of a grueling eight-day tour that will climax in showdown talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Switzerland.

But while mocked by Trump as "Sleepy Joe", Biden has shown no lack of vim in his public appearances at the G7. "He has been getting ready for 50 years," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said.

"He's known a number of these leaders for decades... and there's nothing like face-to-face engagement in diplomacy," she said, as Biden corrals Western leaders

into a tougher line on China and Russia.

### Rebuilding Brand America

He is on solid ground at the G7. The leaders of Canada, France and Germany all endured tongue-lashings from Trump, and there is palpable relief at the reversion to traditional diplomatic modes.

It is a stark contrast to Trump's first presidential trip to Europe, in May 2017, for a NATO summit in Brussels and a G7 in Sicily. At one point he unceremoniously shoved aside Montenegro's leader at a family photo. But while the mood music has turned more harmonious, Biden's tour will be judged on results, according to Stephen Pomeroy, interim chief of policy at the International Crisis Group.

"Of course the G7 crowd will prefer 'America is back' and 'democracy delivers' to Trump's tirades and shakedown," he said. "The big question is whether this meeting can help generate the kind of energy, vision and unity that Washington wants to project

given the competitive challenges it now faces."

Looming large among those challenges is confronting Putin at next Wednesday's lakeside summit in Geneva, and the G7's European members are not quite as gung-ho in taking on either Russia or China.

But for the time being, Biden can boast of having restored some of America's popularity abroad after it plunged to historic lows during the Trump years.

According to a survey carried out in 16 countries by the Pew Research Center, 62 percent of people now have a "favorable image" of the world's leading power, compared with only 34 percent in 2020.

Biden's rapid moves to take the United States back in to the World Health Organization and the Paris climate accord met with strong approval among those surveyed in Canada, Europe and the Asia-Pacific. But the scale of the rebuilding task faced by Biden after Trump is also apparent: a majority of those polled no longer see America as a model democracy. — AFP

## Algeria elects parliament amid protests

ALGIERS: Algeria voted yesterday in a parliamentary election overshadowed by a crackdown on a long-running protest movement that has campaigned for a mass boycott. Pro-government parties have urged a big turnout for the "crucial vote" which they hope will restore stability after two years of turmoil since the forced resignation of veteran president Abdelaziz Bouteflika.

The decision marks a change of tone for Russian demonstrations for reform until they were effectively banned last month, has denounced the election as a "sham" that betrays the hopes of the hundreds of thousands of Algerians whose protests forced Bouteflika from power.

Seven leading protest movement figures were arrested ahead of polling day while police deployed heavily in the capital Algiers to preempt any attempt to rally. Polls close at 7:00 pm (1800 GMT) and results are not expected before the coming days. Authorities are hoping for a solid turnout, but the two previous national votes since Bouteflika stepped down—a presidential election and a constitutional referendum—both saw record low voting after the

protest movement urged a boycott.

In Algiers, only a trickle of people were seen entering polling stations yesterday morning, with most people getting on with their daily lives. "I've never voted, and this time it's no different. I don't believe it would change anything," said Fatima, a shopkeeper in her 50s.

Hamid, a 60-year-old office manager, said he had voted for the sake of "stability". "We are surrounded by danger. Those who reject this election aren't putting forward any realistic alternative," he said.

In the opposition stronghold of Kabylie, a mainly Berber region east of the capital, most polling stations in the main cities of Bejaia and Tizi Ouzou remained closed, said Said Salhi, deputy head of the Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights (LADDH). Boycott calls from the region's two main parties were almost universally respected in the previous two votes since Bouteflika's ouster.

President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, who was elected on an official turnout of less than 40 in late 2019, put a brave face on the likely low legislative turnout.

"For me, it's not the turnout percentage that's important, it's whether the lawmakers that the people elect have sufficient legitimacy," the president said after casting his vote at a polling station on the outskirts of Algiers. More than 13,000 candidates are standing for the 407 seats in parliament, more than half listed as "independent".

The LADDH vice-president deplored the crackdown that preceded the vote. The "repressive atmos-

phere and the restrictions placed on human rights and freedoms mean these elections have no democratic value", Salhi said. The protest movement has urged boycotts of all national polls since it mobilised hundreds of thousands of people in 2019 to force Bouteflika and his cronies from power, after the ailing president launched a bid for a fifth term. It returned to the streets in February after an almost-year-long break caused by the Covid pandemic. — AFP

have been repurposed for coronavirus patients. "We cannot not react to such a situation," he said. "To stop the growth of infections and to save people's lives, today I signed a decree providing for non-working days between June 15-19." The order affects all employees in the Russian capital, a city of 12 million, except for essential workers. Non-essential workers are not required to work from home during the period, but will still retain their salaries.

Together with the weekends and a public holiday on June 14, it means most Moscow workers will not return to their offices until June 20. The mayor also announced the closure of food courts and playgrounds while restaurants, bars and clubs will be banned from serving customers between 23:00 and 06:00. Sobyanyin also called on employers to transfer at least 30 percent of non-vaccinated employees to working from home after the week-long shutdown.

Cases have been on the rise across the country in recent weeks as Russia struggles to inoculate its citizens despite domestic vaccines being widely avail-



ALGIERS: Algeria's President Abdelmadjid Tebboune waves as he departs after voting at a polling station in Bouchaoui, on the western outskirts of Algeria's capital Algiers yesterday during the 2021 parliamentary elections. — AFP

able to the public. A spike in cases has also been reported in Russia's second city Saint Petersburg, which is co-hosting the Euro 2020 football championship. Earlier this week, Sobyanyin said Moscow would be opening several field hospitals to accommodate the influx of patients. Russia has been among the countries hardest hit by the pandemic, with the sixth-highest number of cases in the world, according to an AFP tally.

Kremlin critics have accused authorities of downplaying the severity of the pandemic by only counting fatalities where the coronavirus was found to be the primary cause of death after autopsy. On Saturday, Russia registered 13,510 new coronavirus cases and 399 deaths, according to a government tally. Russia imposed a strict lockdown when the pandemic first swept across the country last spring. But within months authorities had lifted most measures, opting to protect the struggling economy and pinning their hopes on curbing the outbreak with vaccines. — AFP

## Iran's Larijani rebuffed over election bar

TEHRAN: Iran's ex-parliament speaker Ali Larijani yesterday demanded an explanation of why he was barred from running in next week's presidential poll but was promptly rebuffed by the election watchdog.

The moderate conservative was disqualified by the powerful Guardian Council in a surprise move that leaves judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi, an ultraconservative, the clear favorite in the June 18 election. Larijani called on Twitter on the Guardian Council to "officially and publicly disclose all the reasons" for his disqualification as reports on him and his family had been "proven to be false".

The council's spokesman in response said the law does not mandate the body to explain its reasoning in public. The vetting process is carried out using "adequate and trustworthy documents", Abbas Ali Kadkhodae said in a tweet reported by local agencies.

"The presidential election law has not specified anything regarding protesting disqualifications and public disclosure of their reasons," he said. The conservative-dominated, unelected council has approved seven candidates, five of them ultraconservatives, to run in the election from a field of about 600 hopefuls. In addition to Larijani, who serves as advisor to supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, it also barred first vice-president Eshaq Jahangiri and fire-brand former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

The disqualifications have unleashed a flood of criticism, including from a member of the 12-man council. Ayatollah Sadegh Amoli Larijani, a former judiciary chief and brother to the ex-speaker, said "security bodies" were influencing the council's decisions through "false reports". President Hassan Rouhani, who is constitutionally barred from running for a third consecutive term, said last month he had sent a letter to Khamenei asking him to intervene and ensure greater "competition" in the election. — AFP

## Moscow announces 'non-working week' as virus surges

MOSCOW: Moscow mayor Sergei Sobyanyin yesterday announced a "non-working" week in the Russian capital, with non-essential workers told to stay home, as COVID-19 cases hit a six-month high.

The decision marks a change of tone for Russian authorities, with President Vladimir Putin repeatedly insisting that Russia has handled the pandemic better than most countries. "During the past week the situation with the spread of the coronavirus infections has sharply deteriorated," Sobyanyin said on his website as the city registered 6,701 daily infections, the highest number since December last year.

Sobyanyin added that "thousands" of hospital beds



## International

# Armed cattle thieves kill 53 villagers in northern Nigeria

## Police fire tear gas to break up Nigeria protests

**KANO, Nigeria:** Armed cattle thieves have killed 53 people in northwest Nigeria's Zamfara state, police and local residents said yesterday, the latest violence to hit the restive region. Scores of motorcycle-riding gunmen called bandits by locals on Thursday through Friday, invaded the villages of Kadawa, Kwata, Maduba, Ganda Samu, Saulawa and Askawa in the Zurmi district, shooting residents, they said.

The gang attacked farmers in their fields and pursued others who fled to escape the assaults. Zamfara police spokesman Mohammed Shehu said 14 bodies had been taken to the state capital Gusau on Friday, and added that "policemen deployed in the area following the attacks." Local residents said 39 more bodies had been recovered and buried in the neighboring town of Dauran. "We recovered 28 bodies yesterday and 11 more this morning from the villages and buried them here," said Dauran resident Haruna Abdulkarim.

"It was dangerous to conduct the funeral there because the bandits are harboring in the Zurmi forest and could return to attack the funeral," said another resident, Musa Arzika who reported the same death toll. Villages in the Zurmi district have been repeatedly raided by bandits, and local residents blocked a major highway last week, calling on the authorities to end the attacks. Northwest and central Nigeria have in recent years fallen prey to gangs of cattle thieves and kidnapers who raid villages, killing and kidnapping residents in addition to stealing livestock after looting and burning homes.

The criminals have begun to focus on raiding schools and kidnapping students for ransom. More than 850 students have been abducted since December but most have been released after ransom payments. The gangs are largely motivated by financial gains and have no ideological leanings but there is growing concern of their infiltration by jihadists from the northeast waging a 12-year-old insurgency to establish an Islamic state. Military operations and amnesty offers have failed to end the attacks. In a broadcast on Friday, Zamfara state governor Bello Matawalle urged residents to defend themselves against "killer bandits."

### Anti-government protests

Nigerian police yesterday fired tear gas to disperse anti-government protests in the commercial city of Lagos and the capital Abuja, injuring some people and arresting others, AFP reporters said. Nigerian activists had called for nationwide protests over what they criticize as bad governance and insecurity, as well as the recent ban of US social media platform Twitter by the government of President Muhammadu Buhari. The protests were the first to take place simultaneously in several cities since the #EndSARS movement against police brutality in October grew into the largest anti-government rallies in Nigeria's modern history.

Hundreds of protesters gathered yesterday in Lagos, a sprawling megapolis of over 20 million people, and police fired tear gas to disperse the



**ABUJA, Nigeria:** Protesters hold a banner during a demonstration in Abuja yesterday, as Nigerian activists called for nationwide protests over what they criticize as bad governance and insecurity, as well as the recent ban of US social media platform Twitter by the government of President Muhammadu Buhari. —AFP

crowd. The protesters carried banners and placards saying "Buhari Must Go", calling for reforms. In Abuja, a similar scenario played out as the protesters gathered as early as 7.00 am.

A detachment of police and army broke up the crowd using tear gas, AFP reporters at the scene said. Some journalists were harassed by the security forces, they said. Police had said the protests were unauthorized and AFP reporters said they saw several people being detained.

There were also pockets of protests in Ibadan, Osogbo, Abeokuta and Akure, all in southwestern Nigeria. Buhari, a former general first elected in 2015, has been under pressure over growing insecurity in Africa's most populous nation, home to more than 200 million people. Security forces are battling a jihadist insurgency in the northeast, a surge in mass kidnappings and attacks by criminal gangs in the northwest and a rise in separatist tensions in the southeast. —AFP

### News in brief

#### Oil spill nears Corsica coast

**BASTIA, France:** French officials were racing yesterday to minimize the environmental impact of an oil spill approaching eastern Corsica, with two navy boats armed with clean-up equipment heading to the Mediterranean island. "We fear that part of this pollution will reach the Corsican coast today," maritime official Christine Ribbe told AFP. Two ships from the national navy, equipped with "anti-pollution material and specialized staff", were heading to the Corsican coast from their base in Toulon, southern France. —AFP

#### Turkmenistan pays off China debts

**ASHGABAT, Turkmenistan:** Turkmenistan's autocrat leader said that his country's debts to China for a multi-billion-dollar gas pipeline and another gas project had been paid off "in full", state media reported yesterday. China has invested billions in the development of Turkmenistan's gas industry, establishing itself as the isolated country's number one destination for exports. Beijing's most important projects in the country are the pipeline that begins in eastern Turkmenistan and reaches China via Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan and a multi-stage development project at Galkynysh, the world's second-largest gas field. —AFP

#### Putin denies Iran satellite deal

**WASHINGTON:** President Vladimir Putin on Friday denied a US media report that Russia is set to deliver an advanced satellite system to Iran that will vastly improve its spying capabilities. The Washington Post reported Thursday that Moscow is preparing to give Iran a Kanopus-V satellite with a high-resolution camera, allowing Islamic republic to monitor facilities of its adversaries across the Middle East. Putin, who is expected to hear a range of complaints from US President Joe Biden when they meet Wednesday in Geneva, dismissed the report as "garbage." —AFP

#### Body of girl found off Spanish isle

**MADRID:** The body of a six-year-old girl has been found off Tenerife island six weeks after she and her sister were snatched by their father in a discovery that has shocked Spain. Olivia and her one-year-old sister Anna were reported missing in the Canary Islands on April 27 after their father made a phone call "with a farewell tone" to his estranged wife, a spokesman for the Guardia Civil police told AFP. The following day, a boat belonging to the father and a baby car seat were found floating in the waters off Tenerife. —AFP

#### Tunisian navy rescues 54 migrants

**TUNISIA:** The Tunisian navy and coastguards rescued 54 migrants Friday on a boat heading to Europe that was about to sink in Mediterranean waters, the defense ministry said. The migrants, aged between 15 and 40 and almost all men, left from neighboring Libya late Thursday. But their boat began to founder in waters off the southern Tunisian port of Ben Guerdane, the defense ministry said in a statement. The migrants—who include citizens of multiple nationalities, many from sub-Saharan African countries—were taken to Ben Guerdane, before heading to a detention center. —AFP

## Pakistani cleric detained for threatening Malala

**PESHAWAR:** A firebrand Pakistani scholar has been detained for making death threats against Nobel prize laureate Malala Yousafzai over her comments on marriage, officials said Friday. Since surviving an assassination attempt by the Taliban at age 15 in rural northwest Pakistan, the Oxford graduate has become a global figure promoting education for girls. But a recent interview with the fashion magazine Vogue stirred debate in her home country—where she is already a divisive figure—when she questioned whether a legal union between a couple was necessary.

The issue was debated by MPs in her home province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, who said her comments were against Islam. "Malala is dreaming to become the country's prime minister but promoting obscenity," cleric Sardar Ali told stu-

dents of a local seminary in the northwestern city of Lakki Marwat last week. He added that he would blow her up in a suicide attack if she returned. Police official Wasim Sajjad told AFP Sardar Ali had been charged with making threats, hate speech, and inciting terrorism.

The arrest was confirmed by a second senior police official, Muhammad Imran. Last year Yousafzai called out Prime Minister Imran Khan on Twitter, after a Taliban militant who claimed to have been behind her attack escaped from detention. She appeared on the front cover of the British edition of Vogue magazine last week dressed in a full-length designer gown and head scarf. "If you want to have a person in your life, why do you have to sign marriage papers, why can't it just be a partnership?" she asked, in an interview



**In this file photo, Pakistani activist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai poses for a photograph at all-boys Swat Cadet College Gullu Bagh, near Mingora. —AFP**

where she said she was still deciding what to do after finishing her degree.

Though celebrated in many quarters, Yousafzai has received backlash in Pakistan over the years, where some say global attention on the attempt on

her life has given the country a bad reputation. She is also criticized for her perceived championing of Western liberal values, and has faced constant scrutiny over her clothing and views on world affairs. —AFP

## Interfaith march honors family killed in Canada truck attack

**CANADA:** Several thousand people joined an interfaith march on Friday evening honoring the four members of a Muslim family who were killed in an attack that has shocked Canada. The procession started at the site where three generations of a family out for a Sunday evening stroll — 46-year-old Salman Afzaal, his 44-year-old wife Madiha Salman, their 15-year-old daughter Yumna Salman and her 74-year-old grandmother, Talat Afzaal—were killed in London, southern Ontario, as they were waiting to cross the street. The couple's nine-year-old son Fayez suffered serious but non-life-threatening injuries. The march against racism and Islamophobia culminated at London's mosque, about 7 kilometers (4.5 miles) away.

The demonstrators, who included families with children, banged on drums while others sang John Lennon's "Give Peace a Chance." They held posters with messages like "Hate kills" and "We're all human." After a moment of silence marking the time of the tragedy, representatives from several religions gave speeches denouncing hatred and saluting the outpouring of support for London's 30,000-strong Muslim community. Other rallies or vigils in Canada on Friday took place in Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Quebec, where a shooting in a mosque left six dead in 2017.

The Afzaal family's funeral was scheduled for yes-



**CANADA:** Members of the Muslim community and supporters gather for a multi-faith "March to End Hatred" on Friday in London, Ontario, Canada. —AFP

terday. Nathaniel Veltman, 20, has been charged with four counts of first degree murder and one count of attempted murder in the truck attack. If found guilty he faces life in prison. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has called the assault—in which Veltman's truck

mounted a curb and struck the Afzaal family—a "terrorist attack." Detective Superintendent Paul Waight, who is leading the investigation, has said there was evidence "that this was a planned, premeditated act, motivated by hate." —AFP

## Putin hopes Biden less impulsive than Trump

**WASHINGTON:** Russian President Vladimir Putin voiced hope Friday that US President Joe Biden will be less impulsive than his predecessor Donald Trump, ahead of his first summit with the new US leader. In an interview with NBC News, Putin described Biden as a "career man" who has spent his life in politics. Though he described relations with the United States as having "deteriorated to its lowest point in recent years," Putin said he expects he can work with Biden.

"It is my great hope that, yes, there are some advantages, some disadvantages, but there will not be any impulse-based movements on behalf

of the sitting US president," he said, according to a translation by NBC News. "I believe that former US president Trump is an extraordinary individual, talented individual... He is a colorful individual. You may like him or not. But he didn't come from the US establishment," Putin was quoted as saying.

Biden plans to raise a range of US complaints, including over purported Russian election interference and hacking, in the summit with Putin on Wednesday in Geneva at the end of the new president's first foreign trip. Putin has openly admitted that in the 2016 vote he supported Trump, who had voiced admiration for the Russian leader. At their first summit, Trump infamously appeared to accept Putin's denials of election interference.

Biden has said he is under no illusions about Putin and has described him as "a killer" in light of a series of high-profile deaths including of Kremlin critic Boris Nemtsov. Asked directly if he is "a killer," Putin chuckled but did not give a

yes or no answer. "Over my tenure, I've gotten used to attacks from all kinds of angles and from all kinds of areas under all kinds of pretext and reasons and of different caliber and fierceness, and none of it surprises me," he said, adding that the term "killer" was a "macho" term common in Hollywood.

Such discourse "is part of US political culture where it's considered normal. By the way, not here, it is not considered normal here," he said. Putin also dismissed as "fake news" a report in the Washington Post that Russia is planning to supply Iran with an advanced satellite system that would allow it to track potential military targets. "At the very least, I don't know anything about this kind of thing," the Russian leader said, speaking from the Kremlin. "It's just nonsense garbage." According to interviewer Keir Simmons, Putin also denied any knowledge of cyberattacks on the United States, and called on Biden to strike a deal with Russia on cyberspace. —AFP



## International

# Security of airports, embassies to be 'Afghan responsibility': Taliban

## Four Afghans get 10-year jail terms for Greek migrant camp fire

**KABUL:** Foreign forces should hold 'no hope' of keeping a military presence in Afghanistan after the US and NATO withdraw troops, the Taliban said yesterday, warning the security of embassies and airports would be the responsibility of Afghans. It comes as western diplomats and military officials scramble to work out how to provide security for any future civilian presence they keep in the country.

Turkey has reportedly said it is prepared to keep troops in Afghanistan to protect Kabul airport, the main exit route for western diplomats and humanitarian workers. "Every inch of Afghan soil, its airports and security of foreign embassies and diplomatic offices is the responsibility of the Afghans, consequently no one should hold out hope of keeping military or security presence in our country," a statement issued by the Taliban yesterday said. "If anyone does make such a mistake, the Afghan people and the Islamic Emirate shall view them as occupiers and shall take a stance against them," it added.

The United States is in the final stages of completing a military drawdown, alongside NATO forces, by September 11 — twenty years after they invaded Afghanistan and toppled the Taliban.

The decision to end America's longest war has raised fears that an emboldened Taliban could topple the Western-backed government in Kabul. The possibility of keeping troops in Afghanistan is expected to be discussed during a meeting of NATO leaders in Brussels tomorrow.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said last month the alliance would provide funding to help run Kabul airport and train Afghanistan's special forces after it had left. Turkish media later reported that Ankara was willing to maintain a presence in the country, including at the country's main gateway, if NATO provided financial support. The

Taliban has attempted to calm foreign missions by saying they could "continue their operations as usual", after Australia closed its embassy citing an "increasingly uncertain security environment". The militants have in recent weeks made territorial gains in and around the country, including in provinces close to the capital.

On Saturday, at least seven civilians were killed in two separate explosions in the city, the Interior Ministry said, the latest in a series of bombings targeting buses. There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

Meanwhile, a Greek court yesterday sentenced four young Afghan asylum seekers accused of starting fires that burnt down Europe's largest migrant camp last year to 10 years in prison each. Defense lawyers said the court in Chios found them guilty of intentional arson.

The Moria camp on the Aegean island of Lesbos was home to more than 10,000 people before it was destroyed by two fires in September 2020. No media were allowed inside the courtroom on Friday and Saturday owing to coronavirus precautions.

Two other Afghan youths were jailed in a correctional facility near Athens for five years over the same case in March. Defense lawyers for the Afghans have said they did not get a fair trial.

They say three of them had documents showing they were under 18 at the time of arrest but were not recognized as minors by the Greek state. The trial is based in large part on the testimony of another Afghan asylum-seeker who identified the six as the perpetrators.

According to the defense lawyers, the witness was not in court Friday and did not appear for the trial last March as he could not be located. The defendants claim they were targeted by the witness,



**KABUL:** Afghan security forces inspect the remains of a vehicle at the site of a bomb blast in Kabul yesterday.—AFP

an ethnic Pashtun, as all six are Hazara, a long-persecuted minority in Afghanistan.

Other witnesses for the prosecution were police officers, firefighters called to the scene in September 2020 and staff from the European Asylum Service and non-governmental groups who were working at the camp. Built in 2013 to house a maximum of 3,000 people, the Moria camp became badly overcrowded in 2015 as a huge wave of people began arriving on the Greek islands on small boats from nearby Turkey. The camp-home to asylum-seekers from the Middle East, Africa and South Asia seeking a better life in the European Union—quickly became

a byword for squalor and violence.

The two fires broke out on September 8 and 9 last year as tensions soared in the camp over the coronavirus pandemic.

Witnesses told AFP a dispute had broken out as some 200 migrants refused to quarantine after either testing positive for COVID-19 or coming into contact with someone infected. Around 13,000 asylum-seekers, among them families with children, pregnant women and people with disabilities, had to sleep in the open for a week after the camp was destroyed. Authorities have since built a temporary camp on Lesbos that is hosting around 6,000 people.—AFP

## Afghan COVID-19 patients struggle to accept diagnosis

**KABUL:** On his emergency room bed in Afghanistan's capital, you can barely hear Said Ali Shah speak through the oxygen mask plastered to his face. He was taken to the Muhammed Ali Jinnah hospital "out of breath" by his wife, he says, and is only just able to sit up after four days in intensive care.

"No, no, no," he gasped, "I don't have the coronavirus." The 50-year-old, like some other Afghan patients, refuses to accept the reality of his condition. "Of course it is (COVID-19)," Dr Sayed Amiri, director of the 200-bed hospital, told AFP. "He has tested positive, but we avoid telling patients who arrive in this unit... Otherwise, they think they are going to die and lose all hope."

Officially Afghanistan has recorded fewer than 90,000 infections, with around 3,400 deaths, but health experts say a lack of testing and the refusal of patients to seek treatment hides the true figures. And the situation is only getting worse. "In one week, we recorded an increase of nearly 200 percent in cases," said Minister of Health Wahid Majrooh.

### 'Hard to change habits'

Now, the main concern for officials is ensuring they have enough oxygen.

"The next four weeks will be difficult," said Majrooh. "We must prepare for the worst." In a country wracked by decades of war, with foreign forces hastening their withdrawal, and having to live daily with the threat of bomb blasts or targeted assassinations, many Afghans feel they have bigger things to worry about than a virus.

"You see people without masks in front of hospitals, accompanying their loved ones in critical condition," said Doctor Amiri. At the hospital entrance, a nurse offers Covid-19 tests and masks to those bringing sick relatives for treatment.

"Most refuse," Amiri said. "It's hard to change habits." At the country's main COVID-19 treatment center, a Japanese-built infectious diseases hospital, doctor Tareq Akbari makes a similar observation.

"People prefer to stay at home and self-medicate without being tested," he said, adding that there was a stigma attached to having contracted COVID-19. "They arrive here much too late, when they are already breathing badly," said Akbari, adding that sometimes three or four members of one family test positive at the same time.



**KABUL:** A family member comforts a COVID-19 patient at the intensive care unit (ICU) of the Muhammed Ali Jinnah hospital in Kabul.—AFP

### Virus spread during holiday

A national vaccination campaign has moved slowly, with less than a million doses administered in the country of nearly 34 million people. Part of the fault lay in starting it during Ramadan, as many people believed that having a vaccine jab would break their fast.

The recent Eid Al-Fitr holiday that ended the holy month also saw large numbers of people travelling across the country to reunite with families, spreading the virus on crowded public transport. Add to that the fact that

India is one of the few countries that still has regular flights to Afghanistan, bringing the fast-spreading Delta variant that emerged there.

"There are a lot of exchanges between the two countries," said Akbari, adding that the new variant appeared to be hitting younger people more. Akbari and the health minister both agree that the official figure of around 55-60 deaths a week is wrong. "You can easily multiply it by two or three—even more," said Akbari. "And who keeps count in rural districts?"—AFP

## Child labor rises to 160m: First increase in two decades

**NEW YORK/GENEVA:** The number of children in child labor has risen to 160 million worldwide - an increase of 8.4 million children in the last four years - with millions more at risk due to the impacts of COVID-19, according to a new report by the International Labor Organization (ILO) and UNICEF. Child Labor: Global estimates 2020, trends and the road forward - released ahead of World Day Against Child Labor on 12th June - warns that progress to end child labor has stalled for the first time in 20 years, reversing the previous downward trend that saw child labor fall by 94 million between 2000 and 2016.

The report points to a significant rise in the number of children aged 5 to 11 years in child labor, who now account for just over half of the total global figure. The number of children aged 5 to 17 years in hazardous work - defined as work that is likely to harm their health, safety or morals - has risen by 6.5 million to 79 million since 2016. "The new estimates are a wake-up call. We cannot stand by while a new generation of children is put at risk," said ILO Director-General Guy Ryder. "Inclusive social protection allows families to keep their children in school even in the face of economic hardship. Increased investment in rural development and decent work in agriculture is essential. We are at a pivotal moment and much depends on how we respond. This is a time for renewed commitment and energy, to turn the corner and break the cycle of poverty and child labor."

In sub-Saharan Africa, population growth, recur-

rent crises, extreme poverty, and inadequate social protection measures have led to an additional 16.6 million children in child labor over the past four years. Even in regions where there has been some headway since 2016, such as Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean, COVID-19 is endangering that progress. The report warns that globally, 9 million additional children are at risk of being pushed into child labour by the end of 2022 as a result of the pandemic. A simulation model shows this number could rise to 46 million if they don't have access to critical social protection coverage.

Additional economic shocks and school closures caused by COVID-19 mean that children already in child labor may be working longer hours or under worsening conditions, while many more may be forced into the worst forms of child labor due to job and income losses among vulnerable families.

"We are losing ground in the fight against child labor, and the last year has not made that fight any easier," said UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore. "Now, well into a second year of global lockdowns, school closures, economic disruptions, and shrinking national budgets, families are forced to make heart-breaking choices. We urge governments and international development banks to prioritize investments in programs that can get children out of the workforce and back into school, and in social protection programs that can help families avoid making this choice in the first place."

### Other key findings in the report include:

- The agriculture sector accounts for 70 per cent of children in child labor (112 million) followed by 20 per cent in services (31.4 million) and 10 per cent in industry (16.5 million).
- Nearly 28 per cent of children aged 5 to 11 years and 35 per cent of children aged 12 to 14 years in child labor are out of school.
- Child labor is more prevalent among boys than

girls at every age. When household chores performed for at least 21 hours per week are taken into account, the gender gap in child labour narrows.

- The prevalence of child labor in rural areas (14 per cent) is close to three times higher than in urban areas (5 per cent).

Children in child labor are at risk of physical and mental harm. Child labour compromises children's education, restricting their rights and limiting their future opportunities, and leads to vicious inter-generational cycles of poverty and child labor.

To reverse the upward trend in child labor, the ILO and UNICEF are calling for:

- Adequate social protection for all, including universal child benefits.
- Increased spending on quality education and getting all children back into school - including children who were out of school before COVID-19.
- Promotion of decent work for adults, so families don't have to resort to children helping to generate family income.
- An end to harmful gender norms and discrimination that influence child labor.
- Investment in child protection systems, agricultural development, rural public services, infrastructure and livelihoods.

As part of the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labor, the global partnership Alliance 8.7, of which UNICEF and ILO are partners, is encouraging member States, business, trade unions, civil society, and regional and international organizations to redouble their efforts in the global fight against child labor by making concrete action pledges. During a week of action from 10 - 17 June, ILO Director-General Guy Ryder and UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore will join other high-level speakers and youth advocates at a high-level event during the International Labor Conference to discuss the release of the new global estimates and the roadmap ahead.

## Agnes Chow: From teen activist to jailed HK leader

**HONG KONG:** Agnes Chow hails from a generation of Hong Kong democracy activists who cut their teeth in politics as teenagers and are now being steadily silenced by China. The 24-year-old, one of the democracy movement's most recognizable faces, served just under seven months behind bars for her role in an "unlawful assembly" outside the city's police headquarters during 2019's huge and often violent democracy protests.

She was jailed alongside two other well-known youth activists, Joshua Wong and Ivan Lam. She entered the fraught world of Hong Kong's politics early. Chow has described growing up in an apolitical Catholic household.

But at the age of 15, she joined the youth-led movement protesting against plans to implement "moral and national education" in public schools. Students feared the plan would herald the kind of heavily censored education seen on China's mainland.

They staged huge sit-ins and the plan was eventually shelved in a rare example of protest forcing a Hong Kong government climbdown. It was during those demonstrations she met fellow teen activist Wong. Two years later, Wong, Chow and other students were key figures in the "Umbrella Movement" — 79 days of sit-ins and rallies sparked by Beijing's refusal to make good on its promise to one day grant Hong Kongers universal suffrage.

The protests were peaceful, but not successful. Yet, a whole new generation of opposition politicians was forged in those rallies. They would go on to become a major threat on the side of Beijing as it tried to tighten its grip on the semi-autonomous financial hub, which was increasingly chafing under Chinese Communist Party rule.

Chow helped found the now disbanded pro-democracy party Demosisto alongside Wong, Nathan Law and other young political leaders. She gave up a British passport to stand for Hong Kong's partially elected legislature, only to be barred from standing because her party advocated "self-determination".

Since then it has become common for authorities to disqualify politicians for the views they hold.—AFP



**HONG KONG:** Police clear a path through the media pack for a vehicle carrying pro-democracy activist Agnes Chow after she was released from prison in Hong Kong yesterday after spending seven months behind bars for her role in a protest outside the police headquarters in 2019.—AFP



# Business

SUNDAY, JUNE 13, 2021

## US lawmakers, wary of Big Tech, mull antitrust overhaul

### Most ambitious effort in decades to break corporate monopolies

WASHINGTON: US lawmakers unveiled sweeping antitrust measures Friday aimed at tempering the dominance of Big Tech firms including Apple and Facebook, in what may be the most ambitious effort in decades to break corporate monopolies. A bipartisan group of House members introduced five separate bills that propose changes so comprehensive they could reshape the largest US technology and entertainment companies and force an overhaul of their business practices.

In a bid to ward off corporate consolidation, the measures would make it harder for mega-companies like Amazon and Google to buy out smaller competitors, and facilitate the breakup of firms that use their dominant position in their core business to make deep inroads into another.

"Right now, unregulated tech monopolies have too much power over our economy," the House Judiciary's Antitrust Subcommittee chairman David Cicilline, a Democrat, said in introducing the measures. "They are in a unique position to pick winners and losers, destroy small businesses, raise prices on consumers, and put folks out of work."

The goal, he said, is to "level the playing field" and ensure that powerful tech companies follow the same rules as other businesses. The bills follow a 16-month investigation by the Antitrust Subcommittee into the state of competition in the digital marketplace, and particularly the unregulated power wielded by Amazon, Apple, Facebook, and Google.

Silicon Valley giants have come under increasing fire in Europe and the United States due to concerns about monopoly-like power. And US

President Joe Biden and other G7 countries are keen to set a global tax rate of at least 15 percent on multinational firms, in a bid to optimize tax revenue from tech behemoths.

#### 'Power over innovation'

The antitrust bills need to be debated and voted favorably out of the Judiciary Committee before receiving a vote by the full House of Representatives. They would also need approval from the Senate before they could be signed into law by Biden.

One of the bills increases the fees for mergers so that regulators have more funds to police corporations and enforce antitrust laws. "Big Tech has abused its dominance in the marketplace to crush competitors, censor speech, and control how we see and understand the world," said House Republican Ken Buck, who took direct aim at some of the largest players.

"Apple, Amazon, Facebook, and Google have prioritized power over innovation and harmed American businesses and consumers in the process." The reform effort comes amid heightened scrutiny of large tech platforms which have increased their dominance during the coronavirus pandemic.

US state and federal antitrust enforcers last year filed suits targeting Facebook and Google alleging illegal dominance of their respective markets.

And last month Amazon was hit with an antitrust suit from the capital Washington, which claimed the tech giant abuses its dominant position in online retail sales, harming consumers.



An illustration picture taken in London shows the logos of Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft displayed on a mobile phone and a laptop screen. US lawmakers unveiled sweeping antitrust measures Friday aimed at tempering the dominance of Big Tech firms. — AFP

The Computer & Communications Industry Association, of which Google, Amazon and Facebook are members, warned that the latest legislation is too "interventionist" and could mark the biggest departure from US antitrust policy in a century. "At a time when consumers are frustrated with higher prices and fewer options in other seg-

ments of the economy, it's perplexing that the Committee would not prioritize broad reform" rather than narrow action against a few companies, CCAIA President Matthew Schruers said in a statement. "Writing regulations for a handful of businesses will skew competition and leave consumers worse off." — AFP

## New 'Diraya' video addresses safe investment

KUWAIT: In an effort to enhance financial awareness across all segments of society and encourage the Kuwaiti banking sector's social responsibility activities, the Central Bank of Kuwait is presenting new informative video content addressing safe investment and means of protecting customers' personal and bank information. This comes as part of the CBK-supervised "Diraya" campaign (Be Aware in Arabic) which is managed by Kuwait Banking Association (KBA) with the participation of all Kuwaiti banks.

Announcing the new content, the CBK stressed its keenness to direct banks to promote saving among their customers. It also urges them to present sufficient information and explanation regarding different investment and saving products and services that help customers manage their investments and increase yield, such as the array of

deposits, investment portfolios and funds, and savings accounts as well as fully explain each option and its level of risk, if any. This aims to help customers make an informed decision and stress the importance of planning and preparing for the future and any changes or responsibilities it may bring such as tuition fees, retirement, etc.

Along these lines, the CBK pointed out that investments may be classified according to risk involved, and that "high-risk" investments are sometimes being promoted through promises of quick and high profit. This includes investments that are not regulated by any authority or legislation that protects investors' rights such as crypto-assets like the likes of "Bitcoin" which does not fall under the authority or regulation of any institution, neither locally nor internationally, making it a possible means and instrument for illegal activity.

"Forex" trading and speculation activity, an abbreviated coinage for "Foreign Exchange", is another form of high-risk investment where foreign currency is exchanged through apps and platforms working within a global currency trading market. In addition, while currency is



often exchanged for purposes such as travel, import and export of goods, and so on, many parties engage in speculative trading seeking quick profit from fluctuation of currency exchange prices. Speculators often fall victim to fraud through fake websites, which adds the additional risk factor of "reliability".

The CBK thus strongly urges those seeking to invest to realize in full the risks associated with their chosen investment, to have sufficient knowledge

of the field of investment, and to avoid investment with any unreliable parties to avoid financial fraud.

All "Be Aware" informative media is published through multiple communication and information channels including CBK and Kuwaiti banks' social networks accounts. More information on the campaign and its goals, and more literature on this topic is also accessible through the official website: [www.dirayakw.com](http://www.dirayakw.com)

## US billionaires dodge taxes and play into Biden's hands

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden's push to get Congress to reform the tax code and ensure the richest Americans pay their "fair share" has received an unexpected boost from billionaires like Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk, who, it turns out, don't have much of a tax bill at all.

New York-based journalism non-profit ProPublica on Tuesday revealed that Amazon boss Jeff Bezos and Tesla head Elon Musk, two of the three richest men in the world, paid little or no tax on their total wealth, not just their income. They managed the feat thanks to a tax code that Maya MacGuineas, president of the nonpartisan Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, described as being "like Swiss cheese, full of holes."

"Anybody with a savvy set of accountants is able to minimize, and sometimes to bring to zero, their tax liability," she told AFP. Billionaires are able to benefit from provisions like a tax credit for dependent children or reductions linked to loans or investments greater than income, breaks that amount to nearly \$2 trillion each year.

"The more money you make in... different ways, the more components of the tax code that you can also often find to take advantage of," MacGuineas said.

"Again, there's nothing illegal in doing it."

#### 'Pay their fair share'

These revelations could sway public opinion towards Biden, who has long argued that the richest households and individuals do not pay enough in tax. Since taking office in January, he has proposed several measures that would raise taxes on the wealthy and largest American businesses, while also pursuing a multilateral deal on a global minimum tax to ensure companies pay their share no matter where they're based. Biden's allies in the US Senate seized on the ProPublica report to make the case that the country's most prominent business leaders are skipping out on their obligations to their fellow Americans.

"Billionaires like Jeff Bezos, Elon Musk, and Warren Buffett pay a tiny fraction of their wealth in taxes compared to working families. That's just not right," Elizabeth Warren, a proponent of higher taxes on the wealthy, said on Twitter.

Bernie Sanders, who chairs the Senate Budget Committee, tweeted, "Tax the billionaires. Make them pay their fair share. Rebuild our nation's crumbling infrastructure."

However Republicans, who make up a sizable minority in the Senate and can



US President Joe Biden (right) campaigned on increasing taxes on the rich — AFP

use the chamber's filibuster rule to stop most legislation that doesn't attract at least some of their votes, have generally opposed tax increases.

#### Tax overhaul

Biden's proposals would unravel some of the changes to the tax code made by his Republican predecessor Donald Trump.

For the one percent of households with the highest incomes, the tax rate would rise to 39.6 percent from 37 percent. Those who earn more than \$1 million per-year, or about 0.3 percent of

households, would see the capital gains tax rate they pay on stock market transactions also rise to 39.6 percent from 20 percent currently, according to the Biden administration.

"We know that there is more to be done to ensure that corporations, individuals who are at the highest income, are paying more of their fair share," White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said this week. The Internal Revenue Service, the US tax authority, would also see its funding increased and powers expanded as a means of cracking down on tax dodgers. — AFP

## China arrests 1,100 over crypto laundering

BEIJING: China has arrested more than a thousand people for using the profits from crime to buy cryptocurrencies, security officials said, as part of a growing crackdown on the industry.

The country's bitcoin mines power nearly 80 percent of the global trade in cryptocurrencies, although trading in China is banned.

Officials have started to turn a sharp eye towards cryptocurrency miners to prevent speculation and stamp out money laundering. Chinese police busted a network of 1,100 people involved in laundering money by buying cryptocurrencies, the ministry of public security said in a statement dated Wednesday.

The launderers charged clients commission to convert illegal proceeds into virtual currencies via crypto exchanges, the ministry said, without outlining the amount of money involved.

China banned trading in cryptocurrencies in 2019 and is increasingly tightening restrictions on bitcoin mining. In April, the northern region of Inner Mongolia closed down all its cryptocurrency mines, claiming they failed to meet annual energy consumption targets.

The region accounted for eight percent of the computing power needed to run the global blockchain—a set of online ledgers to record bitcoin transactions.

That is higher than the amount of computing power dedicated to blockchain in the entire United States. The northwestern province of Qinghai announced a similar ban on cryptocurrency mining on Wednesday, but no data is available about the size of the operations in the region.

Bitcoin values tumbled in May on the back of a warning by Beijing to investors against speculative trading in cryptocurrencies. China is in the midst of a wide-ranging regulatory crackdown on its fintech sector, whose biggest players have been hit with large fines after being found guilty of monopolistic practices. — AFP



## Business

# Ooredoo Kuwait selects Ericsson Charging to improve customer digital experience

## Platform will support 5G architecture and interfaces

**KUWAIT:** Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, has selected Ericsson (NASDAQ: ERIC) as its strategic partner to migrate and consolidate its online charging system to Ericsson Charging as its single platform enabling digital offerings replacing other charging solutions across the company. In addition, Ericsson agreement will enhance and provide new digital offerings to Ooredoo Kuwait's subscribers as well as an architecture and interface platform ready for 5G.

Ooredoo Kuwait and Ericsson successfully completed the migration and consolidation to Ericsson Charging ensuring seamless customer experience. Ericsson Charging allows Ooredoo Kuwait to deliver superior digital 5G services and quality to its customers in line with the digitalization ambitions of Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait". Ericsson Charging is a modular, scalable, open, convergent Online Charging System (OCS) using industry standards and protocols.



Essa Haider and Kevin Murphy

The solution for Ooredoo Kuwait provides a best-in-class charging system with a reliable and scalable platform that supports their large and demanding subscriber base. The agreement ensures Ericsson can seamlessly bring together Ooredoo Kuwait's various

interfaces to provide its customers with a comprehensive digital experience.

Essa Haider, Director Network Planning & Design, Ooredoo Kuwait, says: "Ooredoo Kuwait is committed to providing a world-class experience for its customers across the country and our agreement with Ericsson to consolidate to Ericsson Charging allows us to continue enhancing our service. This in turn will ensure we can comprehensively capture and secure revenue streams and continue our cycle of improvement for customers in the country."

Kevin Murphy, Vice President and Head of Global Customer Unit Ooredoo at Ericsson Middle East and Africa, says: "We are proud to partner with Ooredoo Kuwait and we are pleased they share our confidence in Ericsson Charging solutions. Our agreement will enable Ooredoo Kuwait to optimize their charging landscape, realize and create new opportunities with its large customer base as well as ensure these digital charging services can be implemented on 5G infra-

structure. Our aim is to continuously support Ooredoo Kuwait as we share their ambitions to realize Kuwait Vision 2035 "New Kuwait".

Ericsson Charging provides a low risk but effective route to capture and secure revenue streams and take advantage of business opportunities from both traditional telecom services as well as digital services, 5G and IoT.

Ericsson Charging is a fundamental part of telecommunications business support systems (BSS), which underpin commercial activities and handle customer-facing interactions. Ericsson Charging is a scalable, flexible solution with a strong user-experience focus and future-proof product roadmap, enabling real-time convergent charging, policy control, decoupling and supporting rapid time to revenue in the market. The solution for Ooredoo Kuwait will ultimately let them control credit while letting users control their costs through flexible packaging, bonuses, and discounts.

## UK economy strengthens recovery

**LONDON:** Britain's economy gathered pace in April as the government eased its coronavirus lockdown, official data showed Friday, with finance minister Rishi Sunak cautiously welcoming the 2.3-percent growth figure as the Delta variant spreads. It was the fastest monthly output for UK gross domestic product since July last year "as government restrictions affecting economic activity continued to ease", the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement. Britain's economy had contracted 1.5 percent overall in the first quarter, although had already begun to bounce back strongly in March with GDP of 2.1 percent.

The UK's overall output for April remains 3.7 percent below pre-pandemic levels seen in February last year. "Overall, the economic recovery stepped up another gear in April and GDP is on track to return to its February level before the end of the year," noted Thomas Pugh, UK economist at Capital Economics research group. "If anything, the economy could regain its pre-crisis level even sooner."

April's growth was driven by the service sector, which jumped 3.4 percent as consumers once again started to visit non-essential physical stores, restaurants and bars and as more children returned to onsite lessons, the ONS said. Output in the production sector however dropped 1.3 percent during the same month, recording the first fall since January. And construction contracted 2.0 percent following a strong March.

Since May, the government has further eased restrictions, with people now allowed to eat and drink inside restaurants and bars, having initially been able to sit only outside.

### 'Promising sign'

"Today's figures are a promising sign that our economy is beginning to recover," said Chancellor of the Exchequer Sunak. His cautious response comes amid mounting concerns over whether the emergence of the Delta variant of the coronavirus threatens the

UK government's provisional June 21 deadline for further lifting virus restrictions.

The Delta variant, which first emerged in India, is now the dominant strain in the UK, according to Public Health England figures. And the UK government on Friday said it is 60 percent more transmissible in households than the variant that forced the country to lock down in January.

Britain on Thursday said G7 leaders will agree to expand global COVID vaccine manufacturing to provide at least one billion doses to the world through sharing and financing schemes. The UK, which is hosting the big powers' gathering in southwest England, added it would donate at least 100 million surplus doses within the next year, including five million beginning in the coming weeks. The announcement came after the United States said it would donate 500 million jobs to 92 poor and lower-middle-income nations.

### Exports drop

Separate data Friday showed UK exports fell 0.6 percent in April after two months of growth, with drops in exports to non-EU countries offsetting increases to nations within the bloc, the ONS said. While exports to the EU rose 2.3 percent month-on-month, they remained 9.0-percent below 2019's average level, or ahead of Britain's formal exit from the European Union at the start of this year, according to Samuel Tombs, chief UK economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics.

"That is a disappointing performance, given the boom in global trade flows. UK exporters have lost market share," he added. Goods imported to the UK meanwhile grew 3.9 percent in April.

The trade data was published as Britain hit back at French President Emmanuel Macron's uncompromising stance on Brexit, in a simmering row over new trading arrangements for Northern Ireland. Macron on Thursday warned London that it was "not serious" to review agreements signed last December, just weeks before the UK left the European single market and customs union. But Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab insisted that Brussels should be more flexible in its approach to Northern Ireland, which shares the UK's only land border with the EU. Under the so-called Northern Ireland protocol, checks are required on some goods heading to the British province from mainland Britain-England, Scotland and Wales. — AFP



LONDON: European Commission vice president Maros Sefcovic (left) leaves Europe House, the headquarters of the EU delegation in the UK in London yesterday. — AFP

## EU urges UK to uphold Brexit deal but Johnson defiant

**CARBIS BAY, United Kingdom:** European leaders yesterday delivered an ultimatum to UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson to keep his word on Brexit to resolve a row over new trade arrangements in Northern Ireland. But Johnson defiantly restated his calls for Brussels to compromise, urging a more pragmatic approach after talks between the two sides broke down earlier this week.

The UK and the European Union signed a last-gasp trade deal in December last year, just weeks before the former's departure from the European single market and customs union.

A separate agreement—the Northern Ireland protocol—was also signed to govern trade in the UK province, which shares the country's only land border with the bloc. But London has so far failed to implement full checks on goods heading into Northern Ireland from mainland Britain-England, Scotland and Wales. And it has indicated that it will extend a grace period on the delivery of British chilled meat products at the end of this month, prompting EU threats of retaliatory measures.

The row—and the spectre of what the UK press has dubbed a "sausage war"—has dogged the showpiece G7 summit in southwest England.

Johnson yesterday morning held talks with French President Emmanuel Macron. German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the heads of the European Commission and the European Council.

All told him directly to abide by the terms of the divorce deal he signed to take the UK out of the European Union after nearly 50 years of membership. "Both sides must implement what we agreed on," said European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen and European Council chief Charles Michel.

"There is complete EU unity on this."

A source in Macron's office said he explained to Johnson in no uncertain terms that the UK should "keep its word", effectively dismissing UK calls for flexibility. But Downing Street said Johnson had told the leaders he would not change tack.

### Double down

"The prime minister expressed confidence in the UK's position in the Northern Ireland protocol," a statement said after his meeting with Macron. "He made clear his desire for pragmatism and compromise on all sides." With Merkel, he said there was a need "to maintain both the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the UK".

And with von der Leyen and Michel, he told them the UK was "committed to finding practical solutions" to the solve the dispute. The protocol is designed to prevent unchecked goods going into the European single market and customs union via Northern Ireland's neighbor, EU member state Ireland.

But pro-British unionist communities in Northern Ireland are opposed, arguing that checks drive a wedge between the province and the rest of the UK.

The checks were suspended after threats to port staff and blamed for some of the worst violence in years in Northern Ireland. The protocol has also cost Northern Ireland's First Minister Arlene Foster her job, and seen her successor pledged a tougher line on opposing it.

The Times this week reported that President Joe Biden had ordered US diplomats to rebuke London for

its stance, which it said threatened the peace in the UK province. Bill Clinton's administration was a key player in securing a landmark 1998 Good Friday Agreement that ended three decades of violence over British rule in Northern Ireland. Biden—a proud Irish-American with distant relatives still in Ireland—has taken a keen interest, with warnings it could threaten a hoped-for UK-US trade deal.

Macron has also blasted the UK and said it was "not serious" in wanting to backtrack on its commitments. Nothing is negotiable. Everything is applicable," he said. Johnson played down any rift after talks with Biden on Thursday, insisting the US president did not sound the alarm over the issue. He said there was "absolutely common ground" on all sides in upholding the Good Friday Agreement. — AFP

## Italy CB sharply raises 2021 growth forecast

**ROME:** Italy's economy will grow more than previously expected this year, buoyed by EU-supported investment, the central bank said Friday. The Bank of Italy said it expected gross domestic product (GDP) to rise by 4.4 percent, but warned its forecast did not take into account favorable economic data from last week.

Factoring in projections released by national statistics agency Istat on June 4, the estimate should be revised upwards by "more than half a percentage point", a statement said. For 2022 and 2023, the bank predicted growth of 4.5 percent and 2.3 percent, respectively.

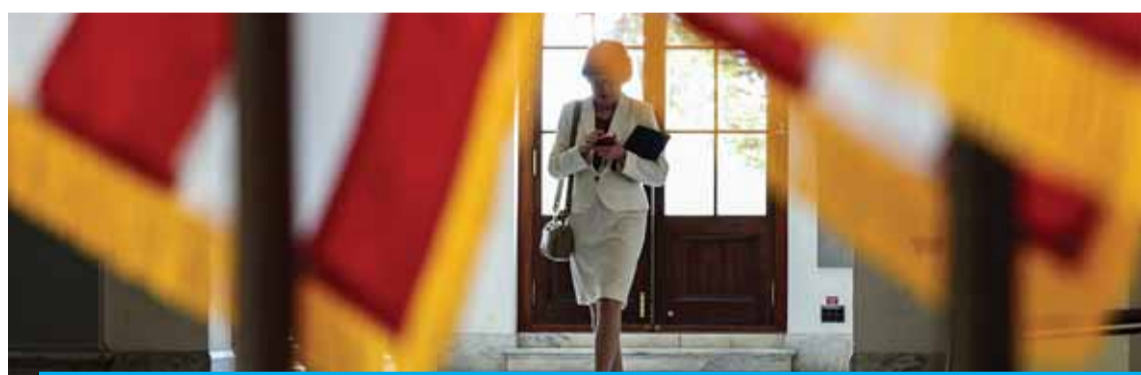
Friday's data was markedly more optimistic compared to January, when GDP was expected to expand by 3.5 percent in 2021, 3.8 percent in 2022 and 2.3 percent in 2023. The recovery "is driven above all by investment" helped by growing confidence in the economy, low interest rates, and the expected windfall of billions of euros from the European Union, the central bank said.

Italy was the first European nation to be hit by the Covid-19 pandemic and its economy contracted by a staggering 8.9 percent last year. However, the economic outlook has recently turned sunnier, and the country is set to receive nearly 200 billion euros (\$242 billion) from the EU's massive post-pandemic recovery fund. The money, covering the 2021-2026 period, is expected to be disbursed in instalments starting in the second half of the year.

The Bank of Italy said its forecast depended on continued progress with vaccinations, allowing the lifting of "most" coronavirus restrictions by the end of the year.

It also said its calculations banked on continued fiscal and monetary stimulus for the economy, and on "no significant delays" in recovery projects backed by national and EU funds.

Last week, Prime Minister Mario Draghi said Italy was "yearning to restart" and "facing a new phase" after "very tough" pandemic months. In one of several signs of growing optimism for the eurozone's third-largest economy, industrial production returned to pre-COVID levels in April, Istat data showed Thursday. — AFP



WASHINGTON, DC: Sen Susan Collins arrives to a luncheon with Senate Republicans in the Russell Senate Office Building Friday in Washington, DC. — AFP

## Biden, Congress face infrastructure uncertainty

**WASHINGTON:** A months-long negotiation on infrastructure between the White House and US lawmakers is coming to a head, with President Joe Biden desperate to woo Republicans while also keeping centrists and climate-concerned progressives in his party on board. Ten moderate senators—five Democrats and five Republicans—announced a tentative agreement Thursday aimed at improving and expanding the nation's crumbling roads, bridges, ports, pipes, tracks and broadband internet. In a joint statement they said they were "optimistic" that the plan—which they stressed would not raise tax rates—could garner broad support from both parties and make it to the president's desk. There is growing urgency to reach a final deal in the coming weeks, as a crowded congressional calendar is on the horizon. But with all sides acutely aware of the time crunch, liberal Democrats voiced their displeasure Friday at what has been left out of the bipartisan framework—and signalled it might already be dead in the water. "NO way that I'm supporting an infrastructure package that doesn't invest in fighting the climate crisis," tweeted congresswoman Pramila Jayapal, who chairs the Congressional Progressive Caucus. "Who's with me?"

"We cannot allow climate denial to masquerade as bipartisanship," added Senator Ed Markey after the

moderates announced an agreement. "No climate, no deal." Biden's initial \$2.3 trillion American Jobs Plan was a mammoth proposal aimed at rebuilding the nation's crumbling infrastructure. But it also sought to raise wages for home care workers, improve child care facilities, expand affordable housing and access to social welfare Medicaid services and, most notably, reduce the impacts of climate change.

Republicans balked at the plan's price tag, and stressed that elements unrelated to traditional infrastructure be kept out. Earlier talks between Biden and Republican senators collapsed this week.

And while the latest bipartisan plan—reported at \$1.2 trillion over eight years, with \$579 billion of it being new spending—raised hopes, it quickly became clear how big the hurdles are.

### 'It's a hustle'

"Dems are burning precious time & impact negotiating w/GOP," House Democrat Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez tweeted on Wednesday. But top Republican Mitch McConnell's plan "is to run out the clock," she added. "It's a hustle. We need to move now."

The popular lawmaker's message to the White House was clear: stop waiting for a unicorn deal to emerge with Republicans, and craft a bill that incorporates Democrats' priorities including addressing climate change. There is quicksand in both chambers of Congress, however. "We're trying to get an outcome on infrastructure. Something that is popular on both sides of the aisle," McConnell told Fox News on Thursday. "All we're insisting on is that the infrastructure bill be about infrastructure and not a whole lot of other things and that it be credibly paid for," he added. —AFP



## Business

# Gulf Bank successfully completes issuance of KD 50 million bonds

## Jointly managing the issuance with Kamco Invest and Markaz

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank has announced it has successfully completed its issuance of KD 50 million subordinated Tier 2 bonds. The bond issue was oversubscribed 1.57 times, with the total value of subscriptions amounting to KD 78.5 million.

Gulf Bank issued the subordinated Tier 2 bonds in Kuwaiti dinars, with a tenure period of 10 years, callable after 5 years, and of KD 50 million. The bonds were rated BBB+ by Capital Intelligence.

These bonds offer rewarding returns for holders of both fixed-interest bonds and variable-interest bonds. The KD 25 million Fixed Rate bonds offer a 4 percent interest, and the KD 25 million Floating Rate bonds offer a rate of 2.25 percent above the Central Bank of Kuwait's discount rate. The interest will be paid in quarterly installments, with payments commencing

on September 10, 2021.

On this occasion, Gulf Bank's CEO, Tony Daher, said: "We are proud of our successful issuance of KD 50 million bonds. These instruments have received great interest, as reflected by their demand volume reaching 157 percent, and indicate overall market confidence in the performance, position and strategic plans of Gulf Bank. We are confident that this issuance will contribute to enhancing Gulf Bank's capital adequacy, in compliance with Basel III frameworks, and will serve our upcoming investment plans towards making Gulf Bank the bank of the future."

The bond issuance process was jointly managed by both Kamco Invest and Kuwait Financial Centre (Markaz).

Faisal Sarkhou, Kamco Invest's CEO said: "We are proud of the efforts and



Tony Daher



Faisal Sarkhou



Ali H Khalil

cooperation portrayed by all involved parties who played a pivotal role in successfully completing this bond issuance. This transaction marks yet another milestone that will pave the path for additional issuances that will strengthen the local and

regional debt markets. Gulf Bank's financial position and clear vision have helped in closing the issuance in a short period with oversubscription. We look forward to managing more bond and sukuk issuances through our Debt Capital Markets team,

who have spared no efforts in delivering the best possible outcome for all our valued clients."

Commenting on the latest bond issuance, Ali H Khalil, CEO of Kuwait Financial Centre Company said: "Our participation in the Bonds transaction has been met with great attention by investors in view of the excellent reputation of Gulf Bank and the professional expertise of Markaz and the other lead managers in providing a variety of investment opportunities to the clients. Markaz assisted a number of local companies from various sectors in issuing bonds and sukuk to obtain financing required to support its businesses. We value our solid relationship with Gulf Bank and we seek to maintain and reinforce this relationship through the continuous cooperation between us."

## NBK launches new MX.3 solution for treasury, investments

KUWAIT: Treasury Group of National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) has announced the successful launch of phase one of the transformation of its Treasury and Investment systems to the advanced MX.3 platform in collaboration with Murex, the global leader in trading, risk management and processing solutions for capital markets. NBK's Treasury Group earlier signed a contract with Murex to provide the bank with its integrated platform solution, MX.3. The new solution supports all day-to-day trading and risk management operations. It was first tested in Kuwait and Bahrain before going live recently. MX.3 provides innovative solutions across all activities related to front-to-back-to-risk management and processing. The solutions provided by the new platform cover the Dealing Room, Treasury and Investment Operations and Risk Management in Kuwait as well as all of NBK's overseas branches and subsidiaries.

On this occasion, Jad J Zakhour, General Manager - Head of Treasury Group at National Bank of Kuwait, said: "The launch of the phase one of the new MX.3 platform is in line with the steps we have taken over the past years to develop our front-to-back infrastructure and implement a full-fledged digital transformation across the Group, in an effort to provide the most competitive Treasury solutions, regionally and internationally." The three-stage rollout of the new platform will support Treasury Group's strategy to comply with existing and future regulations across all the markets in which the Group operates, as well as expand its product offering and price products more efficiently, he added.

In phase one of the rollout of the MX.3 platform, the trading, operations and risk management solution went live for multiple asset classes in Kuwait and Bahrain, Zakhour noted. Zakhour explained that the MX.3 platform will allow NBK to build on its strengths as a key global player in providing Treasury solutions and supporting its regional customers, indicating that Treasury Group is working to develop its IT systems and infrastructure with the aim to improve customer service and thus increase customer satisfaction.

"As one of the leading banks in the region, we will continue to capitalize on our global experience and profound market insight to provide top-notch products and services to our customers," he added. For his part, Philippe Helou, Managing Partner and Co-founder at Murex, commented: "We are pleased with accomplishing the transformation of NBK's Treasury and Investments system by finishing phase one of the MX.3 platform implementation. This milestone will strengthen our long-standing partnership with NBK and our continued efforts to accelerate its digital transformation roadmap, working closely to provide cutting-edge IT solutions."

"Murex is an experienced partner with a well-established track record of supporting financial institutions' efforts toward excellence and innovation for the future by providing them with its most advanced IT platforms," he added. Zakhour and Helou praised the collaboration between NBK's business and support teams and Murex teams, which worked tirelessly over the past year to ensure a smooth and efficient transition to the new platform, despite the challenging context of COVID-19, including business closures and remote working. For more than 30 years, multi-awarded Murex has provided enterprise-wide, cross-asset financial technology solutions to capital markets players. Its cross-function platform, MX.3, supports trading, treasury, risk and post-trade operations, enabling clients to better meet regulatory requirements, manage enterprise-wide risk, and control IT costs. With more than 57,000 daily users in more than 60 countries, Murex has clients across the financial services industry, from banking and asset management to energy and commodities. Murex has a presence in 18 locations around the world, including New York, Singapore, Paris and Beirut.

NBK was named "Best Foreign Exchange Provider in Kuwait and the Middle East for 2021" for the ninth consecutive time in the annual survey of the reputable international magazine Global Finance. The ranking is based on input from industry analysts, corporate executives and technology experts around the world.

## Supplementary disclosure on AUB Capital Sukuk

KUWAIT: Reference is made to the above mentioned subject and our earlier disclosure dated 29 April 2021 and 26 May 2021 and in compliance with chapter 10 of decree 72 of year 2015 regarding the issuance of the revised executive bylaws of the CMA law number 7 of year 2010 regarding the disclosure of material information, we attach hereto the material information disclosure form announcing that Ahli United Bank K.S.C.P ("the Bank") has successfully issued the subject Sukuk on 09 June 2021 at the value of \$600 million. The total orders for Sukuk reached \$1.8 billion representing three times the targeted size. The oversubscription reflects the investors' confidence in the Bank's Management and its solid performance.

## European stocks advance as S&P 500 edges to record

NEW YORK, United States: European stock markets closed the week in a bullish mood Friday, while the S&P 500 edged to a second straight record as investors weighed US consumer confidence and inflation data.

Equity markets in Paris and Frankfurt cheered a day after the European Central Bank adopted a dovish policy posture even as it raised its growth forecast.

ECB chief Christine Lagarde on Thursday said it would be "too early and premature" to discuss tightening monetary policy, even as officials lifted their annual inflation outlook.

"European markets have ripped higher to close the week in a bullish mood," Fawad Razaqzada, analyst at ThinkMarkets, told AFP. "With the central bank covering their backs, investors bought every single short-term dip in stocks, causing the Euro Stoxx 50 and the CAC 40 to hit new highs for the year on Friday, with the German DAX also nearing its record high hit last week."

Britain's economic recovery, meanwhile, is gathering pace, with GDP growing by 2.3 percent in April alone as the UK government eased its lockdown, according to official data released Friday.

Back in the US markets, major indices finished a choppy session with modest gains.

A report released Friday from the University of Michigan showed a rise in consumer confidence as the widespread availability of Covid-19 vaccines brought shoppers back to stores.

"Looking ahead, we expect consumers will be more upbeat as the economy continues reopening and employment conditions heal further," Oxford Economics said in a note.

"Current pandemic-related supply constraints will steadily ease, supporting a healthier labor market and easing price pressures as economic dynamics normalize."

Government data released Thursday showed consumer prices at the highest level in 13 years, but the S&P 500 still finished the week at a record as the market seemed to conclude the May data represented a peak for inflation.

Oil prices also rose as the International Energy Agency said crude demand was set to rise above pre-pandemic levels by the end of next year.

Elsewhere, traders are keeping an eye on Friday's start to the G7 summit in Cornwall, in southwest England.

The United States and China clashed in rare talks as President Joe Biden made his international debut, with his administration pressing Beijing on Covid-19, Taiwan and human rights. —AFP

## AUB named 'Best Private Bank, Kuwait 2021'

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank (AUB) was awarded "Best Private Bank, Kuwait 2021" by the International Business Magazine. This prestigious Award is given annually by the International Business Magazine. AUB was conferred this Award in recognition of its successful clients services model that has been achieved by offering distinguished services and successful workshops to raise the customer awareness, and more importantly, managed clients' crises and cooperation within the digital transformation process.

In granting this Award, International Business Magazine conducted through precise supervision and scrutiny by a team of key experts in this field in addition to a judging panel composed of research experts and editors to make the final selection of the winners, where AUB received the highest votes

On this occasion, Jehad Al-Humaidhi, Acting CEO of Ahli United Bank, said: "We are delighted to have received this prestigious Award, which is added to the Bank's record of awards, stating that this Award is an apparent evidence of the continued growth, leadership and excellence achieved by AUB's Private Banking and Wealth Management".

Al-Humaidhi added that winning this Award by AUB in these exceptional circumstances that still



Jehad Al-Humaidhi

## Ooredoo launches 'Best Cash Price in Market' deal

KUWAIT: With Ooredoo Telecom, the first to introduce innovative digital services in Kuwait, smartphones exclusive offers, there's never been a better time to purchase the most advanced smartphones, and enjoy the best offers and postpaid plans in the country! If you've got your eye on the latest smartphone, Ooredoo Kuwait is your ultimate destination with the company's unique cash offers

happening for the first time in the country. During this thrilling promotional period, both existing and new customers can choose from invincible cash offers in which they have the privilege of purchasing their preferred smartphone in cash with special price, and yet enjoy the amazing features of postpaid Shamel plan including: non-stop 5G internet, non-stop roaming internet, non-stop local calls, and complementary digital vouchers.

Yousef Al-Shallal, Director of Marketing, Ooredoo Kuwait, said: "This is Ooredoo's biggest and most exciting cash offers for smartphones for this year! We are confident that these offers will witness a great turnout from our customers who are keen on acquiring the latest smartphone devices at best prices and special Shamel postpaid plans. Therefore, we have launched these offerings in order to satisfy their desires. This is undoubtedly the best time to purchase the smartphone of your choice, with the best deal to accompany it."

Offers during Ooredoo Kuwait's special cash smartphone offers are available to postpaid customers, on the latest smartphones including iPhone, Samsung, and Xiaomi.

One of the exceptional offers offered by Ooredoo Kuwait is for customers who are aiming to purchase iPhone 12 PRO Max 128GB, they can have for only KD 235 in cash with a subscription to Shamel 25 plan for KD 25 per month for 12 months and enjoy unlimited features including: non-stop 5G internet, non-stop roaming internet, non-stop local calls, and complementary digital vouchers.



cast their shadow over the economic scene due to the repercussions of COVID-19 pandemic is a strong indication of the Bank's success in adapting to various condition and succeeding in offering and providing more banking solutions, and continuing to develop services and products that gain customer confidence and recognition.

Al-Humaidhi expressed the Bank's sincere thanks and appreciation to the Wealth Management team for their outstanding performance and dedication. Meshari Shehab, Deputy General Manager of the Private Banking and Wealth Management, commented that client satisfaction is placed at the core point of the Private Banking approach to its Wealth Management services. High level of client satisfaction was achieved by availing the enormous banking services of AUB to the clients' particular needs. Therefore offering tailor made services on an exclusive level.

Finally, Shehab emphasized the Digitalization efforts critical role in addressing the ever increasing challenges presented by the clients' growing business requirements. These efforts synchronized perfectly with evolving business landscape of Digital Banking.

## NBK and LOYAC support cybercrime awareness programs

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) continues its support to LOYAC and sponsors its Cybercrime Committee Program as part of its commitment toward corporate social responsibility.

NBK's Sponsorship to the program aims to raise awareness on the cybercrime protection laws in Kuwait, and the most common mistakes that youth make on social media. The Cyber Crime Committee Program runs for 3 weeks, where participants will explore and research with specialists from the Ministry of Interior about topics that encourage their role as active members in our society.

The Program addresses cybercrime in Kuwait, the legality and how to correctly use online platforms. The participants are to create and showcase an awareness campaign based on their research and information they received. "NBK's sponsorship is part of its ongoing drive to fulfill its corporate social responsibilities", said NBK Public relations Officer, Joanne Al-Abduljaleel. "As part of the program, NBK and LOYAC will produce a video campaign for social media to help raise awareness on cybercrime."

Al-Abduljaleel added "NBK's sponsorship and support comes in line with the bank's customary and ongoing spirit of corporate citizenship as well as the vital role it plays in supporting youth." NBK continues to promote a range of philanthropic missions and social welfare programs as part of the humanitarian dimension of its corporate social responsibility to assert its leadership in supporting Kuwait's social development, standing as a model in serving all aspects of the community.

LOYAC is a nonprofit organization that runs several programs for the youth to develop their professional skills, enhance their personal growth and help them find their sense of purpose by extending themselves to others.



Joanne Al-Abduljaleel





A Cypriot man rides his moped past a mural by Greek artist Fikos, who describes himself as a "neo-muralist", in the Cypriot capital Nicosia.



Greek artist Fikos, who describes himself as a "neo-muralist", works on one of his murals in the Cypriot capital Nicosia.



A cat sits next to a mural by Greek artist Fikos, who describes himself as a "neo-muralist". — AFP photos

# Greek 'neo-muralist' draws on mythology to depict pandemic

An Athenian "neo-muralist" is blending Greek mythology and Byzantine iconography with graffiti and street art to depict how the coronavirus has forced people the world over to put down roots. From Bangkok to Rabat and Zurich, Fikos has painted the walls of many cities, but he's now adding a splash of color to the sun-beaten facades of the Cypriot capital Nicosia. "Here in Cyprus there are not many murals yet," he says. "It's the beginning phase of the street art scene in Cyprus, so... they are impressed and kind of awed when they see this happening."

The 33-year-old spends time wandering the narrow back alleys of Nicosia's Old City in search of walls to use as a canvas. The one he chose for his latest project is the cracked veneer of a crumbling mud-brick house in an abandoned, dusty lot near the UN-patrolled buffer zone that divides the city's Greek and Turkish-speaking halves. The Greek artist, who describes himself as a "neo-muralist", says he has been living on the Mediterranean island for the past year amid the Covid-19 pandemic, a theme reflected in his latest piece.

Standing on a wobbly platform, he gets to work with a brushstroke along the brow of Amaraucos, the perfume-maker of the mythical goddess Aphrodite, whose fate he says befits life in the time of the coronavirus. Bit by bit, a sketch evolves into a jade-green male figure with leaves sprouting from his head, branches protruding from his chest and roots extending from his legs. "He got punished by the gods and got turned into a plant or flower," says Fikos, who explains that he used the story from Cypriot mythology as an analogy for the pandemic, during which people "have grown roots" by staying in one place for so long.

### Stigma

Fikos says Cypriots have taken to his artwork, unlike others who tend to attach to it the stigma of graffiti. His works now adorn five facades on the Greek-Cypriot side of Nicosia, which has been divided on ethnic lines since communal unrest erupted in 1963-4. Fikos says he draws from a varied palette of influences, from art in ancient Greece to Egypt and Japan. One such artwork is located near the Green Line that divides Nicosia.



A mural by Greek artist Fikos, is pictured on a building on Stasikratous Street, a major shopping area in the center of Cypriot capital Nicosia.

It shows King Onassagoras, who ruled the kingdom of Ledra around 672 BC, next to three female figures — one of them Nicosia, depicted as a woman split in half. "I studied Byzantine painting since I was 13 years old in Athens, and I studied the art of the street in the streets," says Fikos. "Street art has

evolved from graffiti and it has different rules. You must leave your stamp," he says. "But my point of view is totally different. I'm always trying to adapt my sketch to the environment and get inspired from the colors of the neighborhood. My approach is more like fine art, I'd say."

### Mythology endures

Fikos says in the past he was unable to convince Athenians to let him paint over the garish graffiti that blankets the city, even for free. But now his appeal is growing both at home and abroad, and he gets paid for his work. Fikos says he has been commissioned to paint murals in many countries, including France, Ireland, Mexico, Russia, Serbia and Ukraine. They can cover entire facades of buildings as high as 17 storeys, like one in Kiev, yet they aren't overbearing and don't look out of place.

"Most of the time they have something in mind, they give me a theme," Fikos says of his commissions. "But... I do my research on history, mythology or whatever I find appropriate, then I sketch and I start to paint." Once the research is done, the process of painting the murals can take just two or three more days, he says. "I'm mostly inspired by Greek mythology, because I trust that if these myths have survived, they must have something to say." — AFP

## Elton John says Brexit a 'catastrophe' for new UK singers



visa-free travel on the continent for UK musicians.

John, 74, revealed that he met last month with Brexit minister David Frost to discuss the issue. "New and emerging artists will be unable to tour Europe freely — an essential part of their education and development — due to the prohibitive costs of visas, carnets and permits," he wrote. "However, despite this looming catastrophe, the government seems unable or unwilling to fix this gaping hole in their trade deal and defaults to blaming the EU rather than finding ways out of this mess." — AFP

Elton John on Thursday warned of a lost generation in the UK's music industry because of post-Brexit curbs on touring in the European Union. John was among musicians including Ed Sheeran and Pink Floyd's Roger Waters who signed a letter in January criticizing the Brexit deal. "Put bluntly, we are currently in grave danger of losing a generation of talent due to the gaping holes in the government's trade deal," the "Rocket Man" singer wrote on his Instagram page. The trade deal between Britain and the EU, which kicked in at the start of the year, no longer guarantees



Emma, a southern white five-year-old female rhino, stands at Tobu Zoo in Miyashiro, Saitama prefecture, suburb of Tokyo. — AFP

## Japan zoo prays for rhino love as new resident settles in

Japanese zookeepers are praying that a newly arrived white rhino will hit it off with her blind date when they meet later this year as "Emma" settles in to her new home near Tokyo. The horned herbivore, hand-picked by Taiwan's Leofoo Safari Park to start a family abroad, arrived in Japan this week, months later than planned due to pandemic complications. Yasuhiro Shimo, zoo division manager at Tobu Zoo in Saitama outside Tokyo, said the mild-mannered five-year-old would be introduced to her first suitor in September —

but a love match is far from guaranteed.

"The male is 10 years old, and is big. We will put them together and let them get acquainted. We think breeding will take a year," he told AFP. "Of course, if they are not compatible, they won't breed. All we can do is pray." On Friday, Emma could be seen relaxing after her travels, eating, napping and wandering around her paddock. She was picked from a herd of 23 rhinos because of her even temper and small size, which made her easier to ship overseas.

When her departure was delayed from March by the virus, keepers started teaching her Japanese words such as "come" and "no" to get her ready for the trip. "Emma is very used to people. In Taiwan, the keepers put mud on her body and cared for her in other ways like that, so she's familiar with humans. In general, she's quite calm," Shimo said. She is likely to double in size from her current slender 800 kilograms, he added. "She's still young. I think she will grow to two tons." — AFP

## 'Space pups': Mouse sperm stored on ISS produces healthy young

Turns out the comic books were wrong. Japanese researchers found mouse sperm exposed to high levels of cosmic radiation for nearly six years produced a large brood of healthy, unremarkable "space pups." Their study was published Friday in Science Advances — which noted no signs so far of Mousezillas or rodent Hulks. The sperm was stored in the International Space Station in freeze-dried form. Once brought back to Earth and rehydrated, it resulted in the birth of 168 young, free of genetic defects.

Developmental biologist and lead author Teruhiko Wakayama told AFP on Thursday that there was little difference between mice fertilized by space sperm and sperm that had remained confined to our planet. "All pups had normal appearance," he said, and when researchers examined their genes "no abnormalities were found." In 2013, Wakayama and colleagues at the University of Yamanashi in Japan launched three boxes, each containing 48 ampoules of freeze-dried sperm, to the ISS for the long-term study. They wanted to determine whether long term exposure to radiation in space would damage DNA in reproductive cells or pass mutations along to offspring.

That could be a problem for our own species in future space exploration and colonization missions. Batches were returned to Earth for fertilization after the first nine months, then after two years, and finally after six years, leading to hundreds of births. Freeze-dried sperm was selected for the experiment because it can be preserved at room temperature,



This image courtesy of Teruhiko Wakayama, University of Yamanashi, shows healthy offspring and next generation of mice derived from space preserved spermatozoa. — AFP photos

rather than needing a freezer. The ampoules were also small and very light, about the size of a small pencil, further cutting launch costs. When the space mice reached adulthood, they were randomly mated and the next generation appeared normal as well.

### Space colonies

Wakayama, now director for Advanced Biotechnology Center at the University of Yamanashi, told AFP he had been inspired by the science fiction of Heinlein and Asimov and once wanted to be an astronaut. Though he settled on becoming a scientist, the sense of wonder and whimsy about space exploration never left him.

"In the future, when the time comes to migrate to other planets, we will need to maintain the diversity of genetic resources, not only for humans but also for pets and domestic animals," Wakayama and colleagues wrote in their paper. "For cost and safety reasons, it is likely that stored germ cells will be transported by spaceships rather than by living animals." Getting to other planets means leaving the safety of Earth's protective atmosphere and magnetic field — which also extends to the ISS, 400 kilometers (250 miles) above the surface.

Deep space is filled with strong radiation from both solar particles and galactic cosmic rays from outside our system. Solar flares from the surface of the Sun generate particles that can have particularly devastating impacts on human health and penetrate current generation spaceships.

According to Wakayama, the process of freeze drying sperm increases its tolerance compared to fresh sperm, since the former does not contain water inside its cell nuclei and cytoplasm. According to the team's calculations, freeze-dried sperm could be stored for up to 200 years on board the orbital outpost. Humanity might also want to spread its genetic resources off planet in case of a disaster on Earth, the paper added. The study noted it is still necessary to investigate the effects of space radiation on frozen female eggs and fertilized embryos before humans take this next step into the space age. — AFP



This image courtesy of Teruhiko Wakayama, University of Yamanashi, shows quality 8-cell stage embryos derived from space sperm.





Various translations of the iconic tale "Bambi: A Life In The Woods" by Felix Salten are seen on display at the City Hall Library in Vienna. — AFP photos



A Japanese translation of the iconic tale "Bambi: A Life In The Woods" by Felix Salten is on display at the City Hall Library in Vienna



A man passes by a poster of Felix Salten (left) as he enters the exhibition 'Beyond Bambi - Felix Salten and the Discovery of Viennese Modernism'.

## NEGLECTED CREATOR OF 'BAMBI' CELEBRATED IN VIENNA SHOW

While the 1942 Disney film "Bambi" is world famous as a classic of animated cinema, the man behind the story — an eminent writer in pre-war Vienna who had to flee the Nazis — is little known. Felix Salten was a product of the cultural blossoming in the capital of the then Austro-Hungarian empire around the turn of the 20th Century. As a Vienna exhibition which shines a spotlight on the neglected creator shows, he was a prolific writer who moved in the same circles as the likes of Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis.

Salten wrote the iconic and poignant tale of the fawn bereaved of his mother by hunters in 1922 under the title "Bambi: A Life In The Woods". On its publication the following year, it did not enjoy immediate success among the reading public. However, in the 1930s, Salten himself a hunter-sold the film rights for the text for \$1,000 to an American producer, who in turn sold them to Disney. As for the book

itself, "Felix Salten changed publishers and from then on it became much more successful," said Ursula Storch, curator of the exhibition at the Wien Museum dedicated to the city's history. "Of course it was made even more famous by the film adaptation in 1942," Storch told AFP. But by then, "Bambi", along with the rest of Salten's work, had been banned because he was Jewish, first in Germany and then in Austria after Hitler's annexation of the country in 1938.

### Literary 'chameleon'

The film's success, however, was enough to give rise to numerous retellings of the story. Storch says that while Salten himself never offered a commentary on the meaning of the book, it is a powerful evocation of the dark side of human nature and the relationship between humans and the environment. "It's a book which is deeply anchored in its time and is much more than a simple children's story about

the loss of one's mother," said philosopher Maxime Rovere, author of the preface to a new French edition.

Given "the impression of fear, the way the animals must constantly escape," Rovere says it is "impossible not to make the link with (Salten's) personal experience", living as he did through an era of rising anti-Semitism. But as the exhibition makes clear, there is much more to the work of Salten than "Bambi". Born in 1869 in Budapest, he and his family moved to the imperial capital the following year. At around the age of 20, he began a career as a journalist, which remained his staple source of income for around 50 years, according to Marcel Atze, head of the manuscripts department at Vienna City Library.

However, Salten's oeuvre of some 50 books spans opera librettos, poetry, art criticism, film scripts and even a pornographic novel under the title of "Josefine Mutzenbacher". He won a reputation as a versatile literary "chameleon". Storch says

that his social life was no less notable, with Freud and composer Richard Strauss among his acquaintances. But the Anschluss shattered that world, with Salten later writing of his "contempt for the Viennese and for Austrians in general" after many of them joyfully welcomed Hitler's takeover of their country. His diaries record an ever-growing anxiety. "His writings are very moving," Atze, who spent several weeks poring over the journals with colleagues, said. "When you read them you can absolutely imagine what was happening," he added.

### 'Feeling of redemption'

Atze says that only a few such documents survive from this tumultuous period, making Salten "an unbelievably valuable witness". In March 1939, Salten fled to Switzerland, taking with him a library comprising thousands of volumes. Two years later, the Nazis stripped him of his nationality. Atze notes that this news is written in

red in Salten's diary instead of the usual blue or black and that the attendant possibility of being deported from Switzerland as a stateless individual must have left him "trembling" until his death in 1945.

His Swiss granddaughter Lea Wyler never knew him personally but says that accounts handed down through the family tell of a "broken man" marked by successive tragedies. "He had lost his only son in a car accident, he lost his home, Vienna, friends," she told AFP by phone. She laments the fact that out of work left by her "loving, humorous, cheeky" grandfather, only "Bambi" is remembered — and that the Disney adaptation has eclipsed the original. "The crazy thing is that everybody thinks that Disney wrote it. He did not even get that credit, that is really annoying," she said. Nevertheless, Wyler adds the fact that Vienna is now celebrating Salten has brought "a feeling of redemption". — AFP



Various translations of the iconic tale "Bambi: A Life In The Woods" by Felix Salten are seen on display at the City Hall Library.



A picture of Felix Salten, author of the iconic tale "Bambi: A Life In The Woods" is seen with various translations of his book at the City Hall Library.



A historical poster (right) for the animated film "Bambi" produced by Walt Disney is on view at the Wien Museum in Vienna.



The first English edition of the book "BAMBI" by Felix Salten is seen at the City Hall Library.

## Whale of a tale: US fisherman says swallowed by humpback

It sounds like a real-life take on "Pinocchio" — a US lobster fisherman says he was scooped into the mouth of a humpback whale Friday and yet lived to tell the story. "I was in his closed mouth for about 30 to 40 seconds before he rose to the surface and spit me out," Michael Packard wrote on Facebook hours after his brush with the depths. "A humpback whale tried to eat me," he added. "I am very bruised up but have no broken bones."

Packard's beyond-belief big fish yarn began, he told local paper Cape Cod Times, when he was diving for lobster off the coast of the northeastern state of Massachusetts. "All of a sudden, I felt this huge shove and the next thing I knew it was completely black," he said after being released from the hospital. He was about 35 feet down (10 meters) and his first thought was that he had been attacked by a shark, but the lack of teeth and obvious wounds made him reconsider. Packard said he began to struggle-but unlike in the classic chil-

dren's tale "Pinocchio" there was no need to build a fire to secure his escape.

"I saw light, and he started throwing his head side-to-side and the next thing I knew I was outside (in the water)," Packard told the paper. The story says Packard's fishing mate Josiah Mayo "saw the explosion of water as the whale surfaced and Packard was ejected," but doesn't include any quotes attributed to him. Jooke Robbins, director of humpback whale studies at the Center for Coastal Studies in Provincetown, Massachusetts, said she had no reason to doubt the account.

"I didn't think it was a hoax because I knew the people involved... So I have every reason to believe that what they say is true," she told AFP. Robbins said she had never heard of an "accident" of this type, but "it may be that he (Packard) was just in the wrong place at the wrong time." "When they (whales) fish... they rush forward, open their mouth and engulf the fish and the water very quickly," she said, adding they have large mouths, but throats so narrow they wouldn't be able to swallow a human.

The whale, which according to Mayo's description was on the young side, "may not be able to detect quickly enough that something is in the way." Even if all the details weren't yet known, one thing was clear for Robbins: "It is important for people to be quite aware... And when they see a whale, keep a good distance. It's really important to give whales their space." — AFP



In this file photo a Humpback whale jumps in the surface of the Pacific Ocean at the Uramba Bahía Malaga National Natural Park in Colombia. — AFP

## French artist Fred Forest aims to beat NFT record by \$1

French artist Fred Forest hopes to break the record for an NFT sale, the Cartier Foundation said Thursday, putting up a digital artwork for \$1 more than the \$69.3 million set by rival Beeple. Forest, the 88-year-old pioneer of multimedia art, is putting "NFT-Archaeology" up for sale through the OpenSea platform next week. It is a slightly modified version of his own "Parcelle/Reseau" ("Network-Parcel"), which was the first web-only artwork to be sold at auction in 1996.

That work was lost when the buyer went bankrupt and his computer was seized and destroyed, but Forest had kept a copy on his hard drive. Forest won't accept any bids below the asking price as he seeks to unseat US artist Beeple, real name Mike Winkelmann, who scored the market-shattering price of \$69.3 million for his digital collage "Everydays: The First 5,000 Days" through a Christie's auction in March. That sum was the third-highest by a living artist in history, and marked the definitive arrival of digital art, to the consternation of many in the traditional art world who have struggled to see the value in the new form. "The challenge for me is to dethrone Beeple," Forest told AFP.

But he said there was a wider point to be made. "In the art market, artists are not the ones that see the biggest dividends, it's the intermediaries. The Covid crisis and the development of digital will up-end the art world. Artists must become stakeholders and stop being manipulated." "NFTs", or "non-fungible tokens", allow artists to monetize digital art by giving buyers bragging rights to ultimate ownership, even if the work can be endlessly reproduced online. "NFT-Archaeology" will be shown on the Paris-based Cartier Foundation of Contemporary Art's Instagram on Tuesday.

The winning bidder will receive a painting that preceded the digital artwork, as well as a letter of authentication. Forest, a cofounder of two key movements in art, the "Sociological Art Collective" of the 1970s and "Aesthetics of Communication" in the 1980s, said part of the profits will go towards a project that provides legal and technical services to artists. — AFP

## Paris Opera names first South Korean star dancer

Dancer Sae Eun Park became the first South Korean to earn the highest "etoile" title at the Paris Opera ballet, a top honor reserved for just a handful of dancers in the company. Opera director Alexander Neef made the announcement, to a standing ovation, following Park's performance as the lead in "Romeo and Juliet" at the Opera Bastille on Thursday night. "We have all had the pleasure tonight of seeing a magnificent dancer who has shown us the extent of her talent," he said. "It gives me immense pleasure to name Mademoiselle Sae Eun Park an etoile dancer."

Elevated to "first dancer" in 2017 — the second-highest status — Park has been lauded for her elegant and fluid technique. Born in Seoul in December 1989, she joined the company a decade ago, having already been a soloist in her home country. "With the Korean National Ballet, I was already a soloist and dancing lead roles. When I joined the Paris Opera, I was always in the background, but I learned a lot," she told AFP in 2019.

Park won the Grand Prix de Lausanne at 17 and the Gold Medal at Varna, two of the leading prizes in the world for aspiring dancers.

The daughter of a pianist and Samsung employee, she initially trained in the Russian "Vaganova" style of ballet in Seoul. She discovered the French style when she took a class from a Korean ex-member of the Paris Opera. "It was a revelation," she recalled. "Vaganova is more about the upper body. The French style relies more on the feet. The technique came more naturally to me." But she also had wise words from her former Russian teacher: "She told me, 'Don't forget that despite the differences in style, the important thing is to express what is within you.'" Park is now part of a small handful of foreign etoile dancers at the Paris Opera, which includes Ludmila Pagliero, who became the first from Latin America in 2012. — AFP





## Sports

# Embiid scores 27 as Sixers roll over Hawks, Suns rout Nuggets

**LOS ANGELES:** Joel Embiid finished with 27 points, nine rebounds and eight assists as the Philadelphia 76ers snapped the Atlanta Hawks' run of good fortune at home with a 127-111 win in game three of their NBA Eastern Conference playoff series. The teams split the first two games in Philadelphia, but the Sixers dominated Friday to grab a 2-1 series lead and halt the Hawks' 13-game winning streak at home.

Tobias Harris scored 22 points, Ben Simmons tallied 18 points and seven assists, and Furkan Korkmaz drained three of six from beyond the arc for the 76ers in front of a crowd of 16,400 at State Farm Arena in Atlanta. Embiid had a couple of hard falls during the contest but nothing serious. "I'm OK," said Embiid, who is playing with a cartilage tear in his right knee. "I'm standing up, I'm walking. I finished the game. So I'm gonna keep getting back up. I'm going to keep fighting. That's been me since I've been playing basketball." Game four is Monday night in Atlanta.

Philadelphia shot 52 percent overall and an impressive 47 percent from beyond the arc, making 10 of 21 compared to Atlanta who made just six of 23. Philadelphia's three point shooting has improved as the series progressed, going from 34 percent in game one to 46 percent in game two. "I was just trying to push the pace and get in the lane, stay aggressive and get to the rim, get into a rhythm," Simmons said. "I think I did a good job of that in the second half."

The Sixers also once again contained the Hawks' rising star Trae Young, who finished with 28 points in 37 minutes of playing time. John Collins scored 23

points and Clint Capela had eight points and 16 rebounds in the loss. Philadelphia led 28-20 at the end of the first quarter and by five, 61-56, at halftime as Young had 16 points.

The Sixers seized command in the third, outscoring Atlanta 34-19 and extending their lead to 20 points heading into the fourth. Philadelphia roared out of the halftime break, making their first eight shots of the third quarter to build an 80-62 lead. Seth Curry highlighted their 19-6 scoring surge by nailing a three and a pair of short-range jump shots.

Elsewhere, Devin Booker scored 28 points and Chris Paul added 27 and eight assists as the Phoenix Suns seized a commanding 3-0 lead over the Denver Nuggets with a 116-102 victory. "We are peaking at the right time. The regular season prepared us for these games," Booker said. Deandre Ayton had 10 points and 15 rebounds, Jae Crowder scored 14 and Mikal Bridges added 11 for Phoenix, who can sweep the best-of-seven series on Sunday in Denver.

## 'Give our best'

"It is not going to be easy," said Crowder of the possible close out game. "We expect their best, and we are going to give our best too." Phoenix now has a stranglehold lead in the best of seven series and are just one win from reaching the NBA semi-finals for the first time since the 2009-10 season. Nikola Jokic, who received his MVP award before the game, had 32 points, 20 rebounds and 10 assists for the Nuggets but didn't get a lot of help from his supporting cast. Monte Morris scored 21, Michael Porter had 15 and Will Barton added 14 in the loss.

The Suns never trailed after being down 3-2.



DENVER: Nikola Jokic #15 of the Denver Nuggets looks for a shot against the Phoenix Suns in Game Three of the Western Conference second-round playoff series at Ball Arena on Friday. —AFP

Phoenix charged out to a 21-8 lead early and was up 37-27 after the first quarter. Denver scored the final six points of the half to trail just 59-55 at intermission. Phoenix began the final quarter by scoring

the first six points to lead by 20 with 10:17 left. "It was a great crowd. These playoff games have a higher intensity, and they are more physical," said Booker. —AFP

## Olympic 400m champ Horton misses qualifying

**ADELAIDE:** Olympic 400 m champion Mack Horton will not be defending his title in Tokyo after failing to qualify at the Australian trials yesterday, stunned by Elijah Winnington who swam the world's fastest time this year. Horton, who beat drug-tainted Chinese star Sun Yang for the title in Rio then refused to stand on the podium with him at the 2019 world championships, has been struggling for form this season.

The 25-year-old needed to come good on day one of the trials in Adelaide and he gave it his all, but his 3mins 43.92secs wasn't enough despite being one of the quickest globally in the last 12 months. He was narrowly in front at 300m but Winnington came storming back to win in a sizzling 3:42.65 with Jack McLoughlin (3:43.27) pipping Horton for second with only the top two making the grade. "It's really incredible," said 21-year-old Winnington. "I've changed coaches in the past year and it's been incredible for me. We've done so much work and that's why I had full confidence in my last 100."

Despite missing out on the 400m, Horton could still make the plane to Tokyo in the 200m today.

Swimming Australia has set the bar high at the six-day trials - to qualify, athletes must match or better the time needed to make the final at the 2019 world championships. A maximum of 56 swimmers - 28 men and 28 women - can be selected in a sport that has traditionally been the medal-winning backbone for Australia at the Olympics.

Emma McKeon, part of Australia's gold-medal-winning 4x100m relay team at the 2016 Rio Olympics, was also on fire, clocking the world's second fastest time of the year in the 100m butterfly to easily qualify. The 27-year-old made the turn under world record pace before touching in 55.93, behind only China's Zhang Yufei (55.73) this season as she zeroes in on Swedish great's Sarah Sjöström's 2016 world best of 53.48.

"I haven't done a PB in that event since 2017 so it's been a while and I felt like it was time," she said after setting a new Commonwealth and Australian record. "It's not relief, just joy. It's been a long time coming for everyone," she added of a difficult COVID-hit year. Brianna Throssell was second in 57.11, fractionally outside the qualifying time.

McKeon, who won four medals at Rio, is shaping up as one of Australia's best hopes in Tokyo. She will also race the 50m, 100m and 200m free in Adelaide. Brendon Smith was another to smash an Australian record in the 400m individual medley, hitting the wall in 4:10.04 to comfortably qualify in the world's fourth fastest time this season.

come prepared.

"It is challenging," Harrow said in an online interview from the team's base in Ota City, around 100 km north of Tokyo. "If it's cards or games that you can play on phones or whatever, you do need to break the boredom up a little, because there is a fair bit of downtime." Harrow said his players and staff - who were all vaccinated before leaving Australia - are glad to be training again after spending their first three days cooped up in the hotel.

They have played a series of practice games against Japanese teams, at a venue around a 10-minute bus ride from their hotel. "We're quite lucky because we do play games, and we're at the grounds for a good five, six hours. That takes up a fair chunk of the day," he said.

But he said it was disappointing that the team are barred from meeting Japanese fans. The only interaction they have with locals, he said, is when government officials come to their hotel every morning to test for the virus. "It is a shame, because we've been

processes, but it is hoped that the game can emerge from this difficult period stronger and determined to be more inclusive and welcoming to all." The ECB said the review would be "collaborative", with administrators, players, coaches and the Professional Cricketers' Association, the players' union, all involved.

## 'Sanction'

Revelations about Robinson's Twitter posts came just hours after both the England and New Zealand teams had lined up before play on the morning of the opening day of the first Test for a 'moment of unity' designed to show their determination to removed discrimination from cricket. The England side also wore T-shirts carrying the message "Cricket is a game for everyone".

ECB chairman Ian Watmore insisted Saturday the board remained committed to diversity and inclusion. "As the national governing body, we must steer a path between helping individuals project an inclusive image, educating them on what is expected of them and allowing them the space to express themselves to the public. We must also investigate their actions and sanction them when they fall short," he said.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson backed comments from his culture and sports secretary that the suspension of Robinson was "over the top". But yesterday's statement from the ECB insisted it retained faith in its disciplinary procedure. "The board is assured that the right processes are in place to make judgements on suspensions and disciplinary actions under player employment contracts," it said.

The issue has not just been confined to England



ADELAIDE: Elijah Winnington celebrates after winning the men's 400m freestyle final during day one of the Australian Olympic swimming trials yesterday. —AFP

Lee See-Bom swam a new personal best to finish second and also make the Tokyo team. "I've been putting in a pretty good block of training recently. I knew it (the record) was on the cards but I needed a very good race to do it," said Smith. In an upset, neither the fancied Zac Stubblety-Cook nor Matt Wilson posted fastest enough times in the 100m breaststroke. Stubblety-Cook touched first in 59.69, but outside the 59.21 needed, with former 200m breaststroke world record holder Wilson in fourth. Wilson will attempt to make the grade in the 200m on Tuesday. —AFP

to Ota City a couple of times and it's always great to interact with the locals," he said. "But we can't do anything about it. We just have to maintain this bubble and we can't put anyone in jeopardy."

The 'Aussie Spirit' team are restricted to three floors of their hotel, and have their own gym, dining room and meeting room. They must enter and exit the hotel through a special door, and have a lift reserved for their use. "I wouldn't have any idea how many guests are here," said Harrow. "We don't see any guests at all." But he said there were no complaints about the restrictions, insisting the team "just follow those instructions and try to abide by the rules".

The team arrived early in Japan because they needed game practice and couldn't go to the US as originally planned, he said. And despite the lack of interaction, Harrow said the team "have felt very welcome" in Japan, which he sees "as a positive that people are looking forward to the Olympics". "I guess people want to catch a glimpse of us at the grounds," he said. —AFP



BIRMINGHAM: England's Ollie Stone celebrates with England's captain Joe Root after taking the wicket of New Zealand's Daryl Mitchell during play on the third day of the second Test cricket match between England and New Zealand at Edgbaston Cricket Ground yesterday. —AFP

international, with county side Lancashire announcing Friday they had launched an "immediate review and investigation" into allegations of offensive tweets by five of their players. PCA chief executive Rob Lynch said the last week had been "an important period for all professional cricketers across our sport".

He added: "We are committed to working with our members and the ECB on further education, and there is always more that we can do. We will consult with our members and work with the ECB to develop terms of reference for a social media review, which in turn, will lead to better insight and an opportunity to improve." —AFP

## Mahrez strikes as African champions Algeria create record

**JOHANNESBURG:** Captain Riyad Mahrez scored as Algeria defeated Tunisia 2-0 in an international friendly this weekend to create a record 27-match unbeaten run by an African national team. An Ivory Coast side that included Yaya and Kolo Toure and Didier Drogba set a 26-match benchmark in 2013, and Algeria began their remarkable run by winning 4-1 away to Togo five years later.

Popularly known as the Desert Foxes, the north Africans set the record by winning 20 matches, drawing seven, scoring 58 goals and conceding 17. They faced 24 opponents from Africa plus Mexico, Colombia and Qatar, played nine matches at home, six away and 12 at neutral venues. Facing Tunisia away was a huge challenge as reigning African champions Algeria sought to overtake the mark set by the Ivorian 'golden generation'.

The Tunisians are ranked second in Africa, two places above Algeria, had home advantage and took a 12-match unbeaten run into the north African showdown. But Algerian fears that they might trip at the final hurdle were soon allayed as Qatar-based Baghdad Bounedjah and Manchester City winger Mahrez scored within 28 minutes of the kickoff. Rattled after conceding twice, there was no way back for the hosts against an Algerian defense marshalled by Aissa Mandi and Djamel Belamri.

The center-backs were among eight starters in Rades who also began the 2019 Africa Cup of Nations final against Senegal in Cairo, which Algeria won 1-0 through a Bounedjah goal. AC Milan midfielder Ismail Bennacer missed the wins over Mauritania, Mali and Tunisia this month due to a foot injury that required surgery.

Right-back Mehdi Zeffane and midfielder Adlene Guedioura were the other absentees and Youcef Atal, Ramiz Zerrouki and Haris Belkebla took their places. Guedioura did come off the bench during the second half only to be red-carded two minutes from the end of regular time. The line-up was composed exclusively of Algerians based in Europe and the Middle East, including three playing in France and two in Qatar while Mahrez the sole English Premier League representative. —AFP

## Australia softball team finds Olympic bubble 'challenging'

**TOKYO:** No meeting fans, no eating out and no sightseeing - life in the Tokyo Olympic bubble could be "challenging" for athletes, the first team to arrive in Japan has warned. Australian softball head coach Laing Harrow told AFP his players have been bingeing on Netflix and hitting the gym in a bid to "break the boredom" after landing in Japan on June 1.

He said the players "seem to be in a very good headspace", despite the severe restrictions, which organizers insist are necessary to hold the Games safely. But he warned other teams could find life difficult at the coronavirus-postponed Games, with cabin fever a potential risk for athletes who don't

## English cricket to launch review after Twitter storm

**LONDON:** The England and Wales Cricket Board is to launch a "social media review" that could lead to widespread disciplinary action following the fall-out from Ollie Robinson's Twitter posts. The Sussex seamer was suspended from England duty pending an investigation after historic racist and sexist posts made in 2012 and 2013 re-emerged during his Test debut against New Zealand at Lord's last week.

Since Robinson's posts re-emerged, the social media feeds of a number of internationals have been scrutinised, with an unnamed player found to have sent offensive tweets while under the age of 16. Meanwhile, the experienced England trio of James Anderson, Jos Buttler and limited overs captain Eoin Morgan have all faced accusations of publishing potentially offensive messages.

The ECB board met Wednesday, when they decided to look into the issue in more detail, with a statement issued Saturday saying: "The board agreed to the executive's recommendation for a social media review to address any historical issues, remind individuals of their personal responsibilities going forward, and help them learn lessons along the way."

"The board was clear that this process would not prevent further disciplinary action in the future, should that be required, under the applicable

## Sterling honored by Queen for racial equality fight

**LONDON:** Manchester City and England forward Raheem Sterling was on Friday named in Queen Elizabeth II's Birthday Honors list in recognition of his work to promote racial equality in sport. The 26-year-old, who has been heavily involved in anti-racism and anti-discrimination campaigns, has been made an MBE (Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire).

Sterling, a Premier League and League Cup winner with City this season, has been subjected to racial slurs in stadiums and online during his career. In 2019, he took part in an anti-racism campaign, "No Room For Racism" and spoke out last year as the Black Lives Matter movement gained traction following the murder of George Floyd in the United States.

The award comes just days after England players were booed by fans for taking the knee to protest against racial injustice before friendly matches ahead of Euro 2020. Almost a quarter, or 262 people, on the main honors list, which rewards individuals' bravery, service or achievement in their fields, have been recommended for coronavirus-related activities. —AFP



## Sports

# Krejcikova wins French Open, dedicates victory to Novotna

PARIS: Barbora Krejcikova won her maiden Grand Slam singles title at the French Open yesterday, beating Russia's Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova to become the first Czech woman in 40 years to conquer Roland Garros. Krejcikova, ranked 33 in the world and playing just her fifth main draw in a Slams singles event, triumphed 6-1, 2-6, 6-4 for a second career title.

The 25-year-old emulates compatriot Hana Mandlikova who claimed the trophy in Paris in 1981. The 25-year-old Krejcikova dedicated her victory to her mentor, the former Wimbledon champion Jana Novotna who died of cancer at the age of 49 in 2017. "It's hard to put into words. I cannot believe I have just won a Grand Slam," said Krejcikova who was still outside the top 100 when the 2020 French Open took place last October.

"I spent a lot of time with Jana before she died. Her last words to me were 'enjoy tennis and try and win a Grand Slam'. I know she's looking after me. All this is pretty much because she is looking after me. It was amazing that I got the chance to meet her. She was such an inspiration. I miss her and I hope she's really happy."

In a nervy start to the final, Krejcikova was bro-

ken in the first game, serving up two double faults. However, the 29-year-old Russian was unable to capitalise and dropped the next six games as her Czech opponent grabbed three breaks and raced away with the opener inside half an hour. Krejcikova was rewarded for her bold attacking, hitting 13 winners to the Russian's seven.

Pavlyuchenkova, who made her Slam debut back in 2007, was the more composed player in the second set, stretching out to 5-1. A medical timeout at 5-2, during which she was seen munching Haribo gummy bears, merely delayed the Russian levelling the final. In the decider, the players exchanged breaks in the third and fourth games, before the Czech broke to love for 4-3 on the back of a 10-shot rally.

Pavlyuchenkova saved two championship points in the ninth game and a third in the 10th but Krejcikova became champion on the fourth when the Russian hit long. Both women capitalized on a draw in which the top seeds fell and just kept falling. World number one and 2019 champion Ashleigh Barty hobbled out in the second round. Serena Williams was knocked out in the fourth round, world number two Naomi Osaka withdrew after one match, while 2018 champion Simona Halep never even made it to Paris. — AFP



PARIS: Czech Republic's Barbora Krejcikova kisses and celebrates with the Suzanne Lenglen Cup after winning the women's singles final match against Russia's Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova during the trophy ceremony of The Roland Garros 2021 French Open tennis tournament yesterday. — AFP

## Mickelson chases US Open win, Bryson seeks repeat

LA JOLLA: Phil Mickelson will try to complete a career Grand Slam on his hometown course while long-driving Bryson DeChambeau defends his first major title in next week's US Open. The 121st US Open begins Thursday at Torrey Pines on the coastal cliffs of the Pacific Ocean, the same golf course where Tiger Woods outlasted Rocco Mediate in an epic playoff to win the 2008 US Open on a broken leg.

"How much pain he went through, how much struggle and strife and agony he went through, all that pain, and to come out on top is something that is unfathomable," DeChambeau said. "It has inspired me to work even harder." Woods, an eight-time winner at Torrey Pines, won't be competing after suffering severe leg injuries in a February car crash, but there will still be drama on the layout where the US PGA Tour's Farmers Insurance Open is staged annually.

Mickelson, a left-hander from nearby San Diego, shocked the golf world last month by winning his sixth major title at the PGA Championship on Kiawah Island, becoming the oldest major champion in history at age 50. Ageless wonder Mickelson, three times a PGA event winner at Torrey Pines, turns 51 on Wednesday and has people wondering if fate has handed him one last chance at winning a US Open after a record six runner-up efforts. "I do believe that if I stay sharp mentally I can play well at Torrey Pines," Mickelson said. "I'm going to put everything I have into it."

That has meant two weeks of work preparing his game, mentally and physically, at Torrey Pines. "I'll spend time on the greens and really try to be sharp," Mickelson said. "Because I know that I'm playing well and this could very well be my last really good opportunity to win a US Open." Mickelson could become the sixth golfer to capture the four major titles, joining a career Grand Slam group that includes Woods, Jack Nicklaus, Gary Player, Ben Hogan and Gene Sarazen.

Fifth-ranked DeChambeau captured last September's US Open at Winged Foot with a ball-blasting style that cared little about landing areas, counting on shorter distance to make approaches easier and putts shorter.

The strategy paid off in a major win but fears DeChambeau might overwhelm golf courses have proven unfounded. While he won again at Bay Hill in March and has drawn wild cheers with some spectacular drives, DeChambeau only shared 34th and 46th at the past two Masters and 38th at May's PGA.

The US Open is known for formidable rough, the sort that could force the American to change his maximum distance tactics. "We go and practice that week to see if it's feasible to hit 7-irons out, pitching wedge out of it, hit 4-iron out of it even," DeChambeau said. "If it's not, then we literally have to change our dynamics and our course thought, depending on where long rough is, where I can essentially hit it."

Spain's third-ranked Jon Rahm, the 2017 Farmers winner, tested positive for Covid-19 last weekend at the Memorial and was forced into isolation until the eve of the US Open, dimming his hopes even if able to play. Ninth-ranked American Patrick Reed, the 2018 Masters champion, won the most recent PGA Tour title at Torrey Pines in January and takes confidence from that.

"I definitely take good vibes from it," Reed said. "It's Torrey Pines. You have to hit the fairway, you have to hit greens, you got to make putts." "Any time you're playing a US Open you know how penalizing the rough's going to be, so you got to have full control over your golf ball. You have to go and hit fairways and attack the golf course." World number 10 Rory McIlroy, whose first major title came a decade ago, snapped an 18-month win drought last month at Quail Hollow but hasn't won a major since the 2014 PGA. — AFP

## Djokovic conquers 'Everest' and eyes 52-year landmark

PARIS: Novak Djokovic can become the first man in 52 years to win all four Grand Slam titles twice in the French Open final today after conquering Rafael Nadal, the 'Mount Everest' of Roland Garros. World number one Djokovic takes on Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas for the title with tennis history on the line. Victory for the Serb will take him alongside Roy Emerson and Rod Laver as the only men to capture the four majors more than once.

It's an achievement that has proved even beyond the capabilities of Nadal and Roger Federer. It is so rare an accomplishment that it hasn't happened since 1969 when Laver completed his second calendar Grand Slam. Djokovic can pocket a 19th Slam with victory and move just one behind the record of 20 jointly held by Nadal and Federer.

Djokovic insists there will be no let-down physically or emotionally after reaching the final in Paris for a sixth time with an epic triumph over 13-time champion Nadal. "It's not the first time that I play an epic semi-final in a Grand Slam and then I have to come back in less than 48 hours and play finals," said the 34-year-old. "My recovery abilities have been pretty good throughout my career." His four-hour, four-set battle with Nadal is already jostling for a prime spot in the list of "greatest ever

matches" at the Slams.

### 'Never believed'

It featured a lung-busting 92-minute third set and required government intervention to allow the 5,000 fans inside Court Philippe Chatrier to watch the match's conclusion despite it extending beyond the 11pm Covid-19 curfew. The 3-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7/4), 6-2 triumph gave Djokovic the honor of being the only man to have beaten Nadal in Paris more than once, having first achieved it in the 2015 quarter-finals. Nadal has only lost three times in 108 matches since his title-winning debut in 2005. Djokovic, the 2016 champion, said it was his best win in Paris and ranked it among his "three greatest" ever performances. He broke the Spaniard eight times from 22 break points and fired 50 winners. A weary Nadal committed 55 unforced errors.

"It's hard to find words bigger than all the superlatives you can think of for Rafa's achievements at Roland Garros," said Djokovic who now leads their series 30-28 and had lost three finals in the French capital to Nadal. "Each time you step on the court with him, you know that you have to kind of climb Mount Everest to win against this guy here."

Nadal, the defending champion and



PARIS: Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates after winning against Spain's Rafael Nadal at the end of their men's singles semi-final tennis match on Friday. — AFP

chasing a record-setting 21st Grand Slam title, refused to dwell on the consequences. "I'm sad to have lost in the most important tournament of the year for me, but life goes on, it's nothing more than a defeat on a tennis court," said the 35-year-old who conducted a hasty press conference while Djokovic was still giving his on-court interview.

Djokovic will be playing in his 29th Slam final today. He holds a 5-2 record over Tsitsipas, a run which includes all three meetings on clay. At last year's Roland Garros, Djokovic won their semi-final over five sets. "We played an epic five-setter last year in the semis here. I know it's going to be another

tough one," added Djokovic who also defeated Tsitsipas in Rome on the eve of the French Open. "I'm hoping I can recharge my batteries as much as I can because I'm going to need some power and energy for that one."

Tsitsipas, 22, and 12 years younger than the Serb, is in his first Slam final having ended a run of three semi-final losses by defeating Alexander Zverev over five sets on Friday. Victory on Sunday would allow him to become the first Greek player to win a Slam title. He would also become the youngest champion in Paris since Nadal in 2008 and overall at the Slams since Juan Martin del Potro at the 2009 US Open. — AFP

## 'Life goes on, it's just tennis,' says Nadal as reign ends

PARIS: Rafael Nadal shrugged off his epic loss to Novak Djokovic at the French Open insisting "life goes on" as the 13-time champion suffered just his third ever defeat in 108 matches in Paris over 16 years. In their 58th career clash, world number one Djokovic triumphed 3-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7/4), 6-2 in the semi-final and stays on course to capture a 19th major and become the first man in over 50 years to win all four Slams twice.

Nadal, the defending champion and chasing a record-setting 21st Grand Slam title, refused to dwell on the consequences of his 4-hour 11-minute loss. "I am sad to have lost in the most important tournament of the year for me, but life goes on, it is nothing more than a defeat on a tennis court," said 35-year-old Nadal. "If everything goes well, tomorrow I will be at home with my family and friends, and then we will see what is next."

Nadal said he plans to be back in 2022 although admitting that time is not on his side if he wants to re-establish his Paris dominance. Had he made today's championship match, he would have been the oldest Roland Garros finalist in the modern era. "Although it is a very important tournament for me, I am aware that you cannot win it 15 or 16 times," he added. "Next year I will come again, God willing, with the belief and with the necessary work to be able to give myself another chance."

In their 58th career meeting, and ninth at the French Open, Nadal had looked comfortably on course for victory when he raced to a 5-0 lead in the first set. But 2016 champion Djokovic, the man now responsible for two of Nadal's losses in Paris having also triumphed in the 2015 quarter-finals, hit back.

### 'Did not hurt him'

As the match progressed into the later heavier, humid and slower conditions, the world number one flourished. He claimed a titanic 92-minute third set which had seen him serve for it at 5-4 and then have to save a set point in the 12th game. In the fourth set, he was 0-2 down before racing away with the next six games for his second win in Paris over Nadal in nine meetings. That sequence also included defeats in the 2012, 2014 and 2020 finals.

Djokovic will now be playing in his sixth Roland



PARIS: Spain's Rafael Nadal leaves the court after the men's singles semi-final tennis match against Serbia's Novak Djokovic on Friday. — AFP

Garros final and 29th at the Slams. "In the end, of course, if you win the third set you can say that was the key, because it changes the dynamic," said Nadal. "At times, my ball did not hurt him. You have to give him credit, congratulate him, but I know I can play better on this court."

When asked if he had faced the best Djokovic performance of their 15-year rivalry, he was adamant. "No, that's what I feel. He has not faced my best self either. There were games on the limit, games that anyone could win, and today it was for him." Despite that, there is a degree of evidence that Nadal is beginning to lose more epics than he wins at the Slams.

At the Australian Open in February, he lost to Stefanos Tsitsipas from two sets up in a five-set quarter-final defeat. Tsitsipas, who faces Djokovic in today's final, is 13 years younger than Nadal. In the Wimbledon semi-finals in 2018, Nadal lost a final set 10-8 to Djokovic after getting injured in the fifth set of his Australian Open semi against Marin Cilic earlier that same year. Even Gilles Muller of Luxembourg beat him at Wimbledon in 2017, courtesy of a 15-13 final set. "It doesn't matter," added a rueful Nadal. "That's tennis. The player who gets used to the conditions better is the player who deserves to win." — AFP

## Ledecky, Dressel poised to dominate at US Olympic trials

OMAHA: Superstars Katie Ledecky and Caeleb Dressel aim to cement their Tokyo Games berths as the pressure-packed US Olympic swimming trials get underway today. Both freestyle phenomenon Ledecky and multi-event star Dressel bring formidable credentials to the eight-day meeting in Omaha, Nebraska, where only a top-two finish can secure an individual race berth in Tokyo and one poor race can consequently spell heartbreak.

The tension has only been ramped up by the one-year delay to the Games because of the coronavirus pandemic. "I think the kids are dying to race," said Ray Looze, who coaches breaststroker Lilly King. He thought times overall might be a little slower than a typical trials. "If anybody sets a world record, that's a phenomenal accomplishment," Looze said. "But I think there's going to be some world records that go down because there's been some people that have had to go through a great deal and they really, really want it bad."

While meets and even training were shut down for a time, Dressel has demonstrated flashes of brilliance with two short-course world records in International Swimming League action in November. In May, he clocked an impressive 51.15sec in the 100m butterfly at a meeting in Atlanta. It was nowhere near his world record of 49.50 set in 2019, but Dressel said his long course times were trending in the right direction heading into trials.

The 24-year-old is a contender in the 50m and 100m freestyles as well as the 100m fly and will be a key contributor to the US relays. Since Rio in 2016 - where he teamed with Michael Phelps and Nathan Adrian as part of a gold medal-winning 4x200m free relay - Dressel has emerged as a star adding 13 world titles to his resume. He's entered in six events in Omaha and will likely spearhead the US challenge in the Tokyo pool now that Phelps - whose 28 Olympic medals include 23 gold - has departed the scene.

This year's trials mark the first time since 1996 that Phelps hasn't competed at a US Olympic swimming trials. Dressel says he doesn't see himself as picking up the Phelps mantle. "I don't think that falls on my shoulders alone," he said. For a start, there's Ledecky. A prohibitive favorite in the 200m, 400m, 800m and 1500m freestyles, she is the world record holder in the 400m, 800m and 1500m free. — AFP



## Sports



# Delayed Euro 2020 tourney begins under COVID cloud

**PARIS:** The delayed Euro 2020 tournament finally kicked off with victory for an impressive Italy side on an emotional night in Rome. After a year of football played largely in empty stadiums due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Stadio Olimpico was filled to a quarter of its capacity for the opening game and the home fans in the crowd of 16,000 were treated to a 3-0 win for Italy against Turkey.

Roberto Mancini's side came into the tournament on a 27-game unbeaten run and laid down a marker with a comprehensive victory. Ciro Immobile and Lorenzo Insigne scoring after Merih Demiral's own goal had put them in front. The result capped what Mancini described as "a beautiful evening" in the Italian capital as a spectacular sound and light show preceded kick-off and tenor Andrea Bocelli performed 'Nessun Dorma', popularised during the 1990 World Cup held in Italy.

"To win 3-0, and with the supporters in the stadium again at last, makes it all the more special," said the Italian coach after the Group A curtain-raiser. Amid all the euphoria veteran defender Leonardo Bonucci called for "cool heads, humility and a down to earth" approach while maintaining "hearts of fire". Rome is one of 11 cities across the continent hosting matches, the unprecedented pan-European format creating major headaches for UEFA during a pandemic.

## 'Special situation'

The majority of the venues will only be partially-filled for matches, although Budapest is planning to fill its Puskas Arena to 100 percent of capacity. Matches are being played from as far apart as Seville to Baku in Azerbaijan, where Wales and Switzerland met in the first of three games yesterday. Ongoing travel restrictions mean there is little of the carnival atmosphere usually associated with a major tournament when fans converge on host cities.

"We all have to adapt to a special situation," UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin told AFP. The

build-up has been overshadowed by several positive COVID-19 cases among players. On Friday Russia announced winger Andrei Mostovoy had contracted the virus and was ruled out of the tournament. Spain's squad were vaccinated on Friday following positive tests to two players - Sergio Busquets and Diego Llorente. Busquets will miss Monday's match against Sweden in Seville but Llorente has rejoined the squad after four subsequent negative tests. "All these things have made us stronger as a group," said Llorente.

## 'Massive honor' for Bale

In Baku, up to 31,000 fans were able to attend yesterday's first game, when Wales - semi-finalists at Euro 2016 in France - took on the Swiss in Group A with Gareth Bale wearing the captain's armband. "It's going to be a massive honor to lead your country out in a major tournament. It's going to be one of the highlights of my career," Bale said. That match was followed by Denmark's clash with Finland in Copenhagen in Group B.

Denmark, European champions in 1992, were spurred on by 16,000 of their own fans against Finland. Kasper Hjulmand, the Denmark coach, said his side "dared to dream big" as they prepare to face a Finland team making their major tournament debut. Belgium faced Russia in Saint-Petersburg in yesterday's late match but Roberto Martinez's team will be without playmaker Kevin De Bruyne, who is still recovering from the facial fractures he suffered playing for Manchester City in the Champions League final.

Among the other leading contenders, England enter the fray today and hope to make the most of home advantage when they take on 2018 World Cup runners-up Croatia in London. The match risks being overshadowed by a row over players taking the knee to highlight racial injustice. England manager Gareth Southgate says his players will continue the gesture, despite boos by some fans before

games at home are "pure adrenaline" as the 31-year-old scored his first international goal in his club stadium. Merih Demiral's own goal got the ball rolling in the second half before Immobile and Lorenzo Insigne completed the victory. "We did what we had to do, it was our duty to win the first game on front of our fans," said Immobile, who has scored four goals in the last five matches.

## 'Spine-chilling'

Mancini's front-line trio of Immobile, Lorenzo Insigne and Domenico Berardi proved efficient for an Italy who are without a stand-out star striker. Italy missed out on the 2018 World Cup, and the 'Azzurri' had not hosted an international match since the 1990 World Cup. Tenor Andrea Bocelli's rousing performance to 'Nessun Dorma', popularized during that world tournament, set the tone for the night.

"There was an incredible emotion before the match, it was spine-chilling," said Roma midfielder Leonardo Spinazzola, UEFA's man-of-the-match after his performance in his club stadium. "Then it was a perfect match, zero goals conceded and we played great football. "We have a strong team, an incredible mix of strength and technique."

Berardi had a role in all three goals against Turkey, and has scored five goals in his last seven games for Italy. "Our secret is the group," said Napoli's Insigne. "No one's place is guaranteed, those who play know what to do and we put ourselves at the service of each

other." Veteran coach Claudio Ranieri praised Mancini's style which has proved so successful in reviving the four-time world champions.

"What lucidity Mancini has, he knows how to manage emotions," Ranieri wrote in La Gazzetta dello Sport yesterday. "The first game is always the most dangerous, there is the pressure of the debut, the desire to overdo it can sometimes lead you to make mistakes, but Roberto Mancini was really good. He managed emotions, the tactical plan, the most delicate moments of the match with clarity." —AFP

came to prominence in the Ajax side that reached the Champions League semifinals in 2019 before earning big-money moves away. De Jong needed a season to adapt to life in La Liga after his €75 million (\$85 million) transfer to the Camp Nou, but he comes into Euro 2020 off the back of an outstanding second campaign. The only concern is how fresh he is now after playing 4,492 minutes for Barcelona in the 2020/21 season, across 49 appearances in total. That was at least 300 minutes more than anyone else in the squad - Jordi Alba and Lionel Messi were next - and the second-most of any outfield player in La Liga.

A brilliantly gifted midfielder who has also often played in central defence, De Jong's importance at the Camp Nou grew after Ronald Koeman-the man who gave him his full international debut-became coach last August. He has even added runs into the box and goals to his game, including one in Barca's 4-0 win over Athletic Bilbao in the Copa del Rey final. "He has played in every position except goalkeeper. He is incredible," Netherlands coach Frank de Boer said in a recent interview with Spanish

who beat Southgate's men in the World Cup semi-finals in Russia three years ago. But England have been revitalized under the former international defender and they go into this weekend's Group D opener at Wembley with mounting belief they can emulate the success of Bobby Moore and company on home turf more than half a century ago. Southgate has selected one of the youngest and most intriguing squads in the tournament, with the emergence of Phil Foden, Mason Mount and Jude Bellingham heralding a bold new era for the Three Lions.

With England playing all their group games at Wembley, which is also hosting matches in the last-16, semi-finals and final, the stage is set for Southgate's men to make the most of home advantage. To do that, captain Kane must stay fit and firing on all cylinders. Kane fin-



**ROME:** A fireworks display is triggered over the Olympic stadium on Friday as part of the UEFA Euro 2020 2021 European Football Championship's opening ceremony, prior to the competition's kick off Turkey vs Italy. —AFP

recent friendlies. Wembley is hosting eight games in total in the 24-team tournament, including both semi-finals as well as the final on July 11.

## Ukraine shirt row

World Cup holders France - with Karim Benzema recalled from a five-and-a-half-year international exile - are the firm favorites to add the continental crown. Holders Portugal, with Cristiano Ronaldo backed up by a star-studded squad, are also a threat. Meanwhile Ukraine's football association

said Friday it had managed to agree on a compromise with UEFA over Euro 2020 kits that feature patriotic slogans and sparked Russia's ire.

Kiev angered Moscow after its football association unveiled kits showing the outline of Ukraine including Crimea, which was annexed by Russia in 2014. Russia criticized a slogan written on the inside of the shirts - "Glory to the Heroes". A UEFA spokesperson told AFP that Ukraine had agreed to cover up the slogan with a smaller map of the country. —AFP

## Perfect start for Mancini's Italy in Euro 2020 quest

**ROME:** Italy capped a perfect night in the Stadio Olimpico with a Euro 2020 opening win over Turkey but coach Roberto Mancini warned that the road was long between Rome and Wembley. A 28-match unbeaten run has put Mancini two games short of Italy's two-time World Cup winning coach Vittorio Pozzo's record of 30 unbeaten games between 1935 and 1939.

"We still have six games ahead of us. It's a long way," said the 56-year-old former Manchester City manager who took over in 2018 after Italy failed to qualify for the World Cup that year. Amid the euphoria veteran defender Leonardo Bonucci called for "cool heads, humility and a down to earth" approach while maintaining "hearts of fire".

In front of 16,000 fans, and preceded by a glittering opening ceremony, the spark was lit for a run which Mancini hopes will end with a second European title after 1968 in London on July 11. Italy have the advantage of playing their Group A matches at home and next meet Switzerland in Rome on Wednesday followed by Wales four days later.

For Lazio forward Ciro Immobile, the group

## Dutch hope De Jong has enough left in tank for Euro bid

**AMSTERDAM:** He is one of the leaders of a new-look Netherlands, but as they make their hotly-anticipated return to a major tournament the hope is that Frenkie de Jong has enough left in the tank to play a key role at Euro 2020. The Dutch, last seen at a major tournament at the 2014 World Cup when they came third, kick off their European Championship campaign today when they host Ukraine in Amsterdam.

After failing to qualify for Euro 2016 or the 2018 World Cup, the likes of Robin van Persie, Arjen Robben and Wesley Sneijder have all gone and a new Dutch generation has emerged. It is embodied by De Jong, the 24-year-old Barcelona playmaker, along with Matthijs de Ligt, at Juventus. The duo

## Ambitious Kane key to England Euro challenge

**LONDON:** Harry Kane holds the key to England's bid to end 55 years of hurt as Gareth Southgate's side start their Euro 2020 campaign with a revenge mission against Croatia today. England have not won a major trophy since the 1966 World Cup and their under-achieving history is littered with heartache and embarrassment on the big stage. One of their more painful defeats in recent years came at the hands of Croatia,



**ROME:** Italy's forward Ciro Immobile (left) kicks the ball next to Turkey's midfielder Okay Yokuslu during the UEFA EURO 2020 Group A football match between Turkey and Italy at the Olympic Stadium on Friday. —AFP

other." Veteran coach Claudio Ranieri praised Mancini's style which has proved so successful in reviving the four-time world champions.

"What lucidity Mancini has, he knows how to manage emotions," Ranieri wrote in La Gazzetta dello Sport yesterday. "The first game is always the most dangerous, there is the pressure of the debut, the desire to overdo it can sometimes lead you to make mistakes, but Roberto Mancini was really good. He managed emotions, the tactical plan, the most delicate moments of the match with clarity." —AFP



Frenkie de Jong

sports daily Marca. "At the Euro he will be one of our key players. If Frenkie plays well, the Netherlands will play well." —AFP

ished as the Premier League's top scorer for the third time after scoring 23 goals this season.

The 27-year-old is at the peak of his powers and burning with ambition. No wonder he has told Tottenham - without a trophy since 2008 - that he wants to join a club capable of giving him the medals his talent deserves. Kane's transfer saga will be one of the stories of the Premier League close-season, with champions Manchester City leading the chase for the £150 million-rated (\$212 million) striker.

Southgate insists Kane will be able to put aside personal ambitions for the duration of England's assault on the European Championship. "I think his focus is on the team. I think he is very clear on that. The individual awards and achievements are of course a very special thing and have been very richly deserved." —AFP

## Row threatens to dent England feel-good factor

**LONDON:** England is preparing to host its biggest football party for a generation but home matches at Euro 2020 risk being overshadowed by a row over players taking the knee to highlight racial injustice. Manager Gareth Southgate says his England players will continue the kneeling gesture adopted in the Premier League, despite boos by some fans before recent friendlies against Austria and Romania.

The jeers were drowned out by applause at Middlesbrough's Riverside Stadium, but there are fears England's European Championship opener against Croatia today could be blighted by an embarrassing repeat. Players in England's top flight have been going down on one knee before kick-off since George Floyd, who was black, was killed by a white police officer in the United States last year.

Matches had largely taken place in empty stadiums as a result of coronavirus restrictions, but now fans are back the issue has been thrust front and center. All three of England's group matches are at Wembley, as are the semifinals and final of the pan-European tournament, turning it into a virtual home event for Southgate's men. They will also play at Wembley in the last 16 should they top Group D.

Brendan Clarke-Smith, a lawmaker for Britain's ruling Conservative Party, wrote on Facebook that taking the knee "now comes across as little more than habitual tokenism and has lost its effect". In contrast, the opposition Labour party's John McDonnell said the booping of the gesture was "racism". Prime Minister Boris Johnson was initially equivocal over the booping but his spokesman has made it clear that he "would like everyone to get behind the team to cheer them on, not boo".

Ex-NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick started kneeling to protest against racial injustice in 2016 and the gesture has become a familiar sight across a range of sports since the Floyd murder. Piara Powar, executive director of anti-discrimination organization the Fare Network, told AFP that taking the knee was still a meaningful act, which had sparked a "culture war-type debate". "It is something that is impactful," he said. "If it wasn't impactful, people wouldn't be booping it." —AFP



Harry Kane



## Eriksen 'awake' after collapsing on pitch

### 'Excellent' Moore grabs point for Wales in Euro 2020 opener

**COPENHAGEN:** Denmark star Christian Eriksen was awake in hospital, the Danish Football Union said yesterday, after he collapsed on the pitch during the Euro 2020 game against Finland in Copenhagen. "Christian Eriksen is awake and is undergoing further tests" at the hospital, the Danish federation said on Twitter, after the player was carried off the field having received CPR by medical personnel.

UEFA said Eriksen had been "stabilized" after the match was suspended in the first half. European football's governing body added that a "crisis meeting" had taken place with both teams and match officials, with the game set to resume at 1830 GMT. Group B's opening match was stopped after Eriksen fell to the earth near the touchline at the end of the first half, with Danish players in tears as medical staff tried to revive the Inter Milan player.

The previously raucous crowd at the Parken Stadium in the Danish capital fell silent, with the 29-year-old's teammates gathering around him to stop anyone from seeing his on-pitch treatment. Denmark goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel and captain Simon Kjaer had to comfort Eriksen's stricken partner Sabrina Kvist Jensen by the side of the pitch.

After around 15 minutes Eriksen was stretchered off the field followed by the rest of the Denmark team, while Finland's players also walked off. The fans in the stadium, who were celebrating the chance to see their national team again live at the stadium, sat silently in their seats waiting for news of Eriksen's condition.

However soon after stadium-wide chants of "Christian" and "Eriksen" from both sets of supporters began to ring out as his status began to filter through to supporters. They were brought to their feet when stadium announcers said that Eriksen was "stable".

Earlier, Wales coach Robert Page praised Kieffer Moore after the towering striker claimed a point for Wales in a 1-1 draw with Switzerland in Baku yesterday to start both teams' Euro 2020 campaigns. Moore responded to Breel Embolo's second-half opener with a quarter of an hour remaining. Both sides trail Group A leaders Italy, who beat Turkey 3-0 in Friday's tour-

nament curtain-raiser.

"I thought his link-up play was excellent, he's not just a presence up top," Page said. "He's got a good touch for a big lad and he's a willing runner. When you have all those attributes it can be a recipe for success. "The group does look wide open apart from Italy as I sit here. We thought Italy would be good, they didn't let us down last night."

Switzerland boss Vladimir Petkovic said his outfit dropped their quality after Embolo's effort. "Our opponents risked more after it. We dropped 10 percent in standard," Petkovic said. "We wanted to control the match too much. They were dangerous." Page named Gareth Bale on the left wing as the Real Madrid attacker was one of three Wales survivors in the starting line-up from the 2016 semi-final loss to Portugal.

Petkovic kept Benfica's Haris Seferovic and Borussia Moenchengladbach's Embolo up front despite Mario Gavranovic scoring four times in two pre-tournament friendlies. With Petkovic naming a narrow back three, Bale and fellow winger Dan James found space out wide early on in front of an estimated 10,000 crowd as local authorities allowed up to 50-percent capacity in the 69,000-seater Olympic Stadium.

After a quarter of an hour played, James broke free down the left before finding 1.95-meter-tall Moore who forced opposition goalkeeper Yann Sommer to tip the ball over the bar. From the resulting corner, Moore rose highest again and clashed in the air with Manuel Akanji, which left the Cardiff forward playing the remainder of the game with red tape around his head.

With Moore bandaged, the momentum swung towards Petkovic's side and they dominated the remainder of the half but Seferovic wasted three chances. Petkovic's Switzerland remained in control with captain Granit Xhaka, Liverpool's Xherdan Shaqiri and Atalanta's Remo Freuler dominating midfield.

#### Embolo sparks to life

They broke the deadlock four minutes into the



**COPENHAGEN:** Denmark's players gather as paramedics attend to midfielder Christian Eriksen (not seen) during the UEFA EURO 2020 Group B football match between Denmark and Finland at the Parken Stadium yesterday. — AFP

second half as Embolo sparked into life after a quiet opening 45 minutes. Shaqiri delivered a corner to Embolo who headed home after beating Wales right-back Connor Roberts with ease for just his sixth goal in 44 international appearances. Shaqiri, who played just 14 Premier League games for Liverpool last season, was substituted on 66 minutes for the more defensive Denis Zakaria.

Despite Petkovic's pragmatic change in personnel, Wales equalised with 16 minutes remaining. Manchester United's James played a corner short which ended up at Joe Morrell's feet and he crossed into the box. Moore lost his marker and headed a well-placed effort past the out-stretched Sommer to send the roughly 300 travelling Wales fans into a frenzy

behind the opposite goal.

Seferovic was substituted for 31-year-old Gavranovic on 84 minutes and the Dinamo Zagreb forward thought he had claimed all three points for his side with his first touch. After edging past the Wales backline he beat Ward but his effort was chalked off for offside by VAR. Switzerland pressed on in five minutes of injury time and Gavranovic was denied another potential winner, this time Ward saving with his fingertips.

Ramsey left the field for Ethan Ampadu during added time and Page's men held on for a point. Wales stay in Baku for their next game when they face Turkey on Wednesday, with Switzerland taking on Italy in Rome later that day. — AFP



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