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# Arab man kills two in brutal rampage that shocks nation

## Amir, Crown Prince, Speaker mourn the death of martyr Al-Rasheedi



KUWAIT: A military funeral is being held for the martyred policeman Abdulaziz Mohammad Al-Rasheedi (inset) at Sulaibikhat cemetery yesterday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem (left), Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Al-Sabah (right) and other officials attending the funeral of Abdulaziz Mohammad Al-Rasheedi at Sulaibikhat cemetery yesterday.



By B Izzak

**KUWAIT:** A 19-year-old Syrian man yesterday went on a deadly rampage, allegedly stabbing to death his own Kuwaiti mother and then hitting a traffic policeman in Mahboula before stabbing him to death and running away.

Security forces later found the murderer hiding in a farm in Wafra, south of Kuwait, and asked him to surrender before exchanging fire with him and seriously wounding him. The man later succumbed to his wounds in Adan hospital.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem mourned the death of the policeman Abdulaziz Mohammad Al-Rasheedi, a Saudi national working in Kuwait, and Interior Minister Sheikh Thamer Al-Sabah declared him a

martyr. A military funeral was held yesterday afternoon for him at Sulaibikhat cemetery.

HH the Amir yesterday cabled the family of the deceased police officer Al-Rasheedi who died while performing his duties with utter faithfulness and devotion. HH the Amir invoked His Almighty to bestow mercy and forgiveness upon the soul of the lost officer and wished his bereaved family patience and solace. HH the Crown Prince also sent a cable of condolences to the officer's family, expressing sincere consolation for the loss of their loved one, praying to His Almighty to embrace his soul with mercy and wishing his family patience and consolation.

HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent a cable of condolences to the bereaved family. An interior ministry statement said the security agencies received information that the man stabbed his mother to death in the Mubarak Al-Kabir area. The ministry statement provided no

details on the motives of the slaying.

The alleged killer, a Syrian national identified only as Ahmad, then went to the nearby area of Mahboula where he knocked down the traffic policeman who tried to stop him. He then got out of his vehicle and attacked the policeman, stabbing him repeatedly before fleeing. Security sources said they located Ahmad hiding in a farm in Wafra. Security men asked him to surrender, but he refused and shot at the forces. At this stage, elite forces stormed the farm and wounded the man. Ahmad was taken to hospital where he died.

The interior ministry organized an official mourning for the policeman which was attended by National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and the interior minister and others.

Ghanem called on the interior ministry to take the necessary measures to prevent such crimes from taking place again.

Continued on Page 2



The syrian assailant

## Kuwait Cabinet OKs direct flights to many countries

**KUWAIT:** The Kuwaiti Cabinet decided yesterday to allow direct air flights to Bosnia-Herzegovina, Britain, Spain, the United States of America, Holland, Italy, Austria, France, Kyrgyzstan, Germany, Greece and Switzerland. Official Twitter account of the Government Communication Center said the decision would be effective as of July 1 (Thursday), noting that "any rule that contradicts with this decision is no longer valid." — KUNA

## Kuwait to hit 52C, high humidity this coming week

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait is forecast to experience steep increases in temperatures this coming week with mercury expected to reach 52 degree Celsius on Friday. According to the Kuwait meteorological department, the country recorded a maximum temperature of 49 Celsius yesterday. Kuwait experienced very hot and relatively humid weather especially over coastal areas last night.

According to the forecast, temperatures will rise



to a maximum of 49 Celsius today, 50 Celsius on Wednesday and 51 Celsius on Thursday.

Kuwait recorded the highest temperature in the world this year, registering 53.2 Celsius, according to America's El Dorado Weather, which collects temperature data from around the globe.

## Iraq slams US strikes against pro-Iran groups

**BAGHDAD:** Iraq yesterday condemned overnight US air strikes against Iran-backed armed groups on the Syrian-Iraqi border that killed at least seven fighters and sparked calls for revenge from Iraqi armed factions.

The second such raid on pro-Iran targets since US President Joe Biden took office, described by the Pentagon as "retaliatory", led to fears of a new escalation between Tehran and Washington and

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## Local

# Crown Prince receives chairman of AUM board of trustees



KUWAIT: His Highness the Deputy Amir and Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the American University of the Middle East (AUM) Fahad Ibrahim Al-Othman and Tareq Fahad Al-Othman. — KUNA

## Kuwait lists 10 more COVID-19 deaths, 1,652 infections

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Ministry of Health yesterday reported 1,652 new infections of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) over the past 24 hours, raising the total cases to 353,133. Some 1,663 people recovered from the disease in the same period, pushing the total recoveries up to 332,678, Ministry's Spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said. The death toll from the virus climbed to 1,943 after registering 10 mortalities, which have not been vaccinated, in the corresponding period, he stated. He pointed out that over 19,000 patients are treated at hospitals as of yesterday, including 280 cases at intensive care units. Medical swabs conducted in 24 hours hit 13,772, bringing the total to 2.947 million, he said, indicating that the ratio between recoveries to swabs is 12 percent. — KUNA



## North Korean leader Kim 'emaciated'

PYONGYANG: North Korean state television has aired a citizen's comment about Kim Jong Un's "emaciated" condition, a highly unusual broadcast in a country where public discussion of the leader's health and personal life has always been off-limits.

Analysts say the remarks showed authorities were seeking to use the change to Kim's weight to reinforce loyalty to the regime in desperate times. The country is more isolated than ever behind its self-imposed coronavirus barricade, and this month admitted it was tackling a food crisis, sounding the alarm in a nation with a moribund agricultural sector that has long struggled to feed itself.

At the same time Kim's health has long been closely watched internationally as his sudden death would raise questions over succession and stability. Known as a heavy smoker, the leader has long been obese, with his weight appearing to increase steadily in recent years.

But he looked noticeably less overweight in recent media images published by Pyongyang's official KCNA news agency and on state television. Kim's personal life is normally taboo for North Korea's state media-Pyongyang has never confirmed how many children he has-but KCTV last week aired a clip of an unnamed resident of the capital claiming everyone in the country was "heartbroken" by his "emaciated" condition.

"Seeing our respected general secretary looking emaciated breaks our people's hearts the most," he said. "Everyone is talking about how their tears welled up immediately." Analysts say Pyongyang is using Kim's appearance as a way to glorify him by portraying him as a "devoted, hardworking" leader as the country struggles to tackle its food crisis and other challenges.

It shut its borders in January last year to protect itself against the pandemic, and as a result trade with Beijing-its economic lifeline-has slowed to a trickle while all international aid workers have left



PYONGYANG: In this file photo, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un attending the fourth day sitting of the 3rd Plenary Meeting of the 8th Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea. — AFP

the country. "The message Pyongyang is sending is that Kim is a leader who works very hard for his people even to a degree he skips meals and loses weight," defector-turned-researcher Ahn Chan-il told AFP.

Global speculation about Kim's health flared last year after he missed the commemoration of the birthday of his late grandfather, and was absent from public view for about 20 days.

Kim's father Kim Jong-il and grandfather Kim Il-Sung were also obese and heavy smokers. Both died of heart attacks. In 2016, South Korea's spy agency reported Kim had bulked up to 130 kilograms, having piled on around 40 kilos (90 pounds) since taking power in 2011, "bingeing on food and drink".

Last year it estimated he had put on another 10 kilograms, taking him to around 140 kilograms. But Yang Moo-jin, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies, pointed out it was unlikely his recent weight loss was a symptom of acute ill health, as he had attended several public events this month. "No one can really know why he lost weight," he told AFP. "What's clear-from the KCTV footage-is the regime wants the world to think that its people love care for their leader, to a point where they'd cry over his thinner appearance." — AFP

Prime Minister and the interior minister to grant Kuwaiti citizenship to parents and brothers and sisters of the victim as a reward for his sacrifice. MP Musaed Al-Mutairi blamed the interior minister for being responsible for what he called the security chaos.

MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri charged that the brutal crime was the result of the mismanagement of the interior minister. MP Khalil Al-Saleh called on authorities to stop crimes that jolt the society. MP Mubarak Al-Hajraf said the security lapse is the result of mismanagement and said that "those who cannot repair the fault should leave".

MP Muhammad Al-Sayer blamed the interior minister for the bad position of the security agency, adding that those who fail should be axed.

## German embassy explains visa application process

KUWAIT: The Embassy of Germany in Kuwait released the following statement, explaining procedures to apply for a visa to enter the European country after its latest decision to reopen to people who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19:

As of June 25, 2021, Germany has opened its borders to fully vaccinated people. Entry from third countries is generally permitted again from June 25, 2021. The traveler must have received the last vaccination dose that is necessary for full vaccination (in the case of a person who has recovered from coronavirus only one dose is necessary) at least 14 days before the date of travel and the vaccine the person has received must currently be either

- BioNTech/Pfizer
- Moderna
- AstraZeneca
- Johnson&Johnson (1 dose)
- a combination of Astra-Zeneca and Biontech/Pfizer
- a combination of Astra-Zeneca and Moderna

People who have been vaccinated in accordance with these requirements may enter Germany for any travel purpose. Please note: This does not apply to entry from countries categorized as areas of virus variants of concern; restrictions on entry or transport from areas of virus variants of concern also apply to fully vaccinated people. The State of Kuwait is not categorized as an area of virus variants at the moment. From June 28, 2021, our visa application center VFS Global (<https://visa.vfsglobal.com/kwt/en/deu/>) will be open for visa-applications. Third country nationals may apply if their return to Kuwait is scheduled



after August 1, 2021. Third country nationals who fulfill the requirements, may apply, if return is scheduled after August 1, 2021.

For a person who has recovered from a COVID-19 infection, a single dose of a vaccine is sufficient. A proven record (PCR-Test) of a COVID-19 infection between 28 days and six months before the vaccination must be provided.

Children under the age of 12 and who are not yet vaccinated may enter the country with proof of a negative test (PCR test or antigen test) when accompanied by at least one fully vaccinated parent. Children under the age of 6 do not require proof of a negative test.

Travelers, who do not require a visa, may prove their vaccination status with the IMMUNE app- or the KUWAIT MOBILE ID app. For non-vaccinated persons travel to Germany is currently not possible, since all other earlier restrictions are still in place. A detailed list of criteria can be found on the website of the German Embassy <https://kuwait.diplo.de/kw-en/-/2467640>. Applications should be made as early as possible, at least 15 days prior to travelling.

## Kuwait OKs passing of vaccinated citizens via land, sea exits

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Cabinet decided yesterday to allow citizens and close relatives as well as accompany-

ing house maids who had taken the first jab of the anti-COVID vaccine to pass through land and maritime exits as of today. The Center for Government Communication said on its official Twitter account that the decision would be valid until July 31, 2021. It added that the Cabinet decided to open the land and sea borders for those who had taken the two jabs of the accredited vaccines: Pfizer-BioNTech, Oxford-AstraZeneca and Moderna, or one jab of the vaccine Johnson and Johnson effective as of August 1, 2021. — KUNA

## Iraq slams US strikes against...

Continued from Page 1

came despite faltering efforts to revive a key deal over Iran's nuclear program. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said yesterday that strikes on pro-Iran fighters in Iraq and Syria should send a "strong" message of deterrence not to keep attacking US forces.

"I would hope that the message sent by the strikes last night will be heard and deter future action," Blinken told reporters on a visit to Rome. "This action in self-defense to do what's necessary to prevent further attacks sends a very important and strong message," he said.

The Pentagon announced that three military facilities used by Iran-backed militia had been hit overnight Sunday to yesterday — two in Syria and one in Iraq.

Iraq's Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhemi condemned the attack as a "blatant and unacceptable violation of Iraqi sovereignty and Iraqi national security". "Iraq reiterates its refusal to be an arena for settling scores," Kadhemi added in a statement, urging all sides to avoid any further escalation. The Hashed, an Iraqi paramilitary alliance that includes several Iranian proxies and has become the main power broker in Baghdad, said the strikes killed four of its fighters in the Qaim region, some 13 kilometers (eight miles) away from the border.

The fighters were stationed there to prevent jihadists from infiltrating Iraq, the group said in a statement, denying that they had taken part in any attacks against US interests or personnel.

"We reserve the legal right to respond to these attacks and hold the perpetrators accountable on Iraqi soil," the Hashed said. US defense spokesman John Kirby said in a statement that three military facilities used by Iran-backed militia had been hit overnight. Kirby said the targets had been used by "Iran-backed militias that are engaged in unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) attacks against US personnel and facilities in Iraq".

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which relies on a network of sources inside Syria, said seven fighters had been killed in the strikes in the early hours of yesterday. At least six more fighters were wounded and the targets included an arms depot near Abu Kamal, a Syrian town which lies where the border crosses the Euphrates river, the Britain-based monitor said. Syria's state-run SANA news agency said one child had been killed in the raid but gave few details.

US interests in Iraq, where 2,500 American troops are deployed as part of an international coalition to fight the jihadist Islamic State group, have been targeted in more than 40 attacks this year.

The vast majority have been bombs against logistics convoys, but rocket fire and drones packed with explosive have also been used in the assaults some of which were claimed by pro-Iran factions hoping to pressure Washington into withdrawing all its troops. "Given the ongoing series of attacks by Iran-backed groups targeting US interests in Iraq, the president directed further military action to disrupt and deter such attacks," Kirby said.

"Specifically, the US strikes targeted operational and weapons storage facilities at two locations in Syria and one location in Iraq, both of which lie close to the border between those countries," he added. Kataeb Hezbollah and Kataeb Sayyid al-Shuhada, two Iraqi armed factions with close ties to Tehran, were among the "several Iran-backed militia groups" that had used the facilities, Kirby said.

Some of the militia groups that form the Hashed Al-Shaabi have been deployed in Syria over the years to support regime forces and to further Iran's interests in the country. In February, US strikes on facilities in eastern Syria used by Iran-backed militia groups left more than 20 fighters dead, according to the Observatory.

The latest US strikes came two days after the United States and France warned Iran that time was running out to return to a nuclear deal, voicing fears that Tehran's sensitive atomic activities could advance if talks drag on. A return to the 2015 Iran accord has been a key Biden promise after the nuclear deal was trashed by his predecessor Donald Trump. — AFP

## Arab man kills two in brutal...

Continued from Page 1

The interior minister said a comprehensive investigation will be carried out over the crime.

The brutal killings came just a few months after Farah Akbar was kidnapped and stabbed to death, allegedly by a man who had been stalking her, this past April. Her body was dumped at Adan hospital.

MP Mohammad Al-Rasheedi called on HH the



In this image grab taken from a broadcast by Syria TV yesterday shows smoke billowing from a facility used by Iran-backed groups following US air strikes on the Syrian-Iraqi border. — AFP

Local

# Kuwait MoI holds funeral for martyred officer Al-Rasheedi



KUWAIT: Duty martyr, officer Abdulaziz Al-Rasheedi is laid to his final resting place. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Minister of Interior Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah condoles with the officer's father.



National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem attends the funeral.



Duty martyr, officer Abdulaziz Al-Rasheedi is laid to his final resting place.



Officers carry their fallen comrade on their shoulders.



Minister of Interior Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah condoles with the officer's family.



Former Minister of Interior Anas Al-Saleh condoles with the officer's family.



Duty martyr, officer Abdulaziz Al-Rasheedi is laid to his final resting place.

**KUWAIT:** The Ministry of Interior yesterday held a funeral for the duty martyr, officer Abdulaziz Al-Rasheedi of the General Department of Traffic. The funeral that proceeded to the burial site at Al-Sulaibikhat cemetery was led by National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and included Minister of Interior Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, Interior Undersecretary Major General Issam Al-Naham and a number of security and military chiefs.

The interior minister expressed in a press statement condolences to the martyr's family, affirming "this crime will not be shelved and there will full investigation" into circumstances of the case. —KUNA

News in brief

Two deported for insult, harassment

**KUWAIT:** Two residents were sent to the deportation department after one of them insulted Kuwait, while the other was accused of harassing women. Families of the two Egyptian men were asked to hand over the suspects' passports and airline tickets, Al-Anbaa Arabic daily reported yesterday.

Bribe suspects sentenced

The criminal court sentenced to prison a Kuwaiti lawyer and an Arab resident for bribing an employee at Kuwait Airport. The lawyer was also disbarred for 10 years, while orders were given to deport the resident after serving his sentence. The two were arrested red-handed in February while bribing the employee so that she would allow the resident to leave the country.

Two hurt in fight

Detectives are looking for two bedoons who injured two citizens during a fight in Sabah Al-Nasser, using an axe and a knife. The two Kuwaitis, brothers, sustained various cuts in the head, while one of them sustained a hand injury as well. Investigations are still ongoing.

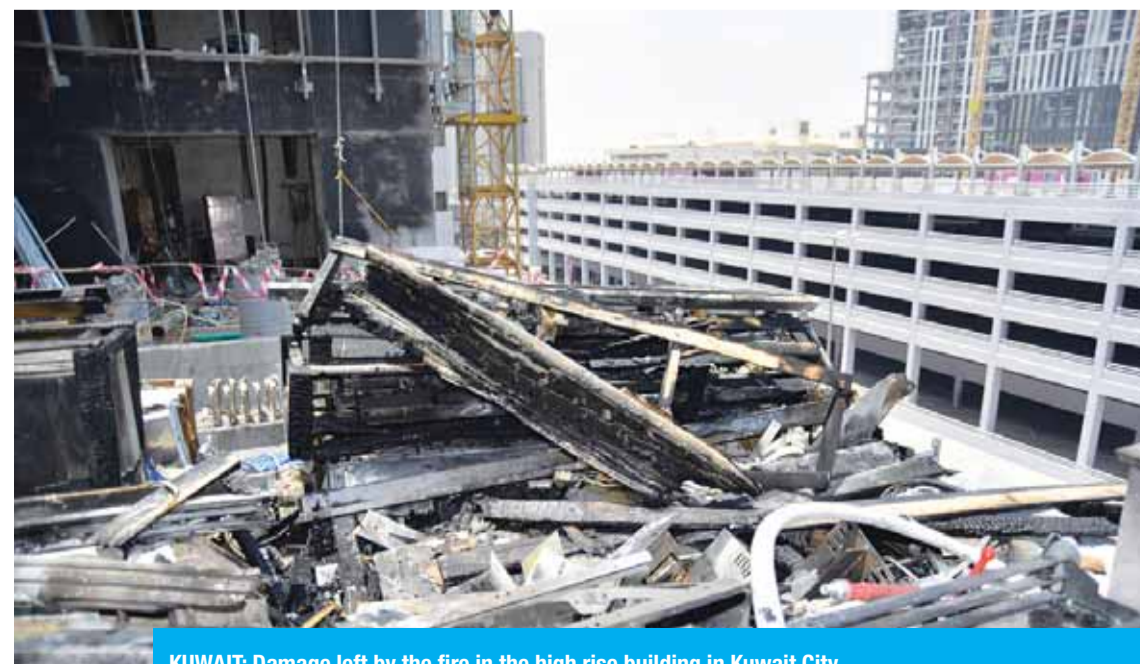
## Firemen battle Kuwait City high rise building blaze

**KUWAIT:** Firemen battled a blaze that started in a high rise building in Kuwait City yesterday. The fire

started outside a window on the second floor of the 42-storey building.

Firefighters were able to put out the flames as no injuries were reported, Kuwait Fire Force (KFF) said.

An investigation was opened to reveal the cause of the fire, it added. Separately, firemen rescued three people after their sailboat capsized near Dhabaiya yesterday. The three were in good condition, KFF reported.



KUWAIT: Damage left by the fire in the high rise building in Kuwait City.

## 96% COVID deaths in June 1-26 were unvaccinated

**KUWAIT:** Around 96.1 percent of COVID-19 deaths registered between June 1 and June 26 in Kuwait have been for unvaccinated people. Health Ministry Spokesman Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad said. Kuwait had on Sunday said that the death toll from the virus climbed to 1,933 after registering 14 mortalities in the previous 24 hours, including 12 unvaccinated cases. Meanwhile, the ministry reported that 1,558 people have tested positive for the novel coronavirus over the same period, taking the caseload to 351,481. The number of total recoveries rose to 331,015 after confirming 1,592 in the same period, Dr Sanad said.

He noted that over 19,000 patients were hospitalized as of Sunday, including 272 cases in intensive care units. Medical swabs conducted in the same period hit 12,218, bringing the total to 2,933 million, he said, indicating that the ratio between recoveries to swabs was 12.75 percent. Dr Sanad renewed his call for the public to abide by health precautions and physical distancing, as well as avoid gatherings. He further urged the public to follow up official accounts of the ministry and the state's bodies to be briefed on guidelines and recommendations in order to control the spread of the virus. —KUNA



Dr Abdullah Al-Sanad

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## KIMS, Nice university sign agreement

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Institute for Medical Specialization (KIMS) signed an agreement with Nice university in France to allow Kuwaiti doctors to study medicine and receive Fellowship in different medical specializations. The agreement came after two years of efforts between the two sides, said KIMS' Secretary General Dr Fawaz Al-Rifae yesterday. The five-year agreement, which came into effect yesterday, involves sending 50 Kuwaiti doctors on scholarships to Nice, a number that could increase in the coming years, he noted. KIMS' delegation had visited the university's hospital prior to signing the agreement to learn of its international standards, he said. Meanwhile, French Ambassador to Kuwait Anne-Claire Legendre affirmed that medical development and cooperation is most needed in the age of the coronavirus. She added that she had closely monitored the efforts of Kuwaiti Minister of Health in fighting the COVID-19 to protect the lives of citizens and expats. In the meantime, head of international health affairs in the Ministry of Health Dr Rehab Al-Wutayan said that the agreement is part of the ministry's efforts to develop its services in cooperation with prominent international health institutions. The agreement was signed in the presence of Health Minister Sheikh Dr Basel Al-Humoud Al-Sabah. —KUNA

## Students must enroll in listed universities

**KUWAIT:** The Director-General of the National Apparatus for Academic Accreditation Dr Hamad Al-Adwani stressed the need for high school graduates wishing to study abroad to enroll in universities listed by the apparatus only. Dr Adwani said in a statement that students wishing to study abroad should visit the apparatus' website, which contains an interactive search engine that enables the user to easily review all universities by country of scholarship or by specialization and degree. He warned against advertisements from offices that promote study in foreign universities in different countries, stressing the need for students to take all official approvals before joining any university. —AFP

# Kuwait's foreign minister takes part in anti-IS meeting in Rome

**ROME:** Kuwait's Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah headed yesterday Kuwait's delegation participating in the ministerial meeting of the international coalition to defeat the so-called Islamic State (IS), held in the Italian capital Rome. The meeting was held in response to an invitation from Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Luigi Di Maio and US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken to the allies to discuss efforts in the campaign to achieve the enduring defeat of IS.

In his speech, Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser said the international coalition meeting confirms to the whole world the unity and solidity of the globe's position against terrorism and determination to defend humanity against the treacherous forces of terrorism, especially the IS. He added that Kuwait cooperates with members of the international coalition for returning fighters to their countries with rehabilitation and reintegration into their societies in accordance with principles of international law and human rights.

Kuwait renews its commitment to the international coalition against terrorism and adherence to activate



**ROME:** Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah speaks during the ministerial meeting of the international coalition to defeat the so-called Islamic State (IS). —KUNA

the State of Kuwait's guidelines, adopted in February 2018, which include preventing the financing of the group, disrupting its capabilities to carry out terrorist acts and exchanging information related to terrorism with the other stakeholders. The guidelines also

include transfer and return of terrorist fighters to their countries with rehabilitation and reintegration into their societies and supporting Iraq in the transition process from the phase of restoring stability to sustainable reconstruction. —AFP

## Foreign Minister holds talks with various counterparts



**ROME:** Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets Norway's Foreign Minister Ine Marie Eriksen Soreide. —KUNA photos



Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets Finland's Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto.



Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets Denmark's Foreign Minister Jeppe Kofod.



Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets Canada's Foreign Minister Marc Garneau.



Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets Portugal's Foreign Minister Augusto Ernesto dos Santos Silva.

**ROME:** Kuwait's Foreign Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah met yesterday with the Foreign Ministers of Norway, Portugal and Finland: Ine Marie Eriksen Soreide, Augusto Ernesto dos Santos Silva and Pekka Haavisto respectively, to discuss bilateral ties and issues of common interest. Kuwait's Foreign Minister also held similar talks with his Canadian counterpart Marc Garneau, Danish counterpart Jeppe Kofod and Luxembourg's Foreign Minister Jean Asselborn. The meetings were held on the sidelines of the ministerial meeting of the international coalition to defeat IS, the Foreign Ministry said in a statement. —KUNA



Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah meets Luxembourg's Foreign Minister Jean Asselborn.

## KRCS opens mobile clinic to serve 125K people in Syria

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) opened Monday a mobile health center to serve more than 125,000 people in northern Syria, and aim to strengthening health care capabilities and improve patient's experience in receiving treatment. KRCS Director of Medical Services Department Manhal Al-Enezi said in a statement that the recently opened center with the Syrian Medical Association for Syrian Expatriates (SEMA) is part of KRCS aid to the Syrian people, and to alleviate their suffering. It operates in the Aleppo, Al-Bab and Dowaibeq, Enezi said, adding that many displaced Syrians in Aleppo suffer from lack of medical centers.

The number of monthly beneficiaries is about 3,000 patients, at an average of 36,000 patients annually, he added. The center includes dental clinic, reproductive and women's health clinic, general medicine clinic and children's clinic, and leishmaniasis clinic, in addition to laboratory, pharmacy and a first-aid room for emergency cases, Enezi said. Kuwait has provided aid and support over the past years to the Syrian people, as Kuwait and KRCS always has and



will continue to support them and will spare no effort to provide aid, he said. —KUNA

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Merging paramilitary into army: Sudan faces transition hurdle

## With propaganda push, China's Communist Party marks 100 years

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WASHINGTON: Democratic lawmakers take a knee to observe a moment of silence on Capitol Hill for George Floyd and other victims of police brutality in Washington, DC. States must take "immediate action" against the "systemic racism" suffered by Blacks, demanded Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights yesterday. —AFP

# UN calls for dismantling 'systemic racism'

## World must avoid repeating outrages like killing of George Floyd

**GENEVA:** The UN rights chief called yesterday for systemic racism against black people to be immediately dismantled around the world to avoid repeating outrages like the killing of George Floyd.

In a report triggered by the death of Floyd, who was murdered by a white US police officer, Michelle Bachelet said the dehumanization of people of African descent had fed a culture of tolerance for racial discrimination and violence. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights set out a four-point agenda for transformative change on racial justice and equality, and urged states to implement it.

Bachelet's recommendations include reparations for historical racism, as well as funding for groups like Black Lives Matter. "The status quo is untenable," said the former Chilean president Bachelet, who presented her 23-page report to the UN Human Rights Council.

"Systemic racism needs a systemic response" to dismantle centuries of entrenched discrimination and violence, she said. "We need a transformative approach that tackles the interconnected areas that drive racism, and lead to repeated, wholly avoidable tragedies like the death of George Floyd."

The report comes three days after former policeman Derek Chauvin was sentenced to 22 and a half years in prison for murdering Floyd in Minneapolis in May 2020. Footage of Chauvin kneeling on Floyd's neck for nearly 10 minutes, indifferent to the dying man's groans, sparked global racial justice protests under the banner "Black Lives Matter".

### 'Dehumanization'

After Floyd's death, the UN Human Rights Office was mandated in June last year to produce a comprehensive report on systemic racism, human rights violations by law enforcement agencies against black people, and government responses to peaceful anti-racism protests.

It also covered accountability and redress for victims. The report's analysis was based on online consultations with more than 340 people, most of them black. Bachelet's office received information on more than 250 deaths of Africans and people of African descent in Europe and the Americas, at least 190 of which were at the hands of law enforcement officials. In many cases, information suggests the victims "did not pose an imminent threat of death or serious injury", the report said.

The investigation said that in many countries in Europe and the Americas, people of African descent disproportionately live in poverty and face serious barriers in accessing education, healthcare and employment, as well as political participation and other fundamental human rights. "The dehumanization of people of African descent... has sustained and cultivated a tolerance for racial discrimination, inequality and violence," the report said.

Bachelet's office looked into more than 60 countries. "We could not find a single example of a state that has fully reckoned with the past or comprehensively accounted for the impacts of the lives of people of African descent today," Mona Rishmawi, the office's chief on equality and non-discrimination, told a press conference.

### Agenda for change

The report urges immediate action to end what it described as systemic violations of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights. It calls for reversing "cultures of denial" when it comes to racism.

Secondly, it said there must be no impunity for human rights violations by law enforcement officials, while trust needed to be built up and institutional oversight reinforced. Rather than defunding the police, the report focuses on "re-imagining" law enforcement through better training, notably in handling people with mental health issues. Thirdly, the voices of black people and anti-racism activists must be heard and their concerns acted upon, said the report.

This should include ensuring representation at every level in state institutions, including law enforcement, criminal justice and policy-making.

Finally, the legacies of historic racism must be confronted, including through accountability and redress, the report concluded. "Behind contemporary forms of racism, dehumanization and exclusion lies the failure to acknowledge the responsibilities for enslavement... and to comprehensively repair the harms," it said. This should include making amends for "centuries of violence and discrimination... including through formal acknowledgement and apologies, truth-telling processes, and reparations", it added. Countries in Europe and the Americas must "dismantle structures and systems designed and shaped by enslavement, colonialism and discrimination, the report said. —AFP

## Swedish PM resigns after no-trust vote

**STOCKHOLM:** Sweden's Prime Minister Stefan Lofven resigned yesterday, one week after he lost a vote of no confidence, leaving it up to the speaker of parliament to begin the search for a replacement. Lofven could have either called a snap election or resigned following the no-confidence vote last week.

He told a press conference that a snap election was "not what is best for Sweden", pointing to the difficult situation the COVID-19 pandemic posed, coupled with the fact that the next general election—which would go ahead regardless—is a year away.

"With that starting point, I have requested the speaker to relieve me as prime minister," Lofven said. The Social Democrat leader—a master of consensus for some, a dull and visionless party man for others—had seven days after the confidence vote to contemplate his options and try and secure a parliamentary majority for a potential reforming of his government. The 63-year-old Lofven, a former welder and union leader with the square build and nose of a boxer, guided the Swedish left back to power in 2014, and then hung on by moving his party closer to the center-right after the 2018 elections. He finally fell out with the Left Party propping up his government, becoming the first Swedish government leader to be defeated by a no confidence vote.

The confidence motion was filed by the far-right Sweden Democrats, after the Left Party said it was

planning such a motion itself in protest against a plan to ease rent controls.

On the left, the proposal for "market rents"—which would potentially allow landlords to freely set rents for new apartments—is seen as being at odds with the Swedish social model and a threat to tenants' rights. The conservative Moderate Party and the Christian Democrats were quick to back the motion, which was passed by 181 MPs in the 349-seat parliament.

Last-ditch efforts to appease the Left Party, which holds 27 seats, failed. Critics have described the constellation that joined forces against Lofven as an "unholy alliance" of parties at opposite ends of the political spectrum. After 11 unsuccessful no confidence votes in modern Swedish political history, Lofven, who has previously distinguished himself by his ability to survive political crises, thus ended up setting an unwanted precedent.

### Tolerated by parliament

Lofven's minority government took power in 2019 after months of political turmoil following inconclusive elections in 2018. To secure control it signed a deal with two center-left parties, the Centre Party and the Liberals, and was propped up by the Left Party.

It will now be up to parliamentary speaker Andreas Norlen to open negotiations with parties to find a new prime minister. Last time, the process took four months, but Norlen has already signaled that he will not let it take as long this time around.

The Swedish system demands that a prime minister is tolerated by parliament—they can secure office so long as a majority does not vote against them. Should the process fail, the country could still end up heading to the polls early. And even if an "extra elec-



STOCKHOLM: Sweden's Prime Minister Stefan Lofven addresses a press conference yesterday at Rosenbad in Stockholm, where he announced his resignation one week after he lost a vote of no confidence in parliament. —AFP

tion" is called, Swedes will still vote in the scheduled general election in September 2022 — creating the possibility of two elections in less than a year.

According to an Ipsos opinion poll published Tuesday, the right and far-right would come out on top in a general election, with a very slim parliamentary majority. In announcing his resignation, Lofven criticized the move to topple his government without having a majority secured to replace him.

"They voted the government out without themselves having an alternative for government," he told reporters, adding that should he be given the opportunity, he was still open to returning as prime minister. "If the speaker proposes, I'm ready to be tested again in the parliament," Lofven said. Lofven's government will stay on temporarily to handle routine tasks until a new administration is formed. —AFP



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## International

# Sudan transition faces hurdle of merging paramilitary into army

## 'Deeply worrying' fractures exist among powerful blocs within security system

**KHARTOUM:** Integrating a powerful paramilitary force into the army has emerged as the latest stumbling block in Sudan's transition to civilian rule following three decades under ousted strongman Omar Al-Bashir. A civilian-military administration has led Sudan since August 2019 under a power-sharing deal that was due to expire next year but was extended after a peace agreement reached in October with several rebel groups. Both deals stipulated the need for reform to the military, including the integration of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) — formed in 2013 to crush rebels fighting Bashir's government throughout Sudan — into the regular army.

The RSF largely drew its members from Arab nomads and camel-herding Janjaweed militias whom rights groups accuse of atrocities in Darfur. Tensions between the RSF and the army have reportedly been simmering in recent weeks but appeared to peak after paramilitary commander Mohamed Hamdan Daglo openly rejected a merger with the armed forces.

"Talk of RSF integration into the army could break up the country," warned Daglo, commonly known as Hemeti, in a speech that went viral on social media. "The RSF is established under a law passed by an elected parliament. It's not a battalion... to be integrated into the army," he said.

Military officials have repeatedly denied any rift, but civilian Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok has pointed to "deeply worrying" fractures among powerful blocs of Sudan's security system.

He has called for a unified army that includes the RSF, and warned that unresolved splits among political



**KHARTOUM:** In this file photo, Members of Sudan's Rapid Support Forces (RSF) paramilitaries stand on guard outside the offices of the anti-corruption prosecution in the capital Khartoum. — AFP

factions at the helm of Sudan's transition could result in chaos and civil war. "The question now for Sudan is to be or not to be," Hamdok told journalists last week.

### 'Rumors'

Sudan is navigating a rocky post-Bashir transition marked by a wrenching economic crisis and deepening political division. It has seen a spike in violent crime, protests and popular discontent in recent weeks as the

government pushes for tough economic reforms. Daglo and General Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan, the army's commander-in-chief and leader of Sudan's transitional ruling body, have slammed allegations of army-RSF tensions as "rumors" that should be "crushed". Last month, rebel groups from the Darfur region who signed a landmark 2020 peace deal with Sudan's government called for speeding up reforms to the security sector, including unifying the army. The peace deal

could collapse if reforms were not implemented, they warned. War broke out in Darfur in 2003 when African minority rebels complaining of discrimination took up arms against Bashir's Arab-dominated government in Khartoum. The years-long conflict killed 300,000 people and displaced 2.5 million, according to the UN. Military expert Amin Ismail said the RSF's integration into the army "is a must at this point".

"The RSF was formed for a specific purpose under Bashir, but now that his regime is gone, it should be part of one unified army." A Sudanese military source told AFP that integrating the RSF into the army was "linked to pressures from the West and international institutions". Failing to do so could "affect Sudan's international relations", the source said, requesting anonymity.

Jonas Horner, a senior analyst with the International Crisis Group, said reform of the security sector was "a fundamental requirement of Sudan's transition". But he warned that any attempt to forcibly integrate the RSF or disarm it "would potentially catalyze serious urban warfare". Before agreeing to integrate his forces, "Hemeti will likely seek assurances over his role in a post-transition Sudan, and over calls for his prosecution" over the Darfur conflict, Horner said. Hemeti was involved in the army's April 2019 ousting of Bashir following mass demonstrations against the president's iron-fisted rule. Protesters have accused the RSF of violently dispersing a mass sit-in outside the army headquarters in June that year. Medics linked to the protest movement say at least 128 people died in the days-long crackdown. — AFP



**ROME:** Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Luigi Di Maio (right) welcomes US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (left) upon his arrival for a meeting of the US-led coalition against the Islamic State (IS) group, at the Fiera di Roma, in Rome, as part of Blinken's three-nation tour of Europe yesterday. — AFP

## US presses allies to repatriate IS fighters

**ROME:** Secretary of State Antony Blinken yesterday pressed US allies to bring back citizens arrested overseas for joining the Islamic State group, warning they could not be held indefinitely in Syria. Blinken made the appeal in Rome at a meeting of an 83-member coalition on defeating the extremist network, where he and the Italian hosts called for greater attention to the jihadist threat in Africa.

About 10,000 suspected Islamic State fighters are being held in northern Syria by Western-allied Kurdish fighters, according to US estimates. "This situation is simply untenable. It just can't persist indefinitely," Blinken said.

"The United States continues to urge countries — including coalition partners — to repatriate, rehabilitate and, where applicable, prosecute their citizens," he said. France and Britain, two of the closest US allies, have been holdouts against calls to bring back their citizens, which were also made by former president Donald Trump's administration.

Both nations have painful experiences with attacks and see little incentive and plenty of political cost to bringing back radicalized citizens who are already jailed overseas. Blinken praised Italy as one of the few Western European nations to repatriate its citizens and also hailed efforts by Central Asian nations such as Kazakhstan, which he said had brought back 600 fighters and their family members and put them in rehabilitation programs.

According to a Human Rights Watch report in March, the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces are holding more than 63,000 women and children of suspected Islamic State fighters from more than 60 countries in two camps surrounded by barbed wire. Blinken said the United States was offering another \$436 million to care for Syrians, including through housing in camps and for COVID vaccination efforts.

### Stepping up efforts in Africa

The Islamic State group has lost almost all of its territory in Syria and Iraq, where it once ran a vast self-styled caliphate marked by an extraordinary campaign of brutality against religious minorities and women. But the extremists are exerting growing force in Africa including in the Sahel, where France is wounding a military campaign, and in Mozambique.

Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio called on the coalition to form a new working group to address "the growing threat stemming from ISIS in Africa". Blinken said the coalition had put more focus on cutting off financing to extremists in Africa and that two African nations, the Central African Republic and Mauritania, had joined the group with the Rome meeting.

Blinken also announced that the United States was designating Ousmane Illiassou Djibo, a Niger-born Islamic State leader based in Mali, as a "specially designated global terrorist", making any transactions with him a crime under US law. — AFP

## Jihadists kill at least 12 in Somalia raid

**MOGADISHU:** Al-Shabaab jihadists killed at least 12 people Sunday in a raid on a town and military base in central Somalia, the army and local officials said. Fighters attacked the base and nearby town of Wisil in Galmudug state, more than 700 kilometers (430 miles) from the capital Mogadishu, several sources told AFP.

Abdirahman Adan, commander of a paramilitary unit in Galmudug state, said by telephone it was difficult to know the exact number of dead. But for the moment they knew that 12 people, six of them from the security forces, had died in Wisil. The attackers had been pushed back and many of them had been killed, he added, without saying how many.

Abdullahi Sahal, a community leader in Wisil, also said six civilians and six soldiers had been killed.

The attack started with the detonation of a vehicle loaded with explosives, said another paramilitary commander, Mohamed Mire. "After the car bomb explosion, they started heavy machine guns," he said. But the security pushed them back, inflicting losses, and they were now in full control, he added. — AFP

## Iran says it has drone that can travel 7,000km

**TEHRAN:** Iran has drones capable of flying 7,000 kilometers (more than 4,000 miles), the commander of its Revolutionary Guard force said Sunday. "We have drones which can fly 7,000 kilometres, without a pilot, and land back at the same spot or anywhere else," General Hossein Salami said in a speech broadcast by state television.

He gave no other details but the new drone would give it a range of 3,500 kilometers, compared to 2,000 kilometers for Iran's "Gaza" combat drone unveiled earlier this year. The "Gaza" drone was reportedly the longest-ranging Iranian drone so far. Iran's air force is mostly made up of ageing US fighters bought under the rule of the shah toppled in 1979 for which maintenance has been hit by American sanctions.

It has relied instead on developing drones, which the Revolutionary Guard said were used in a July 2019 raid on Iranian Kurdish rebels across the border in Iraq. — AFP



**SURFSIDE:** A woman prays in front of photos at the makeshift memorial for the victims of the building collapse, near the site of the accident in Surfside, Florida, north of Miami Beach yesterday. — AFP

## Florida toll rises to 9 as rescuers race to find survivors

**SURFSIDE:** The death toll after the collapse of a Florida apartment tower rose to nine, officials said Sunday, with more than 150 people still missing and their weary families waiting nearly four days for information as to their fate. The outlook grew increasingly grim by the hour, however, as the slow rescue operation, involving workers sorting nonstop through the rubble in torrid heat and high humidity, carried on.

Four new bodies and other human remains were found after rescuers dug an enormous trench — 125 feet long, 20 feet wide and 40 feet deep (38 by 6 by 12 meters) — through the mountain of debris, according to the Miami-Dade County mayor. "As of now, the number of confirmed fatalities remains at nine," Mayor Daniella Levine Cava told reporters in Surfside, near Miami Beach. She had said earlier that one victim had died in hospital. "We have identified an additional four of the victims" for a total of eight identified, she said during a Sunday evening press conference. "We're working to notify those next of kin first."

Six to eight squads, backed by two huge cranes and aided by sniffer dogs, are "on the pile actually searching at any given time," she added. She also said that "we did give all of the families an opportunity to privately visit the site." More than 100 people visited the site over the course of the day. Each of the three

groups—one in the morning, one in the afternoon and one in the evening—was bused by the Miami-Dade police and fire departments and allowed to stay for an hour.

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis said debris with "forensic value" is being taken to a large warehouse to be inspected as investigators seek to determine the cause of the collapse. And Surfside Mayor Charles Burkett said accommodation was being found for anyone wishing to evacuate the tower's nearly identical "sister" building a block away, though no structural problems have yet been identified there.

### International effort

Mexican engineers and search-and-rescue specialists have joined an army of American workers at the site. Teams in protective gear have been toiling round the clock since the early-morning Thursday collapse, but are only able to work a half-hour at a time before handing the job to the next crew. "We don't have a resource problem," Burkett told ABC's "This Week." "We have a luck problem. We need to get more lucky right now."

The 12-storey oceanfront Champlain Towers South pancaked in the middle of the night Thursday as residents slept. Surveillance video of the collapse showed it coming down in just a few seconds.

Jake Samuelson's grandparents, Arnie and Myriam Notkin, are among those missing, although his mother continues to receive phone calls from their landline, with only static on the other end, the family told local media. "We are trying to rationalize what is happening here, we are trying to get answers," Samuelson told Local 10 news, unaware whether the calls were from his grandparents or mechanical failure. — AFP

### News in brief

#### Tunisian navy rescues over 170

**TUNIS:** Tunisia's defense ministry said Sunday that its navy had rescued 178 migrants who were trying to cross the Mediterranean from Libya to reach Europe. Two bodies were recovered and 178 migrants rescued during three operations off Tunisia's south coast, a ministry statement said. The migrants, who the ministry said were from Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, Ivory Coast, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Mali and Ethiopia, had set off from the Libyan port of Zuwara overnight Friday to Saturday. Tunisian authorities on Thursday intercepted 267 would-be migrants who had also begun the sea crossing from Libya, most of them Bangladeshis, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said. — AFP

#### 15 killed in horrific Burundi ambush

**NAIROBI:** At least 15 people were burnt alive or shot dead in a horrific attack in central Burundi after armed men blocked off a road and started killing travellers, security sources said Sunday. The ambush on Saturday night took place in Muramvya province, mirroring similar attacks staged here last year. Armed men barricaded a road with boulders and sprayed bullets on vehicles. They also poured petrol and set alight two buses, burning the passengers alive in what one witness said were "scenes of horror". At least 13 people were torched alive and between two and five shot dead, witnesses and a local official said. A local official said 15 others were wounded, of whom six had serious injuries. — AFP

#### Luxembourg PM COVID positive

**LUXEMBOURG:** Luxembourg Prime Minister Xavier Bettel is self-isolating for 10 days after testing positive for COVID shortly after a European Union summit, his office said Sunday. But none of the other 26 EU leaders who attended the Brussels summit Thursday and Friday is considered a contact case, a statement said. Under the rules in Luxembourg for containing the spread of the virus, close contact with a COVID sufferer is defined as spending more than 15 minutes with them at a distance of less than two meters (six feet) without a mask. A spokeswoman for Bettel said he had respected the rules during the summit. — AFP

#### Man admits killing in UK

**LONDON:** A 28-year-old man yesterday admitted killing a university graduate and injuring seven other people in a knife rampage in Britain's second city. The stabbings in Birmingham city center on September 6 last year came at a time of heightened tension over knife crime, and after two high-profile terror attacks in London. But police in the central English city quickly ruled out links to gang violence, hate crime and terrorism. Zephaniah McLeod admitted the manslaughter of university worker Jacob Billington, four counts of attempted murder, and three of wounding with intent to cause grievous bodily harm. — AFP

#### Ukraine, US launch Black Sea drills

**KIEV:** Ukraine and the United States launched joint naval exercises in the Black Sea yesterday in a show of Western cooperation with Kiev as it faces off with Russia. The drills come just days after the British navy's HMS Defender passed near Russian-annexed Crimea in the Black Sea, with Moscow saying it fired warning shots at the destroyer to ward it off. The Sea Breeze drills—which have taken place 21 times since 1997 — will involve some 5,000 military personnel from more than 30 countries. The exercises will last two weeks and involve around 30 ships, including the missile destroyer USS Ross. — AFP

International

# With propaganda push, China's Communist Party marks 100 years

## While Mao's history renews patriotism, Xi's leadership style pulls on the past

BEIJING: Hair windswept, handsome and 32-metres high, a statue of Mao Zedong presides over a crowd of millennials alternating between selfies and bubble tea-drawing a thread through the past, present and future of China's Communist Party in its red heartland.

As the party prepares to mark its 100th anniversary on Thursday, it has put a propaganda campaign into overdrive with movies, history tours and well-timed space missions, all lacquering the achievements of the party and its President Xi Jinping, China's most powerful leader since Mao.

Xi, who has led the country since 2012, abolished term limits and is yet to anoint a successor, will attend a week of events applauding the party for steering China through a tumultuous century of wars, famine and social upheaval. China today is the world's second-largest economy, where tech entrepreneurs write fortunes in thriving first-tier cities and millions have been lifted from abject poverty to join the globe's biggest consumer market.

Throughout, the Communist Party has stayed firmly at the center of the story, attracting the loyalty of a younger generation that has known no other political system and is unable to freely express dissent. At Mao's statue in Changsha, southern China's Hunan province, visitors young and old said the Communist Party is the lodestar for China's monumental progress.

"China has been developing for so long thanks to the efforts of our forefathers and that generation of Communist Party members," said 23-year-old student and party member Li Peng. "The CCP isn't dying. It's a party that's full of life... now, young people are particularly patriotic and unafraid to speak out."

### No Xi, no party

Xi's leadership style pulls on the past, cherry-picking Mao's history to renew patriotism. In Mao's hometown of Shaoshan, an hour away from his statue, locals and tourists alike revere the Chairman as a near deity. "Without Mao, there would be no today," said He Shaoyun, a 75-year-old farmer from Sichuan province



SHAOSHAN, China: This photo taken on May 26, 2021 shows statues of late Chinese communist leader Mao Zedong at a factory in Shaoshan, in China's central Hunan province. — AFP

who saw Mao give speeches six times as a child.

Nearly 50 years apart in age, "red" tourists like He and Li are riding the same wave of interest in the origins of the party, which was founded by a handful of underground members in Shanghai on July 23, 1921. The July 1 celebration date was arbitrarily chosen by Mao much later.

A party history study campaign has passed on the red lineage to a new generation, ensuring that "a correct view of party history", in Xi's words, percolates through society. The simplified narrative the party tells—a group of heroic underdogs battling evil foes to reach a pre-destined victory for Communism—inevitably glosses over its failures. The latest edition of the CCP's official concise history condenses the decade-long turmoil of the Cultural Revolution into three pages.

The Great Famine, when tens of millions of people

died due to Mao's disastrous economic policies, is only mentioned once in passing as a "natural disaster". The Xi era, since 2012, by contrast takes up over a quarter of the entire book. The party history campaign "is about raising Xi's own profile, and centering the party on him personally," said Carl Minzner, professor of Chinese politics and law at Fordham University. Any divergence from the official line is condemned as the party scrubs out dissent online, suppressing alternative interpretations of its past that are deemed "historical nihilism". Even veiled criticism is not tolerated. A viral essay by former Premier Wen Jiabao failed to survive the censors after it appeared to question the party's present-day ethos. "The China in my heart should be a country that's full of equality and justice, that will always respect people's hearts and fundamental humanity," Wen wrote in April, shortly before it vanished from the internet.—AFP

## India probes drone attack at Jammu air base

JAMMU, India: Investigators are probing a suspected drone strike on an air base in India's restive north, officials said Sunday, as experts said such an attack would be a first in the vast country and raised concerns about security at military installations. "Two low intensity explosions were reported early Sunday morning in the technical area of Jammu Air Force Station. One caused minor damage to the roof of a building while the other exploded in an open area," the Indian Air Force tweeted.

"There was no damage to any equipment. Investigation is in progress along with civil agencies." Jammu and Kashmir's Director General of Police, Dilbagh Singh, said in a statement that a "drone with payload" was suspected to have been used to "drop the explosive material". He called the incident a "terror attack" in an interview with the Press Trust of India.

The Indian Express newspaper reported that two people have been arrested so far over the incident, while two people at the air base suffered minor injuries. A team from India's counter-terrorism task force, the National Investigation Agency, has reached Jammu to probe the incident, an official told AFP. Police have reportedly filed a first complaint about the attack under anti-terrorism laws. Singh did not say which individuals or groups were suspected as being behind the blasts. Retired Lt. General D S Hooda, who until 2016 headed India's Northern Command, said the country's military radar system can detect threats such as aircraft and larger unmanned aerial vehicles—but perhaps not drones. "It could have been a potent attack—there is no need to physically cross over into a military establishment, you could attack it from the air," Hooda told AFP of the Jammu incident.

"We have to start looking at seriously monitoring drone activity and getting anti-drone systems in place as soon as possible." Singh said that later Sunday, police recovered an explosive device weighing some five to six kilograms (11-13 pounds) at a different location, and one suspect was detained—but told local media the arrest was not linked to the air base strike.

He said a "major terror attack" had been averted, as the device was allegedly "received by an LET (militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba) outfit operative and was to planted at some crowded place". —AFP

## Myanmar violence rages with rise of 'self-defense' groups

YANGON: Violence in post-coup Myanmar has escalated as anti-junta "self-defense" forces step up to take on the military, a report said yesterday, warning of an "enormous" human cost if the regime uses its full power in subsequent crackdowns. Myanmar has been in turmoil since the February coup that ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's government, with more than 880 killed in a junta crackdown on dissent, according to a local monitoring group.

In some areas, locals—often using hunting rifles or weapons manufactured at makeshift jungle factories—have formed "defense forces" to fight back. In response, the military has used helicopters and artillery, including against groups in northwestern Chin state and along the eastern border with Thailand. "Faced with armed insurrection, the Tatmadaw [the Myanmar military] can be expected to unleash its military might against civilians," the International Crisis Group said yesterday. "The



YANGON: This photo taken and received courtesy of an anonymous source via Facebook shows protesters marching with banners and flares as they take part in a demonstration against the military coup in Yangon. — AFP

## Thousands stranded in Bangladesh ahead of COVID lockdown

DHAKA: Thousands of people were stranded in Bangladesh's capital yesterday as authorities halted almost all public transport ahead of a sweeping lockdown imposed to combat a deadly resurgence of COVID-19 infections. The country reported 119 deaths on Sunday, its highest-ever daily death toll from the pandemic, while new infections have been averaging around 5,000 for the past few days.

Officials blame the recent spike in cases on the highly contagious coronavirus Delta variant first identified in neighboring India. The majority of the South Asian nation's 168 million population will be confined to their homes by Thursday as part of the restrictions, with only essential services and some export-facing factories allowed to operate. The lockdown announcement sparked an exodus of migrant workers from the capital Dhaka to home villages on Sunday, with tens of thousands of people cramming into ferries to cross a major river.

The staggered implementation of the lockdown

rules left thousands of workers in Dhaka forced to walk to their offices yesterday, sometimes for hours, in the sweltering summer heat. Large columns of people were seen walking on the main roads early yesterday. Workplaces will be shut from tomorrow.

Bicycle rickshaws were allowed to operate in a last minute government concession late Sunday, but prices had soared to unaffordable levels, commuters said. "I started walking at 7am. I could not get any bus or any other vehicles. I can't afford a rickshaw ride," Shefali Begum, 60, who was going to her daughter's home in central Dhaka, told AFP.

Restrictions on activities and movement were imposed across Bangladesh in mid-April as cases and deaths jumped to their highest levels since the start of the pandemic. Infections declined in May but started to rise again this month, sparking the harsher restrictions.

The country has reported more than 880,000 infections and just over 14,000 virus deaths, but experts say the actual toll could be much higher due to possible underreporting. Health officials across the world have been alarmed by the rapid spread of the Delta variant, now reported by the WHO to have reached at least 85 countries. More than two-thirds of new virus cases in Bangladesh's capital were of the Delta variant, a recent study by the independent Dhaka-based International Centre for Diarrheal Disease Research reported. —AFP

## HK police arrest top writer from closed Apple Daily

HONG KONG: Hong Kong police arrested the lead opinion writer of Apple Daily on national security grounds as he tried to fly out of the city, local media reported, days after the pro-democracy newspaper was forced to shut down. Apple Daily, an unapologetic backer of Hong Kong's democracy movement, put out its last edition on Thursday after its top leadership was arrested and its assets frozen under a national security law China imposed on Hong Kong last year.

Fung Wai-kong, managing editor and chief opinion writer for the paper's English website, on Sunday became the seventh senior Apple Daily figure detained under the law. Hong Kong police confirmed the arrest of a 57-year-old man at the airport for "conspiring to collude with foreign countries or foreign forces to endanger national security". They did not name Fung, who wrote under the penname Lo Fung, but local media reported that he has been detained for investigation. —AFP

### News in brief

#### 7 dead, 50 hurt in Bangladesh blast

DHAKA: At least seven people were killed and another 50 people were injured after a powerful explosion ripped apart a three-storey building in central Dhaka on Sunday, Bangladeshi officials said, citing a gas pipeline as the likely cause. Police said the explosion was so forceful that it broke the windows of at least four moving buses, injuring dozens of passengers on board. Dhaka police chief Shafiqur Rahman said at least seven people were killed in the explosion, though the fire service offered a lower death toll of three. Police and fire service officials said 50 people were injured. "Fire service officers are at the scene. They will investigate the reason of the explosion." — AFP

#### Two found dead on migrant boat

MADRID: Two people have been found dead in a migrant boat intercepted overnight off the coast of Spain's Canary Islands, local authorities said yesterday. The boat, which was carrying 37 people, was intercepted off the southwestern coast of Gran Canaria island after setting off from Africa, emergency services tweeted. "Two people were found dead and seven men required hospitalization," they said, adding that the boat was taken to the port of Arguineguin. Three of the hospitalised were in serious condition. All those aboard were from sub-Saharan Africa. —AFP

#### UK top brass in COVID isolation

LONDON: Britain's senior military commanders and the defense secretary are self-isolating after the head of the armed forces tested positive for COVID. Ben Wallace, secretary of defense, and the heads of the Navy, the Royal Air Force and Strategic Command were all ordered to isolate for a 10-day period last week, the Telegraph newspaper reported late on Sunday. It added that the head of the Army, General Mark Carleton-Smith, also spent the weekend in self-isolation as he awaited the results of a COVID test.—AFP

#### Court orders Samoa parliament to sit

APIA, Samoa: Samoa's Supreme Court yesterday ordered parliament to sit within seven days, effectively setting a deadline to end a power struggle that has gripped the Pacific island nation for months. In the latest legal twist arising from Samoa's disputed April 9 general election, the court said parliament had one week to convene "without further delay or procrastination". It follows almost three months of manoeuvring between rival claimants for Samoa's prime ministership—long-serving incumbent Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi and opposition leader Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa. Mata'afa, who is bidding to become Samoa's first female leader, has claimed a slim majority in the election but Malielegaoi has refused to concede his 22-year tenure is over and has called for a new poll. — AFP

#### Times Square shooting hurts bystander

NEW YORK: A shooting in New York's bustling Times Square on Sunday injured a 21-year-old bystander, police said, in the latest incident of gun violence in the Big Apple. The man was struck in the back by a stray bullet as he walked with his family past the Marriott Marquis hotel on Broadway around 5:15 pm (22:15 GMT), a NYPD spokesperson told AFP. "He was the unintended target in a dispute between two males," said the spokesperson. The man, who local media said was visiting from upstate New York, was taken to hospital and is expected to survive, the spokesperson added. — AFP

human cost will be enormous—particularly for women, children and the elderly, who face the greatest hardships from violence and displacement." Clashes have taken place in areas that have not seen conflict for decades, forcing humanitarian agencies into a race to set up new operations and supply lines, the ICG said. An estimated 230,000 people have already been displaced by fighting and insecurity so far, the United Nations said last week.

The self-defense groups add to the volatile mix in the poor Southeast Asian country, where more than 20 ethnic rebel groups were already in various stages of the conflict with the state before the coup. As the economy collapses, the new militias may "seek sources of revenue beyond the ad hoc community donations that have so far sustained them," the ICG warned. It is also unlikely that the shadow "National Unity Government"—formed largely of lawmakers from Suu Kyi's ousted government—will be able to bring them under its control, it added. Clashes involving civilian militias and the military have largely been restricted to rural areas. But last week, at least six people died in a gun battle between security forces and a self-defense group in the country's second city of Mandalay. Meanwhile, a junta trial of Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi will run longer than scheduled, her lawyers said yesterday, with the prosecution still to call nearly two dozen witnesses.—AFP

# Business

TUESDAY, JUNE 29, 2021

## France hails Chinese battery factory for Renault in electric push

### Europe steps up its shift toward electric vehicles

**LAMBRES-LEZ-DOUAI:** President Emmanuel Macron visited northern France yesterday to applaud plans for a Chinese-owned battery factory that will supply the automaker Renault as Europe steps up its shift toward electric vehicles. The two-billion-euro (\$2.4 billion) project by China's Envision is being saluted as an example of Macron's efforts to encourage foreign firms to "Choose France" for investment, in particular in cutting-edge technologies.

"With this project, we're going to invest more than 200 million euros alongside the companies, investors and local governments," Macron told executives and local officials at the site. "It's this united France, that knows how to work together... that will allow us to advance and win back our industry, win back our strength, and be both productive and fair," he said.

It will be the second so-called battery "gigafactory" in France, after the plant planned by rival automaker Stellantis and energy giant TotalEnergies. Around 1,000 jobs will be created over the next three years by a project that aims to revive three Renault factories that have struggled

for years. The company hopes to build 500,000 vehicles annually at the sites by 2025. "We see this as a win-win relationship between Renault, Envision and the French government," Envision's chief Lei Zhang told AFP on Sunday.

"This wouldn't have been possible two years ago. It's the right time now thanks to the French recovery plan," he said. Europe has been ramping up efforts to build gigafactories, with a report by Transport & Environment, a nongovernment organisation, showing there are some 40 projects so far.

Later Monday, Macron, a former investment banker, will host his annual gathering of foreign executives at the Palace of Versailles, where 3.5 billion euros (\$4.2 billion) of projects are to be unveiled. He will then attend today's inauguration of the Paris headquarters for the US bank JP Morgan, which will house its European market operations post-Brexit.

"France is organising and hosting the first major international business summit in 18 months," Trade Minister Franck Riester told AFP. "It's a sign of confidence from the participants in our country's future," he said. — AFP



**DOUAI, NORD, FRANCE:** French President Emmanuel Macron is shown an engine during a visit to the site of the future factory of Japan-based battery maker Envision AESC group, where Renault SA develops an electric-vehicle manufacturing hub, in Douai, northern France, yesterday. — AFP

### Mobile congress opens in Spain with tight virus rules

**BARCELONA:** A scaled-back version of the world's biggest mobile telecommunications fair got underway yesterday in Spain under tight virus controls, with top firms avoiding an in-person presence after the pandemic derailed last year's edition. Spain's King Felipe V and Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez were on hand for the opening of the four-day Mobile World Congress (MWC) in Barcelona, one of the first big technology conferences staged in Europe since the start of the pandemic.

"We are back to business, we are back to Barcelona, we are back together," Mats Granryd, director general of the industry association that stages the congress, the GSMA, said in an opening address. The event, which is usually held in February, is taking place this year both in-person at Barcelona's main conference centre as well as digitally, with an online appearance by tech billionaire Elon Musk among the highlights.

Participants will only be allowed into the congress if they have a negative COVID-19 test result which is less than 72 hours old and will have to sign a daily declaration that they are in good health. Dozens of people lined up outside a testing site at the congress on Monday to determine if they could be allowed in.

Once inside they must wear medical-grade FFP2 face masks at all times — lighter surgical masks are not allowed — and follow a one-way

walking system, although arrows on the floor indicating which direction to follow were largely ignored.

Organisers have limited attendance to 50,000 as part of virus control measures, compared with a normal attendance of around 100,000. They expect 30,000-35,000 people to actually attend. "It's a great success on the part of organisers to be able to stage the event. Even if there was a bit of reluctance on the part of firms and visitors to come," said Samuel Norca, a mobile consultant with US firm Amplitude who came from Paris for the congress.

The fair occupies just three halls of the congress centre this year, compared to eight in the past, with hand sanitiser dispensers distributed throughout the site.

#### 'Here to stay'

Many major firms like Samsung, the world's top smartphone maker, Nokia, Google and Facebook have pulled out of the in-person event, citing virus concerns although some will take part virtually. China's beleaguered Huawei, whose smartphone business has been battered by US sanctions, will be the biggest handset maker with a physical presence at the show alongside telecoms operators such as Orange and Telefonica.

Unlike in other years, no major phonemaker is scheduled to present a new flagship device at the event, although Samsung will hold a virtual event on Monday evening to discuss the future of smartwatches. The congress comes as global smartphone sales are rebounding after slumping in 2020 due to the economic havoc caused by the pandemic.

Global smartphone sales fell by 5.9 percent in 2020 to a total of 1.29 billion units, its fourth



**BARCELONA:** A stewardess tries Nova Audio Earrings at the Mobile World Congress (MWC) fair in Barcelona yesterday. — AFP

straight year of declines, but is expected to increase by 7.7 percent this year due to pent-up demand for new devices, according to research firm IDC.

The chairman of Spanish telecoms giant Telefonica, Jose Maria Alvarez-Pallete, said the world was able to shift to remote work and schooling during the pandemic in "no time" thanks to the efforts of the sector. "We are going to witness how a fair amount of these trends are here to stay," he told the gathering.

Global tech show CES, held annually in January in Las Vegas, was held virtually this year because of the pandemic. Organisers of the IFA consumer technology trade fair in Berlin have cancelled their September event, saying the pandemic made it impossible to stage an in-person show. — AFP

### Britain curbs cryptocurrency exchange Binance

**LONDON:** The UK's finance watchdog has banned major cryptocurrency exchange Binance from regulated trading in Britain, as the industry faces greater global scrutiny. Binance Markets Limited, part of Binance Group, is "not permitted to undertake any regulated activity in the UK", the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) said in a statement published over the weekend.

The ban affects options and futures contracts related to bets on price movements of cryptocurrencies. However purchases of cryptocurrency units, such as of bitcoin and dogecoin, can continue since they are not regarded as financial products and are therefore not regulated. Binance Group tweeted that the FCA move would have "no direct impact". Founded in China four years ago, Binance is one of the world's two biggest crypto exchanges along with Coinbase in the United States.

Cryptocurrencies have long sparked concern among central banks and regulators alike, because of their lack of oversight. The FCA has meanwhile warned consumers once more not to be lured by promises of high returns. Bitcoin traders shrugged off the weekend developments, sending the virtual unit up 5.47 percent to \$33,981 in yesterday's deals. The unit has however slumped in recent weeks after China launched a crackdown on the industry. — AFP

### Australia COVID measures to have 'profound' impact

**MELBOURNE:** Australia faces stalled population growth and budget deficits until at least 2060 as a result of emergency COVID-19 measures, the government warned yesterday. The decision to slam shut its borders at the start of the pandemic, combined with lower fertility rates, mean slow population growth that will weigh on the economy, according to the 2021 Intergenerational Report.

A vast stimulus spending programme launched last year—which saw the government pump billions into the economy to avert a full-blown depression—will help keep the budget in deficit until at least 2060. "This outlook has been profoundly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused the most severe global economic shock since the Great Depression," the report says.

"While Australia's economic recovery is well advanced, some effects from this shock will persist for years to come." Australia's population growth has plummeted to its lowest levels in more than a century after it effectively sealed itself off from the rest of the world at the start of the pandemic.

The nation's economic growth has been built on mining and agriculture and fuelled by several waves of mass migration from Europe, Asia and beyond. But with migration not expected to return to pre-pandemic levels until 2024-2025, the report predicts Australia's population of 25.7 million will not grow to 38.8 million until 2060 — six years later than previously forecast.

In a pattern repeated across the globe last



**MELBOURNE:** People walk along a street in Melbourne yesterday, after the release of the 2021 Intergenerational Report saying Australia's economy will grow more slowly over the next 40 years than previously expected. — AFP

year, economic shutdowns to curb the spread of the virus sent Australia tumbling into recession as whole industries ground to a halt. Huge government borrowing to fund economic stimulus plunged the national budget into deficit, where it is now predicted to stay for decades, exacerbated by the pressures of an ageing population.

Opposition Treasury spokesman Jim Chalmers said in a Tweet that the report revealed "an economy smaller than expected, growing slower, saddled with 40+ years of debt and deficits. Generational debt without a generational dividend".

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg, who launched the

report in Melbourne, said it showed Australia would need to boost productivity to maintain living standards. "With lower population growth and falling participation, economic growth will continue to be highly dependent on productivity gains," he said.

Australia's economy and unemployment rates have both rebounded to pre-pandemic levels after a better-than-expected recovery this year. The country has been largely successful in containing COVID-19, with just over 30,000 cases recorded to date, but is now battling several localised outbreaks that have prompted the imposition of new restrictions. — AFP

### Jersey extends licences for EU fishing boats

**RENNES:** The government of Jersey, a self-governing Channel Island between France and Britain, said yesterday that it had extended a transitional fishing agreement with the European Union allowing EU boats to continue operating in its waters for three months.

"The EU has recently requested an extension to the transitional arrangements, which had been due to come to an end on 30 June," a statement from the Jersey government said, adding that "Jersey ministers have agreed to that request."

Jersey lies just off France's northern coast and access to its rich waters has become a source of friction since Britain's departure from the EU on January 1 tore up arrangements for fishing in the Channel. To gain new licences, Jersey has insisted that EU boats hand over proof that they have been operating in its waters previously. The extension "will allow more time for further track record evidence to be submitted and analysed, and for technical matters to be worked through," according to the statement.

French fishermen have complained that the process is deliberately slow and say that many smaller boats are not equipped with GPS and satellite systems that can be used to provide evidence of their past trips.

French trawlers briefly encircled the main port on Jersey on May 6 as part of a protest, leading to a standoff that saw Britain send two naval boats that were shadowed by French coastal patrol vessels. Jersey, which as a crown dependency relies on Britain for defence, has also been alarmed by recent political rhetoric in France which saw a minister threaten to cut off the island's electricity supplies if no fishing deal was found. — AFP



## Business

# Demise of China's 'model' village, where cash and communism collide

## A village conglomerate of over one hundred companies

**HUAXI:** It was a gilt-edged gift to Communist propaganda: a village led by a Party visionary who transformed farmers into millionaires while tacking close to China's collectivist ideals. But Huaxi's success story has soured, sunk by a pernicious brew of nepotism and political patronage which experts say may hold wider lessons for the pitfalls of "capitalism with Chinese characteristics" in a country where power emanates from the Communist Party.

Village chief Wu Renbao transformed Huaxi, a few hours from Shanghai, from a rural backwater into a wealthy collective, surfing China's economic reforms for over four decades as the impoverished nation remade itself into a superpower.

From textiles to steel and real estate, Wu established the "Huaxi Group", a village conglomerate of over one hundred companies. Those minted great wealth and won the village leadership praise for a pioneering approach of returning profits back to residents of China's self-styled "richest village" via beefy dividends.

By 2004, the average annual income of villagers had reportedly reached over 122,000 yuan (\$19,000) — forty times that of most farmers — as Huaxi's status as a winner in China's Party-driven march from poverty gleamed back in rows of villas, garish hotels, overseas degrees and generous social welfare schemes.

"Communists should seek happiness for the majority of the people," Wu was once quoted by the official Xinhua news agency as saying. When he died in 2013 at the age of 84, a 20-vehicle procession transported his coffin as a huge photograph lionised the village patron, surrounded by paper flower wreaths sent by China's top leaders.

But eight years on, the village's economic takeoff appears to have crash-landed. Viral videos shared in February showed residents queuing up at ATMs frantically trying to withdraw their savings, as hard times descend on the village of plenty.

Local media reported the run on the banks was stirred by a collapse of dividends from 30 percent of the conglomerate's profit to just 0.5 percent, with village debt soaring to 38.9 billion yuan (\$6

billion). Authorities have confirmed the images of the ATM run but denied rumours that the town was bankrupt.

It is impossible to report freely in Huaxi — AFP was accompanied by six government minders on arrival, in a sign of the sensitivity of the village's reputation. But it is clear that Wu's family still dominate Huaxi, showing that network, connections and loyalty to the Communist Party — which marks its 100th anniversary on July 1 — remain the elixir for business success in modern China.

The story of Huaxi is "essentially an ugly tale of despotism," said Valarie Tan, analyst at the Mercator Institute for China Studies in Germany. "How a party secretary and his family in China whose power have been unchecked for a very very long time, and that has really led to mismanagement of funds, over leveraging, some really bad investment decisions and some really bad bets."

### All that glitters

Faded decorations hang from rusty lamp posts on empty streets, a sad legacy of the village's fiftieth anniversary celebrations held ten years ago. That event was marked by the inauguration of a 328-metre tower housing a five-star hotel, a giant aquarium, presidential suites and a gold statue of a bull.

The skyscraper cost the village three billion yuan. But there were few customers during a recent AFP visit. An empty 72nd floor — which once housed a revolving restaurant with North Korean dancers — looks out across rows of villas which mostly appeared empty, with disused swimming pools full of muddy water.

"Many tourists used to come to Huaxi," one taxi driver told AFP, like many requesting anonymity in the presence of foreign reporters. "Things have changed." Despite its much-lauded collectivism, the Huaxi Group is "very much a one-family business", says Larry Ong, of the US-based Sinolinsider firm and author of a report on the village.

Key positions in the group and in the village's political hierarchy are held by the Wu family,



**HUAXI:** File photo shows employees working inside a clothing shop in the village of Huaxi in China's eastern Jiangsu province. —AFP

according to documents seen by AFP. Eighteen of Wu's relatives are on the village Party Committee.

His eldest son and son-in-law both held vice chairman roles at Huaxi Group. Wu Xie'en — who took over from his father as the village chief and chairman of Huaxi Group — told state media in 2018 the long-term stewardship of the village conglomerate was in good hands. "We are engaged in high-tech research and development," he said. "In a few years, everyone will see it's effective."

### 'Modern-day Potemkin village'

But last year the group, once among the biggest companies in China, disappeared from the top 500

list. Ong says the branding as a "model" Communist village always glossed over a sharp social hierarchy, which saw the concentration of wealth diluted each kilometre from the city centre.

At Huaxi's "World Park" — a replica-strewn expanse of landmarks from the Arc de Triomphe to the Statue of Liberty — the lost lustre of affluence can be seen in peeling paint and empty walkways. Yet experts say the enduring propaganda value of Huaxi means Beijing is unlikely to let the village go to the wall — especially during its centenary year. "Huaxi is a sort of modern-day Potemkin village that the CCP upholds to justify its continued embrace of a failed ideology," said Ong. —AFP

## Burberry chief moving to Salvatore Ferragamo

**LONDON:** Marco Gobbetti is stepping down as chief executive of British luxury fashion house Burberry to take up the reins at Italian peer Salvatore Ferragamo, the companies announced yesterday. Expressing disappointment at Gobbetti's departure set for the end of the year, Burberry chairman Gerry Murphy said the board respected "his desire to return to Italy after nearly 20 years abroad".

Following the news, Burberry's share price slumped 9.0 percent in early deals on London's benchmark FTSE 100 index. Salvatore Ferragamo gained 2.2 percent in Milan. Murphy added in a statement that the Burberry board would begin its

search for a successor.

Gobbetti will leave after nearly five years in the role, allowing him to be closer to family, while the announcement comes one month after pandemic-hit Burberry announced a strong sales recovery. "With Burberry re-energised and firmly set on a path to strong growth, I feel that now is the right time for me to step down," Gobbetti added in the statement.

In a separate release, Salvatore Ferragamo said Gobbetti would become general manager and chief executive officer of the Florentine group as soon as he is released from his contractual obligations at Burberry. The sharp fall in Burberry's share price "shows how much he is credited with the success of" the group in recent years, noted Russ Mould, investment director at AJ Bell.

Markets.com chief market analyst Neil Wilson said that while there were "some pandemic-related issues still being washed out, Burberry remains a strong brand in the luxury space with room to

appeal to a broader consumer base".

Gobbetti's tenure comes to an end having seen a turnaround in Burberry's fortunes after the heavy financial fallout of the coronavirus outbreak. It recently announced a surge in annual net profit following strong sales in the first three months of the 2021, the final quarter of Burberry's fiscal year.

As head of Burberry, Gobbetti appointed Italian designer Riccardo Tisci as its chief creative officer who ended the use of real fur and angora in its clothes. Formerly CEO of Moschino, Gobbetti spent 13 years at LVMH where he was head of Givenchy and Celine. —AFP



Marco Gobbetti

## S Lanka eyes tougher import controls to halt forex crisis

**COLOMBO:** Sri Lanka's central bank yesterday called for further import restrictions to address a crippling foreign exchange crisis, following a string of loans from Asian neighbours including impoverished Bangladesh. The island nation's foreign exchange reserves were badly hit last year as the Covid-19 pandemic hit and the local currency came under intense pressure and fell to a record low.

International rating agencies have since expressed fears that Colombo would not be able to service its huge foreign debt. The Central Bank of Sri Lanka last week tightened its controls on dollar sales, leading commercial financial institu-

tions to impose quotas on importers of essential commodities.

But central bank governor W. D. Lakshman said more restrictions were needed. "What the central bank is doing now with the participation of all commercial banks, is judicious management of imports and foreign reserves," Lakshman said in a statement. The bank was "of the view that there is further space to curtail non-essential and non-urgent imports," he added.

Sri Lanka had already banned luxury goods and car imports since last year to combat the outflow of foreign currency. The ban first imposed in March last year applied to tumeric — a staple in local curries, tiles, toilets, tyres, cosmetics, vehicle spare parts, electronic and electrical appliances.

The country's foreign reserves are currently at \$4 billion, down from \$7.8 billion in late 2019 when the government of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa came to power promising robust growth. The economy shrank by a record 3.6 percent last year

and fraud, in cooperation with the Central Bank of Kuwait and the Cybercrime Department of the Ministry of Interior, he indicated.

Al-Matrouk added that the youth are currently falling victim to exploitation, as a result of misuse of the Internet and social media platforms, as well as various fraud schemes using fraudulent text messages, e-mails, and even phone calls.

The youth should be aware of not responding the requests for personal information from anonymous people via e-mail, text messages or phone calls, noting that these are fraudulent attempts aiming to obtain banking information to steal money or personal data, he emphasized.

Al-Matrouk called for cautious dealing with links, because just clicking the link may lead to stealing confidential banking information.

One of the fraudulent schemes used by scammers is to inform the customer that their debit card was stopped due to not updating their information. Then, they ask them to contact a phone number to update the information, which allows them to obtain customer's data, and thus steal his money through online transactions or transfers to intermediary accounts, to pass that money through the financial systems inside and outside Kuwait, which makes tracking and recovering these amounts very difficult, Al-Matrouk explained.

He stressed that NBK is constantly working on enhancing its systems and procedures to ensure security for its customers and employees, and offer them

top-notch banking services in a convenient and secure manner.

Al-Matrouk noted that NBK is keen to spread awareness and means of protection from the fraud risk among customers. To this end, the bank is intensifying awareness campaigns through its various channels, including providing tips, with the aim of familiarizing customers with the risks of theft and fraud using enticing methods via the phone or the Internet.

It is worth mentioning that NBK, in cooperation with the Cybercrime Department of the Ministry of Interior, sponsors LOYAC's Cybercrime Committee Program within its Awareness Committee Program, which is organized online via Zoom during the period from 6 to 22 June, 2021, and attended by participants from the youth.

As the leading financial institution in Kuwait and the region, NBK frequently organizes various activities that contribute to raising awareness about all topics related to the banking sector. It also organizes a wide range of training courses in the areas of combating fraud and financial crime.



Khalid Al-Matrouk

## NBK intensifies awareness campaigns against fraud risk

**KUWAIT:** As part of its initiatives aiming to raise social awareness, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) continued to support LOYAC's Cybercrime Committee Program, organized in cooperation with the Cybercrime Department of the Ministry of Interior.

The 3-week program included an online workshop with the youth, to raise awareness about cybercrime laws and programs that fall under the law, with the aim of raising social awareness about the fundamentals of cyber security. This awareness program also hosted a group of experts and specialists in this type of crimes from the Ministry of Interior.

In his speech during the program, Khalid Al-Matrouk, Chief Security Officer and Head of Anti-Financial Crime-Kuwait at National Bank of Kuwait said: "NBK's participation and sponsorship of this cybercrime awareness program aims to raise the youth's awareness on the necessary measures to protect themselves, as well as society, from the challenges posed by these crimes."

NBK is a key partner and player in all the initiatives aiming to raise awareness on the risks of cybercrime

## Asian markets mostly down after last week's gains

**HONG KONG:** Asian and European stocks were slightly lower yesterday as traders took a breather after last week's rally while keeping tabs on Federal Reserve monetary policy plans in light of the positive outlook for the global economy. The bipartisan agreement between US lawmakers Thursday on a huge infrastructure deal provided an extra boost to already upbeat investors, who have also been calmed by Fed pledges to maintain record-low interest rates and vast bond-buying for as long as the recovery needs.

Even a sharp spike in a closely watched gauge of consumer spending for May was taken in stride on trading floors, with much of the surge being attributed to rallying energy costs. After another record close on Wall Street, Asia struggled to maintain momentum yesterday. Tokyo, Hong Kong, Wellington, Manila, Mumbai, Bangkok and Jakarta all eased, while Shanghai, Sydney and Seoul were barely moved. Singapore and Taipei rose. London, Paris and Frankfurt all fell in the morning session. Observers warned that while the general mood was positive, investors remained on edge as inflation continues to be a worry.

The Fed is "far away from tapering, they are far away from increasing rates, but at some point, if the markets sees the Fed being too far behind the curve you will start to see some adjustment on the long end of the curve", Charles-Henry Monchau, at FlowBank SA, told Bloomberg TV. "We might not have seen the peak in bond yields. I would not be surprised to see some adjustments in the coming months. That might be an excuse for the market to take a bit of profit."

### Eyes on Biden's new stimulus

Traders will also be keeping a close eye on Washington after Joe Biden, Democrats and Republicans came together for a rare agreement on the near \$1 trillion roads and bridges plan, with the president acknowledging there was no guarantee the package would get through Congress.

The White House on Saturday stepped back from a call to link it to a wider tax-and-spending bill — including priorities such as climate change mitigation, child care, schools and social services — that is opposed by Republicans. The announcement fanned fears Biden had threatened to veto the new agreement.

Still, National Australia Bank's Ray Attrill said: "One of the catalysts for US equities achieving new record highs last week was the news of a handshake deal between the president and a bipartisan group of senators, but some Republican senators now 'smell a rat' in so far as voting for the infrastructure bill could be akin to also voting for the American Families Plan." He added that "developments here promise to be one source of market volatility in the week ahead". Investors will be keeping an eye on the release this week of key manufacturing data from around the world for a better grip on the state of the economic recovery, while crucial US jobs figures are also due. Oil prices were flat, having hit multi-year highs last week on demand optimism, while traders are awaiting the monthly meeting of OPEC and other top producers Thursday, which is expected to see them lift output to ease fears over falling supplies. —AFP

# Kuwait: Current account surplus up in 4Q20 on higher investment income

## Imports regain momentum, but remain below pre-pandemic levels

**KUWAIT:** The current account surplus increased in 4Q20 to reach KD 3.5 billion (41.5% of GDP) from a revised surplus of KD 2.4 billion (29.4% of GDP) in the previous quarter, according to the Kuwaiti central bank latest data. While exports remained relatively stable, imports bounced back leading to a decline in the trade balance.

Investment income on the other hand improved due to better financial markets performance in the fourth quarter, supported by positive investor sentiment about economic recovery including on account of additional fiscal stimulus in the US. On the other side, the financial account continued to register net outflows, of KD 2.9 billion, though slightly lower compared to the previous quarter. As a result, the overall balance of payments registered a surplus of KD1 billion, down from a KD2.5 billion surplus in 3Q20.

### Trade balance surplus dropped on higher imports

The worsening of trade balance came on the back of higher imports, which increased by 8.6% q/q driven mainly by imports of Vehicles & parts & accessories (72.3% q/q in 4Q20), electrical machinery (18.4% q/q), and iron & steel (46.2% q/q). On the other hand, total exports increase only by 0.6% q/q to reach KD3.2 billion. Oil exports (88.4% of total exports) remained stable at KD2.8 billion despite the increase in Kuwait oil price and oil production compared to the previous quarter by 1.7% and 2.1% q/q to reach \$44.2/bbl. and 2.29 mb/d, respectively, probably due to higher production cost (Chart 2).

Meanwhile, non-oil exports increased by 3.9% q/q in the form of re-exports which increased by 16.3% q/q. However, on a year-on-year basis, total

trade remain well below its pre-pandemic level (4Q19) by around 25% y/y as both exports and imports were lower by 32.6% and 10.3% y/y, respectively.

The services account continued to register a deficit of KD0.8 billion (10.3% of GDP), relatively similar to that in 3Q20, despite the notable decline in travel payments to KD0.3 billion from around KD0.5 billion. However, the deficit in transportation and construction services worsened, which could be attributed to the opening up of trade among GCC countries as well as the rise in construction activities by around 35% q/q in 4Q20.

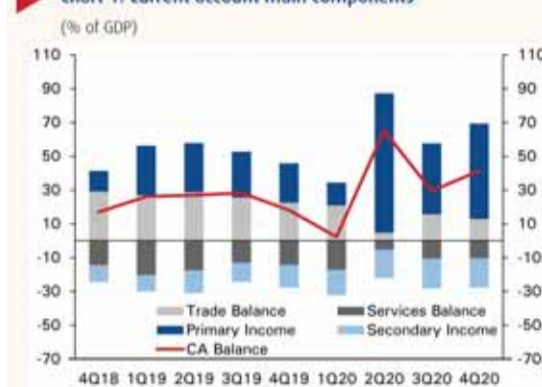
### Investment income improved significantly

The primary income, which registers the returns on investments abroad, rose significantly (by KD 1.4 billion q/q), leading to a surplus of KD 4.8 billion (56.3% of GDP). This rise could be solely attributed to the gains on Kuwaiti's direct and portfolio investments abroad, which increased to reach KD2.2 billion and KD2.6 billion, respectively. Investment income was supported by signs of economic recovery and stimulus optimism, which helped major financial markets to rally in 4Q20. As for the secondary income, consisting of government transfers and workers' remittances, it had a deficit of KD1.5 billion in 4Q20 as workers' remittances increased by 5.1% q/q, higher than its historical average.

### Financial account net outflows remained sizable

The financial account, which covers the net acquisition and disposal of financial assets and liabilities, showed an outflow of KD2.9 billion in 4Q20 slightly lower than 3Q20 net outflows of KD 3.0 billion, but remaining above its historical averages during the last three years.

Chart 1: Current account main components (% of GDP)



Source: Central Bank of Kuwait, CSB, NBK estimates

Chart 2: KEC price and production (\$/bbl, mb/d)



Source: OPEC

The slight decline in financial account net outflows came on the back of a notable fall in government deposits abroad by KD 6 billion, which partly offset increases in net direct and portfolio equity investments and debt instruments. In addition, non-resident portfolio equity investments witnessed an increase of KD 1.7 billion in 4Q20 despite the end of market classification upgrades' series.

### CBK reserve assets remained stable

The Central Bank of Kuwait's (CBK) gross international reserves remained at KD14.7 billion by the end of December following an increase of KD0.7 billion in the previous quarter. These reserves represented around 45.2% of GDP or 13 months of imports of goods and services.

### The current account surplus could improve in 2021

The trade balance should recover in 2021 as oil

exports increase on the back of higher oil prices and possibly an increase in oil production as OPEC+ could release more output into the market over the coming months as per the agreed production schedule, and to prevent an "overshooting" of oil prices. The suspension of all commercial flights and border closure by the end of 4Q20 could help in curbing the services account deficit in 1H21. However, the recent decisions to reopen the economy and the easing of restrictions on travel could see more people traveling abroad and this would have an adverse impact on the services account. As for workers' remittances, they will likely decline somewhat in the upcoming quarters following the fall in number of expats by around 4.0% in 2020. While it is not clear how investment income will turn out in 2021, we believe that overall, the surplus in trade balance resulting from higher oil exports could offset any worsening in the other components, leading to a larger surplus in the current account.

## KIB acts as joint lead manager for AUB's \$600m T1 Sukuk issuance

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait International Bank (KIB) announced that it recently acted as a Joint Lead Manager in the \$600 million perpetual non-call Tier 1 (T1) Sukuk issuance for Ahli United Bank (AUB), alongside several regional and international banks and financial institutions. The mudaraba-based unconvertible Sukuk were issued at a fixed profit rate of 3.875%, with the first reset date set as December 17, 2026.

In addition to KIB acting as a joint lead manager with international banks serving as global coordinators along with local banks & financial institutions as joint lead managers and bookrunners. Speaking about KIB's participation in the issuance, Jamal Al-Barrak, General Manager of the Investment Department at the Bank, said: "The Sukuk market across the region continues to present numerous opportunities for attractive long-term investments and value-driven transactions. At KIB, we are firm believers in playing an active role in the investment landscape and the debt capital market, both in Kuwait and the GCC. Taking part in notable issuances and deals from our local jurisdiction, such as this one, is a major part of that."

Al-Barrak further added: "Despite the setbacks and challenges of the past 18 months, the debt capital markets continue to function efficiently and actively as we have recently seen with a number of impressive deals from banks, corporates as well as sovereigns. As a Bank, we are determined to continue to build our investment portfolio and contribute towards the sustainable growth and development of the region's investment infrastructure."

It serves to note that KIB continues to participate in various high-quality issuances in Kuwait and across the GCC. The Bank served as joint lead manager and joint bookrunner in the Sukuk issuance for Qatar International Islamic Bank's Tier 1 Issuance (QIIB), the first of its kind from Qatar. The Bank also participated as co-manager for Masraf Al Rayan's \$500 million Senior Unsecured Sukuk issuance, which garnered an oversubscription close to three times, in addition to being co-manager for Dubai Islamic Bank's (DIB) \$750 million Senior Unsecured Sukuk issuance, which was oversubscribed three times.

In 2021, KIB served as Joint Lead Manager in the Boubayan Bank \$500 million additional Tier 1 Sukuk, and was a co-manager for the issuance of the first-of-its-kind "Sustainability Sukuk" by the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), with a value of \$1.5 billion for a period of five years and an aim to mitigate the effects of the novel coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) for IsDB member states.

The Bank also continued to invest in diversifying its own portfolio, as KIB successfully concluded a series of successful financial transactions in 2020, including the issuance of \$300 million Tier 2 Basel III compliant 10-Year non-call 5-year Sukuk. Priced at a profit rate of 2.375% per annum and 9 times oversubscribed, the Sukuk was the highest-rated T2 in Kuwait and the GCC, in addition to being the first USD T2 Sukuk from Kuwait to be listed on the London Stock Exchange (LSE) and the first USD Basel 3 compliant T2 from Kuwait.



Jamal Al-Barrak

## BB offers its customers 30% discount on Talabat

**KUWAIT:** Burgan Bank announced the launch of its latest campaign in cooperation with Talabat, the leading online food delivery platform. This new campaign is aligned with the Bank's strategy aimed at developing sustainable relationships with its customers through the best-in-class offers that suit their lifestyle.

Throughout the campaign period extending from June 15 to July 15, Burgan will provide its customers with up to 30% discount on their orders through Talabat.com. Customers holding Burgan credit cards including Haiba, Qatar Airways Mastercard World, Qatar Airways Titanium Mastercard, Titanium Mastercard and Classic Mastercard can benefit from the discount on two orders during the campaign period when using one of the eligible cards to pay. The discount is applied instantly upon



Saket Jajoo

payment using the eligible Burgan card either on the customer's card or on his personal account on Talabat.com without the need to enter a promotional code. The offer includes all the items available on Talabat.com with no minimum order value and with a maximum discount of KD 6.

Commenting on this new campaign, Saket Jajoo, Head of Cards at Burgan Bank said "In addition to innovative financial and investment solutions, we strive at Burgan to constantly provide our customers with special offers through partnerships with the best brands in order to maintain sustainable long-term relationships with them. Because our customers' satisfaction is a key factor in the success of our business, we have designed this new campaign with Talabat for our Burgan Mastercard credit card holders to provide them with an added-value offer through our cards that guarantee them a convenient and com-



fortable banking experience as well as various exceptional benefits."

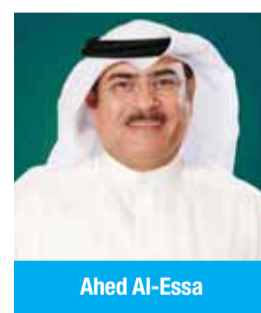
Burgan Bank's credit cardholders enjoy a variety of benefits when using their cards inside and outside Kuwait, and they can freely choose among a wide array of special products and services that cater to their needs and suit their lifestyle. The Bank continues to develop and vary its products to deliver its promise of excellence to customers through a rewarding banking experience.

## KFH leasing product offers variety of branded cars

**KUWAIT:** KFH Executive Manager - Automobiles & Equipment, Ahd Al-Essa said that KFH is currently providing, through its leasing product, a variety of branded cars to fulfill the needs of various customer categories including (youth - family - others) and competitive rental prices starting with KD 69/- . The offer provides an unprecedented level of service as well as leasing and post leasing advantages. KFH is keen on providing the best rental services and the latest car models according to finance lease

and operational lease systems.

Al-Essa added in a press release that "The operational and finance lease product provides a vast variety which comprises the most famous brands, approximately 70 types, of different cars. New brands have been added including Mercedes - Nissan Patrol - GM to the rental fleet. KFH is distinguished for providing the best customer service (Retail and corporate) according to the highest levels of service quality, thus giving customers the opportunity to choose the car that suits their taste from the latest vari-



Ahd Al-Essa

## EnerTech Holding Co. signs agreement for \$190m water supply

**SINDH:** EnerTech Holding Company and the Government of Sindh signed a concession agreement to construct and operate a landmark water supply and storage project, with a total project cost of approximately 30.1 billion Pakistani Rupees (\$190 million), in the Thar region in Sindh Province, Pakistan. The water supplied by the project will be utilized for power sector and will lead to job creation and development in the Thar region of Sindh.

EnerTech Holding Company is a fully owned subsidiary of National Technology Enterprises Company (NTEC), which in turn is a fully owned subsidiary of the Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA), the Sovereign Wealth Fund of the State of Kuwait. The 25-year concession agreement relates to the processing and supply of 45 Cusecs water from Nabisar, Sindh through a 61-kilometer pipeline to Vajihar, Sindh. The project will also encompass the construction of reservoirs at Nabisar and Vajihar to ensure storage of water for a cumulative period of 75 days.

The project has been developed on a fast-track basis by EnerTech Holding Company and the Government of Sindh in a period of twelve months. The quick project development timeline under-



Officials seen during the signing of the agreement.

scores EnerTech Holding Company's commitment to invest in critical infrastructure projects that are deemed strategically important.

The Chief Executive Officer of EnerTech Holding Company, Abdullah Al Mutairi stated: "This is a strategic project for EnerTech, developed in partnership with the Government of Sindh. We are pleased to have developed a sustainable and critical project on a fast-track basis during the coronavirus pandemic. This success is testament to EnerTech's capabilities in infrastructure development. We are excited about contributing to the development of key infrastructure projects in Pakistan."

ety of car models and avail the best rental prices, flexible rental terms and suitable rental period ranging 1-5 years. These distinguished services enhance KFH role and contributions to customer service and support to the automobile market.

Al-Essa said that KFH is characterized by its unique and special offers to customers (government and private sectors) in addition to the exquisite marketing campaigns in cooperation with reputable local automobile agents, thus enhancing KFH market share in the retail and corporate rental market. KFH rental products are characterized for their several attractive advantages including comprehensive maintenance, comprehensive takaful insurance, replacement car, road assistance service 24/7 and the possibility to travel in the leased car according to certain terms and conditions.

The Pakistan's Ambassador to Kuwait his Excellency Syed Sajjad Haider stated that "I am very happy today to see culmination of Investment from EnerTech Holding Company which is part of Kuwait Investment Authority which is one of the most blue-chip investors in the region. Kuwait has been a long-term investor in Pakistan historically and the two countries share important trade links. This project shows that Pakistan is open for investment for sophisticated investors globally. I hope this project will encourage more investment from Kuwait in Pakistan in critical sectors to support the growth and strengthen our economic ties."



This handout photo taken and released by Cambodia's Ministry of Environment shows a male lion sitting next to a transportation container as it was being confiscated by authorities from a private residence where it was being raised as a pet in Phnom Penh.



This handout photo shows a male lion as it is being confiscated by authorities from a private residence where it was being raised as a pet in Phnom Penh. — AFP photos

### Chris Pratt battles future aliens in small-screen 'Tomorrow War'

With a top Hollywood star, a dark "Terminator"-esque sci-fi premise and a reported \$200 million price tag, "The Tomorrow War" would ordinarily be shaping up as one of the summer's biggest and smartest blockbusters. But the Chris Pratt-led movie won't be troubling box offices at all, having been sold to Amazon for a whopping fee back in January, when movie theaters were shut in COVID-slammaged California and beyond. Now, it will stream globally on Prime Video from July 2, making it one of the biggest blockbusters ever to skip theaters entirely. "Please don't watch it on your phones! Watch it on the biggest screen you possibly can with the loudest sound-crank it up," director Chris McKay told AFP.



In this file photo US actor Chris Pratt arrives for Disney Pixar's "Onward" premiere at El Capitan theatre in Hollywood.—AFP

"Invite the neighbors over so that they're not annoyed that you're cranking it up-but just watch it with a lot of people because you're going to have a good time." The film's explosive premise is quickly established: time travelers suddenly appear from the near future, where a horrifying alien invasion is on the verge of wiping out humanity. They beg their own parents and grandparents to travel with them three decades into the future to help fend off hordes of the nightmarish, endlessly ravenous "white spikes."

The movie combines effects-laden action scenes shot on locations including Iceland with horror tropes, family drama, and even environmental themes like climate change. "When we were making the movie, there were existential threats that we had in the back of our mind-like 'what's your responsibility for future generations?'" said McKay. "And then COVID comes along," he recalled, forcing a film shot mainly before the pandemic's arrival to be finished remotely at post-production editors' homes. The parallels of a world suddenly turned upside-down by a threat requiring a unified response were not lost on the filmmakers. "It's dovetailing... we process things through movies, because they can put them in a distance, and especially when it's a genre movie," said the director.

#### 'Movie star'

For Betty Gilpin, who plays the therapist wife of Pratt's military veteran, the film fulfills two key functions: pure, escapist entertainment and "slipping in" a message or two about our duty to the planet's future. "That also really drew me to this script-that it seems like it's going to be this mindless popcorn movie, and then it really has some smart things to say," she told AFP. Gilpin is best known for "GLOW," a cult Netflix show about a real-life 1980s California female wrestling troupe. Her path from TV comedy to blockbuster movie echoes that of co-star Pratt, who broke through as the chubby, loveable goofball Andy Dwyer in NBC sitcom "Parks and Recreation."

Pratt has since beefed up for leading roles in some of Hollywood's biggest franchises, including Marvel superhero movies like "Guardians of the Galaxy" and the "Jurassic World" films. He is married to the daughter of action-movie legend Arnold Schwarzenegger, Katherine.

"I think a lot of people respect that he went from that (sitcom) guy to the 'Guardians of the Galaxy,'" said McKay, who also previously worked with Pratt on "The Lego Movie." "He's a movie star but he can do so many different things and be so incredibly vulnerable." In his latest role, Pratt plays a former special ops soldier who feels trapped in a suburban teacher job-before he gets drafted to battle aliens in the future. "I'm such a huge 'Parks and Rec' fan," said Gilpin of her on-screen husband. "So I feel, to me, he'll be Andy, always." — AFP



# Chinese owner has pet lion confiscated in Cambodia

Cambodian authorities on Sunday confiscated a pet lion after the defanged and declawed animal was seen in TikTok videos in a Phnom Penh villa. The 18-month-old male, weighing 70 kilograms (154 pounds), had been imported from overseas by the owner, a Chinese national, to be raised in his home, environment ministry spokesman Neth Pheaktra told

AFP. "Cambodian authorities started investigating this lion since we saw it on TikTok in late April," Pheaktra said.

Wildlife Alliance-an animal rescue NGO that aided in the raid-wrote in a Facebook post that the conditions of a private residence was "inappropriate for a wild animal". "In addition, the lion's canine teeth had been removed, along with its claws, which drastically reduces

a lion's quality of life," it said. The owner had shared a photo of the lion sitting in a driveway as a dog played nearby. There was also a video of it as a young cub being sprayed down with a hose. "People have no right to raise rare wildlife as pets," Pheaktra said.

The big cat was shown in photos released Sunday by the environment ministry lounging with a small dog as

authorities prepped a crate to move it to the Phnom Tmao Wildlife Rescue Centre in the outskirts of the capital. The confiscation comes a day after a Twitter user posted an aerial shot of the creature roaming around a garden in the upscale Boeung Keng Kang district of Phnom Penh.— AFP

### 'The Rock' serenades cancer-stricken fan - badly

Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson attempted to serenade a fan with breast cancer - but his voice cracked after the first line. The 49-year-old actor was "so excited" to send a personal musical message to a woman named Melissa, who has been battling Stage 4 cancer for the last six years, but he struggled to get to grips with the higher notes in his chosen song, Garth Brooks' 'Much Too Young', and had to terminate his performance. He said in a video shared to Instagram: "I'm so excited right now to deliver this very special message. I'm so excited my cheeks are red. This goes out to a very special woman. A very strong woman. Melissa, A.K.A Missy!" "I want to say first of all, thanks for being a fan, I am honored and I know you are fighting hard, and I know that you're home. Keep fighting and keep staying strong Missy. "I also know you're Garth Brooks' biggest fan... You know I love my country music.



So in the spirit of Garth, this one's for you." But after his voice kept cracking, the former wrestler ultimately gave up his attempts to sing after just two lines. He added: "I'm so sorry, I sing in keys that don't exist. "I'm gonna let Garth sing, he'd be honored to know you're a fan of his Thank you and keep staying strong and inspiring all those around you, including us. We love you Missy, stay strong.(sic)" Despite his botched musical tribute, the 'Moana' star hoped his video would bring happiness to his fan. He captioned his post: "I apologize about my singing in keys that don't exist and sounding like I'm experiencing puberty again. I hope this makes you smile, Missy!(sic)" Dwayne's sweet video came just a month after he recorded himself singing his 'Moana' alter ego Maui's song 'You're Welcome' for a four-year-old cancer patient named Indy Llew Jones. He wrote at the time: "Stay strong honey and keep singing your songs."



### Scarlett Johansson to launch a beauty line

The 'Black Widow' star will release a clean beauty collection in 2022 after she dropped her beauty collaborations with other brands to create a line that is "true" to herself. She told WWD: "I've been fascinated by the transformative power of beauty since I was a child. My mother instilled in me a passion for self-care from my early teenage years. Several years ago, I took a step back from my beauty deals with the goal of creating something true to me. The result is a clean, accessible approach to beauty." The line is being funded by The Najafi Companies. Scarlett, 36, has co-founded the line with Kate Foster and it has been in the works for the past two years. She commented: "I met Scarlett almost two years ago. She shared her brand vision with me and right away, I was thinking about how we could turn it into a reality. It has been an incredible experience working alongside her and we are thrilled to have the support and partnership of The Najafi Companies to help the brand achieve its full potential. "We are proud to have built a brand that fills a void in the market and addresses a true consumer need. Our brand platform is differentiated and has a great deal of runway for growth and expansion." Jahm Najafi, founder and chief executive officer of the Najafi Companies, added: "The Najafi Companies is an entrepreneurial and mission-driven private investment firm. We are not a fund and we don't manage third-party capital. We invest using our own capital, which enables us to truly think long term, move expeditiously and remain highly flexible. "We also do not subscribe to a diversification strategy; rather, we concentrate our time and resources and look for needles in a haystack. We are passionate about supporting ambitious and thoughtful founders and management teams who lead with integrity and vision. Scarlett and Kate fit squarely in the type of leaders with whom we love to partner for the long term."

### Jennifer Hudson feels Aretha Franklin pressure

Jennifer Hudson is feeling "a lot of pressure" about portraying Aretha Franklin on screen. The 'Dreamgirls' actress was given "strength and encouragement" about appearing in 'Respect' after being personally chosen by the late Queen of Soul - who passed away in 2018 - but she admitted the recognition has also raised the stakes of expectation for the film, which will be released this summer after being delayed by more than six months due to the coronavirus pandemic. She told

'Entertainment Tonight': "That's a lot, a lot, a lot of pressure!" Everyone is counting down and I'm like, 'Please don't tell me! I don't want to know, that's enough pressure.' "Enough with her being like, 'Jennifer do this.' But that's that women power, that's that empowerment, like if she passed the torch and she said, 'Jennifer you can do it,' that gives me the strength and the encouragement to try." Jennifer recently released 'Here I Am (Singing My Way Home)', an original song from the film's soundtrack and she hoped she was able to do Aretha's roots justice with the track. She said: "You should feel the church in it, the spirit, the soul. "I wanted to make sure that was the base and the premise of everything because Aretha was the gospel... I'm so happy to hear that [it sounds like Aretha] because that was my sentiments exactly."



### Kid Cudi: Kurt Cobain inspired SNL floral dress

Kid Cudi says Kurt Cobain inspired him to wear a floral dress on 'Saturday Night Live'. The 37-year-old rapper turned heads in the strappy gown on the late-night comedy sketch show in April. And he has now explained how the late Nirvana frontman famously rocking a similar style on the cover of The Face magazine in 1993 was his muse, while he also wanted to inspire young people to be themselves and wear whatever they want to. Speaking on 'The Shop: Uninterrupted', Cudi explained: "The image of seeing Kurt Cobain in a dress was very rock 'n' roll to me. That was cool. So I already made my mind up years ago that I wanted to do this. And it's cool because I'm also giving confidence to the kids and telling them to be themselves and do what they want to do." The 'Memories' hitmaker faced backlash by some for his outfit choice but he loves that he has caused a stir. He said: "I've already seen people making YouTube videos where they're just strictly talking about me and this dress. Like grown men, angry, grown Black men, angry. 'He's doing something against men and mas-

culinity, it's a big thing going on...' And I just be like, 'Yo, this is so funny, this is crazy that I've stirred it up like this.' "I'm more like, 'Hmm, I wonder why they feel that way. I've never been someone who's, like, thinking about the backlash. I don't care about what anyone thinks. You can't when you're doing this thing. I knew it would make some people angry, but I love that. Because hip-hop is so weird about this thing." Meanwhile, Cudi has recently been open about his mental health struggles and admitted that his sadness "eats away" at him. The music star posted the following text on Instagram: "Sadness eats away at me sometimes. How do I deal? A lot of u hit me and ask how I get through. Truthfully, idk. Some days are great, others not so great. I just try to believe God has something better for me. I try to have faith in the light. Please, believe." Cudi captioned the post: "God has better days waitin for me. I just know it. (sic)" — Bang Showbiz



A butterfly flies over lavender plants at Cyherbia botanical park in the Cypriot village of Avgorou in southwestern Famagusta District.



Elena Tsolakis harvests the Damask roses for oil extraction in the small mountain village of Agros standing of the Troodos mountain range.



A worker collects lavender from a field which will be used for essential oil extraction at Cyherbia Botanical Park in the Cypriot village of Avgorou in southwestern Famagusta District.



A worker prepares to extract essential lavender oil using stem distillation at Cyherbia Botanical Park in the Cypriot village of Avgorou in southwestern Famagusta District.



Miranda Tringis, owner of Cyherbia botanical park, arranges lavender oil products displayed for sale in the Cypriot village of Avgorou in southwestern Famagusta District.



Owner Miranda Tringis takes out a butterfly, known as the eastern tiger swallowtail, from a mesh cage used for raising butterflies at Cyherbia Botanical Park in the Cypriot village of Avgorou in southwestern Famagusta District.



Elena Tsolakis arranges the Damask roses for oil extraction in the small mountain village of Agros standing of the Troodos mountain range. — AFP photos

## Ancient aromas aim to lure new crop of tourists to Cyprus

Lavender, basil and roses: aromatic plants are being cultivated in Cyprus to broaden the island's sun-and-sea appeal and regain a lofty botanical status dating back to Roman times. From sunrise in the village of Agros, 1,100 metres (3,600 feet) above sea level in the Troodos mountain range, Andria Tsolakis, her younger sister Elena and their mother Maria busy themselves among their rose bushes. In the crisp morning air, they gather the Damask roses for which Agros and the family are famed. For more than seven decades, the Tsolakis family have cultivated the pink rose of Syrian origin they say first cropped up mysteriously at the foot of the village church. From the precious harvest, they extract rose water and oils used in cooking and cosmetics.

"We need around 400 roses, flowers, in order to make one kilo (two pounds) of roses (petals). And from that kilo, we will produce two liters of rose water," said 31-year-old Andria. When their father, Chris, took over the business, he decided to start up a boutique called "The Rose Factory" and to add Agros to the eastern Mediterranean island's tourist circuit. In a normal tourist season, before the Covid-19 pandemic that has brought much of the sector to its knees, "we welcomed up to 10 buses every day," said Elena. Today, a partly European Union-funded project aims to promote tourism in six southern European states-Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Italy and Malta-with the lure of their aromatic and medici-

nal plants.

Mappae (Medicinal and Aromatic Plants Pathways Across Europe) says its mission is to "create a multi-sensory, tourist and cultural thematic route, linking European destinations united by a common tradition". "We are blessed with more

"The climate here is ideal to grow these kind of herbs, because herbs love the heat, they love the strong sun," said herbalist Miranda Tringis, who runs a botanical park near Ayia Napa, the island's top beach destination. Cyprus is proud of its riches in flora, its plants as well as olive



Elena Tsolakis (left) and workers harvest the Damask roses for oil extraction in the small mountain village of Agros standing of the Troodos mountain range.

than 800 different herbs, some of them can only be found in Cyprus," said Yioula Michaelidou Papakyriacou, Cypriot coordinator of the project. "Our grandmothers could heal everything with herbs," she said. Papakyriacou puts the high quality of the island's essential oils down to its geology, the formation of the Troodos range, air quality and weather conditions.

and cypress trees. "It was like that in the first century after Christ, when (Roman naturalist) Pliny the Elder wrote that the herbs of Cyprus are the best in the entire Roman empire," said Tringis. "And that is still true to this day." — AFP

## Mask-free and 'low risk', Italy welcomes milestone

Italians were finally able to go outside without masks yesterday after the whole country became a "low-risk" zone for coronavirus, a milestone for the first European country to be hit by the global pandemic in February 2020. In a decree that took effect yesterday, the health ministry for the first time classified each of Italy's 20 regions as "white", the lowest of four categories under a colour-coded classification system that evaluates COVID-19 risk. It means facemasks are no longer compulsory in outdoor areas-welcome news in a country where an ongoing heat-wave is expected to push temperatures past 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit) in some southern areas this week. "It's a kind of relief as it's very hot," local Salvatore Casuccio told AFP in central Rome.

However, many people out and about on yesterday were still wearing

their masks, whether through habit or continued concern. Giulia, another Rome resident, was still wearing hers, as was her mother. "We are still concerned about this situation. It's not over yet," she said. Once a symbol of the coronavirus crisis in the West-with images of army trucks transporting coffins from the overflowing morgue in the northern city of Bergamo seen around the world-Italy has seen infections and deaths plummet in recent weeks.

One third of Italy's population over the age of 12 had been fully vaccinated, or 17.8 million people, according to the government. Long prohibited from entering the country, tourists from the European Union, the United States, Canada and Japan are returning after the government removed a quarantine requirement for vaccinated visitors, or those who test negative. Despite the

progress, Health Minister Roberto Speranza urged Italians to be vigilant as the Delta variant, which is causing havoc in many countries, spreads across Italy. "Caution and prudence is still needed, especially because of the new variants," Speranza wrote, after signing the ordinance Saturday. "The battle is not yet won."

After months of stop-start restrictions, including full national lockdowns over Christmas and Easter, coronavirus measures have been gradually eased since late April. The lone hold-out in being classified "white" yesterday was the Aosta Valley, the small alpine region in the northwest. In Italy, more than 127,000 people have died of COVID-19 related complications, while more than four million people have been infected. — AFP

## Belgian art star Jan Fabre sent to trial for sexual harassment

Belgian choreographer Jan Fabre, one of Europe's most celebrated and controversial artists, has been referred to a Belgian criminal court on charges of sexual harassment in the workplace, a court statement said yesterday. The 62-year-old choreographer, visual artist and theatre director is known for his provocative performances that openly address sexuality. A first hearing will take place in Antwerp on September 21, the court said. The case stems from complaints by twenty dancers who in 2018 alleged suffering years of humiliation and sexual harassment in an open letter that thrust the #metoo movement into the highest spheres of Europe's avant garde.

The former employees described a toxic work environment where sexual acts became an exchange for performance

time and where "humiliation was our daily bread". Among other accusations, they said that Jan Fabre invited artists to his home under the pretext of preparing performances, but would then attempt a "sexual approach". Some staff were offered a substantial sum after these invitations, with those who refused the money seeing their stature in the group suffer. They alleged several acts of humiliation and sexual intimidation, including "semi-secret" photographic sessions in which dancers were singled out with offers of money and urged to take drugs to "feel more free". The statement said that Fabre would be tried for "violence" and "sexual harassment in the workplace" against 12 employees, as well as "indecent assault on a person". — AFP



In this file photo Belgian multidisciplinary artist Jan Fabre and newly appointed artistic director of the annual Athens and Epidaurus Festival looks on during a press conference at Athens Acropolis museum to present the festival's program. — AFP

## Sports

# Djokovic slides to victory as Wimbledon makes soggy return

LONDON: Novak Djokovic overcame an early scare before getting his bid for a sixth Wimbledon and record-equaling 20th Grand Slam title off to a winning start yesterday while rain brought havoc to the schedule, one year after the tournament was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Defending champion and world number one Djokovic, looking to become just the third man in history to complete a calendar Grand Slam, claimed a 4-6, 6-1, 6-2, 6-2 win over Britain's 253rd-ranked Jack Draper. However, the 34-year-old Serb struggled on the slippery Centre Court surface with the roof closed above it due to the rain. Left-handed Draper, playing just his fifth match on the main tour, saved seven of seven break points in the opener to stun the top seed.

But Djokovic soon snuffed out any danger of him becoming only the third defending champion to lose in the first round, by sweeping through the remainder of the tie. He finished with an impressive 25 aces and 47 winners as his 19-year-old opponent, who grew up just six miles (9.5km) from the All England Club, wilted.

'Extremely well'

"He's a youngster and I hadn't seen him play too much prior to Queen's and

he played pretty well, won matches against high-ranked players," said Djokovic. "Walking onto Wimbledon Centre Court for the first time, he's done extremely well."

Next up for Djokovic will be either former runner-up Kevin Anderson or Chilean qualifier Marcelo Tomas Barrios Vera. It was the 34-year-old Djokovic's first match on the court since his epic five-set win over Roger Federer in the 2019 final, the longest title match in tournament history and where he saved two championship points.

His match yesterday was preceded by a standing ovation for Professor Sarah Gilbert, one of the key scientists behind the Oxford Astra-Zeneca COVID-19 vaccine who was a special guest in the Royal Box. Wimbledon looks very different with COVID-19 protocols in place and a 50 percent capacity until finals day, but one familiar feature was the summer rain.

Play on the outside courts started five hours late with 16 of the day's scheduled 64 matches cancelled until today. Belarus second seed Aryna Sabalenka had the honor of being the first winner at the tournament in two years when she downed Romanian qualifier Monica Niculescu 6-1, 6-4 under the roof of Court One. Sabalenka fired 48 winners

past Niculescu.

Elsewhere yesterday, Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas, promoted to third seed in the absence of Rafael Nadal, has a tough opener against 57th-ranked Frances Tiafoe of the United States. Tiafoe won a second-tier grass court Challenger event in Nottingham this month before making the quarter-finals at Queen's Club.

Tsitsipas, who lost a five-set final to Djokovic at the French Open two weeks ago, made the last 16 at Wimbledon in 2018. However, he was a first-round loser two years ago and comes into Wimbledon with just 15 matches on grass in his career. Two-time champion Andy Murray is on Centre Court against Georgia's Nikoloz Basilashvili, a semi-finalist in Halle.

## Hotel bubble

Murray, now ranked at 118, is playing his first singles match at Wimbledon since 2017 after a lengthy battle with hip and groin injuries. Petra Kvitova, the 2011 and 2014 champion, starts against former US Open winner Sloane Stephens. Players are confined to a hotel 'bubble' in central London this year. However, there have already been two virus-related withdrawals.

Britain's Johanna Konta was identified



LONDON: Serbia's Novak Djokovic slips on the grass as he plays a return against Britain's Jack Draper during their men's singles first round match on the first day of the 2021 Wimbledon Championships at The All England Tennis Club in Wimbledon, southwest London, yesterday. —AFP

as a close contact of a positive coronavirus case and will have to self-isolate. The world number 31, a semi-finalist at the tournament in 2017, had been drawn to face Katerina Siniakova of the Czech Republic.

The 30-year-old's place will be taken by 123rd-ranked lucky loser Wang Yafan

of China. On Saturday, former men's doubles champion Frederik Nielsen was forced to withdraw after also being identified as a close contact. "This is not unexpected," said All England Club chief executive Sally Bolton. "It's terribly sad for the players but it's something we plan for. We have protocols in place." —AFP

## Japan Olympic chief says 'no way' to ensure zero virus cases

TOKYO: Japan's Olympic chief said yesterday there was "no way" to ensure zero virus cases among teams arriving for the Tokyo Games, as officials prepare to tighten screening procedures. Japanese Olympic Committee president Yasuhiro Yamashita said "thorough measures" would be necessary at airports, after two members of Uganda's team tested positive last week following their arrival in Japan.

"No matter what measures are put in place, there is no way we will have zero positive cases arriving," Yamashita told reporters. "Even if you've had two vaccine doses, it doesn't guarantee every individual will be negative."

On Sunday, a Games official had said teams should be immediately isolated if they arrive in Japan with an infected team member. "In order to make sure no clusters arise, we need to have thorough measures at the border at the time of entry to Japan,"

Yamashita said, adding that daily virus testing would also help reduce the risk of infections spreading. But he hoped athletes would have "positive memories" of the Games, despite "severe restrictions" that mean they can't even leave the Olympic Village to buy souvenirs.

Yamashita, a former Olympic judo gold-medalist, said he sympathized with the athletes, who will be confined to the Village when they are not training or competing. "How can international athletes have some time to relax and create some positive memories?"

"Of course, the top priority is to make it safe and secure, but I think we need to make an effort to give athletes that kind of space," Yamashita said. Several high-profile athletes have already said they will not compete in Tokyo, with tennis star Serena Williams the latest to drop out on Sunday.

Williams did not give a reason for her withdrawal, but a ban on family members at the Olympics would have



TOKYO: A man walks out from the entrance of the Tokyo International Exhibition Centre, also known as Tokyo Big Sight, where the International Broadcast Centre and Main Press Centre for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games are located, in Tokyo yesterday. —AFP

separated her from her daughter. Athletes must sign a written pledge promising to abide by antiviral rules in Tokyo, including staying away from tourist areas, shops and bars, limiting contact with other people, and not using public transport.

Yamashita, who won gold at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics but missed the 1980 Moscow Games

because Japan boycotted the event, said athletes would find it "difficult" to spend so long cooped up inside. "I think the athletes will be spending their time here in Japan in extremely restricted conditions," he said. "I think this is something that we need to understand, and not think of the athletes as being strong-willed or selfish." —AFP

## Biles wins women's all-around, named to US Olympic team

WASHINGTON: Simone Biles punched her ticket to the Tokyo Games on Sunday, easily winning the US women's all-around title at the US Olympic Gymnastics Trials in St Louis. Biles, who is likely competing domestically for the final time, won the all-around with 118.098 points to finish 2.66 ahead of Suni Lee, who finished with 115.832 points. Lee will be making her Olympic debut. They both earned automatic nominations for the Tokyo team.

Jordan Chiles and Grace McCallum, Jade Carey and MyKayla Skinner also have places on the US team. The men and women each had two days of competition in St Louis this week, with the women wrapping up the event on Sunday. Biles entered Sunday's second day with a solid three-point lead on the rest of the field.

Biles, one of hundreds of gymnasts abused by former USA Olympic team

doctor Larry Nassar in the scandal which rocked US gymnastics, said it had taken her time to rediscover her love for the sport. "Everything I've been through with USAG and finding the love for the sport again and just being Simone, it's been a long journey to now," she said. "The crowd was very loud, very in tune, very supportive. These are the crowds we love because it helps guide us through each event, keep our spirits high, and keep the motivation going."

Of the six US gymnasts, Biles will be the only one in Tokyo with previous Olympic experience. The women's team is seeking their third straight gold medal at the Games and Biles will try to capture back-to-back all-around titles and a fifth consecutive by a US gymnast.

The 24-year-old Biles will be the oldest American women's gymnast since 26-year-old Annia Hatch and



ST LOUIS: Simone Biles competes on the uneven bars during the Women's competition of the 2021 US Gymnastics Olympic Trials at America's Center on Sunday in St Louis, Missouri. —AFP

Mohini Bhardwaj, 25, in the 2004 Olympics. The event had to be moved from the sold-out Enterprise Center, home of the NHL's St Louis Blues, to

the nearby Dome at America's Center, the former home of the NFL's St. Louis Rams, because of COVID-19 capacity limits. —AFP

## McLaughlin smashes record, Lyles back on form at US Olympic trials

EUGENE: Sydney McLaughlin delivered a sizzling world-record breaking 400m hurdles victory as the weather-disrupted US Olympic track and field trials drew to a thrilling close in Eugene on Sunday. The final day of the 10-day meeting in Eugene was disrupted by brutal triple-digit temperatures which blasted Hayward Field with furnace-like conditions and forced organizers to postpone afternoon events to the evening.

When the action resumed in slightly cooler temperatures on Sunday evening, it was McLaughlin who stole the show, scoring to a stunning victory in 51.90sec after an epic battle with rival Dalilah Muhammad. The 21-year-old McLaughlin became the first woman ever to duck below the 52-second

barrier after a superb tactical race against reigning Olympic and world champion Muhammad.

Muhammad — who had held the previous world record of 52.16sec following her win over McLaughlin at the 2019 World Championships in Doha — was second in 52.42sec. Anna Cockrell claimed the third qualifying spot in 53.70sec.

"I knew from the moment I woke up today that it was going to be a great day," McLaughlin said afterwards. "It's one of those moments that you dream about and think about and play in your head," she said when asked what had gone through her mind after seeing the world record as she crossed the line. "It was the final 'I did it' moment and I'm going to cherish it for the rest of my life."

## 'Iron sharpens iron'

It was another classic duel between McLaughlin and Muhammad, who have dominated the 400m hurdles in recent seasons. McLaughlin described her ongoing rivalry with Muhammad as "iron sharpens iron." "It's just two great athletes pushing each other to be better," she said. "There's no animosity, no hard feelings, just two people trying to be their best. We wouldn't be able to have these world records going

back and forth without one another."

Muhammad meanwhile said she had expected McLaughlin to challenge her record after impressing in the heats — but warned she is confident of making improvements to her own time at next month's Tokyo Olympics. "I definitely saw it coming. She looked so good in the rounds," Muhammad said of McLaughlin's time. "I think there's more in store for me and Tokyo will be good for me," added Muhammad, whose pre-season was disrupted this year after she caught COVID-19.

In other finals action on Sunday, there was a striking return to form by reigning world 200m champion Noah Lyles in his favorite event. Lyles had struggled in last week's 100m final, and had been outshone by 17-year-old prodigy Erriyon Knighton in the opening rounds of the 200m. But the charismatic 23-year-old Floridian roared back to his best in the final, storming over the line in a world-leading 19.74sec, ahead of Kenny Bednarek in 19.78sec. Knighton was third in 19.84sec to book his spot in Tokyo.

Lyles said a relaxed approach had helped him deliver his best performance of the trials when it mattered. "I stopped stressing, I let my body do what it does," he said. "I was asking for a lot in the

## T20 World Cup to be moved from India to UAE

NEW DELHI: The Twenty20 World Cup will be moved to the United Arab Emirates from India due to the coronavirus pandemic, an Indian cricket board official said yesterday. The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) said it had told the International Cricket Council, the sport's world body, of its decision to host the event in the UAE in October and November.

"We have told the ICC about the decision to shift the World Cup to UAE. We were left with no option as the COVID situation is not clear and the travel restrictions remain," the BCCI's treasurer, Arun Dhumal, said. "The dates will more or less be the same and we will work out the details soon."

The ICC had given the BCCI a deadline of the end of June to decide the host country for T20's showpiece event due to the high number of COVID-19 cases in India. BCCI vice-president Rajeev Shukla said the qualifiers may take place in Oman while the rest of the matches will be at three UAE venues in Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Sharjah.

The BCCI had already moved the suspended Indian Premier League to the UAE in September-October after the T20 tournament was halted on May 4 due to a number of players and team officials being infected with COVID.

The UAE has been a preferred destination for cricket as the Pakistan Super League was completed last week in the Gulf nation. The IPL was also held in the UAE last year. The pandemic disrupted the global cricket calendar last year and even after the matches resumed in July 2020, players have been confined to strict bio-bubbles and quarantine protocols.

The ICC meanwhile postponed the T20 World Cup originally scheduled to be held in Australia in 2020. India was handed the hosting rights in 2021 and Australia was chosen as host for the 2022 edition. India, home to 1.3 billion people, has eased some lockdown restrictions in recent weeks as it emerges from a brutal surge in COVID-19 infections and deaths in April and May. But health officials fear that a new wave could sweep across the country, the world's second-most infected after the United States, later this year. —AFP



EUGENE: Sydney McLaughlin reacts after winning the Women's 400 Meters Hurdles Final during day ten of the 2020 US Olympic Track & Field Team Trials at Hayward Field on Sunday in Eugene, Oregon. —AFP

prelims — I was just thinking 'More more more', but today I just thought 'Flow — let it flow, let it come'. I'm tired of stressing, tired of fighting — just let everything come." —AFP

## Sports

# Brains behind the brawn: Germany's Goretzka hopes to make impact against England

**BERLIN:** Having used last year's COVID-19 lockdown to pack muscle on to his frame, Leon Goretzka is set to bulk up Germany's midfield against England in tonight's blockbuster last-16 clash at Euro 2020. Germany coach Joachim Loew is under pressure to shake things up in the middle of the park for the knockout stage after neither Toni Kroos nor Ilkay Gundogan impressed in Wednesday's nail-biting 2-2 draw with Hungary.

Bayern Munich star Goretzka has been limited to cameo roles at this European Championship after recovering from a torn thigh in May, yet he has still made an impact. He came within a whisker of scoring in the 4-2 drubbing of Portugal as a second-half substitute, then equalized with a thunderbolt strike against Hungary. "We have no doubts now and are full of confidence," Goretzka told German television after the final whistle in a warning to England.

## 'Protective coat'

Loew was certainly impressed with his "great" performance against Hungary. "He brought in a lot of pace and made deep runs", the coach said. After Bundesliga matches were halted in March 2020, as Germany went into lockdown due to COVID-19, Goretzka returned from the two-and-a-half-month break noticeably much more muscular.

He says bulking up paid dividends. "I can safely say that since I have had these muscles, I go into the

games with a different feeling," he told the Deutsche Bahn magazine. "It literally made me stronger, you could call it a protective coat."

Off the field, the 26-year-old has shown the same heart he puts into tackles by throwing himself behind good causes. Last year, Goretzka and Bayern team-mate Joshua Kimmich donated a total of one million euros (\$1.2 million) to found the "WeKickCorona" campaign and help charities during the pandemic.

He also uses his profile to fight racism and xenophobia, describing nationalist right-wing party AfD as "Germany's shame". After scoring Germany's equalizer last Wednesday, Goretzka made a heart shape with his hands during his goal celebration in response to taunts from Hungary fans.

The game was overshadowed beforehand after UEFA refused to allow Munich to light up the Allianz Arena in the rainbow colors in what would have been a show of solidarity towards Hungary's LGBTQ community. "Spread love, Wembley calling!" Goretzka later wrote on Twitter with a rainbow emoji alongside a picture of him making the heart gesture.

Before the European Championship started, he made his politics clear. "If I'm allowed to play for our country, I want to play for our values and constitution," Goretzka said. "Black, red and gold are the colors of our democracy — not of the far right."



**HERZOGENAURACH:** (From left) Germany's Kevin Volland, Joshua Kimmich, Leon Goretzka, Jonas Hofmann, Serge Gnabry and Timo Werner warm up during a training session at the team's base camp in Herzogenaurach Sunday. — AFP

There are plenty of brains behind Goretzka's brawn. Born in February 1995, he turned pro at 18 with home-town club VfL Bochum and earned high marks for his 'abitur' - Germany's University entrance exams.

In 2013, he moved to Schalke 04 and made

Germany's provisional squad for the 2014 World Cup, but was injured in a warm-up game and missed being part of the side that won the trophy. Two years later, Goretzka captained Germany at the Rio de Janeiro Olympics, but was injured in the first game as the team eventually won the silver medal. — AFP

## Verstappen cruises in Styria, leaving Hamilton 'powerless'

**SPIELBERG:** Max Verstappen dominated the Styrian Grand Prix on Sunday, as reigning champion Lewis Hamilton rolled in a distant second in his Mercedes, complaining that the Red Bulls are "faster, they're just faster." The Dutchman started from pole in his Red Bull, led throughout and finished more than 35 seconds head of Briton Hamilton.

Even though Finn Valtteri Bottas, who started from the pit lane, was third, edging out the second Red Bull of Mexican Sergio Perez, it was a day that suggested momentum has shifted from Mercedes. "That is the most dominant win we've had so far this season against Mercedes," said Red Bull team principal Christian Horner after his team's fourth straight victory. Verstappen, who has claimed three of those victories, agreed. "Looking at the gap in the end, yes," he said. "But above all, the overall balance of the car was the best so far."

Mercedes have won the constructors' title the last seven seasons. In that span Hamilton has won six driver titles, interrupted only by then team-mate Nic Rosberg in 2016. A fourth straight race without a victory represents a significant drought. "It's been the first race in eight years where we were lacking pace," said Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff.

On Sunday, Verstappen dominated and increased his lead over Hamilton to 18 points while Red Bull, sponsored by an Austrian company, increased their



**SPIELBERG:** Red Bull's Dutch driver Max Verstappen is congratulated by his team as he crosses the finish line to win the Formula One Styrian Grand Prix at the Red Bull Ring race track in Spielberg, Austria, on Sunday. — AFP

lead in the constructors' championship to 40 points. "Unbelievable. The car was on fire," Verstappen on team radio at the finish. "Another win at home feels really good." "It's looking really good," he said after climbing out of his car. "We just have to keep pushing really hard and I'm confident we can do a really good job again."

Hamilton spent much of the race expressing frustration on his inability to cut into Verstappen's lead as once again Mercedes were not quite as quick as Red Bull, although he did pick up a bonus point for the fastest lap time. "It was a bit of a lonely race really," Hamilton said. "I was trying to keep up with those guys but, the speed they have -

they've obviously made some big improvements. Impossible to keep up."

"They continue to keep pulling out those laps - and on the straights we lose a lot. Nonetheless, we got good points as a team today and we've just got to keep pushing. They're faster, they're just faster. There's not a lot I can do in that respect. I've just got to keep trying to do the best I can do each weekend." Bottas, who started from the third row after a three-place penalty for spinning in the pit lane, was happy with his finish. "I think from where I started, this was the maximum today, so it's good," he said, adding that it was "important be in between" the Red Bulls. — AFP



Jack Grealish

## Cult hero Grealish vows to emulate England legends

**LONDON:** Jack Grealish wants to go from cult hero to England legend as the Aston Villa playmaker eyes a leading role in tonight's Euro 2020 last 16 clash with Germany. Grealish gave a tantalizing glimpse of his ability in his first start of the tournament against the Czech Republic last week.

The 25-year-old's nimble footwork and perfectly-flighted cross opened up the Czech defense, with Raheem Sterling the beneficiary as he headed the goal that sealed England's 1-0 win. It was the kind of influential moment that underlined why Grealish has such vocal backing from England fans urging Gareth Southgate to pick him more often.

With a reputation as a head-strong character off the pitch, Grealish struggled to earn Southgate's trust until the final months before the Euro. He eventually forced his way into the squad but had to wait for his maiden tournament start after making one substitute appearance against Scotland in England's first two group matches.

With Phil Foden rested and Mason Mount in self-isolation, Grealish was promoted to the starting line-up against the Czechs and delivered a superb first-half display. He faded in the second half as England went into their shell to protect the lead and Southgate has to decide whether to keep faith with Grealish or restore Mount and Foden to the team.

Befitting his confident personality, Grealish has no doubts he would prove his worth if he starts against Germany at Wembley. Name-checking England icons Paul Gascoigne and Wayne Rooney, Grealish has his sights set high as he prepares for a potentially career-defining moment. "I've spoken about how big these tournaments are in people's careers. You think back and look at Gazza at Italia '90, where he was well known before but everyone remembers that tournament," Grealish said. "You look at Wayne Rooney at Euro 2004 when he set his marker to be one of the best in the world. I've got a bit to follow in their footsteps but hopefully I can do that if I get more chances in the tournament."

Grealish's desire to tease and torment defenders with his clever flicks and deft passes mark him out as something different to the other options available to Southgate. That crowd-pleasing quality makes him the darling of Villa's Holte End and an English icon in waiting.

Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola is convinced of Grealish's class and is reportedly ready to pay £100 million (\$138 million) to sign the midfielder for the Premier League champions. Yet to make his Champions League debut, the European Championship is Grealish's biggest stage in a career that featured a spell in the Championship with Villa just three seasons ago. — AFP

## Middleton pours in 38 points, Bucks grab 2-1 series lead

**LOS ANGELES:** Khris Middleton and Giannis Antetokounmpo combined for 71 points as the Milwaukee Bucks rallied to beat the Atlanta Hawks 113-102 in game three of the Eastern Conference finals on Sunday. Middleton scored 20 of his 38 points in a blistering fourth-quarter performance and Antetokounmpo finished with 33 points and 11 rebounds as the Bucks grabbed a 2-1 series lead in front of a crowd of 16,600 at State Farm Arena in Georgia. Middleton also had 11 rebounds.

"What I saw today was unbelievable. It was greatness," Antetokounmpo said of Middleton. Game four is Tuesday in Atlanta, where the Hawks are now 3-3 at home in the playoffs. The Bucks were down by 15 points in the first quarter and did not take their first lead until the third, but they finished with a 25-7 scoring surge as Middleton led the charge. "Shout out to Khris for the fourth quarter. He went crazy," said Bucks' Bobby Portis. "He did his thing, that's for sure."

Trae Young led the Hawks with 35 points and Italy's Danilo Gallinari came off the bench to score 18 points in the

loss. John Collins (13) and Kevin Huerter (11) also scored in double digits. The Hawks offense started to wilt after Young appeared to reinjure his right ankle when he stepped on an official's foot and headed to the dressing room late in the third. He returned with about three minutes gone in the final quarter. Young is averaging 9.9 assists in the postseason but had just four on Sunday as he did not get as much help from his supporting cast. He said his ankle was "hurting", but added that he hoped it would be fine for game four after seeing team doctors. "I am going to get as much treatment as I can," he said. "That's the plan."

Milwaukee improved to 3-0 in game threes during the postseason. They cruised to a 113-84 win over the Miami Heat en route to a four-game sweep in the first round, and held on for an 86-83 win over the Brooklyn Nets in game three of the second round to jump-start a series comeback.

The Bucks won despite Antetokounmpo making just six of 12 from the free-throw line. The Atlanta crowd tried to distract Antetokounmpo throughout the game, counting out



**ATLANTA:** Trae Young #11 of the Atlanta Hawks and Khris Middleton #22 of the Milwaukee Bucks look on during Game 3 of the Eastern Conference Finals of the 2021 NBA Playoffs on Sunday at State Farm Arena in Atlanta, Georgia. — AFP

loud how many seconds it took him to shoot a free throw. He shot an impressive 13 of 21 from the floor.

### Fast start for Hawks

The Hawks started quickly, jumping out to a 25-14 point lead with just under four minutes left in the first quarter. Young with 10 points. Atlanta carried the play for almost the entire first half, leading by 15 points in the first. But the Bucks tied it 56-56 on their final possession of the second quarter when Pat Connaughton nailed a 23-foot

three-pointer from the corner after taking a pass from Jrue Holiday.

Young led all scorers with 17 points at the break. The Bucks finally grabbed the lead late in the third when Portis made a basket to make it 82-80. Antetokounmpo sparked the comeback by scoring 11 points in the second quarter, which set the stage for Middleton to shine down the stretch and seal the victory. "We just had to stay with it. We didn't play our best basketball at the start," Middleton said. — AFP

## Trail Blazers name Billups head coach

**LOS ANGELES:** The Portland Trail Blazers have turned to Los Angeles Clippers coaching staff to find their new head coach, agreeing a deal with Chauncey Billups. Billups is the 15th head coach in Trail Blazers franchise history, the team announced in a news release on Sunday night.

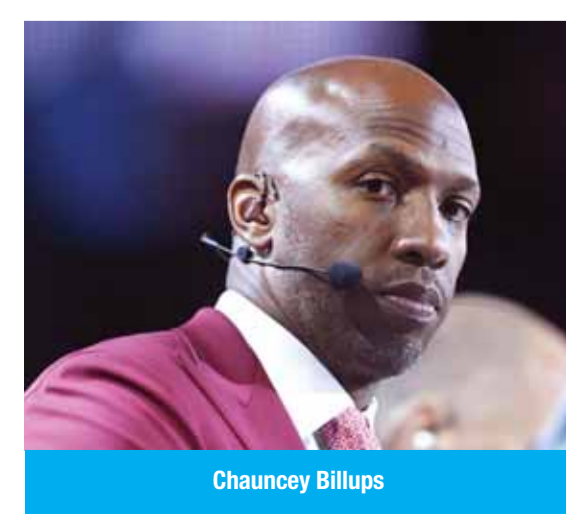
"Chauncey is a proven leader with an elite basketball IQ that has won everywhere he has been," said president of basketball operations Neil Olshey. "He is prepared for the challenge of developing the Championship habits and strategic approach we need to achieve the expectations

and goals for our franchise."

Billups has served since November 2020 as an assistant coach with the Clippers, who are currently battling the Phoenix Suns in the NBA's Western Conference finals. The Suns had a commanding 3-1 lead before last night's game five.

The 44-year-old Billups is a five-time NBA all-star as a player. In 2016, the Detroit Pistons retired his No 1 jersey. "I'm very excited and humbled to be the next coach of the Trail Blazers," said Billups. "Portland is a special place and a unique franchise."

Portland has made the playoffs in eight consecutive seasons, the longest active streak in the NBA, but has been knocked out in the first round five times. In 2019, they advanced to the conference finals but were swept by the Golden State Warriors in four games. Portland has suffered first-round losses in four of the past five seasons. — AFP



Chauncey Billups



# Hazard stunner enough for Belgium to oust Portugal and Ronaldo from Euro 2020

SEVILLE: A rocket from Thorgan Hazard knocked reigning champions Portugal out of Euro 2020 on Sunday and earned Belgium a blockbuster quarter-final with Italy. Hazard's swerving shot before half-time sealed a 1-0 win for Belgium and settled a scrappy contest in Seville that never really lived up to its billing as the stand-out tie of the last 16.

Guerreiro went closest to a late equalizer when his shot came back off the post, one of 29 shots Portugal had, six of them on target.

But before the late rally, Belgium were the braver, more fluid team and Martinez hailed his side's fighting spirit to hold on. "We showed our talent in the first half and in the second half we showed an aspect that

years ago but has perhaps been outgrown by a side that now boasts some of the most creative technicians in the world. "I think it's an unfair result but they scored and we didn't," said Portugal coach Fernando Santos.

### De Bruyne injury worry

Eden Hazard started in Belgium's front three again after playing 90 minutes against Finland on Monday. Portugal's Diogo Dalot came in at right-back for the injured Nelson Semedo. Eden Hazard skied an early shot over after a neat exchange with Romelu Lukaku while Diogo Jota skewed wide, slipped in down the left by the impressive Renato Sanches.

Ronaldo cut an isolated figure up front, his every touch booed early on by the Belgian fans, who then cheered when he was robbed of the ball before being bumped to the ground by Thomas Meunier. The closest Ronaldo came to an all-time record 110th international goal was a dipping free-kick from 30 yards which Courtois parried away while at the other end, Lukaku was a more dynamic force. One scintillating break saw Lukaku tear through Portugal's midfield and with his shirt being pulled behind him, he was just lacking the final pass to Hazard.

An untidy game found its moment of clarity in the 42nd minute. It started with Courtois coolly evading Ronaldo's press before more excellent work from Lukaku allowed De Bruyne to switch left to Thorgan Hazard. He cut in and ripped a swerving shot that rocketed towards the center of the goal before swerving right and past Rui Patricio, who was too slow to adjust.

Belgium played with more verve after half-time and looked set to take charge. But De Bruyne's injury checked their rhythm and Portugal came again, Jota firing over and Joao Felix, on as a substitute, heading into the hands of Courtois. Tempers flared as a crescendo of collisions incensed the crowd and left Pepe lucky only to be booked after he led into his challenge with his arm. Portugal finally had to push and in a wild last 10 minutes, Guerreiro went closest to an equalizer, his shot hammering against the post. Belgium did just enough. — AFP



BUDAPEST: Czech Republic's midfielder Tomas Holes celebrates after scoring a goal during the Euro 2020 round of 16 match between the Netherlands and the Czech Republic at Puskas Arena in Budapest on Sunday. — AFP

## Czech Republic's Holes goes from annoying neighbors to last 16 hero

PRAGUE: When the Czech Republic's Tomas Holes scored a late goal to clinch a late draw for Slavia Prague at Arsenal in the Europa League in April, his sibling got in trouble with the neighbors. "We apologize for the noise around 11pm," read a note posted by Jiri Holes on the ground-floor notice board of his block of flats the next morning.

"Just to explain, my brother scored in the 90th minute against Arsenal in the Europa League quarter-final," he wrote. When midfielder Holes claimed the opener in Sunday's Euro 2020 last-16 game against the Netherlands, the Czech television commentator was quick to quip: "I wonder what his family are up to."

The 28-year-old Holes scored with a header at the near post on 68 minutes, following a corner. He then spread his arms with a broad smile, knowing he had taken his country past the 10-man orange-clad favorites towards a Euro quarter-final.

"The cross was long to the far post. I was ready at the near post, Tomas Kalas did a wonderful job heading it back and I had an easy job," the softly-spoken Holes said. The Czechs beat the Netherlands 2-0 in Budapest, and they will take on Denmark in Baku in the quarter-final on July 3.

### 'Loose train carriage'

Holes was involved in the second goal too — he dashed for a loose ball between the stunned Denzel Dumfries and Georginio Wijnaldum, took it to the box and found striker Patrik Schick with a cutback. "He was like a loose train carriage," former Czech Republic forward Guntar Bittengel told national television.

Holes grew up as a footballer in the central city of Hradec Kralove, from which he moved to Jablonec before joining Slavia ahead of the 2019/2020 season. Slavia bought him as a right-back for a team where the post was taken by Vladimir Coufal, who is now at West Ham player. Slavia coach Jindrich Trpisovsky decided to condition Holes to become a defensive midfielder, similarly to a former Germany captain. "I told him — don't worry, Philipp Lahm moved to the position from a right-back at 28 and then he was the captain of the world champions. So why not you?" Trpisovsky said.

Holes was not excited at first about what he called "a tough spell." "I didn't play at Slavia and I wasn't even on the bench many times. And when I played, I was below par," he added. But it turned out Trpisovsky had reason. Holes became indispensable and proved his worth against the Gunners, when, as a defensive midfielder, he stood in for center back Ondrej Kudela, serving a 10-match ban from UEFA over a racist slur. He stood up to the task, although Slavia bowed out of Europe at Arsenal's hands after a 4-0 second leg loss. Holes played his first international in a makeshift Czech Republic set-up facing Scotland last September when the first-choice team were hit by COVID-19. He gradually became a permanent fixture in the centre of the Czech midfield, alongside West Ham star Tomas Soucek. — AFP



SEVILLE: Portugal's forward Cristiano Ronaldo (right) reacts as Belgium's players celebrate their victory at the end of the Euro 2020 round of 16 football match between Belgium and Portugal at La Cartuja Stadium in Seville on Sunday. — AFP

But it could prove a statement victory for Belgium, whose chief concern now will be the fitness of Kevin De Bruyne and Eden Hazard, who both hobbled off injured and were set to undergo scans yesterday. De Bruyne suffered an ankle injury while coach Roberto Martinez said Hazard's problem was "more of a muscle feeling".

Cristiano Ronaldo tested Thibaut Courtois with a dipping free-kick in the first half but the 36-year-old neither broke the international goals record nor added to his five for the tournament. Raphael

wasn't there two or three years ago," said Martinez. "This is what a winning team needs."

For all the superstar names on the pitch, it was Eden Hazard's less heralded brother Thorgan who proved decisive, the Borussia Dortmund winger who Eden once said had even more talent than him. "In these games if you have a chance you have to have a go," Thorgan said. "It went in, with a bit of luck and it was the goal that got us through. It's a dream for me."

Portugal, meanwhile, stuck to the defensive approach that served them so well in France five

## Andriy Shevchenko, ex-Ukraine star plotting Euro success as coach

KIEV: Andriy Shevchenko's Ukraine might be disappointed by the fact that they only reached the knock-out phase of the European Championship for the first time thanks to a considerable stroke of good fortune. But ahead of tonight's Euro 2020 last-16 game against Sweden, the 44-year-old coach may draw inspiration from a past encounter against the same opponent, the swansong of his illustrious career as a player. Ukraine lost 3-2 to the Netherlands to start Group C, then clinched a key 2-1 victory over North Macedonia, but were beaten to second place by Austria after a 1-0 defeat in their final game. After an anxious two-day wait to see if they qualified as one of the four best third-placed teams, Ukraine were indebted to Spain, whose crushing win over Slovakia in Group E sent Shevchenko's team through to the next round.

Five years after taking over following Ukraine's failure to score a single goal at Euro 2016, Shevchenko has rejuvenated the team, toughening it up on the big stage. But he described the fatigue of his players as the main reason for the defeat to Austria. "The game was physically hard today. We were constantly late," Shevchenko said after the match in which a draw would have been enough for Ukraine to finish as runners-up. "I saw the team simply lacked strength. We tried to strengthen (with substitutions), but it was almost impossible to do."

The remarks raised eyebrows at home as Ukraine's team have enjoyed preferable conditions for their Euro 2020 preparation, which some explain by a special bond between Shevchenko and the Ukrainian football association chief. Local media say Shevchenko is the godfather of the daughter of Ukrainian FA president Andriy Pavelko. The association in April greenlighted the decision to shrink this season's domestic championship by one week to grant



Andriy Shevchenko

the national team extra time for training ahead of Euro 2020, an unusual move for a European league.

The national FA was also under fire back in 2016 when Shevchenko, the former Dynamo Kiev and AC Milan star, took over from Mykhaylo Fomenko as Ukraine coach, his first managerial role. Critics pointed to Shevchenko's lack of experience and argued that as Fomenko's assistant, he was partly responsible for Ukraine crashing out of the Euro in France after losing all three games in their group. But in their qualifying group for Euro 2020, Ukraine surprisingly finished unbeaten in first, beating reigning European champions Portugal 2-1 in a key match in Kiev.

Ahead of tonight's match in Glasgow, the success of the team that beat Zlatan Ibrahimovic's Sweden 2-1 in Kiev in 2012, and which he captained, might inspire Shevchenko and his men to reach new heights. Ukraine's greatest striker was in the twilight of his career going into Euro 2012, but it was his winning brace in their opening match that sent tens of thousands of local fans at the Olympic Stadium into euphoria. — AFP

### News in brief

#### Ronaldo 'proud' of Portugal's efforts

LISBON: Captain Cristiano Ronaldo said yesterday he was "proud" of holders Portugal's efforts despite bowing out of Euro 2020 after the weekend's 1-0 last 16 loss to Belgium. "We did not get the result we wanted and we leave the competition sooner than expected," the 36-year-old Juventus star and five-time Ballon d'or winner admitted as his side failed to match their 2016 exploits. "But we are proud of our showing. We did everything we could to retain the title of European champions and this group proved it could still give the Portuguese people much joy," the former Manchester United and Real Madrid attacker posted on social media after Sunday's loss. — AFP

#### St Petersburg match to go ahead

SAINT PETERSBURG: The Euro 2020 quarter-final in Saint Petersburg on Friday will go ahead as planned, Russia's tournament organizers said yesterday, as the city posted a new pandemic high for daily virus deaths. "The quarter-final will take place as planned," the press service of the organizing committee in Saint Petersburg said. A UEFA spokesperson told AFP that the surging outbreak "changes absolutely nothing" and "there are no plans to change the location of the match". Saint Petersburg, Russia's second city and one of the country's main virus hotspots, has seen a surging outbreak due to the highly transmissible Delta variant first identified in India. — AFP

# Classifieds

## Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

## Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265

## CHANGE OF NAME

**Mathews Palookunnel Thomas**, holder of Indian Passport K5707962 issued at Kuwait on 17/06/2012, resident of Palookunnel House Nirmalagiri Peruvanthanam Kerala, and presently residing at Kuwait Po Box 5640 safat 13057, do hereby change the name of my minor child Alen Mathews Palookunnel, holder of Indian Passport R2318945 issued at Kuwait on 04/04/2017, from Alen Mathews Palookunnel to Alen Mathews with immediate effect. (C 0612) 27-6-2021

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## Spain prevail in extra-time epic with Croatia to reach Euro 2020 last eight

**COPENHAGEN:** Spain reached the quarter-finals of Euro 2020 yesterday after an epic 5-3 extra-time win over Croatia which sets up a potential mouth-watering clash with world champions France.

Spain had looked to be cruising into the quarter-finals at the Parken Stadium in Copenhagen thanks to goals from Pablo Sarabia, Cesar Azpilicueta and Ferran Torres which had put Luis Enrique's side 3-1 ahead with 13 minutes remaining in normal time.

However substitute Mislav Orsic pulled one back following a chaotic goalmouth scramble in the 85th minute and then supplied the cross from which Mario Pasalic headed Croatia level in the second minute of stoppage time to take the match to the additional half-hour. Spain eventually prevailed-after some scares-in a thrilling contest with a fine finish from under-fire forward Alvaro Morata and Mikel Oyarzabal's breakaway strike giving Luis Enrique's side the win their overall play deserved.

Spain had not won a major tournament knockout match since thrashing Italy in the Euro 2012 final but progress to a showdown with either the French or Switzerland on Friday that is set to be played in Saint Petersburg despite concerns about increasing coronavirus cases in Russia.

Spain should have been a goal ahead in the 16th minute when Koke was put clean through by an inch-perfect Pedri pass, but with the goal at his mercy the Atletico Madrid man could only shoot straight at Livakovic.

Then three minutes later Morata,

who was selected by Luis Enrique despite poor form in the group stage which led to abuse by Spain fans of him and his family, saw his point-blank range header blocked by Domagoj Vida. Almost immediately afterwards disaster struck for Spain through Pedri's own goal, which came after goalkeeper Unai Simon allowed his bobbling backpass to bounce over his foot and gently roll into the net. From nowhere Croatia all of a sudden had their tails up and Nikola Vlasic and Mateo Kovacic both fired off efforts which troubled Simon even though they didn't hit the target.

### Croatia fightback

Spain were rattled by the opening goal but quickly recovered to carry on dominating the ball and got a deserved leveler seven minutes before the break through the enterprising Sarabia, who lashed home on the rebound after Jose Gaya's shot was well saved by Croatia goalkeeper Dominik Livakovic.

The second half got off to a slower start but Croatia continued to offer little and Spain had the lead in the 57th minute through Azpilicueta, who couldn't miss with his close-range header from Ferran Torres' well-flighted cross after a burst into the area from the impressive Pedri.

Simon made up for his earlier howler in the 67th minute when he got down low very quickly to keep out Josko Gvardiol's close-range shot at his near post. And with 13 minutes remaining Torres put Spain two ahead with a classy piece of finishing.



**COPENHAGEN:** Spain's forward Alvaro Morata attempts to score next to Croatia's defender Duje Caleta-Car (right) during the Euro 2020 round of 16 football match between Croatia and Spain at the Parken Stadium in Copenhagen. — AFP

The Manchester City attacker perfectly read the flight of substitute Pau Torres' raking long pass from near the halfway line to the edge of Croatia's area, and he easily swept past Gvardiol before slotting home a calm finish.

With the match looking as good as over Orsic sparked the large Croatian support in the Parken back to life when he prodded home following confusion

in the Spain penalty area. And then with time running out for Croatia the stands erupted as Pasalic met fellow substitute Orsic's cross to take a match which had previously looked dead to extra time. It was Croatia who were initially the more threatening after the restart but Morata, who had up to then looked lost up front, put Spain back in front nine minutes into extra time when

he deftly controlled Dani Olmo's cross and lashed a rocket of a shot past Livakovic.

Oyarzabal then finally made sure of Spain's passage into the quarters three minutes later thanks to another superb Olmo cross which allowed the Real Sociedad playmaker to rattle home a close-range finish and definitively put the tie to bed. — AFP






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